



Health
Canada

Santé
Canada



Strong Families Healthy Children

Canada's Community Action Program for Children (CAPC)

Celebrating the Community Action Program for Children (CAPC)

Thousands of people are working together to improve Canada's future by focusing their energy and creativity on children from birth to age six — children who, with positive intervention and support in their most formative years, are more likely to reach their full potential.

The primary responsibility for children belongs, of course, to families. But today, there's a general acceptance that *all* sectors of society need to be involved in supporting children and families in their parenting role. Partnerships among parents, community workers and volunteers, private business people, and all levels of government are needed to improve the lives of Canadian children.

Health Canada's Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) is an exciting, innovative, community-based response to a national concern. It springs from the awareness that communities are best positioned to recognize the needs of their children, and have the capacity to draw together the resources to address those needs. CAPC builds on community strength by funding community-based coalitions to establish and deliver services to meet the developmental needs of children living in conditions of risk.

What's Inside

Meeting the Challenge	2
A Strong Foundation	4
Basics of Growth and Development . . .	6
Special Projects for Special Needs . . .	8
Sharing the CAPC Experience	10



Meeting the Challenge

“Someone in the community thought of an idea that would improve someone else’s circumstances.

People worked together on the idea – refining it, revising it, changing it to fit, and developing it.

Teamwork put the idea into action.

The idea then took on a life of its own. This is

CAPC in a nutshell!”

CAPC staff



Participants have a voice in defining issues and are respected for the work they do in addressing them. Every day, CAPC projects and participants transform the textbook theory of “community development” into a living reality. In the process, almost 29,000 children and 27,000 parents and caregivers visit CAPC projects every week; 7,600 volunteers donate more than 36,000 hours a month; and more than 1,700 jobs have been created.

Because CAPC programs are so responsive to community needs, no two projects look alike — even within the same region.

Individually, the 392 projects that exist across the country are impressive.

Collectively, they represent a grassroots movement that’s working to create the conditions necessary for *all* children to thrive physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially.

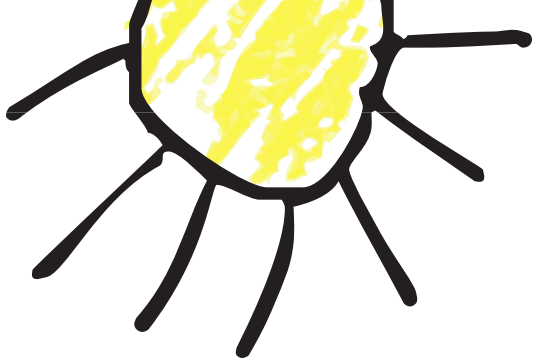
As one CAPC worker put it: “People can do really amazing things when given the chance, when communities and families come together.”

CAPC is one of three community based programs from Health Canada intended to ensure that children have a healthy start in life. The other programs are the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program and Aboriginal Head Start.

Canada is a wealthy country with much to be proud of — not the least of which is a steady improvement in the health of its children. In the last 20 years, for example, infant death rates have been cut in half and educational levels are rising.

But not all children fare equally well. The low birth weight rate hasn’t improved during the past decade. The infant mortality rate continues to be higher in poor neighbourhoods. Virtually all health indicators





for Aboriginal children are lower than the Canadian average. And the percentage of single parent families has nearly doubled in the past 30 years.

Perhaps most distressing of all, one Canadian child in five lives in poverty.*

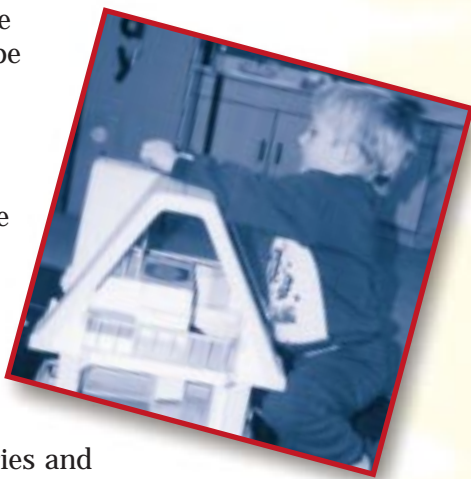
Research is showing that parent capacity is key to optimal child development. One of the best strategies for helping young children to reach their full development potential is to provide parents, as early as possible after a child is born, with the support, information and skills they need to raise their children. Experience tells us that action must take place at the community level to be most effective and relevant.

CAPC was designed to support families with children whose health and well-being may be at risk. Over half of CAPC caregivers' households had incomes less than \$20,000.

