



Assessing the Impact of Head Start

Dialogues with Parents and Staff
of the Edmonton Head Start Project



The Edmonton Head Start Program
is a collaboration of:

- ABC Head Start
- E4C
- Oliver Centre — Early Learning
Programs for Children and Families

This project was made possible through
funding from the Public Health Agency
of Canada — Alberta/NWT Region.

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Head Start gives my child confidence. She feels she has a voice, and that she gets the help she needs... offering her positive options to choose from.



Throughout this report are thoughts such as this, from parents who participated in the Edmonton Head Start Project 2010 Parent and Staff Community Dialogues.

The Edmonton Head Start Project

The Edmonton Head Start Project is a collaboration between ABC Head Start, E4C and Oliver Centre. It began in 1994 with funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada's Community Action Program for Children (CAPC). Each program provides half-day Head Start programming at 16 locations in Edmonton, including Francophone Head Start. Children aged three and a half to five are engaged in a learning-through-play environment, four to five half-days a week. Their learning may be supported through speech and language services, occupational therapy services, and health screenings as well as mental health consultations. Daily snacks and transportation are provided.

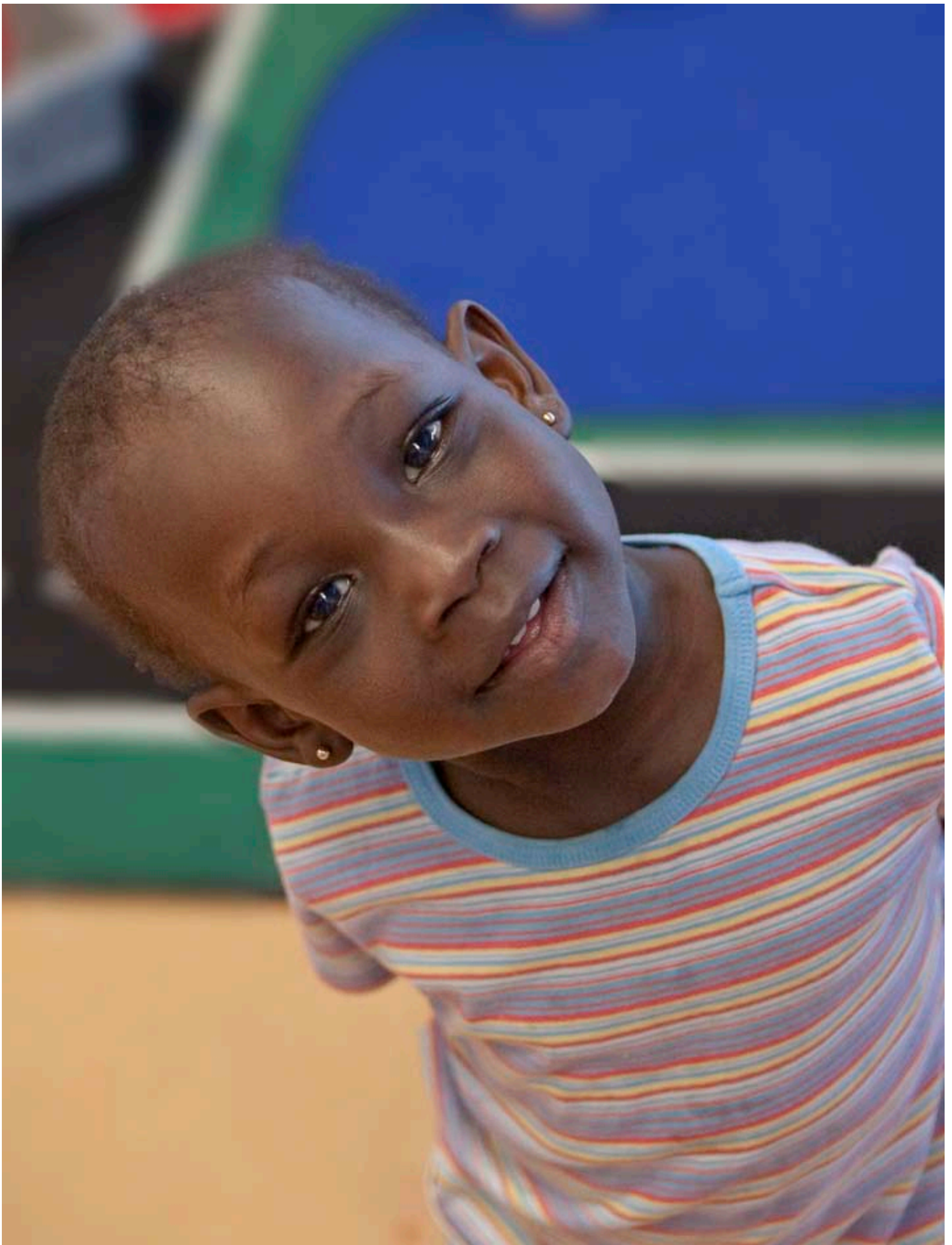
These three Project agencies also work together within a larger Interagency Head Start Network inclusive of a continuum of Head Start programs: Early Head Start, Aboriginal Head Start and Full-day Head Start. Each year, Edmonton Head Start serves over 520 children and their families who represent over twenty cultural and language groups.

What Is Head Start?

Head Start is much more than a pre-school service; it's a complete package, offering low-income families the best available early educational opportunities for their children. Head Start is a comprehensive preschool program that nurtures children's growth and development, at the same time offering parents a range of family support services. Head Start programs and activities are designed on the understanding that the early years are the most critical time in a child's development, with initial experiences at home and school laying the foundation for a child's future educational and life success.

Head Start provides a positive introduction to school experiences and serves as a bridge linking children and families to community resources. The goal is to prepare children for a successful educational experience, in partnership with their families and communities.

Parents have the opportunity to attend regular education and support groups. They have access to in-home support and are invited to be involved in all aspects of the program, including volunteer opportunities and advisory committees. Community volunteers and partnerships enrich the program by providing support to children and families in their journey towards success in learning and life.



Executive Summary

In early 2010, the Edmonton Head Start Project hired a consultant to conduct four intensive “community dialogues” with its parents and staff. The purpose was to gather information to evaluate the intermediate impacts of Head Start. →



- That data is contained in this document, together with parents' views on how their community is changing, and parents' recommendations on how Head Start can better reflect those changes in its programming.

The format used in the community dialogues was based on a Social Analysis Systems (SAS2) approach, a highly participatory process combining qualitative and quantitative data (such as ratings) to generate collaboration and discussion. This approach helps participants understand complex situations and engage in diagnostic thinking. Interactive techniques within small groups made it possible to systematically capture a range of perspectives and allow emerging themes to be identified and discussed. By focusing on parents' participation, the attempt was to address one of the failings of more typical evaluations: obtaining feedback from parents. Parents whose children had participated between 2004 and 2010 in a Head Start program* offered by the three agencies of the Edmonton Head Start Project were invited.

Discussion focused on a handout called the Head Start Impacts and Activities Wheel. Seven "impacts" were drawn from the intermediate and long-term outcomes in the Edmonton Head Start Work Plan. A list of activities, such as parent-teacher conferences, home visits and self help skills appeared under each of the impacts. Participants were asked to rate each of the impacts and activities using a five-point scale.

* ABC Head Start, E4C's Clareview Head Start and Oliver Centre's Calder Head Start

The Seven Impacts

1. **Teach me how to help** my child develop and learn.
2. **Enable my child** to be ready for kindergarten.
3. **Help to connect my child** with professional services (e.g. health team, speech & language) to strengthen his or her development.
4. **Help me with my parenting.**
5. **Help me to solve problems** and plan for the future.
6. **Help me to make new friends** and connections in the community.
7. **Help me to connect** with other community services (e.g., food bank) and health care (doctors, health clinics).

Findings

High percentages of participants from each Head Start agency rated the impacts as significant or very significant. This holds true when parents' and staff's responses are viewed separately. In fact, there was considerable similarity between both groups' perception of the impacts; the only slight disparity noted between parents and staff was in 'helped connect my child with professional services' and 'helped me make new friends and connections'. In each case, staff considered the impact slightly more significant than the parents did.

However, there is a concern that a broad enough perspective was not measured and that only those parents feeling most positively (or negatively) about Head Start turned up. A total of 51 parents and 31 staff participated in the community dialogue sessions: only 17% of the 294 parents invited attended.

Emerging Themes

Participants also provided helpful information relating to trends and recommendations. Four distinct themes emerged.

Theme 1: The projection of an increase in multicultural families, and the desire by families to see multiculturalism reflected more in program activities and staff knowledge or representation. Parents want to inform others about their own culture while learning more about Canadian conventions, practices and mores. Parents see an increasing need for additional help in connecting to other programs, such as ESL, and employment counseling or preparation. Head Start has an important role to play here as a community hub, linking families or providing information in a variety of formats.

