

# Children First

## Implementation Evaluation

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**October 2006**

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Prepared for the Ministry of Children and Family Development,  
Early Childhood Development Team

# CHILDREN FIRST IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION

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# CHILDREN FIRST IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION

## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *1.1 Purpose*

The Children First Implementation Evaluation was commissioned by the Provincial Early Childhood Development Team of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). The project had the following goals:

- A review of the appropriateness and rationale for the initiative and the goals
- A review of the critical components of the initiative including how these are connected to the goals and intended outcomes and a review of the role of Provincial Advisor
- A review of what aspects of the initiative are facilitating success or acting as stumbling blocks
- A cluster evaluation of the Children First sites around the province
- Development of a framework for integrating the findings
- Draft and final reports.

The findings of the cluster evaluation are contained in a separate report.

### *1.2 Findings Related to the Implementation of Children First*

#### **The appropriateness and rationale for the initiative and goals**

1. This review examined the research on community driven approaches to improving outcomes for children and families and found that there is growing evidence and support for community based planning and management of services and supports that is geared towards creating more integrated, flexible systems that will respond to the unique needs of communities and neighbourhoods.
2. Cross sectoral partnerships are common to community driven initiatives and are critical to the success of the work.
3. The goals of Children First are appropriate in that they are nested within the Communiqué on Early Childhood Development and the BC ECD Action Plan, they incorporate community building principles and they are focused on improving outcomes for children.

## The Critical Components of the Initiative & the Role of the Provincial Advisor

The critical components of the initiative are the **overall intent** of the initiative, the **objectives**, the **core activities**, the **implementation strategy** and the **structures** that support the initiative:

1. The **overall intent** of the initiative is to develop a comprehensive, integrated service delivery system that supports children and their families. This is appropriate. It addresses systemic problems arising from a patchwork of services that are difficult for families to negotiate. Service integration can lead to more holistic ways of working with families and children, a reduction in the duplication of services and opportunities for families, service providers and communities to work together for the benefit of children.
2. The **objectives** of the initiative are to increase community capacity, increase effectiveness and efficiency, engage hard to reach families, increase opportunities for early identification and improve outcomes for families. Increasing community capacity and increasing effectiveness and efficiency flow directly from the overall intent of the initiative. The objectives of engaging hard to reach families, increasing opportunities for early screening and improving outcomes for families are seen to be part of an integrated system where better outcomes for *all* families are addressed.
3. The **core activities** of the initiative encompass: Working Together, Spreading the Word, Research, Planning, Advocacy, Allocation and Evaluation. These core activities connect directly to the objectives. The guidelines of one of the core activities "Working Together" does not specifically refer to parents as "players" and this could be easily remedied.
4. The **implementation** strategy of the initiative which involved a community driven approach through the formation of cross sectoral partnerships has been shown to be effective. However, this "bottom up" approach would ideally be combined with a "top down" framework that is integrated across ministries in the provincial system - including legislation, planning and funding.

The Children First initiative was implemented in stages. Initially three "learning" sites were funded. The key learnings from these sites were used to develop Implementation Guidelines and new sites were added in the different regions of the province. Next, some re-allocation of funding led to a further expansion to 45 communities. The Learning Initiative Guidelines are appropriate in that they provide information related to the goals and objectives of the initiative, principles of practice and the expected community development process, etc. A draft logic model appended to the guidelines is informative but would be difficult to utilize for the purposes of evaluation.

5. For the most part, the community level **structure** makes sense. However, it is under-resourced in some areas and there are organizational aspects that could be improved upon, or at least clarified. Some planning support is provided at the regional level and whether or not this is sufficient was not clarified as part of this review. The role of **Provincial Advisor** is critical to building and maintaining connections amongst

initiatives, between the initiatives and the provincial government and with other ECD initiatives in the emerging system. While a network of regionally based advisors or coordinators may supplant this role in the future, this network does not presently exist. The role of information sharing, consultation and coordination between the Provincial Advisor and the community coordinators is clear. There is, however, some confusion related to the role of the Provincial Advisor as it connects with MCFD staff and processes at the regional and community levels. These connections have not yet been sufficiently defined and the links are somewhat informal.

### **Aspects of the Initiative that are Facilitating Success or Acting as Stumbling Blocks.**

MCFD staff at the provincial, regional and community levels, coordinators around the province and a representative of Success By 6® demonstrated agreement on what they believe to be the greatest **strengths** of Children First with the most common strength identified as being the community driven approach. Other strengths articulated by respondents in all groups included:

- The increased focus on working together
- The planning and research functions
- The ability to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood development and inform parents about community service
- The ability to do outreach in communities and advocate on behalf of children
- An increased sensitivity to the needs of vulnerable families
- The provincial coordination functions.

The tone and content of the responses to a question about the strengths of the Children First initiative reflect a unified belief in its goals and an overall enthusiasm for the work. Further, the strengths identified by the stakeholders are congruent with the critical components of the initiative and this is a very positive finding related to how the initiative has been implemented.

Stumbling blocks, or **weaknesses** identified by the same group of stakeholders are detailed in the body of the report and fall within the broad categories of systemic issues, infrastructure, funding/sustainability, participation, communication and technical support.

Responses related to **what could be done to strengthen** Children First. Again, are also detailed in this report and the majority of these fall into the broad categories of funding/sustainability, maximizing efficiency, training and technical support, leadership, communication and evaluation. These ideas, coming from the people who work within the system are important. The recommendations made in this report arise from this input and from the other information collected in this review. Strategic questions that arise out of the stakeholders suggestions for strengthening the initiative are outlined on Page 26.

## **1.3 Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made as a result of the review and synthesis of information provided through project documentation, research related to the Children First model and the direct input of Children First Coordinators, CSMs, regional ECD Consultants, the Provincial ECD Team, HELP and Success By 6®.

### **1.3.1 To the Provincial ECD Team, and Provincial Advisor**

1. Work with government, the regions and communities to combine the Children First “bottom up” approach with a “top down” framework that is integrated across ministries in the provincial system, including legislation, planning and funding. Ensure that a new framework does not inhibit the successful elements of the new self-organizing system.
2. Work with government to obtain commitment for sustained funding of Children First, as well as additional funding for implementation of community based plans - where these plans clearly show that this is necessary and where these plans reflect a significant move towards service integration.
3. Work with the regions towards fully implementing Children First in every region.
4. Monitor the progress of the region that has implemented a regional coordination function to assess how this impacts on community level decision making and the potential for regional structures supplanting the provincial coordination function over time.
5. Continue the role of the Provincial Advisor, increase the allocation of hours to the position and provide for administrative support.
6. Work with the stakeholders to either clarify the different roles that Success By 6® and Children First play, or to consolidate the initiatives.
7. Work with the regions to clarify and formalize the role of the Provincial Advisor, as it relates to regional staff and CSMs.
8. Consult with the initiatives around training and communication needs and agendas for provincial meetings.
9. Clarify the need for an ongoing cycle of community based planning, activity and evaluation.
10. Review and update the Children First Guidelines, integrating the Core Activities, and long and short/intermediate term outcomes and including “parents” as players under the core activity of Working Together.

