

City of Vancouver
Child Care and Early Childhood Needs Assessments
A Community and Consultant 'Tool Kit'
Spring, 2003

Introduction and Background

From time to time, the City of Vancouver initiates Child Care Needs Assessments in neighbourhoods and communities across the city. Often, these Needs Assessments are undertaken when specific planning or development issues that will have an impact on the need for and delivery of child care and related childhood services are under consideration.

Generally, the purpose of these Assessments is to inform the decisions made by the City and other stakeholders in ways that advance the City's vision of childhood development services as described in the 2002 City Report "*Moving Forward Together*" *Childcare: A Cornerstone of Child Development Services*".

The City's vision sets out a coordinated comprehensive range of child development services including early childhood education, child care and parenting/caregiver services in a network. The range of services may include, licensed group and family childcare, licensed preschool, parenting programs, supports to informal child care providers and stay at home parents, including drop-in program, play groups and child minding. (p.14)

While there are some similarities in Child Care Needs Assessments, the work plan for each Needs Assessment should reflect and be responsive to:

- ✓ The specific characteristics of the review area
- ✓ The key stakeholders at the community level
- ✓ The 'research questions' that need to be answered
- ✓ The nature of the development opportunities and/or challenges
- ✓ The resources and time lines available for the assessment

Within a 'community specific' approach, there are 6 common strategies and tools that are useful in conducting a Child Care Needs Assessment:

1. Working with a Project Steering Committee
2. Collecting and analyzing demographic information on the review area
3. Reviewing current relevant child care policy, funding programs, & trends
4. Conducting community and parent surveys
5. Conducting Key Informant Interviews
6. Hosting Focus Groups

Each of these strategies and tools is briefly described and discussed below.

1. A Project Steering Committee

Given the multi-jurisdictional nature of child care, it is a good idea to involve key stakeholders in all aspects of the Needs Assessment. Involvement throughout the process increases the likelihood that the recommendations will be accepted and implemented by those who need to 'be on side'.

One of the best ways to do this is to create a small, collaborative Steering Committee to oversee the Needs Assessment. The membership will depend on the specific circumstances of each study, but could include:

- ✓ The City of Vancouver's Childhood Development Coordinator
- ✓ Representatives of any other funders or sponsors of the Needs Assessment
- ✓ Representatives of the Park Board or School Board and related Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) and/or Community Centre Boards if their facilities are part of or affected by the review process
- ✓ One or more agencies that deliver child care or related childhood services in the review area.

Participation in the Steering Committee should not require an onerous commitment of time. The committee need only meet 3 to 4 times during the Needs Assessment supplemented with email communications in between meetings.

Key times for meetings of the Steering Committee include:

- ✓ To review and finalize the work plan for the Needs Assessment
- ✓ To review progress and emerging issues during the data collection process (1 or 2)
- ✓ To review and comment on a draft of the Final Report
- ✓ To discuss moving the Needs Assessment recommendations forward

The Steering Committee will be most effective if agendas and materials to be discussed are circulated in advance of the meeting.

2. Collecting and Analyzing Demographic Information

Child Care Needs Assessments will rarely have a sufficient budget to undertake the collection of primary demographic information. It is therefore necessary and appropriate to use existing demographic information about the review area.

The focus should be on data that has a direct impact on child care and related childhood development services such the number and socio-economic characteristics of families with children; current and projected school enrolment, current number, type and distribution of child care spaces and related childhood development and family services; Early Development Indicators data and linguistic and cultural characteristics in the review area. Actual and city-wide comparative data is useful and relevant in order to establish priorities.

Existing possible sources of relevant demographic information include:

- ✓ 2001 (or most recent) Census
- ✓ 2001 (or most recent) Provincial Child Care Survey
- ✓ Vancouver School Board enrolment projections
- ✓ University of British Columbia Community Asset Mapping Project (CAMP)
- ✓ Vancouver Child Care Resource and Referral Services
- ✓ City of Vancouver Social Planning Department – Childcare Demographics
- ✓ Ministry of Human Resources, Vancouver Region - Employment Assistance and Child Care Subsidy Case Load Data
- ✓ Ministry for Children and Family Development – Children-in-care case load data
- ✓ Vancouver Coastal Health Authority live birth and 0-5 health stats

While all of this information should be accessible to Consultants working for the City of Vancouver, it is often difficult to gain access to the data without the direct involvement of senior City staff.

The final report should include a summary analysis of the demographic information. This section should summarize the key demographic information that has a direct impact on child care planning. The planning implications should be highlighted at the end of the demographic summary.