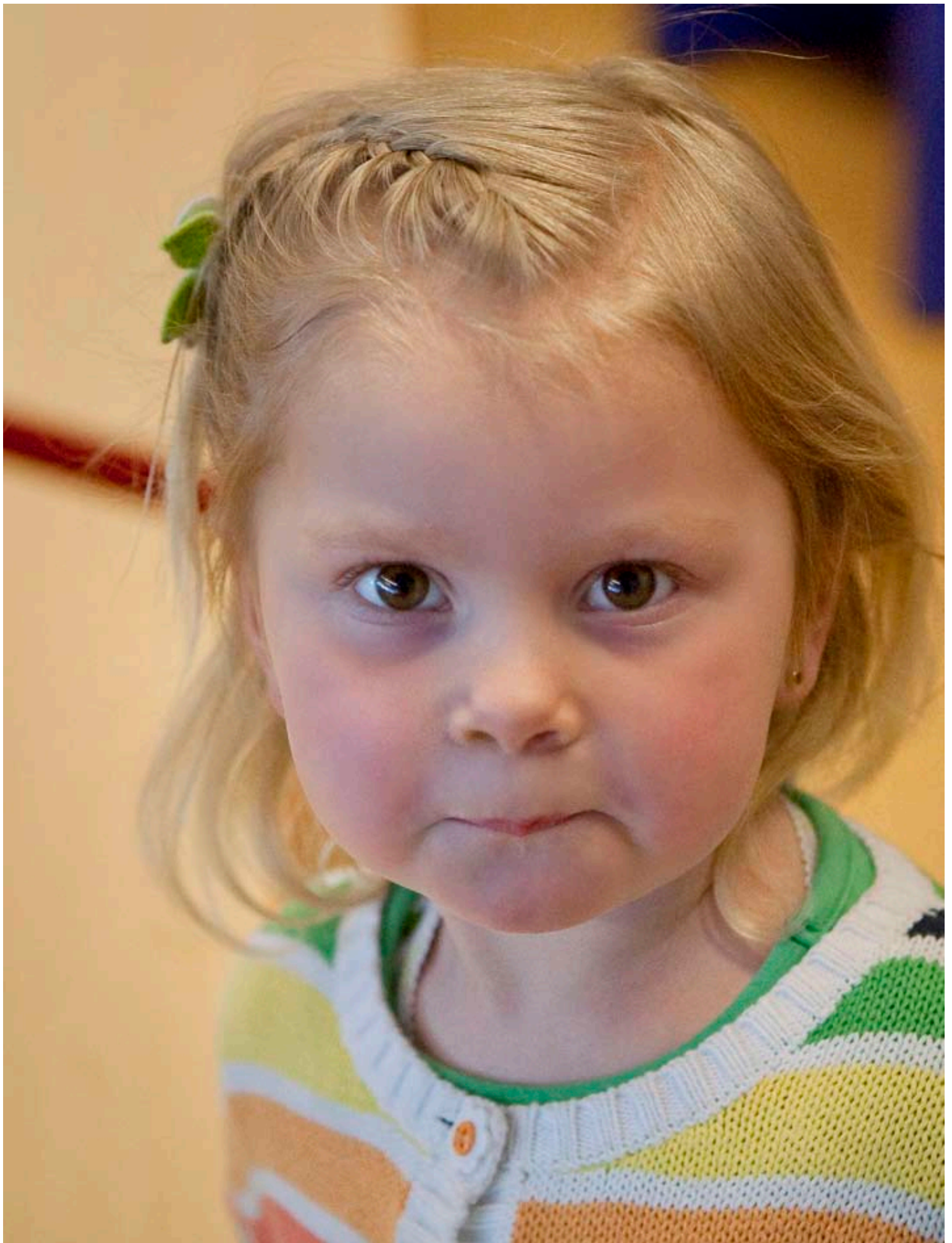
Theme 2: Parents have concerns about the transition from Head Start to kindergarten and elementary school, particularly for children with special needs. Parents need more information about schools and direct contact with teachers there to feel reassured that the personal attention and understanding provided by Head Start will continue.

Theme 3: There is a growing need for flexibility in scheduling. As families take on more responsibilities, they may find it harder to attend groups during the day or to find childcare on the days that Head Start is not offered. Programs may have to adjust their schedules to accommodate families' changing circumstances.

We need more Head Start: 5 days a week, with longer hours, or with both morning and afternoon classes so that more children can be accommodated.

Theme 4: Parents want to be better connected to their community and to each other. The dialogues generated considerable interest and enthusiasm, and participants identified various ways to promote ongoing communication and connections. Head Start programs may want to examine ideas such as a buddy system or mentorship to enhance goodwill and further understanding.





The Head Start Impact: What We Wanted to Know

In early 2010, the Edmonton Head Start Project launched a unique evaluation of its programming: it asked parents with children, attending or who had been in Head Start, to talk about their experiences and to offer recommendations. →

→ The intent was to address one of the failings of more typical evaluations: the difficulty of obtaining feedback from parents on intermediate outcomes. Traditionally, parents had only provided formal feedback at the end of their child's year in Head Start, a short-term snapshot. This report, therefore, contains a statistical analysis of intermediate outcomes for children as measured by staff and parents. It also contains parents' views on how their communities are changing demographically with an increasing number of immigrant families, and what Head Start can do to meet their needs in its programming.

In March and April 2010, four five-hour "community dialogues" were held with parents and staff of ABC Head Start (North and South), E4C's Clareview Head Start and Oliver Centre's Calder Head Start. An interactive process was used to encourage participants, in particular parents, to talk freely, with the focus on

parents being heard. In addition, parents had an opportunity to mingle with staff and other parents and learn more about the program and related services. A total of 51 parents and 31 staff participated. Peter Faid, of Community Services Consulting Ltd., was asked to design and facilitate the sessions because of his previous experience in conducting annual evaluations for the Head Start programs. This report describes his findings and observations.



Purpose of the Edmonton Head Start Project 2010 Evaluation:

- **To identify and measure** the extent to which the children's programming and family services are achieving the intermediate and long-term outcomes for participating children and their families.
- **To explore** whether there have been significant changes in the needs of Head Start families and whether adjustments in some aspects of the program might be considered.
- **To demonstrate** to current and potential funders the successful achievement of Head Start outcomes.
- **To improve** the recognition of Head Start programs with a wider public audience.

This project was made possible through funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada — Alberta/NWT Region.

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How We Went About It

The Seven Impacts:

A key element of the approach in this Head Start evaluation was to have participants rate seven impacts Head Start has had on them.

These impacts were drawn from the intermediate and long-term outcomes described in the Edmonton Head Start Work Plan. →

- The wording of the impacts was simplified somewhat for the exercise. Participants worked with a handout called the Head Start Impacts and Activities Wheel (appended).

Participants were asked to rate each of the impacts using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represented “no impact at all” and 5 represented “very significant impact.”

Activities

Under each impact was a partial list of activities, such as parent-teacher conferences, home visits and self-help skills (appended). The list was drawn up by the consultant and executive directors. The category “other” allowed participants to add to the list. Participants were to note the three highest ranked impacts and to record the two activities that they thought contributed most to those impacts.

The Seven Impacts of Head Start:

