

SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION



ABORIGINAL HEAD START
ON RESERVE PROGRAM

March 2003

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ABORIGINAL HEAD START ON RESERVE PROGRAM

Health Canada hired Auguste Solutions and Associates Inc. to conduct the first evaluation of the program between 2001-2003. We are pleased to present you with their report.

Dear Reader:

Hello and Congratulations! The evaluation team is impressed by the overall quality of the Head Start program currently being delivered in about 275 First Nation communities across Canada. In three short years, First Nations, Tribal Councils, regional native organizations and Health Canada, in conjunction with hundreds of dedicated Early Childhood Education staff and administrators, worked together to plan, implement and deliver the highly successful Head Start program.

This report summarizes more than 1,000 pages of reports produced during the evaluation. Yes, the program experienced problems when it was started, and that had to be expected! There were problems with getting the project planned at the regional and national levels. A very small number of the hundreds of Head Start projects ran into some serious start-up problems, with only a couple of sites having to shut down . . . a major achievement in itself. Most of the start-up problems that were encountered are being addressed, and many have already been resolved.

No major problems were identified with the overall purpose, structure and content of the program that is being delivered to the children. As was expected, and encouraged within the program guidelines, communities adjusted their programs to meet their communities' needs. Different levels of emphasis were placed upon the different program components, with communities having to adjust their programs according to the availability of staff, money and space.

The primary conclusion is that the Head Start program being delivered on-reserves to First Nation children is beneficial, will improve over time as the program matures, and will provide the participating children with much needed help.

The primary recommendation is that the program be made available to all children in all First Nations across all of Canada.

Auguste Barrieau, MBA

David Ireland, Ph.D



Cover Photograph: Thanks to the Webique First Nation in northern Ontario for sending this picture of their Head Start children out on a warm day. The cover picture, like all of the other pictures within this report, was submitted to the evaluation team by the First Nation Field Evaluators.

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SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY



Photograph: Sea Bird Island First Nation located by the Fraser River in British Columbia graciously sent us this picture showing parents and their children participating in a Head Start activity.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose and scope of Phase One of the evaluation of the Head Start program were to provide First Nations communities and Health Canada with a description of what is happening in terms of:

- The accomplishments of the AHSOR program;
- The roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in the program;
- The strengths and weaknesses of the program;

- The opportunities and challenges for the program; and
- The possible ways of improving the program.

Phase One also included an in-depth process evaluation as well as the establishment of an extensive and detailed baseline.

Phase Two of the Head Start program evaluation, (to be conducted in the future and under a separate contract), will look at the impacts and effects the program has had upon the children and their communities.

Methodology

Data were collected by surveys sent to all AHSOR projects. Surveys were completed by Head Start Administrators and ECE staff for most projects, and a sample of parents and community members were interviewed. Interviews were conducted with individuals involved with the AHSOR program across the country, and with Health Canada staff in Ottawa.

The surveys were developed taking into account the goals, expectations, and objectives of the AHSOR program. Questions were based on actual activities and experiences reported by AHSOR projects.

Community Participation

First Nation communities were randomly selected from across Canada and asked if they wished to participate in the case studies which were part of the evaluation. Twenty-four communities agreed to participate. Each of the 24 participating Head Start projects identified an individual (First Nation Field Evaluator) to participate in one of the three day training workshops conducted in Edmonton and Montreal.

The 24 field evaluators were essential to the success of the project. These enthusiastic and hard-working individuals helped define and refine the survey questionnaires. They pilot tested these questionnaires in their communities, and later used the questionnaires to interview more than 400 individuals: parents, early childhood educators, program administrators and community members.