3. Reviewing current relevant child care policies

Child Care Needs Assessments conducted with the City of Vancouver are based on the City's child care policies and funding programs. Information on the City's child care policies is available at:

www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/initiatives/childcare

To a large degree, the development and viability of child care and related children's services in Vancouver is dependent on enabling provincial and federal policies and funding programs. As part of an effective Child Care Needs Assessment it is important to review the current policy and funding context.

The starting place for information on BC's provincial child care related positions, publications and programs and documents is the government's website.

Relevant addresses include:

www.mcaws.gov.bc.ca/childcare

Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services - home page for child care related information

www.mhr.gov.bc.ca/PUBLICAT/ft/other.htm#ccs

Ministry of Human Resources – source of information on child care subsidy program

www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/early_childhood

Ministry of Children and Family
Development – link to Early
Childhood information

Information about federal government directions, although generally of less immediate import for specific child care developments, is also an important part of the policy context. You can begin your search of relevant federal government information at: http://socialunion.gc.ca/menu_e.html

Additional information from a community perspective about child care is readily available through a number of websites including:

www.childcarecanada.org

Website of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit of the University of Toronto with extensive access to national and international child care research and policy analysis.

www.cfc-efc.ca

Website of fifty Canadian providing quality, credible resources on children and families.

www.wstcoast.org

Website of Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre with links to their library collection on child care and early childhood services.

www.cccabc.bc.ca

Website of the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC with a link to the publications of the Child Care Advocacy Forum.

www.firstcallbc.org

Website of First Call a community coalition advocating for children and youth.

It is also important to take the pulse of current child care issues and trends in the City and in the review area. Information on Vancouver child care programs and fees are available through Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre (604-709-5661). There are also a number of formal and informal child care provider networks across the City that can provide a current ‘snap shot’ of key issues.

It is also important to review existing reports or studies that have been conducted in the review area. For example, ‘Windows of Opportunity’ has produced Action Plans for families with young children in six Networks across the city. These reports provide useful background information, and need not be duplicated.

A summary of key child care policies and trends should be included in the final report. Highlight those policies that will have the most direct impact or influence on the services in the review area and include a brief discussion of the specific planning implications.

4. Conducting community and parent surveys

Conducting surveys to assess the needs, preferences, suggestions and barriers to service access of community members and parents can play an important role in Child Care Needs Assessments. However, surveying can also be a complicated and time-consuming process. As a result, the use and extent of surveys should be carefully considered within the budget and time line of the Needs Assessment.

Given that the resources available to conduct Child Care Needs Assessments are usually quite limited, the following issues need to be carefully considered:

- ✓ It is unlikely that you will have the resources required to conduct a community-wide survey or to establish a statistically valid random survey. It is therefore important to be clear about the purpose and scope of a survey, to establish a manageable number of surveys that can be distributed and collated and, where possible, to survey a target group that is directly impacted by the decisions under consideration.

Possible and likely 'groups' include the families attending one or more of the elementary schools within the review area; current users and/or those on the wait list for child care and related services in the review area; families who participate in family resource and drop-in programs in the review area; families attending Well Baby Clinics, etc.

- ✓ Remember that families have limited time so try to keep the survey tool as simple as possible. Only ask the questions that you really need to complete your Needs Assessment. Sample survey tools targeted at specific groups are included in the January 2003 Final Report of the Mount Pleasant Child Development Services Needs and Preference Assessment (available through Carol Ann Young)
- ✓ Given the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the City, it is important to consider whether or not it is possible to produce and collate surveys in languages other than English. While a multilingual survey is always desirable, it will require translation of the survey tool and multilingual staff to collate and analyze responses.
- ✓ In order to increase return rates, it is helpful to have the Steering Committee and other service providers accept some responsibility for 'talking up the survey' amongst their constituencies and for distributing and collecting the survey from the families they work with. Families are more likely to take the time to complete the survey if they hear about it or receive it from someone they know and trust. One strategy is for the Needs Assessment consultant to meet with the group being surveyed at the service site, briefly explain the survey and if possible, have families to complete and return the survey at that time.

The final report should include a summary of survey findings highlighting significant trends. More detailed data is best provided in an appendix.

5. Conducting Key Informant Interviews

Key Informant interviews are conducted with individuals, groups and organizations who have particular expertise or perspectives that are relevant to the Needs Assessment. There are generally three purposes for conducting key informant interviews:

- ✓ To develop a list or inventory of existing services in the review area
- ✓ To get a 'snap shot' of trends, issues and initiatives relevant to the Needs Assessment
- ✓ To generate ideas and suggestions that inform the recommendations of the Needs Assessment.

When developing your list of key informants, consider 'who cares' and 'who should care' about the child care and childhood development issues in the review area.

Try to include individuals who are in senior levels of management and those who work on the front lines.