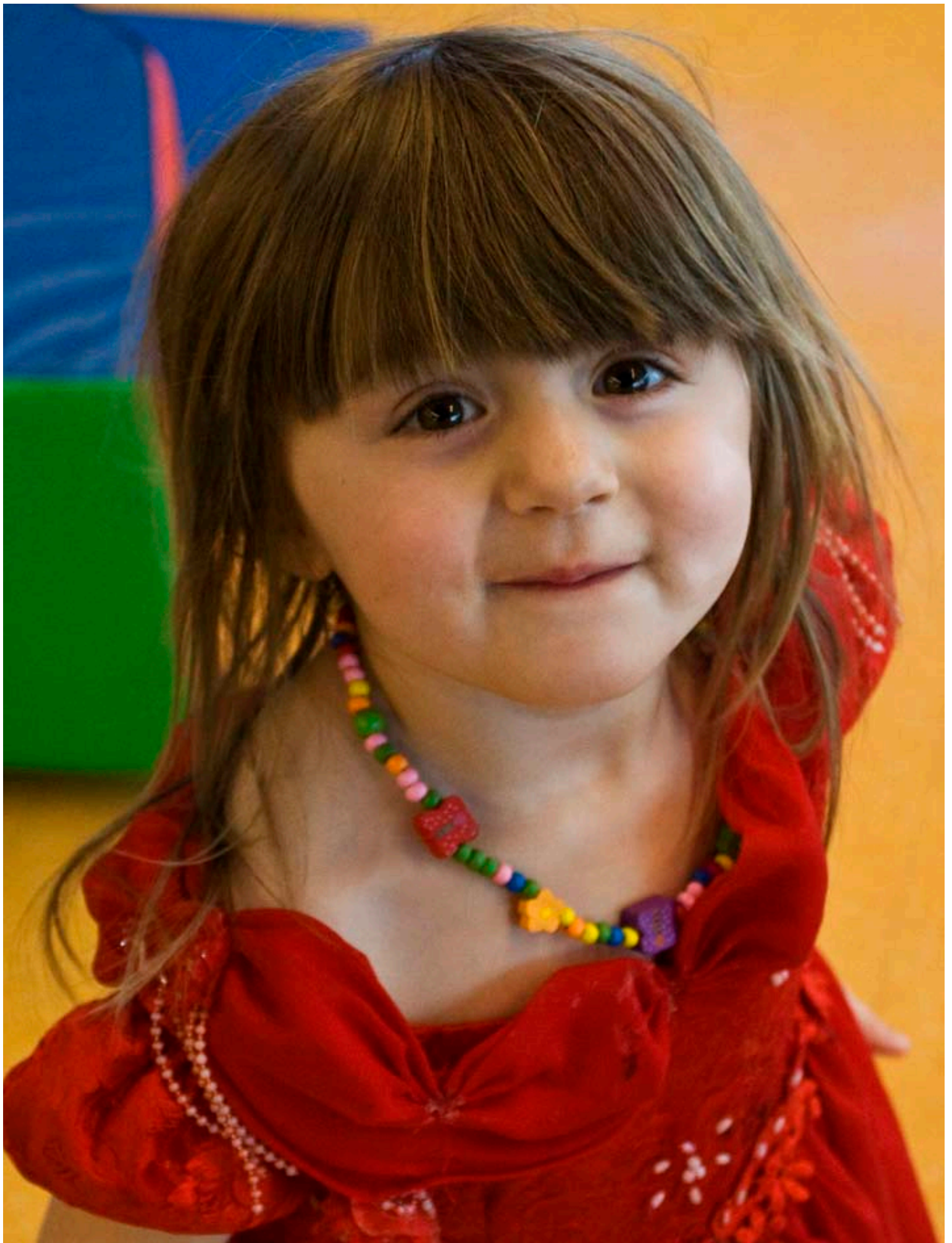
1. **Teach me how** to help my child develop and learn.
2. **Enable my child** to be ready for kindergarten.
3. **Help to connect my child** with professional services (e.g. health team, speech & language) to strengthen his or her development.
4. **Help me with my parenting.**
5. **Help me to solve problems** and plan for the future.
6. **Help me to make new friends** and connections in the community.
7. **Help me to connect** with other community services (e.g., food bank) and health care (doctors, health clinics).

Impact by Number of Children in Head Start

Parents' responses were also considered in the context of how many children they have now or have had in Head Start. The hypothesis is that the greater the number of children in a family who attend Head Start, the larger the positive impact will be on the family. This is because parents become familiar with the program's staff, expectations and required routines, and older children tend to assist younger siblings with program activities. So everyone benefits.

However, the counter argument might be: as parents become more familiar with the program through the participation of subsequent children, they might see less of an impact, for example, in the number of new contacts made or their skill development in parenting, problem solving and planning. Parents may have already maximized the benefits when their first children became involved in the program.





What We Found

Along with rating the seven impacts, participants were also asked to identify significant changes in the needs of Head Start families over the next decade. Nine key trends emerged out of these discussions, as well as four common themes.



Emerging Trends

1. The number of multicultural families requiring resources, programs and supports will increase as the number of new Canadian and Aboriginal families grows. More children will have ESL and special needs, and cultural teaching will have to become a larger component of Head Start programs. Language, culture and other barriers will increase. Staff with diverse backgrounds (e.g., knowledge of Aboriginal language and traditions) and translators may be required. There may not be enough program space to meet growing needs.

2. With greater numbers of immigrant and refugee families with children in Head Start, staff will have to spend more time helping parents adjust to Canadian life (e.g., understanding the legal requirements of care for children, safety issues, etc.). The program may have to take additional steps to recognize the wider diversity among its families (e.g. by honoring holidays and traditions).

3. More families may need help dealing with issues such as drugs, violence, abuse, alienation, poverty and the associated stress. There will be more working poor families, and parents may need employment counseling and transportation.

4. The structure of the family is changing. There are more single parent families and more blended families, which increase the challenges for families and the program. The definition of “family” may have to be extended and children taught that other configurations are okay.

Head Start is really my family. The staff recognize that I know my child best, but they are there to support me. I have two special needs children and there are lots of challenges. Really, Head Start provides support to all my family members.

5. Increasingly Head Start parents work or are in school, so they have less time with their families, fewer opportunities to connect with Head Start and are **less likely to be able to attend daytime activities** in the program. Programs may have to consider holding parent groups outside business hours or make other arrangements to get parents involved.

6. It is becoming **more difficult to access programs** because requirements are changing (e.g., income levels and hours for Alberta Education, closure of elementary schools). More low-income families will be above the cut off guidelines, so will not qualify for assistance, but still require support.

7. **Costs are increasing**, but program budgets are not, and provincially funded services are being reduced. Program planning and priority setting will become more difficult and extracurricular activities may have to be limited. Increasing costs in housing, food and transportation are also affecting families' abilities to cope.

8. As technology use increases, **children will need more computer skills** and more access to computers. Greater in-class use will have to be made of computers and other electronic devices such as smart boards. Costs and other factors make it difficult for parents to keep up with technology and school expectations (relating to their ability to help children at home). Parents need more exposure to technology.

9. The **focus on physical activities and health** will have to increase.



Themes

1. Multicultural Needs

Given the projected increase in multicultural families, some parents wanted to see multiculturalism reflected more in both program activities and in staff knowledge or representation. In this two-way street parents want to inform others about their own culture while learning more about Canadian conventions, practices and mores.

Participants understand that the cultural divide can affect all facets of family life. Increasingly, parents will need additional help in connecting to other programs, such as ESL, and employment counselling or preparation.

Head Start has an important role to play here as community hub, linking families or providing information in a variety of formats. For example, a parent group session could be dedicated to preparing a resume or facilitating the set up of a community kitchen. Head Start programs may have to enhance their partnerships with each other or with other agencies to fulfill these emerging needs.

2. Transition to School

Related to the first theme is parents' concern about the transition from Head Start to kindergarten and elementary school. In families whose children have special needs that concern may be exacerbated. Will the personal interest, understanding and attention Head Start has shown children be carried over into kindergarten?

The impression from the community dialogues is that parents need more information about schools and direct contact with teachers there to feel reassured that this level of caring will continue. Given the recent closure of inner city schools in Edmonton, the need for information may be about to increase.

I'm happy that my child gets to learn about Canadian culture. But I'd also like to go into her classroom and tell stories or sing in our own language. I'd like to teach others about our heritage and culture.

3. Flexibility in Scheduling

A third related trend is the growing need for flexibility in scheduling. As families take on more responsibility, they may find it increasingly difficult to attend groups during the day or to find childcare on the days that Head Start is not offered. Over time, the programs may have to review and adjust their schedules to accommodate families' changing circumstances.

I would like more help getting my child ready for kindergarten: what is the school routine, the rules, the expectations that teachers will have of him? Will the teacher know about his challenges?

4. Communication and Connections

Parents want to be connected to their community and to each other and this should be encouraged. A website, mentoring and a newsletter were identified as means to achieve this goal.

Alumni parents can help because they are often more settled and more experienced about the school system than their novice Head Start counterparts. As their children are older and more independent, these parents may be in a better position to volunteer in Head Start in some way. Head Start programs might try to channel the interest and enthusiasm demonstrated in these community dialogues by setting up a buddy system, mentorship or a hot line. Alumni parents may be able to give newer parents guidance and advice relating to Canadian life and the transition to kindergarten.

The community dialogues have surfaced many opportunities to create goodwill and further understanding.

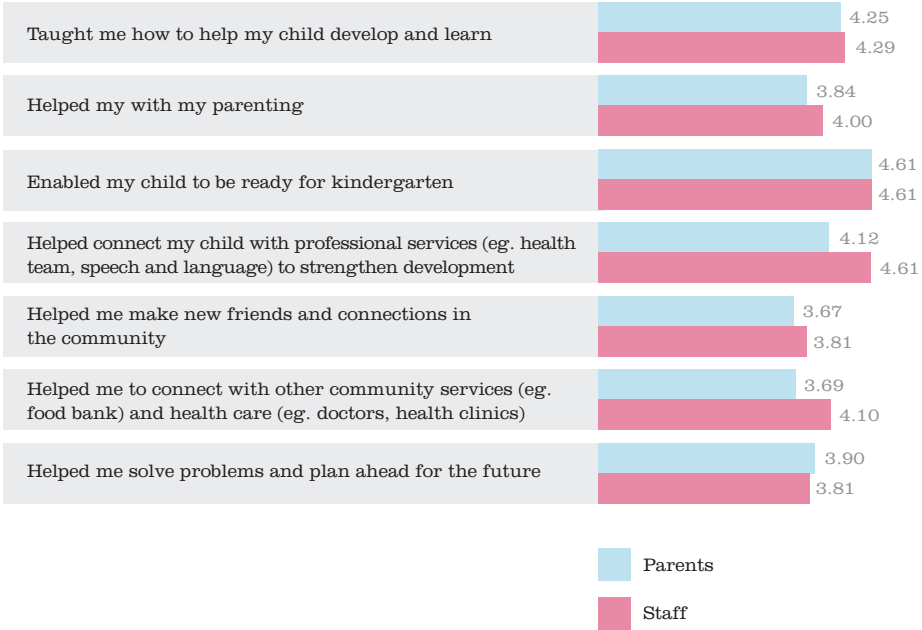


The Big Picture

Based on the ratings of the impacts, all three Head Start agencies can be said to be doing an excellent job. In each case, high percentages of participants rated the impact as significant or very significant. This also holds true when parents and staff’s responses are viewed separately.