Equally important, the field evaluators helped pilot a “child observation instrument” that may be part of the impact evaluation to be conducted during the forthcoming Phase Two evaluation. The names of the 24 individuals who undertook the field evaluator training workshops are:

- Ms. Rawnda ABRAHAM, Long Lake First Nation, Longlac, Ontario
- Ms. Shirley ALBERT, Flying Dust First Nation, Meadow Lake, Sask.
- Ms. Tammy ARSENAULT, Lennox Island FN, Prince Edward Island
- Ms. Ruby BIRD, Paul First Nation, Alberta
- Ms. Elizabeth BLOWEES, Red Bank, Red Bank, New Brunswick
- Ms. Lynda BOSUM, Oujé Bougoumou FN, Oujé-Bougoumou, Québec
- Ms. Feddie CARLICK, Iskut First Nation, Iskut , British Columbia
- Ms. Cindy FORSTER SANDERSON, Peguis FN, Peguis, Manitoba
- Mr. Robbie KAWAPIT, Whapmagoostui, Whapmagoostui, Québec
- Ms. Farrah KEW, Okanesse First Nation, Balcarres, Saskatchewan
- Mr. Earl LABOUCAN, Whitefish Lake FN, Atikameg, Alberta
- Ms. Barbara LINKLATER PETERS, Nelson House FN, Manitoba
- Ms. M.J. LOFT, Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, Tyendinaga, Ontario
- Ms. Dolores PAUL, Afton FN, Nova Scotia
- Ms. Karen MARTIN, Gesgapegiag FN, Gesgapegiag, Québec
- Ms. Nicole MARTIN, Lac Simon, Lac Simon , Québec
- Ms. Karla POINT, Hesquiaht First Nation, Tofino, British Columbia
- Ms. Pam RAINE, Samson Cree Nation, Hobbema, Alberta
- Ms. Dawn SCHRAM, Cape Mudge First Nation, Campbell River, BC
- Ms. Penny SPENCE, Brokenhead Ojibway FN, Scanterbury, Manitoba
- Ms. Debra TERRANCE, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, Cornwall, Ont
- Ms. Patricia THOMPSON, Cary the Kettle First Nation, Sintuluta, Sask
- Ms. Sandra TRASK, Okanagan First Nation, Vernon, British Columbia
- Ms. Connie TWIN, Kapawe'no First Nation, Grouard, Alberta

Once the workshops were completed, one of the participants withdrew. We were fortunate to have join the project:

- Ms. Dana Wilie, coordinator for the combined Athabasca Chipewyan FN and the Mikisew Cree First Nation Head Start projects, Fort Chipewyan, Alberta.



In addition to the 24 First Nations that contributed field evaluators, another 111 First Nations completed a wide array of lengthy and sometimes complex questionnaires. Many thanks to everyone.

SOME INTERESTING STATISTICS AND OBSERVATIONS

Head Start is a federally funded national program designed to provide the regions and communities with the opportunity to adjust and mould the project to meet local needs and priorities. This section provides an overview of some of the different and relevant innovative approaches that have been taken.

Selection of Projects

A total of 273 Head Start projects were funded by Health Canada under the on-reserve Head Start program. The original plan was for regional offices to coordinate a call for proposals, with the best proposals receiving funding. In the end, the results were as follows:

- Ontario, Manitoba and Pacific regions decided to follow the recommended proposal call process. Not all First Nations submitted Head Start proposals:
 - Ten percent (10%) of communities in Ontario received Head Start funding; and
 - Thirty percent (30%) of communities in Manitoba and Pacific received Head Start funding.
- Atlantic, Quebec and Saskatchewan regions took a universal funding approach and decided to fund a Head Start project in essentially 100% of their communities.

There are positive and negative effects to both funding approaches:

- Communities whose projects were funded based on the proposal writing process were generally funded at higher levels on a per Head Start child basis (which made their projects more financially viable), but not all communities received funding; and



- Communities that were funded on the universal basis received less funding on a per Head Start child basis, thus limiting their options and the range of services that could be offered on a per child basis.

Head Start Buildings

Finding a good space for their Head Start projects was a major concern for most communities. Good space is usually very hard to find and in most communities there are many good causes that are also looking for space to house their projects. Selection criteria varied from community to community with child safety and kitchens being the two most common. A few communities built new buildings to meet their needs while others used whatever they could find. Renovations to meet safety concerns happened in many communities.

One third of the projects have a building dedicated solely for Head Start use, while almost half share a building with other child-oriented programs, such as: a school, a preschool, a day-care centre and/or childcare centre. The remaining projects shared space with non-child-oriented programs such as a fire-hall, a Band Council office or a culture centre. Administrators in two-thirds of the projects rated their Head Start building as satisfactory.



