



northwest territories

Key focus for 2004/2005

Helping children by:

- fostering quality early learning and child care programs

Helping families by:

- specialized home visiting programs
- literacy development

Helping communities by:

- encouraging partnerships

NWT Framework for Action for Early Childhood Development

Child

- ❑ Each child is considered to be a gift to the family and the community.
- ❑ Children are our future.
- ❑ Programs provide a secure, nurturing environment and promote the balanced development of children.

Family:

- ❑ Each child is surrounded by and grows up in a family.
- ❑ Families, whether they be a single parent, two parents or an extended multigenerational family.
- ❑ Families provide a nurturing environment and stimulation for development and learning.
- ❑ Parents want the best for their children.

perspective

Community

- ❑ Healthy communities provide a safe and healthy environment in which children and families grow.
- ❑ The community and its culture shape the design and delivery of all programs.
- ❑ High quality early childhood development programs support and complement the parent's role.
- ❑ Community programs are family oriented and promote the healthy development of children.
- ❑ Community programs are inclusive of all children and their needs through partnerships among programs.

It is recognized that a variety of partnerships are vital to the development and the effective delivery of quality early childhood experiences. In the NWT, the cooperative efforts include the family, community, Aboriginal groups, organizations and government.

For 2004/2005, some examples of partners include:

- NWT Literacy Council (Family Literacy);
- HSSA (Healthy Family, Infant Hearing Program);
- Aurora and Yukon College (Early Childhood Development);
- Health Canada (Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Initiative Program); and
- Local regulated early learning and child care programs (Language Nests).



supporting our

Targeted Programs for Prenatal to birth

children & families

Canada's Prenatal Nutrition Program

The Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) is a federal government program that has been ongoing since 1994. This program provides funding for communities to deliver programs that give prenatal women access to:

- healthy foods high in nutrients;
- prenatal nutrition information and counselling provided by a qualified dietician; and
- breastfeeding support.

The target groups for CPNP are high-need, hard to reach prenatal and breastfeeding women. The goal is to improve maternal and infant nutritional health by providing a greater depth of service to women earlier in their pregnancy and for a longer duration postpartum. The program has a particular focus on those who are facing difficult life circumstances that threaten their health and the development of their babies.

In 2004/2005 seventy five per cent of all communities had a CPNP project. This totaled 25 community CPNP projects. Projects typically involved cooking groups, nutrition education through games and quizzes and breastfeeding support plus education activities.

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is an easy way to give babies the best start possible. The NWT encourages and supports all mothers to breastfeed as a way to promote healthy childhood development and parental bonding. Women in communities are supported to initiate and sustain breastfeeding through CPNP programs and Public Health Departments for postnatal support including breastfeeding. One Health and Social Service Authority provides a loan and/or free use of breast pumps to support women especially in difficult initial times.

The NWT Breastfeeding Survey (1993), indicated that 80 per cent of mothers initiated breastfeeding while in the hospital. The NWT is striving to ensure that the same percentage of women continue to breastfeed for six months post birth.

A number of initiatives were implemented in 2004/2005 to promote, support and protect breastfeeding. For example, the 2003-2005 Breastfeeding and Infant Feeding Survey was developed to update the 1993 information. The survey is being completed at the community level to track breastfeeding information for the first 12 months of life for each baby born in the NWT.

Infant Hearing Program

Significant hearing loss is one of the most common major conditions present at birth and occurs more frequently than any other condition screened in newborns (Hearing Foundation of Canada). Children, whose hearing impairment is not detected until after three years of age, miss the critical window for language development. Children with hearing impairments who are identified early and receive appropriate intervention have a significantly improved chance to develop age appropriate language and communication skills.

The Infant Hearing Program (IHP) is a joint initiative between Stanton Territorial Health Authority, Beaufort-Delta Health and Social Services Authority and the Department of Health and Social Services. The purpose of the IHP is to identify newborns at risk for hearing loss as hearing loss may affect health, language, learning and development. The goal of the program is to screen ninety five per cent of babies born in the NWT.

Information on the program is provided to parents prenatally or at the time of birth. Information pamphlets have been developed and distributed as part of the universally distributed Healthy Pregnancy Kits.

In 2004/2005, there were 807 newborns discharged from the hospitals. 49 per cent of these infants were screened in the hospitals. 100% of these babies received screening and 7.5 per cent of those screened, were determined to be at risk at birth.

Twenty five per cent of those babies screened received inconclusive initial screening results. These babies were then referred to an audiologist for more in-depth screening.

In 2004/2005, there were no babies identified with hearing loss.

Inconclusive hearing results and thus costly travel has proven to be a challenge for the program as the infants and families need to travel to Yellowknife to access an audiologist for the specialized screening process.





Healthy Family Program

The Healthy Family Program is an intensive, home-based, early intervention program that is managed within health and social service Authorities. Public health nurses, social workers and healthy family program staff work in partnership to deliver this service.

The intent of the Healthy Family Program is to optimize the home environment for the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of children (ages birth-6 years) who are at risk of being developmentally delayed. Families are assessed and invited to participate in the program prenatally or at birth of the child. Specially trained Family Home Visitors provide this early intervention and follow the families through the program.

There are four Healthy Family Program pilot sites in communities ranging from populations of 1,800 to 18,600 people. Each program has a coordinator and a complement of home visitors related to the community birth rate. All Healthy Family Program staff are trained in core program areas.

The total number of screened births in these four communities was 144 (note that two programs started in the last half and quarter of the year). There were 44 families involved in the Healthy Family Program in 2004/2005.

Here is what some parents say about the Healthy Family Program:

"I like this type of program. I enjoy it. It helps me feel like I am doing good."

"It is a good program because babies don't come with manuals and this is like having a manual. It's nice to know we are doing all we can."