### **1.3.2 To the MCFD Regions**

1. Provide equitable resources for adequate infrastructure to support Children First in every part of each region.
2. Work with the Provincial ECD team to clarify and formalize the role of the Provincial Advisor as it relates to regional staff and CSMs.
3. Assess the workloads of CSMs, relative to their ability to participate fully in the Children First initiative.
4. Monitor the progress of the region that has implemented a regional coordination function to assess how this impacts on community level decision making and the possibility of regional structures supplanting the provincial coordination function over time.
5. Ensure that regional plans and MOU's with other funders flow from community based planning and decision making.
6. Where necessary, work with the initiatives to clarify roles of Host agencies, CSMs and the region and any issues related to supervision and wages of community coordinators.
7. Assess the need for streamlining Children First Boundaries.
8. Work with Children First and other ECD programs in the regions to raise capacity/commitment to involving Aboriginal people.

### **1.3.3 To the Children First Initiatives**

1. Continue to work towards full participation of Aboriginal people and organizations and parents of young children in planning, implementation and evaluation.
2. Where necessary, clarify the role of the host agencies and issues related to supervision and wages of coordinators.
3. Continue to work towards building trust and expertise that will lead to the elimination of competitive bidding and full integration of services at the local level (this will take patience and time).
4. Create orientation packages for new steering committee members.

## **1.4 Conclusions**

For the most part, the Children First initiative has been implemented in a logical way. This review showed that the goals, community driven approach, and strategy of forming cross sectoral partnerships are appropriate. The intent, objectives and core activities of the initiative make sense and while the Implementation Guidelines are in need of updating, they provide clear direction for implementation of the initiative at the regional and community levels.

There are organizational and structural aspects of the initiative that require serious attention if the initiative is expected to continue to grow to a point where service integration occurs. However, the initiative has some very real strengths. These strengths are unanimously acknowledged by the various groups of stakeholders and they are congruent with the critical components of the initiative. This provides a strong foundation for further development and refinement of Children First.

For reasons of brevity, the results of the cluster evaluation of the Children First sites, which was conducted in conjunction with this review, are contained in a separate report. The cluster evaluation examines the ways in which the various initiatives are addressing the goals of Children First. Readers of this report are encouraged to review the results of the cluster evaluation which clearly show that the Children First initiative is successfully mobilizing hundreds of people in communities around the province in support of young children and families. Taken together, the two evaluations demonstrate that this unique provincial strategy of providing communities with the freedom to self-organize is having an effect. Leadership guru Meg Wheatley says it best, "*There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about.*"

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

The independent consultant reviewed documentation provided by the Provincial ECD Team related to the start up of Children First including provincial planning documents and a series of Status Reports, to gain an understanding of Children First, and how it had been implemented.

Annual Reports, strategic and action plans, Terms of Reference and budget breakdowns from initiatives around the province were examined with a view to determining the structure and infrastructure of the initiative at different levels. The data in the Annual Reports, community plans, Terms of Reference, membership lists and budget breakdowns were categorized and compared, and a significant amount of communication with community based coordinators took place for the purposes of clarification.

Online surveys related to the role of the Provincial Advisor and the strengths and weaknesses and opportunities for improvement of the initiative were distributed to Children First coordinators, Community Services Managers and the Provincial ECD Team. Information related to the same topics was gathered from ECD /CYSN Consultants, Success By 6® representatives by phone and email. Information related to the role of the Provincial Advisor was also gathered from Dr Clyde Hertzman at the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at UBC.

The findings from the Annual Reports, online surveys, communications with the various stakeholders and research related to the goals of the Children First model were synthesized and integrated into this report.

### 2.1 *Limitations*

1. For the most part, the findings of this project are based upon reports from stakeholders. No attempt was made to assess the quality of these reports.
2. This review did not determine how Children First allocation decisions are made at the regional level, or what efforts have been made to integrate services at that level.
3. Ten CSMs responded to the online survey and three participated in a relatively brief interview. There are approximately 35 CSMs in the province and more input would likely have resulted in a better understanding of their perspective, however the reviewer was unable to procure this within the timeline for completion of the project.

## 3.0 OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN FIRST IMPLEMENTATION

This section of the report looks at how Children First came into being; the rationale for the initiative; how the initiative has grown since inception in 2000 and the accountability structure that is presently in place.

### 3.1 *Background*

In September 2000, the Federal/Provincial/Territorial First Ministers (with the exception of Quebec) released a communiqué on Early Childhood Development (ECD), whereby governments indicated their commitment to early childhood development and agreed to direct additional investment to four priority areas:

- Promote healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy
- Improve parenting and family supports
- Strengthen early childhood development, learning and care
- Strengthen community supports.

Provincial or territorial governments have the flexibility to tailor ECD funding to best address the needs of children within their province. In BC, MCFD is the lead in the development of a cross-ministry coordinated strategy for investment in early childhood development that will address the needs of children from conception to age six.

The BC ECD Action Plan identified 5 major priorities including “investments in community capacity to develop and deliver coordinated supports and services that are based on community population and needs”. Within the ECD action framework the Children First Learning Initiative is identified under the key action area of “strengthening community supports”.

### 3.2 *Rationale for the Children First Initiative*

The rationale for Children First is that while communities have many services and supports, there is work to be done in linking them with each other and with the knowledge that research has provided. Knowing this, and the importance of the whole community being invested in the well being of young children, MCFD launched the Children First Learning Initiative in December 2000. Initially MCFD funded three communities to support the process of learning what it would take to bring the parts together to develop an effective system of supports for all children from conception to school entry.

The overall intent of Children First is to develop a comprehensive, integrated service delivery system that supports children and their families. The **goals** of the Children First are to:

- Recognize and link the multiple services and supports that a community has to offer;
- Facilitate bringing community-based service providers together to ensure there is a comprehensive, integrated system of services for children and their families;
- Connect families and their children to the services, at the appropriate time;

- Connect research and community experience through the support of a multi-discipline research group.

Children First takes a community development approach to building upon the existing capacity of communities to work together to understand and address the unique needs of children. The intent is that each initiative is empowered to build community ownership and, through the work of cross sectoral groups, to find ways to be responsive to the unique characteristics of its community. Community characteristics have been shown to affect children's development both directly and indirectly (Aber, Gephart, Brooks-Gunn, & Connell, 1997). To the extent that children come into direct contact with their communities, these communities serve as Microsystems that directly affect their development. Community building initiatives strengthen the capacity of individuals and organizations to cultivate and maintain positive changes by developing leadership and by building relationships amongst people and organizations both within and outside of neighbourhoods (Richman et al., 1996). In this context the Children First approach makes sense.

While the research shows that mobilizing communities to plan and deliver services at the local level is effective, it also shows that this "bottom up" approach should be combined with a "top down" framework that is integrated across ministries in the provincial system, including legislation, planning and funding (Beach & Bertrand, 2000; McCain & Mustard, 1999). What the components of a top down framework in this instance might be will require clarification by the various stakeholders.