As Figure 1 shows, when the scores are weighted*, there is considerable similarity between parents and staff in their perception of the impacts. The largest differences occur in Impacts #3 and 6; however, even then the scores are still less than 0.5 apart.

FIGURE 1
Impact Comparison: Parents vs Staff



* To give weight to the differences in the ratings, for example between “very significant” and “significant,” each of the ratings was assigned a value as follows: very significant impact – 5, significant impact – 4, moderate impact – 3, little impact – 2, no impact at all – 1. The ratings were multiplied by the value, totaled and divided by the number of participants.



FIGURE 2

Impacts by Program: Parents & Staff

When the weighted impacts are examined by program, as shown in Figure 2, once again the differences are relatively small. The scores for ABC Head Start South are slightly lower than those for the other programs in all categories; however, the difference is less than 1.0 in every case.



The Head Start Impact

For the purpose of clarity in this report, participants’ ratings of the seven impacts have been divided into three categories:

- Head Start’s impact on **children**,
- Head Start’s impact on **parents**,
- Head Start’s impact on **community connections**.

On Children

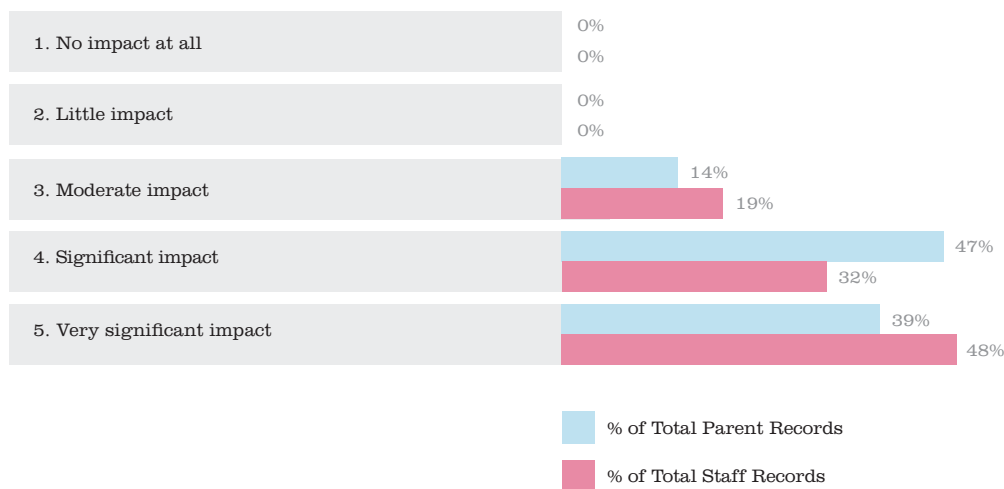
Impact 1: Head Start taught me how to help my child develop and learn;

As Figure 3 shows, all parents and staff thought that “develop and learn” had a positive impact on children, with 86% of parents and 80% of staff rating the impact as significant or very significant. A larger proportion of staff (48%) provided the highest rating.

Among the three activities offered, parents (78%) and staff (81%) alike thought the parent groups contributed most to Impact 1. There was less agreement in relation to “home visits” and “parent/teacher conferences,” with 65% of parents and 74% of staff choosing the first, and 69% of parents and 74% of staff selecting the second as a primary contributor.

FIGURE 3

Impact 1: Develop & Learn



PARENTS' VOICES

I felt that my own communications skills improved as I learned more about how to talk and play with my daughter.

The results are shown in Figure 4. Other activities referenced under Impact #1 included circle time, celebration days, services by various specialists (physiotherapist, occupational therapist, speech language pathologist), and classroom observations.

Figure 5 shows that families with one child in Head Start are more likely to rate Impact 1 as “significant” than families with two or more children in the program. However, half of families with two children rated the impact as “very significant” compared with 35% of families with one child and 30% of families with three or more children in the program.

- One Child in Program
- Two Children in Program
- Three or More Children in Program

FIGURE 4

Impacts & Activities: Impact 1 (Develop & Learn)

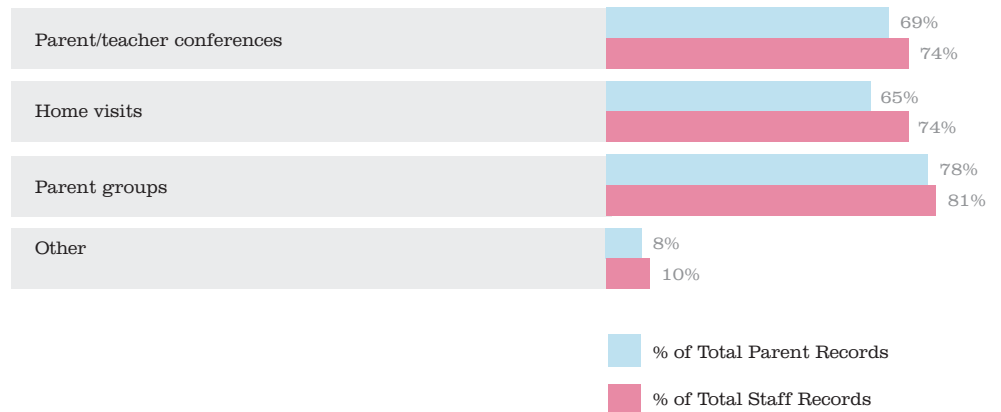
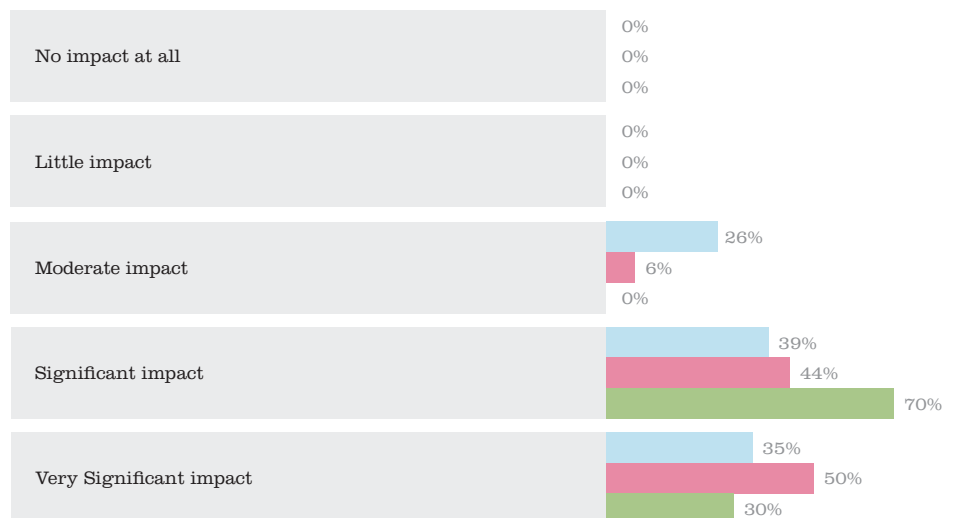


FIGURE 5

Impacts by Number of Children in Programs





Impact 2: Head Start enabled my child to be ready for kindergarten;

As can be seen in Figure 6, parents and staff provided quite similar ratings, with 95% of parents and 94% of staff seeing “enabled my child to be ready for kindergarten” as having a significant or very significant impact. Small percentages of both groups (4% of parents and 6% of staff) rated the impact as moderate. For one parent, (2%), there was no impact at all.

Parents and staff made similar choices with regard to “play and share”: 84% of both groups identified this activity as contributing the most to Impact 2. “Self-help skills” were more often rated as a contributor by staff (81% as compared with 63% of parents). Conversely, 78% of parents chose the four-day a week class as a contributor to Impact 2, while only 68% of staff made that same choice. The results are shown in Figure 7. Other activities under Impact 2 included [building] social and communication skills, reading books, learning songs, and learning the expectations of schools.

When this impact is viewed through the lens of the number of children a family has in the program, results show that parents with two or more children in Head Start are more likely to rate the impact “very significant”.

PARENTS'
VOICES

Head Start gave my child the social skills she needs. The kindergarten teacher told me that she can always identify the Head Start graduates by their high social skills and ability to fit into the classroom.