Each CAPC project is unique — some provide parenting workshops, one-on-one counselling or help families access other community resources. Others provide home visits or operate toy-lending libraries and community kitchens. CAPC projects promote positive parent-child interaction through recreation, special events and cultural programs. And that's just the beginning ...

In whatever shape or form support is given, the Atlantic CAPC Regional Evaluation says it all: "CAPC works!"

* Poverty as measured using Statistics Canada's low income cut-offs (LICO).



CAPC's Origins

At the 1990 United Nations World Summit for Children, the leaders of 71 countries came together to discuss their most vulnerable citizens. Recognizing that the fate of the Earth rests on children, these countries made a fresh commitment to invest in their well-being.

The Government of Canada responded to this challenge with a four-pronged plan called the Child Development Initiative (CDI). CAPC is the largest program in this initiative. With its announcement in 1992, CAPC represents a significant investment in children, based on strong partnerships among federal, provincial and territorial governments and different sectors of society. CAPC and the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) received a substantial increase in the 1997 federal budget. This resulted in an annual allocation of \$52.9 million for CAPC projects.

A Strong Foundation

CAPC projects are effective because of the dedication, commitment and patience of the people who are involved — the parents, workers, and volunteers — and because they create programs specifically designed for the communities that use them. CAPC projects are as varied and as interesting as the people they serve.



Viewed as a whole, CAPC projects create a rich and vibrant tapestry that's helping to break down the health, social, environmental and developmental barriers facing young children.

There are some basic similarities among all CAPC projects. The common threads for all the projects are CAPC's guiding principles.

- **Children first**
— children must be the primary consideration in CAPC programs.
- **Strengthening and supporting families**
— all sectors of Canadian society share the responsibility for children by supporting parents as they raise their children.
- **Equity and accessibility**
— children, regardless of culture and socio-economic status, are entitled to equal opportunities to develop to their full potential.
- **Partnerships and collaboration**
— holistic support for children and their families can only be achieved through the combined efforts of parents, families, communities, governments and service providers.
- **Community-based**
— the community is viewed as the focus for decision-making and action.
- **Flexibility**
— in order to respond to the diversity of communities across Canada and the particular circumstances and changing needs of children and families, CAPC programs must be flexible.



Who's at Risk?

The first few years of life are the most important for a child's development because the building blocks of cognitive, physical and social development are being laid. CAPC was designed to address the health and development needs of children living in conditions of risk. These children are:

- living in low-income families
- living in teenage parent families
- at risk of, or have, developmental delays, social, emotional or behavioural problems
- neglected or abused.

Special consideration is given to Métis, Inuit and off-reserve First Nations children, the children of refugees, children in lone parent families and children who live in remote or isolated communities.

CAPC Responds to Children Living in Low-Income Families

The Educational Upgrading program at Annapolis Valley-Hants in Nova Scotia – a CAPC project – provides mothers with the academic instruction they need to get high school certification. The program supports women in their studies by addressing such basic needs as transportation and food. Their Jump Start program provides a full-day play group and skill-building experience for pre-school children while their mothers get an education.

The Trinity Conception Family Resource Program in Newfoundland serves more than 40 communities – most of which have a large proportion of people with low educational levels and high unemployment. The project offers a smorgasbord of programs to support parents and children from conception to the age of six. There are parenting programs, children's programs, support groups, as well as a clothing exchange, baby equipment loan program and discussion groups on budget management.

Basics of Growth

"We had a child who was very shy, didn't participate in activities, didn't talk, and seemed sad. After eight months in the program, this child smiles more, asks for help, talks, plays with other children, has gained weight, and is much happier."

CAPC worker

Children Grow Through Play

Play is an essential part of child development. When children play they learn about themselves, the larger world and the importance of getting along with others.

Located at Canadian Forces Base, Dundurn, Saskatchewan, the Come 'N' Play program provides two-hour sessions, three times a week, for parents and children. In a safe, loving, stimulating environment, children do arts and crafts, drama, storytelling and games. Focusing on safety, healthy growth and development, they learn how to interact positively with others.

"When they first started coming to the Centre, the mother would push away her child every time he came near her. I can still remember the day that child came over and she picked him up and sat him on her lap and hugged him."

CAPC worker

Children Grow With Love

Every parent, regardless of ethnicity, income, education, or geographic location, wants to be the best parent possible. But sometimes circumstances make this difficult.

One of the programs at the CLSC Chaleurs in Paspébiac in Gaspésie, Québec, focuses on developing skills to improve the relationship between parents and their children. Through a series of hands-on workshops in areas such as rocking and singing, crafts, massage, and motor skill activities, parents learn how to relate physically and emotionally to their children, and the important role of activities such as making eye contact with children, talking and hugging.