### ***3.3 Phase One – Start Up of Children First***

The intent of the first phase of the Children First Initiative was to develop, evaluate and report on a more effective community system of services and supports for children 0 to 6 and their families. Initially three communities (Port Alberni and the West Coast, Eastern Fraser Valley and Prince George) were funded as "Learning Sites", to determine how to build an integrated and comprehensive system for ECD through learning about:

- The key community characteristics, cultural awareness and partnerships needed to support young children and their families;
- Processes, resources and support to build sustainable community partnerships and coalitions;
- Processes to best support communities and service providers to determine their strengths and their needs;
- Approaches that facilitate integration and community ownership of service delivery models;
- Processes that engages all families in accessing information, supports and services;
- Emerging practices to bring the strengths and needs together to improve the well-being of young children.

Through community development activity which brought people together in advisory groups, community forums and focus groups, the selected communities refined their understanding of the characteristics of their communities as they relate to the needs of children. Experienced researchers and evaluators were involved in the process, and what were identified as "key

learnings” about the components that are needed to build an integrated emerged from the three sites. These are summarized in the following table:

<b>Prince George</b>	<b>Eastern Fraser Valley</b>	<b>Port Alberni &amp; the West Coast</b>
A collaborative community structure	A collaborative community structure	An integrated, comprehensive and responsive system of services
Dedicated and ongoing leadership and funding	Service linkages	An ongoing, inclusive process of planning, implementation and evaluation
Program flexibility	A “strengths based” approach	
Coordination of existing resources	Full community involvement	
Community capacity building	Improved understanding of what families need, want and will benefit from	A “strengths based approach”
Careful, methodical and respectful work to build an Aboriginal component		

### ***3.4 Phase Two – Expansion to Every Region***

In 2002/2003, the program was expanded to one capacity building “Learning Initiative” in each region of the province. To assist communities in establishing an initiative, Implementation Guidelines were prepared by the Provincial ECD Team. These guidelines identified **objectives** that would support the overall intent and goals of the Learning Initiatives on a larger scale:

- **Increased community capacity** – communities come together, partnerships develop and communities learn how to work together collaboratively to enhance opportunities for children and families
- **Increased effectiveness and efficiency** - in coming together, community partners learn how to work more effectively and efficiently with their collective resources to enhance opportunities for children and families
- **Engaging “hard to reach” families** - in an effort to increase access to services for ‘hard to reach’ families, undertake a range of activities to ensure that all families access necessary supports and services
- **Increased opportunities for early identification and screening** – explore new opportunities and approaches for early identification, including preconception, universal newborn and toddler screening and using strength –based approaches
- **Improving outcomes for children and families** - communities focus on ECD in ways that make a significant difference for children, families, service providers and the community at large.

The guidelines were supplemented by other key documents that provided an umbrella framework for this initiative including The Ministry of Children and Family Development Service Plan, The Early Childhood Development Action Plan for BC, The Ministry of Children and Family

Development Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Services, and Strategic Shifts for the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

It was expected that Children First initiatives would be community driven and that each initiative would be unique in that it would develop in a way that suited the needs of each community, with some activities being “core” to the process.

In 2002/03 the program was expanded around the province, adding fourteen new communities and establishing an initiative in every region of B.C. The programs became known as the “Learning Initiatives” to reflect that this was a process that took place throughout the community and was not confined to one location or site.

### ***3.5 Phase Three - More Growth***

More recently, the reallocation of Children First funds within some of the MCFD regions led to the creation of new initiatives. Decisions about where new initiatives would be established were made at the regional level. Children First initiatives are now active in 45 communities (Appendix A) - 18 in the Interior Region, 3 in the Vancouver Coastal Region, 12 in the Fraser Region, 3 in the Northern Region and 9 in the Vancouver Island Region.

In 2004, a Provincial Advisor was contracted by the Provincial ECD Team to:

- Consolidate the provincial network of Children First initiatives and ECD community coalitions;
- Complete status reports and develop guidelines to support future development of the CF initiatives;
- Develop partnerships with HELP and Success By 6® in planning and implementation of ECD plans and priorities around the province.

### ***3.6 Accountability***

Implementation of the initiative was monitored by the Provincial ECD Team which produced Status Updates in 2002 and 2003 detailing the activity in each of the Learning Initiatives, and by the Provincial Advisor who produced Status Reports 2004 and 2005. The 2004 report provided an overview of Children First, current status, details of strengths and challenges, recommendations and updates on individual initiatives. The 2005 report provided background information on CF, identification of the “core functions” of Children First and how these were being responded to, “themes” that had emerged over the previous year, a number of recommendations and updates from each initiative.

In the 2005 Status Report the Provincial Advisor identified core functions of CF initiatives with a view to creating consistency in how Children First was described, to broaden the understanding of the goals and to support and guide the development of new initiatives. These components are now described as the “**Core Activities**” of Children First initiatives, and include:

#### **a. Working Together**

- The development, or enhancement, of a coalition of service providers and community members interested in healthy early childhood development. This group

- will have broad inter-sectoral representation. One of the roles of this group will be to act as the steering committee to the initiative.
- The engagement, by the steering committee, of an individual to coordinate all the activities of the initiative.
  - The participation of the Aboriginal, and as appropriate other multi-cultural, communities.
  - The constant broadening of the coalition. Community partnerships need to extend to all sectors of a community, whether or not they have traditionally been involved in ECD service delivery. (e.g. business, faith community).

**b. Spreading the Word (Public Awareness)**

- Public awareness activities designed to increase the understanding of the importance of the early years.
- Community engagement and mobilization. A range of activities to involve community members in the support of young children and families.
- The development of a mechanism(s) for making information about the ECD services and supports in the community widely available. (e.g. brochures, websites).

**c. Research**

- Community research activities designed to guide the planning of supports and services. Research information collected by the initiatives includes:
  - a review of existing ECD assets and services;
  - socio-economic characteristics of the community;
  - information (EDI) on school readiness;
  - information from parents and service providers on the accessibility and effectiveness of existing services; and
  - an overview of early childhood development “promising practices”.

**d. Planning**

- The development of a strategic plan for the initiative, articulating goals, objectives, activities and intended outcomes.
- The joint creation (with all other coalition members) of a community ECD plan – identifying local needs and priorities for young children and their families along with strategies to address those priorities.
- The development of innovative ways to use and/or link existing ECD resources and services more effectively and efficiently.
- A focused review and plan to enhance early identification and screening activities in the community.
- Strategies to engage “hard to reach” families in the community, including the identification and response to the barriers that limit access to services.

**e. Advocacy**

- Activities to further identified community priorities for young children and families.

**f. Allocation**

- The development of a process for allocating funds to locally identified priorities and the commitment of coalition members to honouring that process.

- Allocation of available funds to meet identified priorities. This may include both funds available within the initiative budget and those from other funding sources (e.g. School District, MCFD).

**g. Evaluation**

- Evaluation of the achievement of the provincial objectives of the initiative.
- Monitoring of local child development outcomes.

These core activities relate directly to the Children First goals. They are presently used as a basis for Annual Reports of how the initiatives are progressing, i.e. initiatives provide examples of how they are addressing the core activities at the community level.

It was noted that the core function of “Working Together” does not specifically refer to parents as coalition partners. Further, the cluster evaluation of initiatives around the province showed limited involvement of parents in steering committees. While the cluster evaluation shows that parents are being consulted by the planning tables, it could be expected that the involvement of more parents at these tables could lead to a more family-centered approach to service integration.