FIGURE 6

Impact 2: Ready for Kindergarten

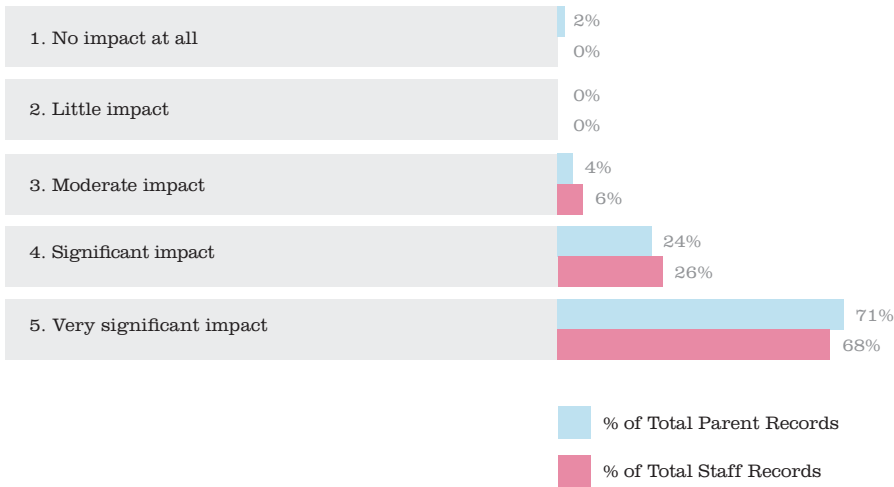


FIGURE 7

Impacts & Activities: Impact 2 (Ready for Kindergarten)

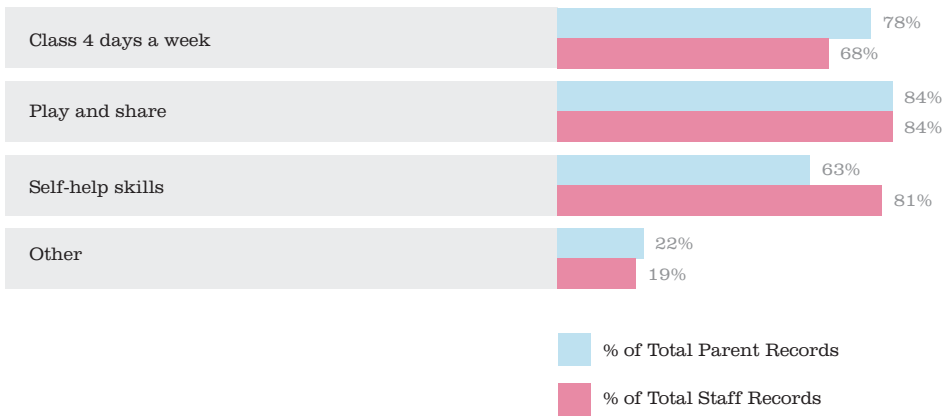
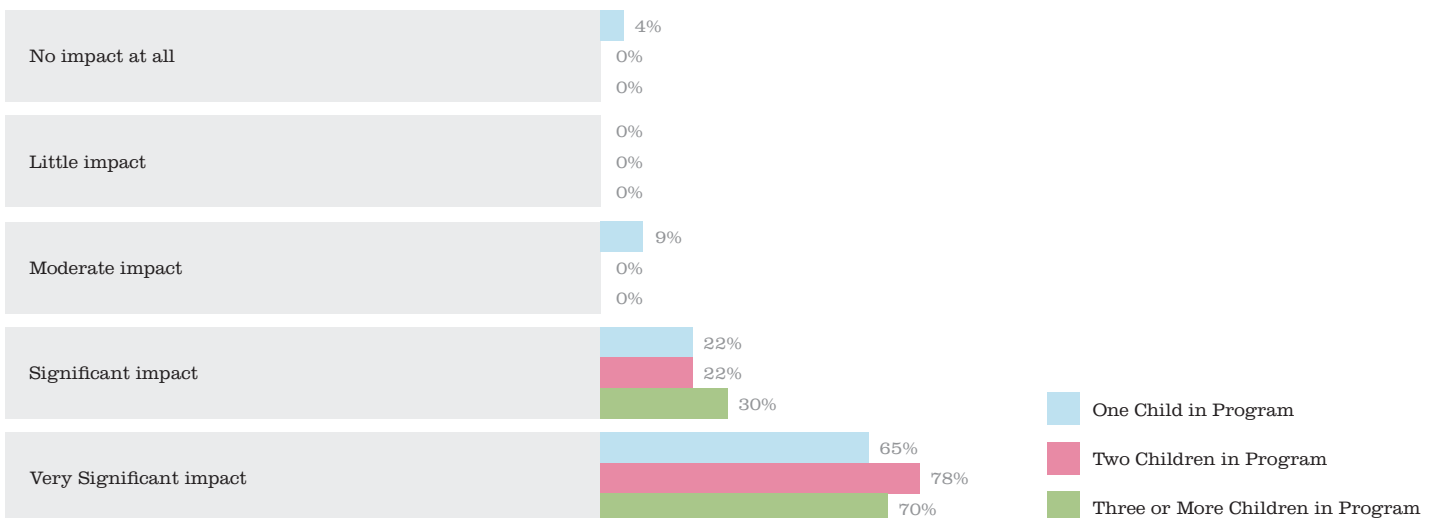


FIGURE 8

Impacts by Number of Children in Programs





Impact 3: Head Start helped connect my child with professional services, such as a health team or speech and language experts, to strengthen my child’s development;

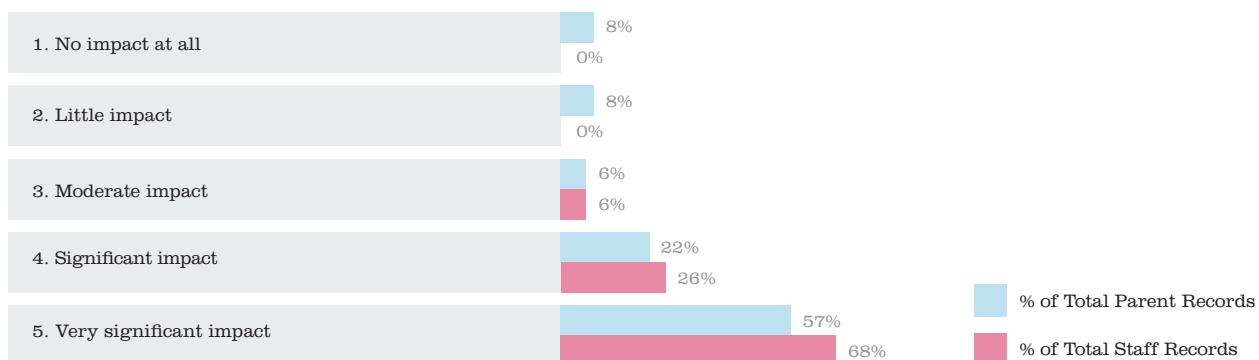
A majority of parents (79%) and staff (94%) rated “helped connect my child with professional services” as significant or very significant. When the two higher ratings are considered, the gap between parent and staff rating (15 percentage points) is largest for this impact than all the others. Part of the explanation may be that these particular parents did not require professional services for their children.

Smaller percentages of both groups (6%) gave it a moderate rating, but 16% of parents thought “helped connect my child with professional services” had little or no impact. The results appear in Figure 9.

A greater discrepancy between parents and staff can be seen in Figure 10 where participants were asked to choose which activities contributed the most to Impact 3. For example, 68% of staff identified CASA as a primary contributor, compared with 22% of parents. This may reflect a difference in parents’ knowledge or use of CASA. Often parents do not know the name of an agency, only that they received help.

FIGURE 9

Impact 3: Connect Child with Services



PARENTS' VOICES

I was able to access a therapist at Clareview Head Start. And then she came to see my child at home as well as at school, and kept us up to date with how things were going.

Similarly, 74% of staff chose primary health team, compared with 43% of parents. Rankings of early childhood education were closer, with this activity identified by 59% of parents and 65% of staff. Other activities contributing to Impact 3 included services received through an occupational therapist, speech and language

pathologists, outreach, Glenrose Hospital, and social workers.

As Figure 11 shows for Impact 3, the percentage of “very significant” responses increases by number of children in the program. However, the pattern does not hold up for “significant” ratings.