Photograph: Long Lake First Nation in Northern Ontario contributed this absolutely beautiful picture of this young child experimenting with her visual and tactile senses; free to experiment and grow, and yet still under the supervision of a trained early childhood education specialist.

Working With Other Early Childhood Programs

Nearly 60% of the Head Start projects are combined with active early childhood education programs such as kindergarten and day-care.

The Children and Participation in the Program

The Head Start program criterion states that the projects can cater to children from birth to 6 years of age. Communities can decide to focus on specific age groups, or children with special needs, or any combination thereof. They have the opportunity to establish their priorities based on the needs of their children. Some interesting statistics and observations include:

- In one-fifth (21%) of the projects, all eligible children within the community are enrolled, if their parents have agreed to their children attending;
- The majority of projects (53%) focus on children aged 3 and 4;
- About 15% of projects serve children less than age 1; and
- About 10% of the projects serve children aged 6 years old.

Reasons for children not being enrolled in the Head Start projects include:

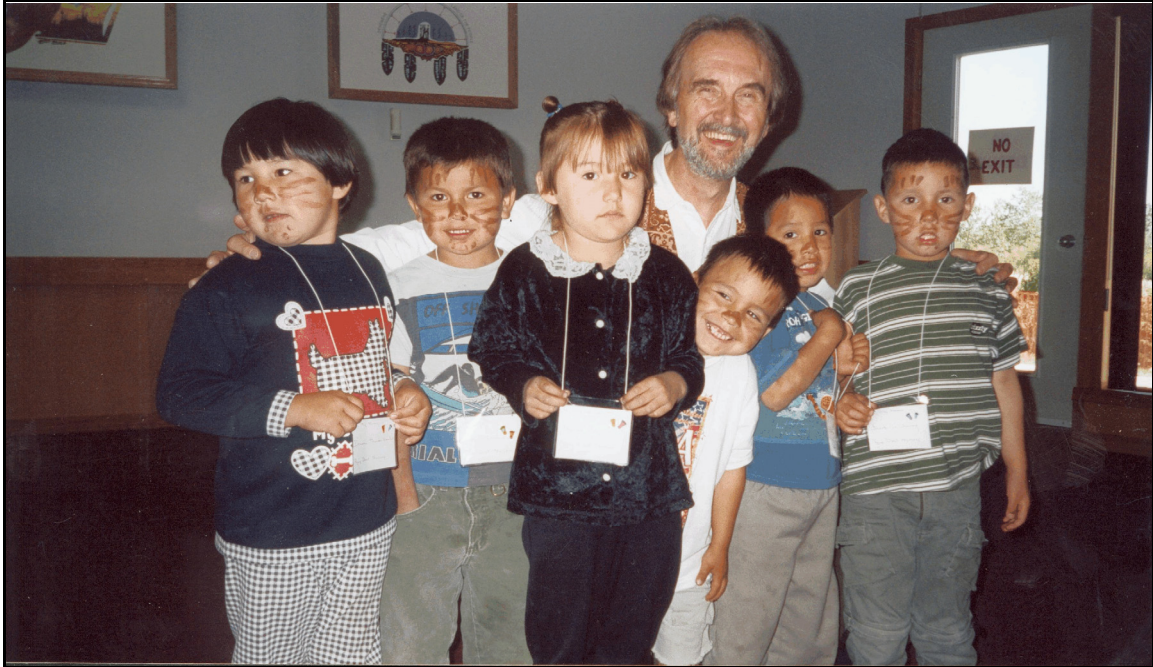
- Parents or children are not ready for the program;
- Family issues;
- Transportation;
- There are not enough spaces for the children; and
- The hours/schedule are unsuitable for the family.

Participation and attendance levels varied from project to project:

- Most (80%) of projects reported an average daily attendance rate of 75% or more, with nearly 40% of projects reporting an attendance rate of more than 90%;



- Nearly 40% of projects reported that no children left their Head Start program in the previous year, and
- Almost 40% of projects reported that the maximum number of children leaving was 5; with the family moving and family issues being the principal reasons for children leaving the Head Start program . Parents' or child's dissatisfaction with the program were reported in very few cases.



Photograph: Scheduling special events within the Head Start program is an important part of maintaining children's interest. The Meadow Lake group of Head Start projects were successful in getting TV personality Fred Penner to stop over and spend some time with the children.