### **3.7 Summary**

For the most part, the Children First initiative appears to have been implemented in a logical way, with decisions around implementation being “nested” from the highest level in 7 steps:

1. Communiqué on Early Childhood Development – this identified “key action areas”.  
↓
2. Development of BC ECD Action Plan – this plan focused on the same target groups and action areas as the Communiqué.  
↓
3. Children First was initiated under the key action area of “strengthening community supports”.  
↓
4. Three learning sites were established to find out how to build an effective, community based system.  
↓
5. The “key learnings” from the first sites were used to develop provincial guidelines and the initiative was implemented in all regions of the province (14 sites).  
↓
6. Core activities were identified to guide the development of new initiatives.  
↓
7. A re-allocation of Children First funds in 3 of the 5 regions (regional decisions) resulted in expansion of the initiatives to 45 communities.

Steps 1 – 6 are entirely logical; one step flowing from the next. The re-allocation of funding in Step 7 happened in three of the five regions and while challenging for communities faced with budget reductions, this enabled much wider implementation around the province.

What is unclear is why the expansion did not occur in every region; there are still communities that have no "coverage", and there is no chain of accountability related to this. Perhaps this will be a next step in the process.

A number of variables make it difficult to draw conclusions about what impact funding levels have had on the development of community capacity. These include:

- Annual funding of anywhere between \$10,000 and \$800,000 allocated to Children First initiatives around the province;
- The mix of funding allocated to staffing, community development activities and services;
- Different levels of capacity and pre-existing partnerships;
- Some budgets are integrated with other streams of funding, such as Success By 6® , Understanding the Early Years and Building Blocks.

However, it is very clear is that sustaining the community capacity building processes is necessary to the ongoing success of the initiative and this will be dependant on sufficient funding to support the ongoing development of the local initiatives. This finding is consistent with what was learned in the first phase of Children First.

Finally, the evaluation of the three learning sites and the ongoing monitoring of the status of Children First by the Provincial ECD Team and Provincial Coordinator have contributed to the development of the initiative and has led to better understanding of community based planning, the challenges associated with creating more integrated service delivery systems and the need for an evaluation framework.

## 4.0 CHILDREN FIRST STRUCTURE

This section looks at the structure of Children First at the provincial, regional and community levels.

### 4.1 *Provincial*

In 2002, the Honourable Linda Reid, Minister for State for Early Childhood Development released the BC Early Childhood Development Action Plan: A Work in Progress. Children First is one of eight programs falling under the key action area of strengthening community supports. The desired outcomes in this area are:

- Increased numbers of children who are entering school ready to learn
- Fewer children in care
- Communities have comprehensive, integrated and coordinated service delivery systems for ECD
- Aboriginal communities have the capacity to deliver coordinated culturally relevant ECD services
- Communities are empowered and supported to make decisions and provide ECD programs and services
- Increased awareness of the value and support for ECD.

The Early Childhood Development Team of MCFD has responsibility for consultation and support to Children First initiatives. The Provincial ECD Team also has a responsibility to report on the status of and expenditures for the Learning Initiatives to Ministry Executive, the Minister of State Responsible for ECD and to the federal government, as part of its commitment under the Federal/Provincial/ Territorial ECD Agreement.

### 4.2 *Regional*

Total funding for the initiative is \$3.8 million dollars annually. The funds are allocated on a regional basis and managed by regional staff. The funds can be reallocated within the regions to build community capacity as needed. This review showed a range from \$10,000 to \$800,000 in actual allocations to the different initiatives. In some regions CF funding is being allocated to service delivery, rather than capacity building. This has led to some confusion around whether or not the goals and objectives of Children First represent actual "policy".

Each region employs an ECD/CYSN (Children and Youth with Special Needs) Consultant. The Consultants provide planning support to the CSMs as well as a link between the regional and provincial office. This role is fairly new and it appears that the Consultant positions are flexible to meet needs within the regions. For example, in one region with three initiatives, the ECD/CYSN Consultant co-chairs a management committee in one community, is one of the MCFD participants at the Children First community table in a second community, and is not involved in the third, where MCFD is represented by the Community Services Manager.

Accountability for the Children First Learning Initiative in each of the funded communities ultimately rests with the macro-regional authority of the MCFD. The Learning Initiatives are required to report on the activities and outcomes of the Learning Initiatives through an Annual Report to the Provincial Advisor and the regions are expected to demonstrate that the funds have been expended.

One of the five regions has created a Regional Advisory Committee and has hired a regional coordinator. Some regional coordination is being provided in a second region by a Success By 6® Coordinator.

Related to service integration at the regional level, some work has been done to develop Memoranda of Understanding between different funders, such as Health Authorities, MCFD and School Districts and /or regional plans. These were not examined as part of this review.

### **4.3 Community**

At the local level, 35 CSMs participate in community level planning and administer Children First funds. In some areas, "Host Agencies" have been chosen to manage the initiatives; in others the initiatives are directly managed. Information gathered from 38 initiatives showed that:

- In 5 initiatives, Health Authorities act as Host Agencies for the initiative
- In 3 initiatives, School Districts act as Host Agencies
- In 20 initiatives, community not-for-profit agencies act as Host Agencies
- In 6 initiatives, MCFD contracts directly with a coordinator and/or other staff
- In 1 initiative, MCFD contracts directly with 9 Aboriginal agencies
- In 2 initiatives, United Way acts as Host Agency
- In 1 initiative, a sub committees of the local Child and Youth Committee acts as Host.

The majority of initiatives have one staff person working anywhere from a few hours a week to full-time under contract to the Host Agency or in a few instances they are MCFD employees. These positions are described as Managers, Coordinators, Facilitators, Community Development Workers, and in one instance a Community Champion. Some initiatives also reported having part-time administrative support. Three initiatives which each include a number of communities reported having a coordinator for each community.

Exceptions to this are:

- An initiative that employs a public health nurse, nutrition educator, speech language pathologist and an administrative assistant in addition to the Manager;
- A multi community initiative that includes contracts with a Coalition Development Worker, a Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant, a Child Care Researcher, a Community Dialogue Project Coordinator, an office assistant, a Website Designer and a Social Marketing and Communications Plan Developer in addition to the Manager;
- An initiative which employs 2 community development workers – one English speaking and one Punjabi speaking in addition to a Project Coordinator who works 5 hours per week;

- An initiative that employs a part-time coordinator, one part-time family resource network coordinator, part-time secondment of ECD specialist with MCFD and occasional administrative support.

Each initiative has a cross sectoral steering committee made up of a broad base of MCFD representatives, community agencies, school district representatives, Health Authority personnel and a variety of other stakeholders. The diversity of participants is discussed in the “Working Together” section of the cluster evaluation report.

In the course of this review, thirty three of forty two initiatives contacted indicated that they have Terms of Reference in place. Twenty six initiatives submitted their Terms of Reference for review. For the most part these are well put together and incorporate the elements that one might expect (See chart in Appendix B). Less commonly used elements included the role of the Host Agency, sub committee guidelines, confidentiality policies, meeting schedules and procedures and accountability/reporting policies.

