



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Early Childhood Programs and Services for Children Birth to School Age

children & families

Regulated Early Childhood programs

The development of quality early childhood programs is a goal for the GNWT. The GNWT committed approximately \$2 million to support families and child care programs. This support included:

- continued delivery of the Early Childhood Education certificate program by Aurora College;
- assistance for regulated early childhood programs with the purchase of equipment, materials and start up expenses;
- subsidies to low income families to assist with child care expenses;
- licensing and monitoring of regulated child care programs; and
- program delivery and operational support to regulated child care programs.

As of March 2004, there were 99 regulated child care programs offering 1403 licensed spaces throughout the NWT. There are 4 regional early childhood consultants responsible for licensing and monitoring regulated programs. These consultants also provide support to front line staff and operators/non-profit boards of directors as required.

Approximately \$200,000 was provided to low income families through the Child Care User Subsidy Program. This subsidy supports families to access child care services by assisting with child care fees.

42 students enrolled in 4 distant education courses and 2 practicums during the 2004/05 academic year.

28 students also participated in a two day workshop offered in three regional centres in the NWT.



Universal Developmental Screening

Universal developmental screening was implemented in the Northwest Territories in June 2002 to ensure that all children had a developmental screen by the age of three years. Developmental screening is a key component in the promotion of healthy children and healthy families.

The Nipissing District Developmental Screen (NDDS) is a broad based general screen designed to identify potential developmental delays in children from birth to six years of age. Nurses and community health representatives have been trained to administer the screen and to provide feedback to families. Children who are identified with potential developmental delays are referred to regional or territorial services for an assessment.

The NDDS includes parent education of child development into the assessment process in the form of a parent handout. This is appreciated by parents. As one parent says,

"The tear-off sheet gave me the tools so I could know for myself if my baby was doing okay...It made me feel independent and that I could do things on my own and not call the nurses all the time." (Hume and Associates, 2004, Final Evaluation Report, NWT Early Childhood Action Plan, page 17)

In 2004/2005, there were 2,714 developmental screens performed on children from birth to six years of age. Developmental screening is to occur at 6 months, 12 months, 3 years and as the pre-kindergarten screen.

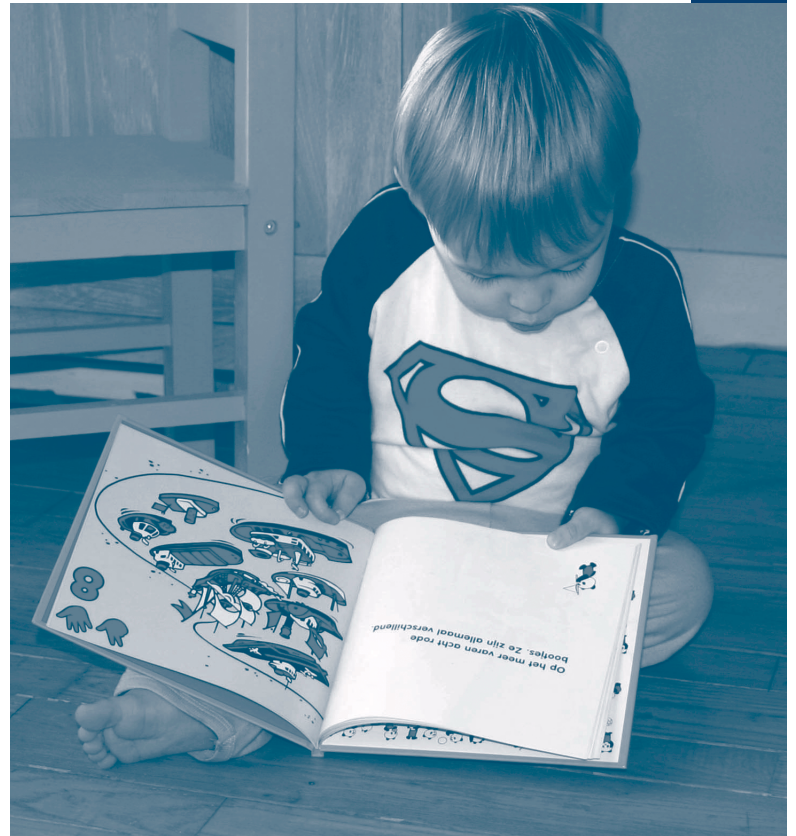
Family Literacy

Literacy skills develop in the early years of a child's life. Early literacy skills provide a strong foundation for learning. The Early Childhood Development Framework for Action (ECD FA) has incorporated early literacy and family literacy throughout many initiatives.