The Schedule

The frequency and duration of Head Start sessions varied across the country. Factors most affecting the planning scheduling decisions include:

- Availability of staff;
- Available funding;

- Availability of transportation; and
- Interfacing with other children's programs such as day care etc.

Almost all projects (90%) are centre-based with the remaining 10% delivering part, or the entire program in the child's home. Some interesting trends include:

- Most projects (80%) have a half-day program; The majority of programs (70%), regardless of whether they are half-day or full-day, deliver the program for between 29 and 52 weeks in a year;
- The majority of programs, whether half-day or full-day, are delivered for 4 or 5 days a week.

On a very positive note, almost all the parents (97%) said they were satisfied with their child's schedule.



Photograph: The Meadow Lake group of Head Start projects worked diligently at providing their children with a wide range of special events. Some of the Head Start team and children are pictured at a pow wow.

Transportation

In more than half of the projects, parents/guardians provide transportation for their children to get to Head Start. Head Start projects provide transportation in 40% of the projects, usually by school bus.

In 30% of the communities, some or all of the children live within walking distance from the project. Most parents (80%) reported that transportation is not a significant problem for them or their child.

Children With Special Needs

The Head Start program did not establish national or regional definitions for what constitutes a child with special needs. That task was left to the parents and educators at the community level.

The majority of projects (75%) have procedures for identifying special needs, with more than half of the projects stating that they are equipped to address special needs. The identification procedures for identifying children with special needs ranges from Head Start staff observing children to professionals visiting regularly to assess children.

It was reported that about 10% of all participating children have been identified with special needs; while the total number of children with special needs is unknown. Staff and parents reported a wide variety of special needs, the most common being speech or language difficulties and emotional/behavioural disorders. Interestingly:

- Fifty-five percent (55%) of projects have some or all staff trained in addressing special needs;
- Ten percent (10%) of projects have the help of parents trained in special needs education; and
- Forty percent (40%) of projects report that professionals visit to provide periodic support.

Even without additional formal special education staff and resources, some projects have been able to:

- Identify children with special needs and integrate them into the program. Special needs children learn how to interact with other children at Head



Start. Other children become accustomed to and then begin to understand special needs children;

- Put a focus on parents coping and creating an environment for children with special needs to develop; and
- Bring in specialists, such as Community Health Nurses who have skills in FAS, or doctors if they are available.

Seventy percent (70%) of parents whose children have special needs were satisfied with the provisions made for their child's special needs and/or care.

Staffing and Qualifications

Staffing issues were different from region to region and between remote, northern and near-urban communities. Communities reported that:

- Sixty-five percent of Head Start administrators have been in their positions for more than one year, with 40% having been in their positions for more than 2 years . . . remarkable for such a young program; and
- Sixty-five percent of ECE staff have been in their positions for more than one year, and 38% have been in their positions for more than 2 years.

When questioned on ECE qualifications, it was reported that:

- Forty-two percent of teaching staff have completed their ECE certificate, and 28% are working on completing their ECE training;
- Nationally, about half of the Head Start staff have completed a degree, diploma or certificate program (not necessarily ECE specific), and a further quarter of the staff is working to complete a degree, diploma or certificate;
- Teaching staff in 27% of projects are ECE qualified, and 42% of projects have one or more staff members who have completed their ECE qualifications; and
- In 23% of the projects, all staff working with the children are trained in special education, and a further 32% of projects have some staff who are trained in special education.



Seventy (70) of the 134 responding communities stated that they had vacant positions to be filled.

THE PROGRAM

The program is based upon six required components: 1) Culture and Language; 2) Education; 3) Health; 4) Nutrition; 5) Social Support; and 6) Parental Involvement. The six components were identified and selected through an extensive consultation at the community, regional and national levels.



Photograph: This team of eight worked together with Long Lake First Nation Head Start staff to build the 'snow-person of the year.' Their Head Start program focuses on healthy outdoor activities combined with tasks to challenge their learning abilities.

Note: From here to the end of this report, many of the levels of satisfaction will be expressed by degrees of magnitude (e.g., majority, a small portion etc.) rather than percentages. This was done because trends were for the most part

developed from multiple information sources and not from one specific data component, and exact percentages could not be computed.