## **4.8 Summary**

The structure of Children First is evolving over time and the levels are “nested” appropriately in that outcomes are defined at the provincial level; funding to achieve these outcomes flows to the regions and regions are empowered to allocate the funding to the community level to build capacity. The reasons for the variations in the amount of funding allocated and why funding has been allocated to service delivery rather than capacity building in some areas around the province are not completely clear. These may be due to regions responding appropriately to the unique needs of the various communities, however there is no reporting system in place to ascertain that this is the case. The Annual Reports generated at the community level show how the funded initiatives are progressing but there does not appear to be any way of knowing why some communities are not funded at all or why some initiatives are allocated considerably more funding than others. How well this flexible structure is supporting the relatively fast growing community based system is addressed in the section 6 of this report, where stakeholders identify the strengths and weaknesses of the initiative.

## **5.0 THE ROLE OF THE PROVINCIAL ADVISOR**

The Provincial Advisor role is intended to meet five specific objectives:

1. Provide support, guidance, and networking to Children First Initiatives and liaison between Initiatives and the Early Childhood Development Team.
2. Connect MCFD regional staff and early childhood development capacity building initiatives in their communities.
3. Connect Children First Initiatives and Provincial ECD Team to other ECD initiatives in B.C. (Human Early Learning Partnership, Success By 6® , ECD Funders Group, Understanding the Early Years).
4. Develop and support early childhood development capacity building and planning coalitions in all communities.

## 5. Support integrated provincial ECD planning.

This review asked CSMs, coordinators, ECD/CYSN Consultants and the Provincial ECD Team about their views on the importance of the Provincial Advisor, and if the role of Provincial Advisor had helped to strengthen their initiatives:

- 98% (N=51) felt that the Provincial Advisor has helped to strengthen the initiatives;
- 73% felt that the Provincial Advisor role was “very important”, and the balance answered “somewhat important”.

This review also asked coordinators, Regional ECD Consultants, CSMs and others about the role of Provincial Advisor, relative to the five objectives cited above. In this context, two questions were posed to each group:

1. How has the Provincial Advisor helped to strengthen initiatives?
2. What might be done to strengthen provincial coordination of Children First?

The next two sections of this report detail responses to these questions.

### ***5.1 How the Provincial Advisor Has Helped to Strengthen Initiatives***

Survey results provided details about how various groups consider the Children First Provincial Advisor to have made each initiative stronger:

#### **Coordinators and Community Services Managers Responses:**

32 Coordinators and 10 Community Services Managers provided feedback from the community level. All but one of the 42 respondents were extremely positive, and it was clear that they believed that the role of Advisor has been really useful to their initiatives in five key areas: knowledge transfer, networking, problem solving/consultation, coordination of meetings and training, and reducing isolation. A number of coordinators also expressed their appreciation of the Provincial Advisor’s accessibility. A summary of responses in these five areas is contained in Appendix C. The survey responses from 10 CSMs were substantially similar to those of the coordinators.

#### **Provincial ECD Team Responses:**

Members of the Provincial ECD Team also referred to the ability of the Provincial Advisor role in the areas of knowledge transfer, networking, problem solving/consultation, coordination of meetings and training. In addition the following functions were thought to strengthen the initiatives:

- Principal liaison for provincial rollup of CF;
- Provides leadership, training to initiatives and government;
- Is accessible and knowledgeable;
- Has the ability to identify gaps;
- Provides some provincial focus and consistency;

- Assisted with establishments of new coalitions and fund re-distribution.

### **Regional ECD Consultant Responses:**

The five regional ECD consultants were asked for their perspectives on how the role of Provincial Advisor had strengthened the initiative. It was expressed that the Provincial Advisor creates opportunities and direct supports for community coordinators to come together, with positive results. She is uniquely positioned to make province wide coordinator conferencing take place. The Provincial Advisor keeps all players connected, and keeps the Children First initiative alive; PA encouragement and support for the initiatives is pivotal. One ECD consultant felt the current Provincial Advisor role is not helpful as presently structured.

### **Other Perspectives**

A Success By 6® coordinator described the role of Provincial Advisor as a “keeper of the knowledge” who achieves impact by: knowing what is happening throughout the Province; defining common challenges and trends; and coordinating evaluation, training and networking. From the perspective of the Success By 6® Evaluation coordinator the role of provincial Advisor is as critical as the provincial team that supports Success By 6®. Further, she indicated that as a result of the Provincial Advisor's analysis of where Success By 6® and Children First funds were distributed, a re-distribution occurred. Additionally, the significant workload of ECD managers makes this role even more important.

Dr Clyde Hertzman, who leads the Human Early Learning Partnership, observed that the role of Provincial Advisor strengthens the initiative in that it promotes interchange between initiatives, links Children First to HELP, the EDI initiative and the hub, and provides technical support.

## ***5.2 Issues Related to Provincial Coordination of Children First?***

Stakeholders were asked for their views on how provincial coordination of Children First could be improved. This topic engendered a high level of response, and a rich blend of ideas was offered, as described in the balance of this section.

### **Coordinators Perspective:**

This group of 25 respondents most commonly articulated recommendations related to: increasing time allowed for provincial coordination; improving communication, and addressing sustainability and funding:

1. **Increasing Provincial Advisor Capacity.** 40% of survey respondents supported an increase in Provincial Advisor time. Responses identified several ways in which this added capacity would be of benefit including visiting local initiatives to: review assets, EDI and neighborhood planning efforts; enhancing support for the coalitions, facilitating more sharing of information; and finding more time to connect with regional staff.
2. **Improving Communications.** 20% of coordinators made suggestions related to communications issues. These included:

- Provide interim communications (between provincial meetings) such as a newsletter or a quarterly update, to convey not only factual information but also insights that have only been readily available at provincial meetings;
  - Clarify the differences between the roles of the Provincial Advisor and regional coordinators.
  - Help to make better connections between initiatives..
3. **Funding and sustainability** issues were mentioned by 12% of coordinators. One respondent wanted to see extra funding for broader attendance at provincial meetings, and some type of “virtual community”.
4. **Other Coordinator’s suggestions related to improvement of provincial coordination:**
- Develop a solid ECD-ECE framework
  - Establish more formal relationships and more disciplined collaboration, between related provincial programs and among local initiatives
  - Develop a more structured Children First planning process, using tools like benchmarks, collaborative policy development, and outcomes
  - Change the provincial meetings - some wanted these sessions expanded, while others believed that these sessions were restricted to information sharing, to the exclusion of effective exchanges between stakeholders.

#### **The Perspective of the Community Services Managers:**

Four CSMs responded by identifying specific opportunities for improvement in the system.:

- Spend more time making links to other ECD initiatives;
- Review the objectives of provincial coordination;
- Expand coordinator capacity, to better organize the integration of activities at community and regional levels.

#### **The Perspective of Regional ECD Consultants:**

Suggestions from the Regional ECD Consultants about how to improve coordination reflected somewhat different themes:

- Coordinate more with similar initiatives (Success By 6® , Understanding the Early Years), especially in communications and training
- Provide clear policy and direction regarding regionalization
- Avoid additional bureaucracy that could happen through regionalizing – i.e. high level coordination is not needed to support communities in bringing people to the table.