FIGURE 10

Impacts & Activities: Impact 3 (Connect Child with Services)

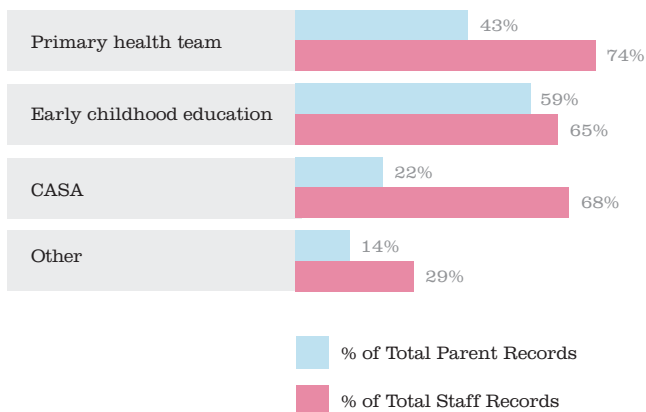
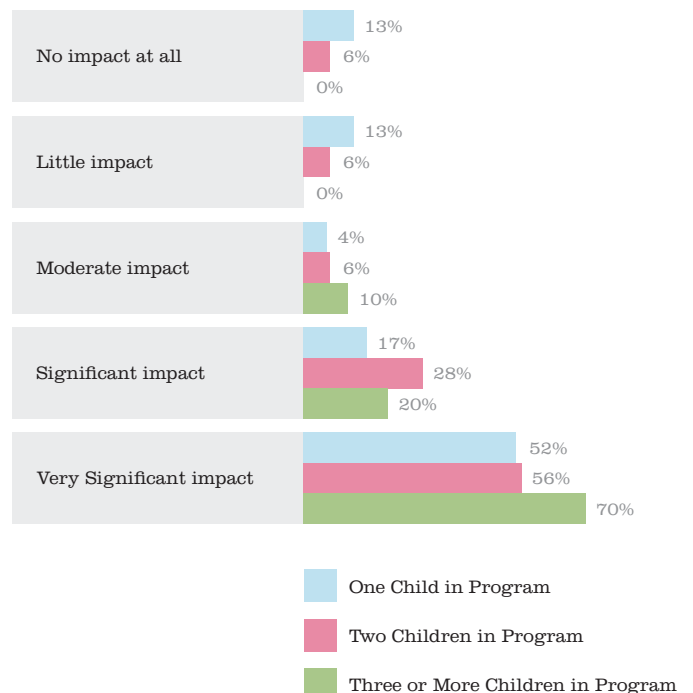


FIGURE 11

Impacts by Number of Children in Programs



On Parents

Impact 4: Head Start helped with parenting;

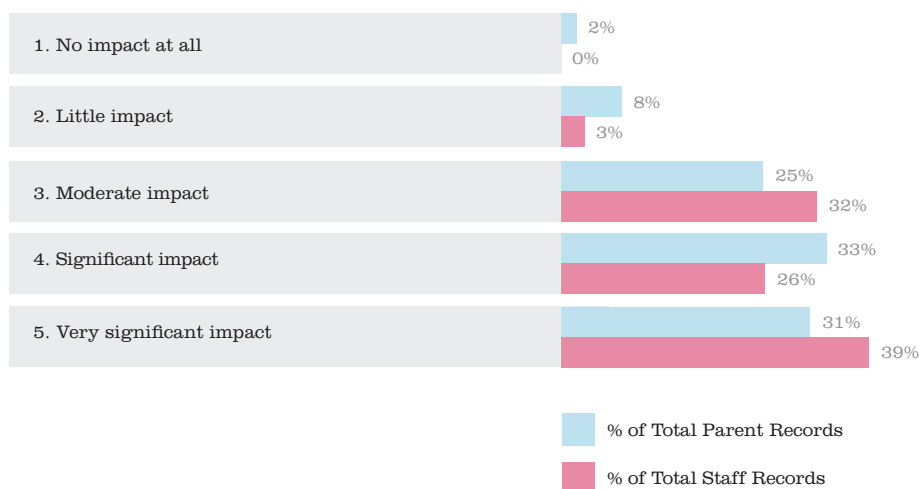
A majority of both groups (64% of parents and 65% of staff) rated the impact of “helped me with my parenting” as significant or very significant. A quarter of parents and 32% of staff saw “helped me with my parenting” as having a moderate impact. Ten percent of parents and 3% of staff rated it as having little or no impact. The results are shown in Figure 12.

PARENTS' VOICES

I watched how the teacher dealt with my child in the classroom. That gave me ideas I could take home and use in family activities.

FIGURE 12

Impact 4: Helped with Parenting





I really enjoyed the in-classroom speakers. I could take the information the nurse provided and apply it to my own life.

As Figure 13 shows, parents thought that contacts with Head Start staff contributed most to Impact 4. The percentage of parents and staff selecting this activity was similar, as was their choice of parent/child activities. A larger difference can be seen between parents' and staff's ranking of classroom observations, with 55% of parents seeing it as contributing most to Impact 4, compared with 39% of staff. Other activities under Impact 4 included use of 1, 2, 3 Magic, visits by the home educator, services by CASA and connections with other parents.

When Impact 4 is considered (Figure 14), parents with two children in the program are again more likely to provide a positive rating: 44% indicated a "significant" or "very significant" impact.

FIGURE 13
Impacts & Activities: Impact 4 (Helped with Parenting)

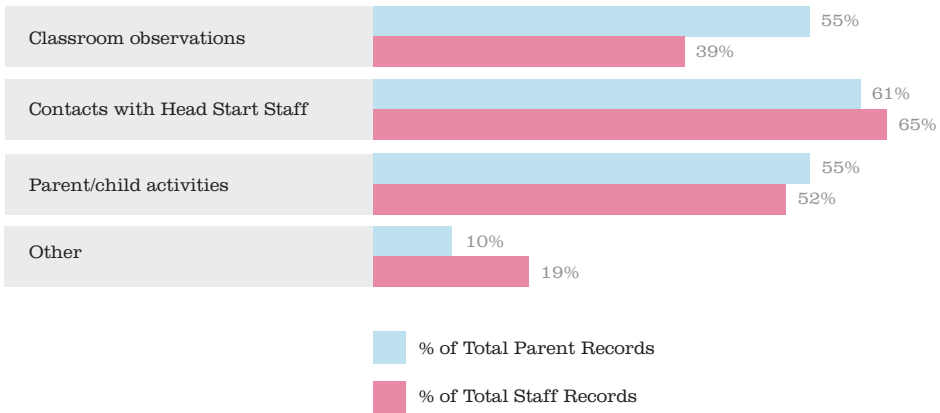
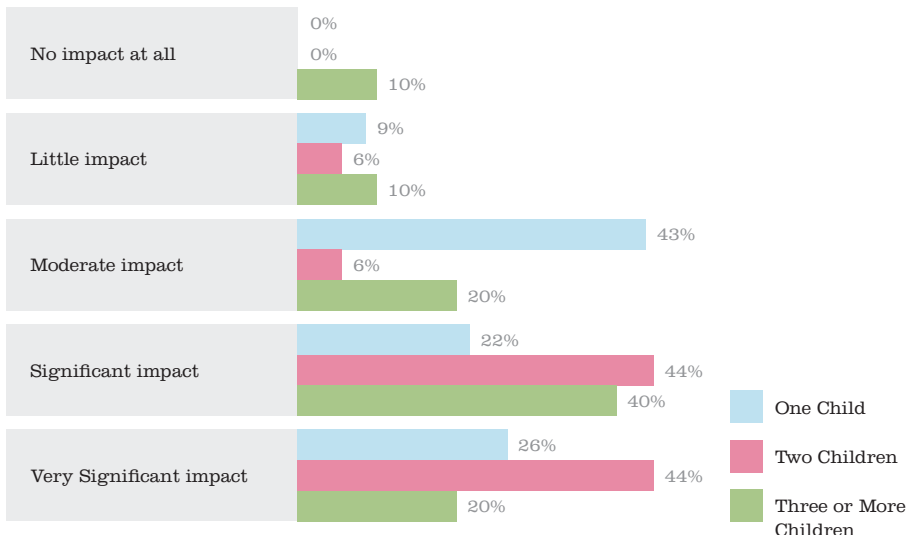


FIGURE 14
Impacts by Number of Children in Programs





I learned from Head Start how to change my behavior to help my child learn. Especially in dealing with the special needs he has.

Impact 5: Head Start helped me solve problems and plan for the future;

Sixty three per cent of parents and 58% of staff gave this impact the highest ratings of 4 or 5, although more parents (39%) rated the impact very significant. 27% of parents and 39% of staff thought this impact was moderate; and 10% of parents and 3% of staff saw little or no impact.