Most projects are implementing strategies and activities in each of the six components. Nationally, projects spend more time on Culture and Language and Education; and less time on Social Support and Parental Involvement.

Program Success and Satisfaction

A high percentage of Head Start staff, community members and parents judge the program to be successful, or satisfactory. At the community level parental satisfaction is very high at 90%. Parents believe that there are several positive indicators, such as warm and affectionate staff, and the child having fun at Head Start.

A large majority of parents (97%) are satisfied with what Head Start is doing for their child in the areas of:

- Social development;
- Helping the child to develop nutritious, healthy eating habits; and
- Developing school readiness in the child.

Likewise, parents overwhelmingly agree that Head Start is helping them as parents, for example, learning about early childhood development, health and nutrition, and social services that are available to them.

The Culture and Language Component

Some of the major findings specific to this component include:

- A majority of projects are spending a significant amount of time on the Culture and Language component;
- The Language component is generally more active and successful than the Culture component;
- In 30% of the projects, Elders, community resource people and parents help with Culture and Language activities, such as telling stories and



legends, teaching First Nations languages, teaching or leading traditional activities, and teaching arts and crafts, and

- Eighty percent of administrators, 74% of ECE staff and 65% of community members judged the Culture and Language component to be successful.

The Education Component



Photograph: Band conservation officers (black shirt) are ‘enlisted’ to bring Akwasasne First Nation children on an educational outing. Ecology, colour recognition and water safety, including the use of life jackets, were high on the educational list of ‘things to learn.’

Some of the major findings specific to the education component include:

- A high percentage of projects report teaching children process skills useful in school, social skills and preparation for specific school skills, such as reading, writing and mathematics;

- The majority of projects spend a lot of time on the Education component, more than on any other component, and half of the projects spend more than a third of the time on Education;
- Almost all administrators, ECE staff, and community members judged the Education component to be successful;
- A high percentage of the sample of parents said that the Education Component was informative and helpful to them in:
 - Learning about child development;
 - Informing parents about their child's development;
 - Helping parents to be the primary teachers of their child; and
 - Assisting their child with Head Start-related work.
- Kindergarten teachers reported that they see a difference in the children who have attended the Head Start program versus those who did not have the opportunity to attend.

Health Promotion

Some of the major findings specific to the health component include:

- The Head Start Program has an active and successful Health Component, and the majority of projects spend a significant amount of time on Health activities for children, and parents;
- The health-related strategies most often identified include:
 - Having a structured daily hygiene schedule (children wash hands and clean teeth regularly);
 - Providing toothbrushes and toothpaste;
 - Scheduling health checkups for head lice, screening, and vaccinations; and
 - Staff serving as positive role models as well as providing children with positive role models and positive health behaviours.



- Head Start projects provide health-related activities for parents, providing information through workshops and information sessions about child development, early drug prevention, health services and the importance of vaccinations, healthy living habits, hygiene and disease prevention, e.g., diabetes; and
- A high percentage (between 80 and 90%) of administrators, ECE staff and community members judged the health component to be successful.

The Nutrition Component



Photograph: The Iskut First Nation in British Columbia prepared a feast to celebrate a special event within the Head Start program. One of the focuses was to prepare and serve traditional and popular foods in slightly more nutritious ways, without losing taste appeal or increasing the cost of the meal.

Some of the major findings specific to the health component include:

- Almost all of the Head Start projects report that they provide nutrition-related activities for children; and more than 60% of Head Start projects provide nutrition-related activities for parents; and

- Most Head Start participants judged the Nutrition component to be successful.

Social Support

Social support includes government programs as well as community-driven support systems. Some of the major findings specific to the component include:

- Almost half of the projects have established linkages with a wide variety of social services, agencies and programs, including:
 - Medical and health services;
 - Children's education programs;
 - Adult education and training programs; and
 - Crime prevention programs and social and family services.
- About 30% of projects have established linkages with recreational and cultural programs, and abuse prevention programs; and
- For many projects, many social service agencies are not available to the community.

Some of the most common social support activities promoted by Head Start staff include:

- Providing parents with skills, advice, and information on parenting;
- Providing information about community resources;
- Providing referrals to specific social support services;
- Helping parents develop a social support network with other parents and families; and
- Joining community resource teams to network with other programs.