#### **The Perspectives of the Provincial ECD Team:**

- Build the capacity of the provincial infrastructure with more administrative support, clearer provincial guidelines and 5 regional advisors to work with the Provincial Advisor;
- Strengthen linkages with other provincial initiatives, regional and provincial offices;

- Identify a framework that includes strategies for inclusion of Aboriginal communities;
- Shift to a full time position with deliverables that address the areas that need attention and growth;
- Focus more on barriers to community development (i.e. recruitment and retention of trained professionals);
- Focus more on the needs of communities – especially rural and northern Aboriginal communities.

#### **Other Perspectives:**

- The Success By 6® Lower Mainland Coordinator suggested that provincial coordination could be more closely linked with Success By 6® for the purposes of training, evaluation and provincial meetings;
- Dr. Hertzman suggested that the role of Provincial Advisor could cross over into the Ministry of Education, as well as MCFD.

### **5.3 Regional vs Provincial Coordination**

In the course of doing this review, a question was raised regarding the feasibility of the Provincial Advisor role occurring at a regional level. The Interior MCFD region recently instituted regional coordination. The goals of this function are:

1. To foster connections among early years community development coalitions.
2. To provide a collective, community based voice for young children and families in the region.
3. To foster connections to other similar regional networks, and provincial initiatives (MCFD, Success By 6® and provincial coalitions i.e. First Call).

This particular region is large and since its activities are quite widely dispersed, some regional coordination can only help. Meeting the third of the regional goals outlined above may allow this region to take over some of the work currently done by the Provincial Advisor. The region alone, however, could not be expected to provide the overview of the “big picture” necessary for provincial planning and consultation. Should this structure prove to be effective and should similar capabilities be created in the other regions in the future, the role of Provincial Advisor may become less critical.

### **5.4 Summary**

Overall, the stakeholder feedback indicates that there is indeed an important role for provincial coordination and technical support for the initiative. As described earlier, many coordinators favored expanding Provincial Advisor time spent on Children First. In parallel, they identified how this added capacity would enhance the Provincial Advisor’s valuable role in making initiatives feel more connected to the overall system, which would be highly desirable.

The Provincial Advisor’s management/coordination functions are important and highly valued. The range of responsibilities now included in the Provincial Advisor role would not likely continue to be well executed, or even continue without a professional to do the work. However,

even more critical for this role is the ongoing building of the network of initiatives where people not only feel connected, but are actually connected and able to share information.

The Provincial Advisor plays a distinct and critical role in facilitating the flow of information within the system, “connecting it to more of itself”. Preserving this function in some form is probably essential for system wide change to occur.

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While the Provincial Advisor is playing an important role in supporting the development of Children First, there is some confusion related to this role of the within the Ministry. Although the role of information sharing, consultation and coordination between the Provincial Advisor and the community coordinators seems clear, these connections are not well understood by MCFD staff; it seems that this connectivity has not yet been sufficiently defined and the links are quite informal. This situation can be remedied by bringing the “players” to the table to talk about what matters to them, and to agree on what types of linkages will best help them support each other as part of a system that will achieve the Children First goals.

***“To bring health to a system, connect it to more of itself. The primary change strategy becomes straightforward. In order to change, the system needs to learn more about itself from itself.”***

***(Wheatley, 1999)***

With respect to replacing provincial coordination with regional structures: There is always a risk that creating yet another system within an existing system will generate a level of bureaucracy that stifles grass roots decision making. However, the Terms of Reference of the one Regional Advisory Committee that has been created shows that the Committee is set up as a conduit for funneling community level decisions to a higher level, and this may prove to be effective. Once this regional structure has become more established, an evaluation will no doubt lead to new ideas about whether this structure improves the overall system and should be pursued in other regions.

The same caution is offered related to MOU’s between the different funders at the regional level and to regional ECD plans; ideally these should respond to and support community based planning and decision making. For example, a regional plan could be expected to be a compilation of well executed community plans and MOU’s could be expected to be drawn up to allow the different funders to address these plans as effectively and efficiently as possible.

## **6.0 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF CHILDREN FIRST & HOW THE INITIATIVE CAN BE STRENGTHENED**

### **6.1 Strengths**

For the purposes of this review, CSMs, Regional ECD consultants, Children First Coordinators, staff at the Provincial ECD Team and a representative of Success By 6® (a total of 53 respondents) were asked to comment on the strengths of Children First. Answers by the different groups of respondents were strikingly similar with the most commonly identified strength being the community driven approach of Children First:

1. Community driven approach.
2. Increased focus on working together.
3. Planning and research function.
4. Ability to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood development and inform parents about community service.
5. Ability to do outreach in communities, advocate on behalf of children, increased sensitivity to the needs of vulnerable families and provincial coordination.

### **6.2 Weaknesses**

The same group of stakeholders was asked to comment on the weaknesses of Children First and while there was not full agreement, the issues identified fall within the categories of systemic issues, infrastructure, funding/sustainability, participation, communication and technical support. The following illustrates issues that were identified in these areas:

#### **Systemic Issues**

- What is being learned at the community level does not appear to be informing planning at the provincial level
- The purpose of the initiative is unclear as some communities fund programs and services while others are focusing on capacity building
- There is confusion around the role of Children First as it relates to other initiatives such as Success By 6® and there are challenges related to attempting to “amalgamate” these at the community level
- Overlaps exist with other initiatives such as Success By 6® (fragmentation has been partly overcome but this varies by region)
- Provincial funding “stovepipes” increase the time required for contracting/granting
- The provincial perspective is difficult to understand – e.g. The Ministry of Education seems to be taking a more active role in ECD – is this work in conflict with the community driven approach?
- The connection between coordinators and CSMs not strong enough
- “Role confusion” exists amongst community partners who have to “change hats” from committee members to agencies competing for funding.

## **Infrastructure**

- Coordinators are not always part of an organization that has equipment, supplies and systems in place
- There are challenges related to the participation of already busy staff from community agencies
- Most managers are doing the work off the side of their desks – they are under resourced
- Children First does not have a presence throughout some regions
- There are too few MCFD staff at the community level to deal with competing demands;
- There is inequity around the province related to wages, supervision and resources for coordinators.

## **Funding/Sustainability**

- There is a lack of funding for implementation of plans
- There is inequity in regional funding, particularly in the North
- The budget is small; smaller centres have more of a challenge
- The year-to-year funding at the regional level is creating uncertainty
- The effect of population based formulae results in smaller communities not having the ability to fund even the base costs of coordination.

## **Participation**

- It is difficult to get true participation from Aboriginal leadership
- There is insufficient focus on Aboriginal engagement and the interests of children with special needs.

## **Communication**

- There is insufficient communication related to how this initiative is different to others
- Profile related to what Children First actually achieves for communities is lacking
- The changing membership at community tables results in a lack of clarity about the mandate
- A strong connection with Success By 6® at the provincial level is lacking.