Children Grow in Healthy Homes

The vision of the Dene Cultural Institute (DCI) in the Northwest Territories is to become a place for healing by building on Dene history, culture and traditional healing methods. The guidance of Elders is essential to maintain continuity with the social and cultural past.

The DCI's Mobile Healing Program was established to help children have healthier and happier childhoods. By using mobile, participant-driven workshops families gain the ability to eliminate and deal with the effects of alcoholism, violence, child sexual abuse, and other intergenerational dysfunctions. The program hopes to deliver at least 30 Healing Workshops each year.

Children Need Hope

The Fredericton Regional Family Resource Centre in New Brunswick is piloting a new Parenting for Literacy program in partnership with the Early Childhood Centre of the University of New Brunswick. Two mornings a week, parents and their children work and play together, and apart, with a focus on developing literacy skills.

"I'm beginning to see a link between now and farther down the line. I'm beginning to develop goals and dreams for my children, to give them choices and empowerment."

CAPC parent



and Development

Children Grow Through Cultural Pride

In order to grow up proud of who they are and where they came from, children need a positive grounding in their own traditions.

Many provinces have allocated funding specifically for Aboriginal children. In Saskatchewan, for example, 65 percent of the CAPC funding is designated to serve Métis and off-reserve First Nations communities.

The Hiliye'ye Lelum Society Port Alberni Friendship Centre in British Columbia provides an atmosphere where Elders can transfer cultural teachings to parents. The program works so well, adult schools want to incorporate it into their curricula.

"Since our child has been in the program, our Native culture is being discussed and explored more. I guess you can say we're becoming more proud to be Native."

CAPC parent

Children Need to be Safe

As a result of Kids 'n' Carseats, a CAPC project in Red Deer, Alberta, the correct use of carseats improved from 30 percent the first year to 50 percent in the second year. In fact, Red Deer had lower rates of carseat misuse (30 percent), than the national rate (58 percent).

Community awareness about child carseat safety was heightened through mobilizing a fleet of volunteers, including community agencies, the RCMP, Alberta Motor Association, Kinette Service Club, local car dealerships, insurance agencies, youth groups, local fire fighters and paramedics, hospital personnel and local businesses.

"One month after a Red Deer grandmother had her grandchildren's carseats adjusted at a carseat clinic (tethered, missing parts replaced), she was in an accident. She broke her leg and ribs, and was hospitalized for a week. The grandchildren who were in the car with her weren't even scratched. The officer at the scene told her that her grandchildren wouldn't have fared so well if they hadn't been in properly installed carseats."

CAPC worker

Children Need Informed, Confident Parents

People are not born with the knowledge of how to parent. Good parenting skills are learned. Many parents need additional information and support. The Kids R First Family Resource Centre in Summerside, PEI, offers a variety of parenting programs reflecting the needs of the parents and the ages of the children. While children play in supervised playrooms, parents participate in a facilitated session called Positive Parenting. Programs include Nurturing; Magic 1, 2, 3; How to Talk so Kids Will Listen; and Active Parenting Today.

Children Grow When Part of Their Community

Recognizing how important it is for rural children to socialize and feel part of a community, the CAPC project in Breton and Buck Creek, Alberta, operates several drop-in parent/child programs. The children play, make friends, and learn valuable social skills. Their parents, meanwhile, learn how to play with them. Parents and children are able to break out of their social isolation and connect to the larger community.

"Without these groups, I'd still be behind locked doors and my daughter would still be sitting watching TV instead of playing with kids. If it hadn't been for these sessions, if it hadn't been for the Resource Centre, a lot of us women would still be behind locked doors and closed curtains."

CAPC parent

CAPC projects in urban areas aim to break the isolation of many parents living in the middle of a city who feel completely alone.

*Note: The quotes from CAPC parents and staff appearing on pages 6-7 are not necessarily from the program being described.

Special Projects for Special

Some projects address specific issues identified by the community.



The Wahbung Abinoonjiiag Program in Winnipeg, Manitoba, provides a variety of services for Aboriginal women and their children to break the cycle of family violence. New community partnerships have led to an Outreach Program and a Healing Circle Program.



In Saskatchewan, the Meyoyawin Circle Project has established the Children's Visiting Program at the Pine Grove Correctional Centre. This program was set up to allow children to visit their mothers who are incarcerated. Mothers participate in a parent education program, Elders teach them positive discipline and communication skills, and children are taught culturally-appropriate values and traditions.