The NWT Literacy Council has been a key partner in the development of the literacy component of the ECD FA. Since the ECD FA's inception in 2001, the NWT Literacy Council has supported and offered a number of family literacy initiatives. These initiatives have provided community based family literacy training to parents, and community members including approximately 200 community members participating in the first level of family literacy training.

In 2004/2005, the Council continued their work by:

- developing 13 different resources to assist family literacy providers, placed literacy materials in the hands of young learners and researched family literacy models;
- hosting a workshop on Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPPY) for 20 participants;
- delivering first stage family literacy training to 32 participants;
- delivering second stage family literacy training to 25 family literacy providers; and
- providing support funding to 39 family literacy projects in 28 communities.



Comments from Family Literacy Providers:

"The parents want more programs like this to help their children become more focused when they start school."

"I would run a similar program again. The children and the adults are really interested in the Elders' storytelling".

"The Family Tutoring Program is perfect for my class. I will use it with my adult learners who have young children".

"Families learned that books can be made at home using everyday objects and supplies found at home".

"I love the Talking Books. They are so easy to make we are making them in Inuinnaqtun. Elders tell us stories and then we make them into talking books."

The Healthy Children Initiative

The HCI is a joint initiative developed by the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to provide funding to communities to enhance existing programs and services for children 0-6 years of age and their families and/or provide services to individual children requiring intensive support to assist children with integration into a centre based early childhood program.

The vision of the Healthy Children Initiative complements the ECD Framework for Action with its focus on healthy child development.

The Healthy Children Initiative provides a total of 1.5 million dollars to communities across the territories. Community groups are encouraged to work together to develop programs to meet local needs. In 2004/2005, 28 communities accessed HCI funding for a total of 43 individual projects. Funds were primarily used for:

- salaries for child care staff, developmental workers (at early childhood programs or kindergarten), cooks;
- food for nutritious snacks and meals;
- staff training (primarily courses offered by the NWT Literacy Council; and
- program materials.

Language Nests

Children have a natural ability to learn languages in their early years. Children who begin with a foundation of the local Aboriginal language and culture often are more confident throughout their lifetime. Teaching children their language increases the survival of the language as a living language throughout the community.

Language Nests in the NWT provide varying degrees of language immersion opportunities for young children. The NWT has had one program in eight of the official aboriginal languages since 2003.

In 2004/05, eighteen sites were funded in the Chipewyan, Cree, Tlicho, Gwich'in, Inuinnaqtun, Inuvialuktun, North Slavey and South Slavey languages. Criteria for financial support includes the existence of well-established regulated early childhood programs, as well as strong community and parental support. In addition, programs had to demonstrate improved language skills of the children and/or staff and parents in the projects, fiscal responsibility, staff training, elder involvement, integration of the program with other community events and/or resource development.

Forty people participated in a second training workshop on early childhood language learning theory and practices. To support collaboration on resource development, participants included language nest staff, elders and representatives of Teaching and Learning Centres.





Appropriate Aboriginal Language resources are key to the teaching of children and for carry over of language learning in the home. The Language Nest Program in 2004/05 developed many resources including:

- Early literacy booklets for families;
- 2 music CDs in South Slavey - one for parents (Country Gospel) and one for the children (simple songs);
- Beginning work on South Slavey Dictionary, booklets, games and tapes for use at home; and
- Cree Language Lesson CD's.

Qualitative successes reported by Language Nest programs include:

- Parent reports of children using the language at home;
- Parent requests for participation in Aboriginal adult language classes;
- Children from the Language Nests are arriving at school with an unprecedented knowledge of their language;
- Noticeable changes in children's self esteem along with their Aboriginal language skills;
- Reports that the children are proud to be Dene; and
- Two communities discussing immersion K-3 as a follow up to the Language Nest Programs.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) is committed to working with individuals, families and communities on the prevention of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Strong healthy families lay the foundation for the healthy development of our children. Strong, healthy families are the cornerstone of vibrant and self reliant communities.

In partnership with Health Canada and the Northern Secretariat, the GNWT administers funding for the First Nations and Inuit FASD Program. In 2004/2005, there were six community FASD projects supported by this fund. Activities included training for early child care workers/early intervention workers, a regional FASD coordinator and a territorial asset mapping workshop.

The Department of Health and Social Services is a member of the Canada Northwest FASD Partnership (CNFASDP). The CNFASDP is an alliance of 7 jurisdictions working towards the development and promotion of an interprovincial/territorial approach to prevention, intervention, care and support of individuals affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Participating jurisdictions include: Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Yukon, Nunavut and NWT.

The Department of Health and Social Services will be developing a FASD strategy to be launched in the Fall of 2006.