## **Technical Support**

- There is no common tool for strategic planning;
- Initiatives are unable to measure outcomes.
- 

### ***6.3 Strengthening Children First***

Stakeholders provided their ideas about how the initiative could be strengthened. These ideas fall into the categories of funding/sustainability, maximizing efficiency, training and technical support, leadership, communication and evaluation:

## **Funding/sustainability**

The stakeholders identified the following needs in this area:

- Multi-year, secure funding
- Funding for rural communities to strengthen their ability to build community capacity and ownership – there should be base funding for every community, plus a “top-up” for population base
- Funding for implementation of neighbourhood based integrated services (hubs)
- Funding for regional coordination
- More support to large geographic areas with many small communities
- A system and direction for the results of regional planning that leads to provincial funding and policy
- Increased budgets to allow for supervision and translation of marketing materials;
- More support of the business community.

## **Maximize efficiency**

Stakeholders indicated that the following would maximize efficiency:

- More coordination around who is distributing information (i.e. same information coming from the Provincial Advisor, MCFD staff and the regional coordinator)
- Merge of similar initiatives to help bring the community on side, support local fundraising and eliminate duplicative reporting
- Streamline Children First initiatives according to a defined boundary and function;
- More effective linking by regional/community MCFD office/staff with initiatives to optimize/leverage funding and align better with government
- Continue to engage research and atypical stakeholders
- Streamline Children First boundaries.

## **Training and technical support**

The stakeholders identified the following training needs in the areas of training and technical support:

- Training and support in the areas of community development, social marketing, public presentations, interpreting statistical information, the development of evaluation procedures and tools and information management systems
- Use a centralized approach for things such as a core parent surveys and social marketing
- Better sharing of tools
- More consultation by the province and regions with initiatives related to planning and allocation.

## **Leadership**

The following issues/needs identified by the stakeholders will require leadership at the provincial and regional levels:

- Develop an ECD framework that takes the learning from Children First into account
- Provide guidelines around what services should be available in every community
- Demonstrate a clear mandate that is distinct from but complementary to Success By 6®

- Position Children First, Success By 6® and Understanding the Early Years together as leaders in the development of community based plans, at the highest levels, with the explicit recognition of the roles of others as participants and collaborators in implementing community ECD plans
- Implement Children First in all areas of BC
- Attract more support from the business community
- Provide more support from the region/province and more clarity about the essential elements of the initiative and the funding needed to fully implement it
- Clarify the role of Children First (capacity building vs. service delivery)
- Increase linkages with politicians.

## Communication

Stakeholders suggested the following improvements in the area of communication:

- Increase the profile of Children First
- Incorporate and reflect the unique perspective and needs of Aboriginal communities in each community;
- Increase visits to rural and remote sites by provincial staff
- Affirm government's continued support and commitment at all levels;
- Strengthen links between politicians, provincial government, regions and community initiatives
- Strengthen relationships at the regional level between Children First and government ministries to ensure a coordinated and acknowledged approach to funding
- Improve agendas for provincial meetings
- Centralize an approach to social marketing
- Incorporate the unique perspective and needs of Aboriginal communities and other atypical stakeholders.

## Evaluation

One respondent suggested the implementation of community report cards.

### ***6.4 Strategic Questions to Consider***

An analysis of strengths and weaknesses of any organization leads to the identification of strategic questions and this instance is no exception:

1. What is described as the "lack of a provincial framework" is a factor that may continue to plague efforts to rationalize and integrate at every level. The questions are: "How prescriptive do we want that framework to be, particularly when a community driven approach has been identified as Children First's greatest strength"? and "What will it take to reach agreement across ministries at the highest level?"
2. The reasons behind the inequity of regional funding are unclear to the reviewer. It appears that decisions around allocation of funding is made at the regional level, yet people at all levels in the system – Provincial ECD Team, regional and local are questioning allocation decisions. This begs that old question "Who's on first?" in this situation and "Who needs to be involved in resolving this?"

3. With respect to confusion around the roles of Children First and Success By 6®, some communities appear to have managed integration at the community level very well and in some instances Success By 6® plays the lead role in the community initiative. At the same time, the existence of two initiatives with similar mandates are bound to “split the focus” and waste resources when it comes to raising profile or engaging business. The question is: “How can this be resolved – who needs to be part of the discussion and what are the factors that will affect decisions about this?”
4. The lack of resources to provide base funding for community development is an important issue and can surely be addressed. The question is “Who has the authority to make a decision to provide base funding and what can be done to facilitate this decision?”
5. The lack of resources to implement community plans goes much deeper than simply asking “how can we bring more funding into the ECD system” and the strategic questions are more painful: “Has the planning been conducted in a logical way, and is it inclusive of the research and the people who will be affected most?”; “Do the plans provide for integration of services that will enable more effective and accessible services for children and families?”; “Are the plans inclusive of all parts of the children serving systems in communities?”; and “Do the plans include an evaluation component by which progress can be measured?”
6. The issues of inequity of staff wages and coordinators who are not part of an organization that has equipment, supplies and systems in place, and a lack of supervision for coordinators are closely related. Some coordinators are contracted and work from home, some have space in Host Agency offices and some are Ministry employees. Few of the Terms of Reference submitted for review had guidelines related to the role of the Host Agency, so this may be unclear in some initiatives. It appears that some effort needs to be made to resolve these issues and the strategic questions are “How can we ensure equity, supervision and adequate working conditions?”; “What is the role of the Host Agency? and “Who needs to be at the table to resolve these issues?”
7. A discussion of what might be required to establish an evaluation system took place in an earlier section of this report and the strategic question is “How will we reach agreement at all levels upon a shared set of long term outcomes and indicators and the use of a common logic model and other similar tool?”

## **6.5 Summary**

The tone and content of the responses to the question about the strengths of the Children First initiative reflect a belief in its goals and an overall enthusiasm for the work. It is encouraging to see that there is widespread agreement at every level examined about what the main strengths of Children First are. The strengths identified are congruent with the goals of the initiative and this is a very positive finding related to how the initiative has been implemented.

For the most part, the improvements/strategies suggested by the participants in this review address the weaknesses or challenges identified by the various stakeholders. These ideas are important and included in the recommendations made in this review.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

This Implementation Evaluation, in combination with the cluster evaluation of the Children First sites around the province, demonstrates the many successful aspects of the initiative as well as areas for improvement. It provides a basis for discussion amongst different provincial Ministries concerned with early childhood development, the Provincial ECD Team, regional and community MCFD staff and the community initiatives about how Children First and the ECD system can continue to move to the next level of service integration that will benefit children and families.

The structure of Children First is evolving in unique ways in each community served and the support of the provincial ECD Team, through the Provincial Advisor is contributing to the development of a new province wide system of ECD supports and services. Overall the strengths of the initiative are congruent with its goals. While this review showed that there is some confusion within the system, this is positive from a systems perspective in that this sort of confusion is indicative of change that is happening, or is about to happen. Systems theory shows that systems cannot transform and re-organize without being willing to move into a place of some confusion. The work that is being done in the areas of community building, research and planning is generating a continuous generation of information where people typically tend to become overwhelmed and eventually let go of old problem solving approaches. When this happens, "old ways" are largely discredited or abandoned and those involved gain new abilities to transform systems into a new order (Wheatley, 1999; Kelner-Rogers, 1998).

The reviewer acknowledges the support and very significant cooperation of the many Children First coordinators, regional and community MCFD staff, the Provincial Advisor and the Provincial ECD Team who participated in and supported this work.