Overall, between 65 and 70% of ECE staff and community members judged the social support component to be successful. Parents report that the social support component helps them in the following ways: identifying helpful services for them, increasing their



knowledge about health services and healthy living, and developing a social support network.

Parental Involvement



Photograph: Staff and parents at the Long Lake First Nation planning Head Start activities and throwing a surprise party for a new mother.

Some of the major findings specific to the parental involvement component include:

- Parents are involved in 80% of the projects;
- A third of the projects (31%) have half their parents involved; and
- A quarter of the projects have between 70 and 100% of the parents involved.

Parents not involved in their child's Head Start program cited their reasons for not participating:

- Forty-four percent said that their work schedule conflicted with Head Start's schedule; and
- Seven percent said they had a conflicting school/training schedule.

Parents also stated that:

- The Head Start staff makes them feel welcome and appreciated at the program;
- They find the tasks interesting, and they are interested in the Head Start project; and
- They are not asked to do things they do not like or do not feel confident doing.

CONCLUSIONS

The Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve Program is off to a promising start. There are a large number of Head Start projects across Canada providing extensive programs to a significant number of children. Most projects deliver programs in suitable or adequate buildings. Likewise, staff is very well-qualified and experienced in early childhood education, and, to a lesser extent, in special education.

It should be noted, however, that there are variations both within regions and amongst regions, in the degree of success that projects are having – for various reasons.

Challenges to the Head Start Program

Challenges to the Head Start Program include the following:

- Only 273 communities are funded to have a Head Start project while 310 communities do not have a project;
- Funding for projects varies for diverse reasons, including:

- Regional decisions about the funding process; and
- Inadequate estimates of project requirements and costs, for example, for transportation and supplies;
- Some projects cannot hire enough staff and do not have enough space to accommodate all the children in the community, usually due to insufficient funding;
- A significant number of projects occupy unsuitable or inadequate accommodation;
- About a third of projects have no staff ECE-qualified or trained in special education;
- The most common challenges to implementing the six components of the Head Start program include:
 - A lack of knowledge and skills on the part of ECE staff; and
 - A lack of appropriate resource materials for the components;
- Professional experts are not available to a significant number of projects; and
- Many communities do not understand the Head Start program, and the need for parents and community members to be involved in it.

Needs

While recognizing that the Head Start program is still developing, there are many areas of need including:

- Ensuring that all projects have sufficient funding to implement the program properly;
- Extending the program to children who are unable to attend Head Start because there is insufficient space in their community's projects, or because their community does not have a project;
- Ensuring that all projects are accommodated in an appropriate and adequate building;
- Ensuring that all projects have adequate transportation available to the children and their parents;



- Ensuring that all projects have sufficient qualified staff both in Early Childhood Education, and in Special Education;
- Ensuring that all staff have training in the knowledge and skills required to implement the full Head Start program;
- Ensuring that staff have adequate curriculum resource materials to implement the program;
- Ensuring that projects have available to them professional resource people;
- Ensuring that communities understand the need for their involvement in the program, and that Head Start staff have the skills and knowledge required to involve people in their communities.

Effects

There is evidence that the program is making a difference in the lives of children. It is reported that:

- Kindergarten teachers are really impressed with the behaviour and the achievement of Head Start children;
 - They notice a huge difference in the children's self-esteem;
 - They have better basic skills; and
 - Children are more independent and confident.
- They have a greater knowledge of health, and they practice healthy routines without being reminded;
- They have a greater knowledge of nutrition, and they practice principles of good nutrition; and
- Children are learning their community's language.



Major Accomplishments

Most projects have a comprehensive, active and successful program. Parents and ECE staff and administrators identified education, health and nutrition as being the most successfully implemented of the six components. Examples include:

- Children, parents and the community are enjoying the implementation of the Head Start program. Infrastructures, processes and partnerships are in place;
- Successful projects are characterized by significant activity and imaginative programming;
- The program appears to have created effective linkages with service agencies, where possible, both on reserve and available locally; and
- Involving parents in the administration or the conduct of the program is either a success story or a challenge, depending on the site.