In Toronto, Ontario, Breaking the Cycle is an education, prevention and intervention program for pregnant and parenting women with substance abuse problems. A wide range of services are provided in collaboration with provincially funded programs including a lunch program, nutrition counselling, prenatal planning, postnatal support, labour coaching, breastfeeding support, parenting information, onsite medical services, addictions counselling and parent relief. Programs for children include infant stimulation, developmental assessment, early identification and intervention, and medical services.



CAPC Principles

1

Children First

2

Strengthening and Supporting Families

3

Equity and Accessibility

"Children from the Resource Centre seem to have developed the necessary friendship skills. They settle in, listen, are able to follow routines, and know how to read books. These children knew the alphabet when they came to kindergarten — a skill 90% of the children in that school don't have."

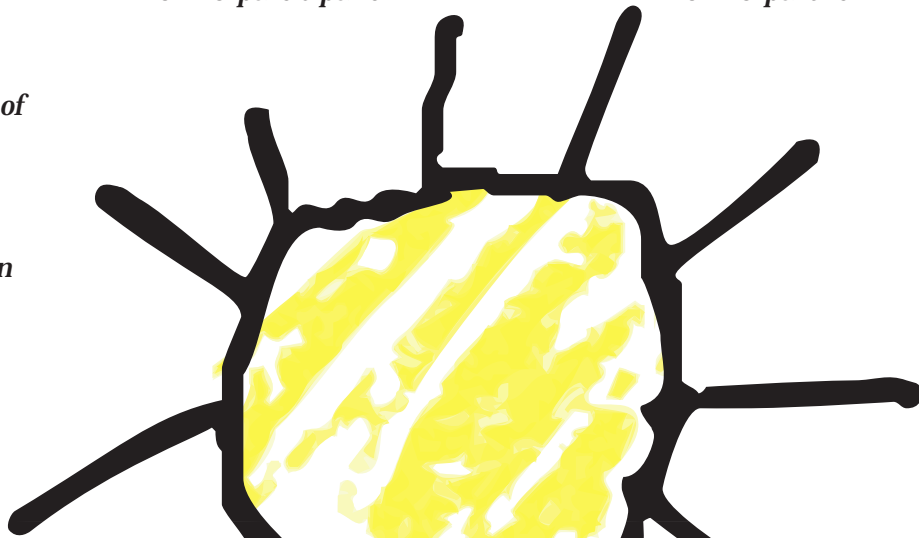
Kindergarten teacher's observation on CAPC children

"It's helped us become more of a community. People look out more for each other. We can be there for others."

CAPC participant

"I like that the Centre helps parents and children keep their own cultural habits and accept the Canadian way of life."

CAPC parent



Needs



4

Partnerships and Collaboration

“Partners did things that raised awareness and had the community buy ownership of the Centre. Some groups donated when we were having an Easter party and other groups offset the cost of photocopying. Those kinds of activities may not be social services or public health, but it’s the businesses in the community, and individuals, that are collaborating.”

CAPC worker

5

Community-Based

“It is the willingness to let communities define the program for themselves which creates the success within each.”

CAPC worker

6

Flexibility

“We operate from two rural family resource centres, a transition house, an early intervention agency, and two minivans. Our programs go wherever space is found free or at modest cost; local churches, community halls, fire halls, schools, a halfway house, and participants’ homes. We offer a wide range of services and programs for both parents and children. We work side by side. When something needs to change, it does. No fuss. No muss.”

CAPC worker

Sharing the CAPC Experience

CAPC project staff, parents and volunteers are building community-based services that have the ability to transform lives! They have learned much in a short time and are now in a position to share what they have learned with other communities and with governments.

From Theory to Reality

One important lesson is that the foundation on which CAPC projects are based is solid. The six guiding principles which form the framework for CAPC have provided the direction and inspiration for communities who are mobilizing to support families in their parenting role and are having a positive impact on the development of young children.

Parent Involvement is Essential

Parents must be involved in a variety of meaningful ways in programs intended for them. CAPC projects are coming up with new strategies for involving parents and getting their feedback and opinions. Parents participate and support CAPC programs because they are *their* programs.

Volunteerism is Alive and Well in Canada

The 159,000 hours donated to CAPC between April 1, 1995, and March 31, 1997, by over 7,600 volunteers demonstrates that people do care about Canada's children. It also shows that when a community feels ownership and pride for a program, it will support it. This is further seen in the level of donations received by projects. More than \$21 million in cash, and more than \$10 million in items and services were donated to CAPC projects in the same two-year period.

How to Reach Families and Keep Them Coming

Some of the most important program attributes are those that are often overlooked — accessible, understanding and friendly.