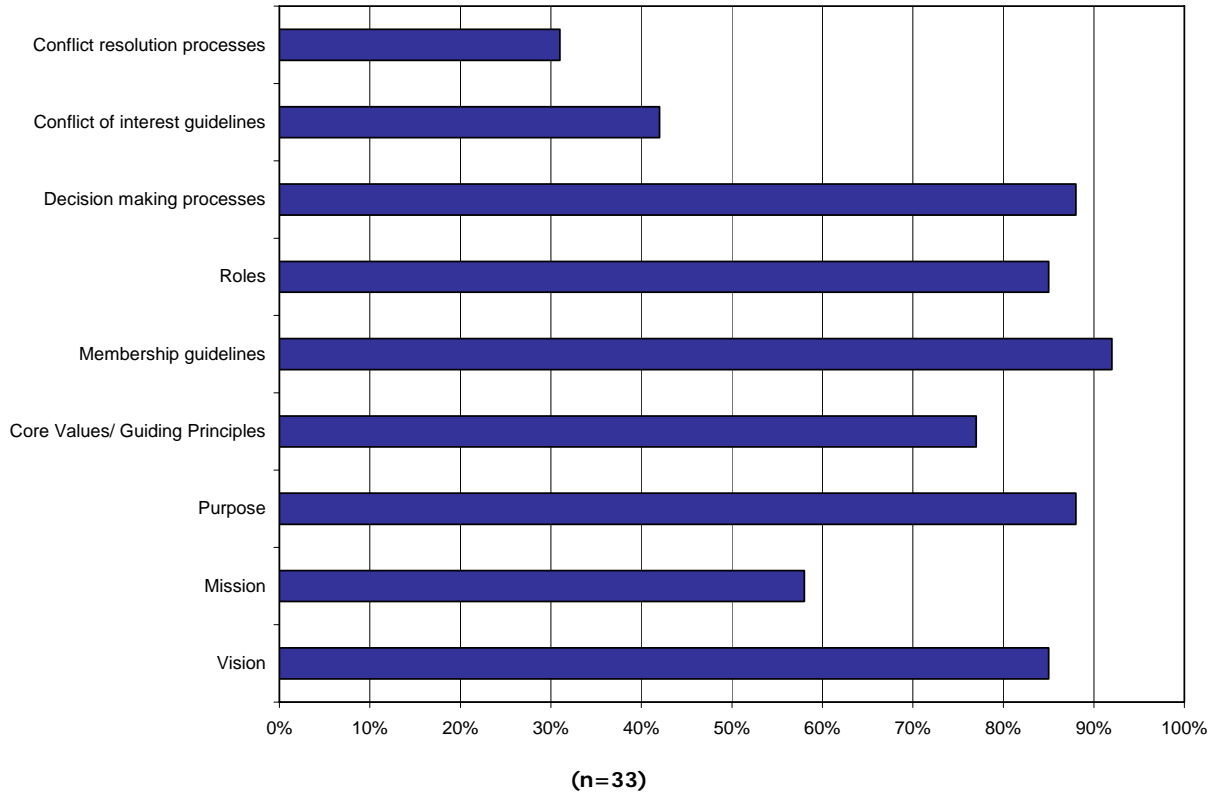
## Appendix A

### Children First Initiatives in 2005-2006

REGION	Community
North	Prince George, Terrace, Bulkley Valley
Interior	Central Okanagan, South Okanagan, North Okanagan (regional coordination), Vernon area, Sicamous, Salmon Arm, Revelstoke, Enderby, Golden, 100 Mile House, Williams Lake, Ashcroft/Cache Creek, Lillooet, North Thompson, East Kootenay, West Kootenay, Boundary
Vancouver/Coastal	Richmond, Vancouver, Sea to Sky
Fraser	Hope, Aggasiz Harrison, Chilliwack, Abbotsford, Mission, Langley, Delta, Surrey White Rock, Ridge-Meadows, Tri-Cities, New Westminster, Burnaby
Vancouver Island	South Island, Cowichan Valley, Nanaimo, Parksville/Qualicum, Port Alberni, Westcoast. North Island: Comox Valley, Campbell River, Mount Waddington

## Appendix B

Common Elements in CF Steering Committee Terms of Reference



## **Appendix C**

### **How the Provincial Advisor has helped to strengthen initiatives**

#### **Summary of Coordinators Responses to the Implementation Survey**

**Knowledge Transfer.** The Provincial Advisor is viewed as an important, *if not essential*, source of information by all responding coordinators. This group also outlined a variety of “connections” between their initiatives and other information sources. They believe that the Provincial Advisor enables the information flow in various ways:

- Keeping initiatives current on Provincial and Federal activities, including ECD developments and research findings
- Regular distribution of information on what happens in the Province, the Federal Government and outside Canada
- Linking an initiative to other Children First efforts in other communities, particularly facilitating information about resources and ideas employed by others.

**Problem solving/consultation.** The Provincial Advisor’s consulting role was considered quite helpful by most coordinators. Her contributions have been provided in a variety of ways:

- Her accessibility and availability as a resource, as a contact, or as a provider of information was widely noted
- Some initiatives have relied on the Provincial Advisor to help with clarifying specific issues within their communities; this role has included direct consultation with key stakeholders in building a community-based coalition
- The Provincial Advisor is also seen as a linking point for initiatives seeking new contacts or specific information about their counterparts.

**Coordination of meetings and training.** The value of this function was explicitly recognized, in several respects:

- Organization/administration of professional development, planning and training sessions were deemed very helpful
- The Provincial Advisor is key to helping initiatives look beyond their own local activities
- Some responses suggest that the Provincial Advisor is a unique player in expanding the capacity of initiatives, as well as enhancing networking among initiatives.

**Networking.** About two thirds of the coordinators consider the Provincial Advisor as a key element in facilitating the creation of a Provincial network to support their initiatives. The range of responses show that initiatives rely on the Provincial Advisor to inform and stimulate relationships in several ways:

- A number reported that Provincial Advisor initiates contact with initiatives, and supports contact between them, thus facilitating exchange or sharing of skills and ideas about strategies
- This approach is considered vital, and the keystone for linkage between initiatives; some think that understanding Children First as a province-wide effort could not occur if the Provincial Advisor structure were not in place
- The Provincial Advisor is seen as a critical point of access to provincial bodies like the Provincial ECD Team, and she is credited with expediting contact between Children First and other MCFD programs, like Success By 6® .

**Accessibility.** Several coordinators reported that the Provincial Advisor's ready availability was widely appreciated:

- The incumbent Provincial Advisor's style and commitment provide a ready and timely resource
- Because her accessibility is combined with commitment to timely response to inquiries, coordinators report a high level of satisfaction
- The ways in which initiatives make use of such an available resource vary somewhat: instant contact to answer questions; information transfer; and facilitating connections between initiatives.

**Reducing isolation.** A few respondents commented on this benefit, as a special byproduct of the networking process.

- The perceived isolation of a single Children First initiative can be significantly mitigated by continuous involvement with information sources and exchanges that are Provincial rather than restricted to local community conditions
- Active participation in regional and Provincial activities can energize local participants who cannot always readily see beyond their own community concerns.

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