FIGURE 15

Impact 5: Solve Problems & Plan Ahead

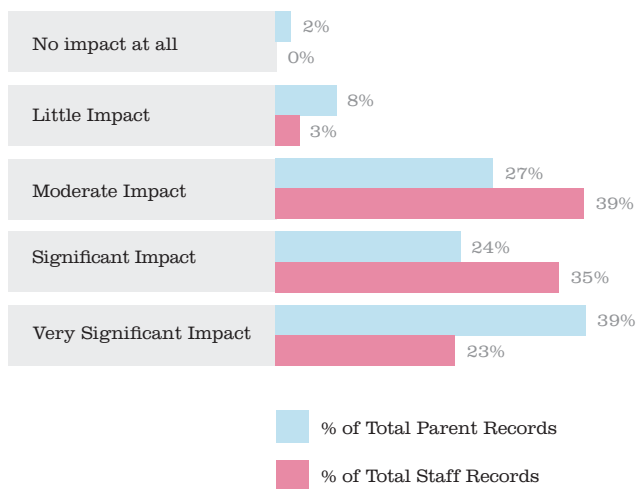
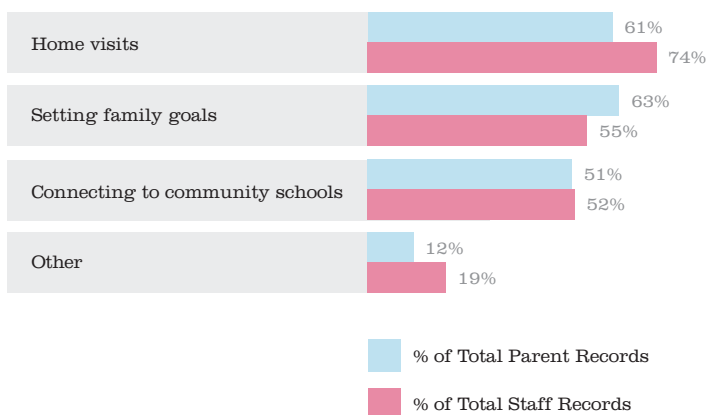


FIGURE 16

Impacts & Activities: Impact 5 (Solve Problems & Plan Ahead)



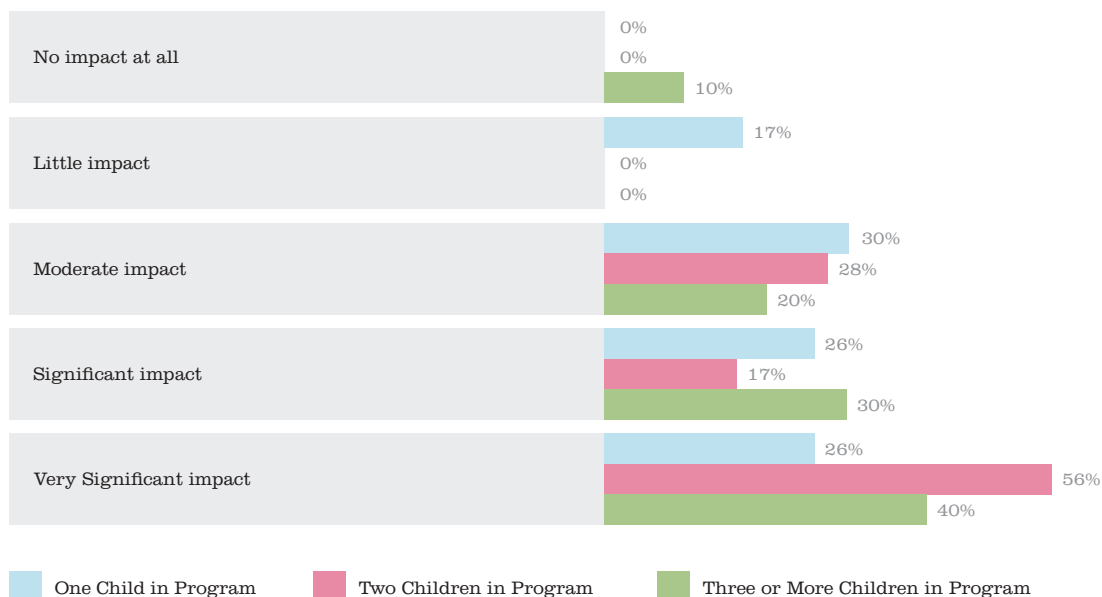
When choosing from among the top contributing activities to Impact 5, staff members were more likely to identify “home visits” than were parents, with rankings of 74% and 61% respectively. A larger percent of parents than staff chose “setting family goals.” However, the two groups were closer in their rankings of “connecting to community schools.” 52% of staff and 51% of parents saw this activity as being a top contributor to Impact 5. The results are shown in Figure 16.

Activities under “Other” included help with employment, being linked to resources and getting connected with mental health professionals and social workers.

By the time their third child enters Head Start, parents may have reached a plateau in learning about problem solving and planning. Therefore, the impact would be less. This assumption is reflected in the “very significant” ratings, but not with “significant”.

FIGURE 17

Impacts by Number of Children in Programs



On Community Connections

Impact 6: Head Start helped me make new friends and connections in the community

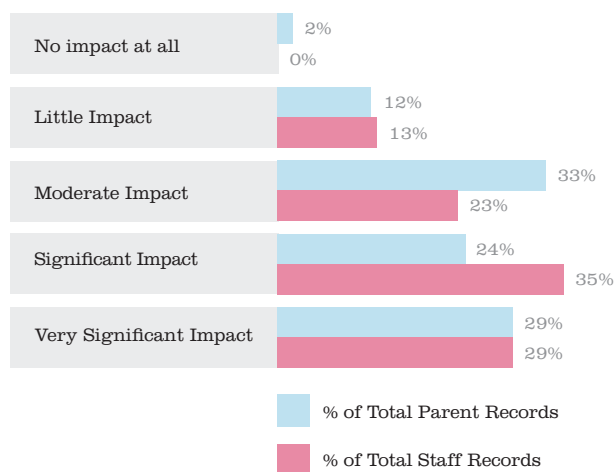
Fifty three per cent of parents and 64% of staff said Impact 6 was significant or very significant — a difference of 11 percentage points between the two groups. One-third of parents and 23% of staff gave the impact moderate rating. However, 14% of parents and 13% of staff thought there had been little or no impact.

Parents’ group was listed as an activity under Impact 6, and parents and staff were in agreement about this being a major contributor to that impact (73% and 71% respectively).

Rankings for field trips were also similar for both groups: 47% of parents and 42% of staff identified these as a primary contributor to Impact 6. The two groups were further apart in their choice of “social events and celebrations,” with 43% of parents and 58% of staff seeing this as among the top three contributors to Impact 6.

FIGURE 18

Impact 6: New Friends & Connections



Other activities in this category included access to the City’s fee reduction program, connections to multi-cultural health brokers and help getting a child into subsidized daycare.

Logically, Impact 6 might be rated lower as the number of children in the program increases because parents may have made most of their new friends and connections through their

PARENTS' VOICES

The parent group is the highlight of my week: I really like the information I receive. What we learned about nutrition was especially helpful. And then we get together for social events and celebrations too. I get to develop friendships, as well as my child.

FIGURE 19

Impacts & Activities: Impact 6 (New Friends & Connections)

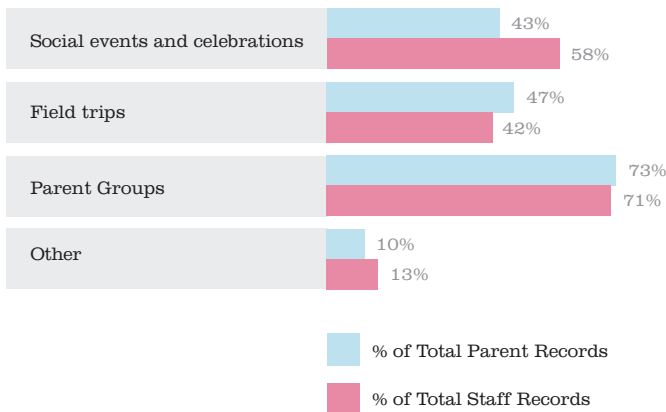
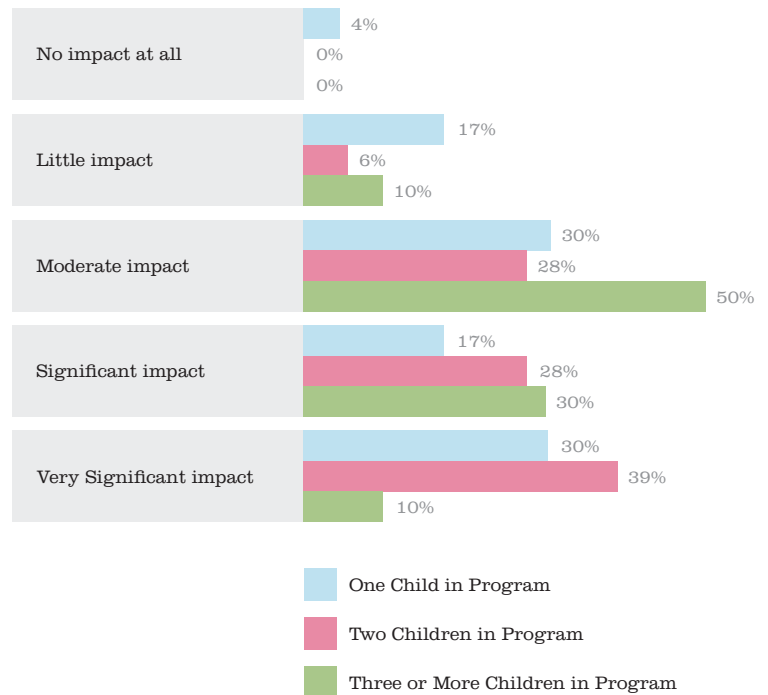


FIGURE 20

Impacts by Number of Children in Programs



involvement with children who entered the program earlier. As Figure 20 shows, the percentage of “very significant” responses decreases for parents with three or more children in Head Start. However, the same logic does not apply to those with two children in the program, since 39% of them gave Impact 6 a “very significant” rating.