The following list provides a starting place for identifying key informants:

- ✓ Regional Authorities
 - Ministry for Children and Family Development – Family Support Supervisors (Aboriginal and Non Aboriginal)
 - Vancouver Coastal Health Authority – Community Health Nurses
- ✓ Civic Bodies
 - Vancouver Park Board and local Community Centres
 - Vancouver School Board and local School Principals and Parent Advisory Councils
 - Vancouver Public Library – local branch Children's Librarian
- ✓ Community Service Providers
 - Neighbourhood Houses and other multi service agencies in the review area
 - Family Place and other family support services in operating in the review area
 - Infant Development Program Consultants for review area
 - Child Care Resource and Referral Program Staff in review area
 - Supported Child Care Consultants in review area
 - Child Care Providers in review area

Questions for key informants need to be tailored to the specific research questions of each Needs Assessment. However, common questions include:

? Can you briefly describe the services that your organization provides in the review area?

What is your organization's mandate for child care and related childhood development services?

Does your organization have policies, programs and/or initiatives that impact or are impacted by the delivery of child care and related childhood development services in the review area?

What issues or trends are you observing in the review area that are relevant to this Needs Assessment? (E.g. shifts in population, shifts in community needs, shifts in program usage, current or emerging barriers to service access, community impact of changes to provincial policies, etc.)

Are you aware of reports, studies or other documents that would provide important information for this Needs Assessment?

What suggestions, if any, do you have about the delivery of child care and related childhood development services in the review area? (If the Needs Assessment is related to a specific development, this question should be more specific).

You should conduct your key informant interviews in ways that are respectful of people's time and schedules. Some suggestions include:

- ✓ While face-to-face interviews are preferable, telephone interviews may be more practical.
- ✓ Wherever possible, it is effective and efficient to meet with existing child related committees and networks within the review area. Ask for time on their agendas, explain the Needs Assessment and then pose questions to the group. This will help you get a sense of the existing infrastructure in the community, will allow you to connect with a larger number of key informants, and makes it easier for people to participate in the Needs Assessment.

The key trends emerging from key informant interviews can be summarized in the Final Report as part of a larger discussion of Community Trends and Issues, or can be reported on separately. A list of key informants should be included in an appendix.

6. Hosting Focus Groups

The purpose of Focus Groups is to provide more in-depth discussion and exploration of the research questions under consideration. There are two times during the Needs Assessment when Focus Groups are useful:

- ✓ During the data and information gathering phase of the work in order to identify community trends, issues and barriers and to generate solutions.
- ✓ When options or recommendations are emerging and need to be tested out with key stakeholders.

During the early phase of the work, Focus Group questions are similar to key informant interview questions. Focus Groups can be held with three important constituent groups:

- ✓ **Parents** – It is essential to hear from as many parents in the review area as possible. Given how busy families with young children are, wherever possible, Parent Focus Groups should be convened within existing settings or groups such as Family Place programs, Elementary School PACs, Child Care Program Parent Boards, Well-baby Clinics, etc. As much as possible, try to include parents who are not using or able to access existing services. These Focus Groups should not only examine what parents want and need for their children, but should also explore what would make it possible for parents to use the ‘ideal ‘ service if it existed. Try to encourage parents to think outside of the existing service delivery models.
- ✓ **Child Care Providers** – It is essential to understand the current and projected future realities of existing child care providers in the review area. If possible, try to hold a Focus Group with an existing committee or network that brings together review area child care providers. This Focus Group should explore enrolment and usage patterns, unmet service needs, financial viability, sustainability and the impact of new child care developments on existing child care services.
- ✓ **Community Service Providers** – It is also important to hear from other community service providers and a Focus Group may be a more efficient way to gather input than conducting individual interviews. Again, if possible, attempt to schedule a Focus Group with an existing interagency committee or network.

The results of Focus Groups held during the information-gathering phase of the work can be summarized in the Final Report as part of a larger discussion of Community Trends and Issues, or can be reported on separately. A list of Focus Group participants should be included in an appendix

One or two Focus Groups should also be convened near the end of the Needs Assessment, when specific recommendations and options are under consideration. The purpose of these Focus Groups is to test the level of support for possible recommendations. These Focus Groups should include representatives from the key agencies and bodies that will be responsible for implementing the recommendations or will be most affected by the recommendations. At these Focus Groups, participants should be provided with a brief review of the process and the option(s) under discussion should be explained. Participants should then be asked to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the option(s); any concerns they have about the option(s) and their level of willingness to participate in implementation.

The results of these Focus Groups should be referenced in the Recommendation Section of the Final Report. Where Focus Group results indicate support for the recommendations or otherwise influenced the recommendations, this should be clearly explained. Where Focus Group results are still at odds with some or all of the recommendations, this needs to be fully explained and a clear rationale provided.