CAPC projects are discovering innovative ways to build trust, promote health, support families in isolated communities and deal with such important issues as the prevention of FAS/FAE and child abuse.

New Resources, Tools and Knowledge

The wealth of skills, knowledge, and resources that CAPC projects have accumulated are there to be shared with other community groups — an action Health Canada supports.

For example, Brighter Futures for Children of Young/Single Parents in Ottawa, Ontario, has developed *Anger/Stress: The H.E.L.P. Toolbox*. The resource provides young/single parents with tools and skills for coping with everyday stress. The program is organized into a series of four-week modules dealing with anger, self-confidence, coping, parenting and stress.

The Skookum Jim Friendship Centre in Whitehorse, Yukon, has developed The Traditional Parenting Program. This includes a workshop and Facilitator's Manual which is designed to be used in all First Nations' communities. The Manual contains examples of traditional Elders' teachings on motherhood and fatherhood. The Yukon First Nation Elders were involved in collecting this information and developing the program.

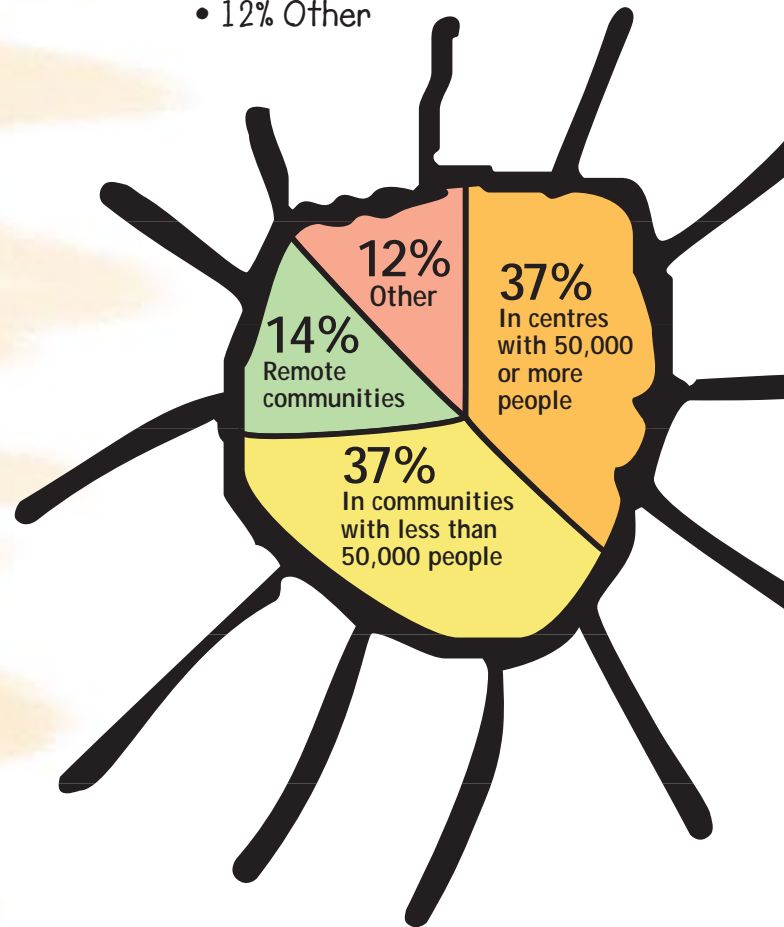
Perhaps more than anything, CAPC projects point to the fact that we all have a role to play in raising Canada's children, and that when communities take ownership of children's issues wonderful things can — and do — happen.

It's important to heal inside your community, not in isolation of it.

CAPC parent

Where are CAPC Projects?

- 37% are in centres with 50,000 or more people
- 37% are in communities with less than 50,000 people
- 14% are in remote* communities
- 12% Other



* Remote communities are accessible only by air, or have no road access for more than two weeks each year, or are more than 300 km by car from a community with a population of 50,000 or more.



Sources

Information and data for this report have been taken from local, regional and national CAPC evaluations, as well as newsletters and personal accounts from CAPC project participants and staff.

For more information, contact:

Community Based Programs
Health Canada
Jeanne Mance Building
Address Locator 1909C2
Ottawa, Canada
K1A 1B4

Internet address:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/childhood-youth/>

Published by authority of the
Minister of Health

Également disponible en français
sous le titre : *Des familles
saines, des enfants en santé.*

© Minister of Public Works and
Government Services Canada,
1998

Our mission is
to help the people of Canada
maintain and improve their health.

Health Canada



"I am a stronger person
making healthier choices.
My children are more stable.
My parenting and self-care
improved dramatically."

CAPC parent

Canada