PARENTS'
VOICES

There are so many things we get from Head Start. The gifts from Santa's Anonymous; the Sobeys' gift certificates; the bread donations on Wednesdays; the surprise tart in my child's backpack.

Impact 7: Head Start helped me connect to other community services, such as the food bank, and to health care providers.

A majority (58%) of parents rated this impact as significant or very significant, while a larger percentage of staff (70%) gave it these higher ratings — a 12% difference.

Almost one-quarter of parents (24%) and 16% of staff gave it a moderate rating; but 18% of parents and 3% of staff thought Head Start had little or no impact here.

As Figure 22 indicates, there was less agreement between parents and staff with regard to the contribution of activities under Impact 7. 68% of staff identified “connections with doctors and dentists” as a major contributor as opposed to 57% of parents. A similar difference can be seen in the choices of food banks and the NET Team*. Food bank was ranked among the top three by 52% of staff and 41% of parents, while NET Team was ranked as a

primary contributor by 26% of staff and 16% of parents. Other activities included leisure access programs, community kitchens, Christmas Bureau, Alberta Works and the Multicultural Health Brokers.

Again, one might expect parents with more than one child in Head Start to be familiar with community services and to have made connections as a result of their initial participation.

Therefore the rating for Impact 7 would decrease with family size. This happens when the “significant” and “very significant” ratings are rolled together. The percentages decrease from 87% for one child to 67% for two children to 50% for three children. However, as Figure 23 shows, when the “very significant” results are examined, the pattern does not hold up.

* A police officer and a civilian community capacity builder, supported by a youth mobilization team comprise this multi-disciplined team. N.E.T. combines the skill, expertise and perspectives of traditional law enforcement practices with innovative community development strategies.

FIGURE 21

Impact 7: Connect with Other Community Services

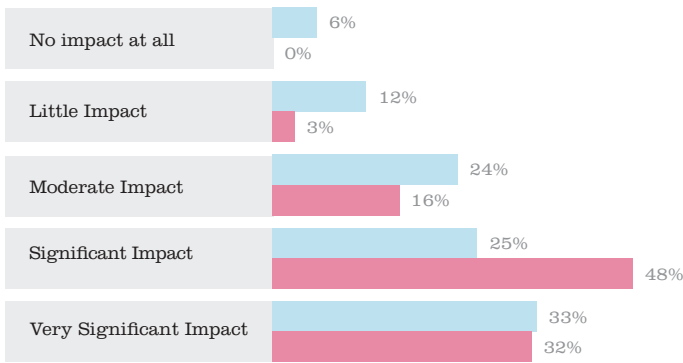


FIGURE 22

Impacts & Activities: Impact 7 (Connect with Other Services)

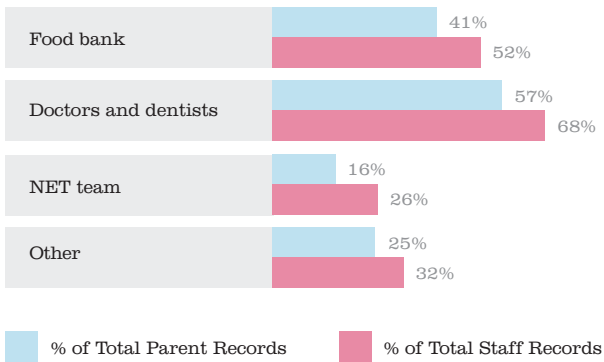
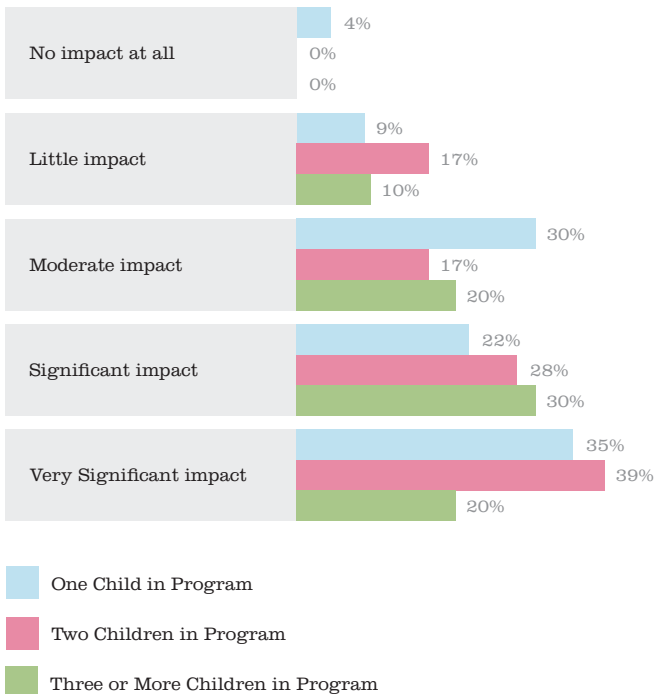


FIGURE 23

Impacts by Number of Children in Programs



Changes to Responses

At the end of each workshop, participants were asked if they wanted to change any of their ratings based on what they had heard through the day. Fourteen made a change, eight of them parents. The parents made a total of 17 changes to the impacts. Fourteen of the changes were positive, that is the ratings increased, and three were negative. The single impact with the greatest number of changes was Impact 7 (Helped me to connect with other community services and health care). Four people increased their ratings of this impact by 1 on the scale, and one person downgraded the rating from 5 (very significant impact) to 2 (little impact). While participants were not asked to give a reason for the changes, it could be a result of having more information and more time to reflect on the topic or of being influenced positively or negatively by the discussion.



Toward the Future: Participants' Recommendations

In the last exercise of the session, participants reviewed each of the seven impacts and made recommendations under each one for how Head Start can help families prepare for the future.

To Help Children

Recommendations for Impact 1: Teach Me How To Help My Child Develop And Learn

- Ensure parents know that it is okay (or even preferable) to ask about their child's learning and be involved in his or her education. Teachers could phone parents regularly to explain what they are doing at school and what parents can do at home in support.
- Increase the number and types of activities reflecting cultural diversity. Encourage parents to share information about their cultures in parent groups and the classroom.
- Set up tools such as a Head Start website or a hotline so someone is available at all times to support parents with various issues.
- Increase the number of ways parents can be involved (e.g., the website, peer support, phone trees).
- Create more opportunities for parents to see children interacting with teachers and provide parents with explanations of the strategies they use.
- Provide parents with information and training on child development and more instruction on how to help and support their children in learning their ABCs and numbers:
 - Suggest activities to parents that will assist children in specific areas of development,
 - Help each parent to recognize their child's strengths and build on these.
- Extend the number of programming hours to five days a week morning and afternoon, and increase the number of field trips. Offer early drop off and late pick-up.
- Help parents develop their literacy skills.
- Include self-esteem and social skills learning in all aspects of Head Start.
- Expand parent training on discipline.
- Educate families about health and nutrition; for example where to shop, how to read food labels and plan meals and information about allergies.
- Find a balance between the child-adult interaction and the child's independent learning. We have to allow for both.



Recommendations for Impact 2: Enable My Child To Be Ready For Kindergarten

- Help to meet the needs of low-income families above the financial cut off guidelines by increasing their access to services.
- Extend the hours of Head Start (as described under #1) and open up spaces for programs in other parts of the city.
- Ensure each classroom reflects a mix in socio-economic backgrounds.
- Increase access to computer technology.
- Give children more time to play and increase the number of field trips.
- Provide a list of schools with details (full or half-day, fees, transportation, etc.) about kindergarten classes:
 - explain what to do over the summer and what to do in September,
 - prepare an information package that goes from the parent groups to parents,
 - identify which schools provide for children with special needs so parents can place their children appropriately.
- Increase connections with kindergartens and schools:
 - take field trips to kindergartens,
 - hold joint activities with schools,
 - determine what children are expected to learn in kindergarten and increase staff and parents' knowledge accordingly,
 - create opportunities for parents to talk to kindergarten staff; for example, bring a teacher to the parent group or hold an Open House.
- Continue to support families through the transition from Head Start to kindergarten.
- Try to get more men involved in Head Start, for example, dads in the parent groups.



- Increase the opportunities for early diagnosis: create more openings for children with severe challenges, add staff, offer more on-site services, and increase resources.
- Incorporate more readiness skills into teaching and parent learning:
 - focus on independence skills and bringing each child to his or her full potential,
 - allow children to work at their own pace,
 - teach parents to introduce routines at home, including those relating to healthy food, nutrition and sleep habits,
 - provide information on bullying,
 - take steps to reduce parents' anxiety,
 - make parents aware that children will not be bussed to school,
 - teach parents about rights and opportunities and how to advocate for their children,
 - clarify the supports and services that will be available to children when they enter the school system.



Recommendations for Impact 3: Help To Connect My Child With Professional Services To Strengthen His Or Her Development

- Educate parents about professional services, what is available and what each entails (assessment, etc.):
 - provide parents with information regarding service eligibility, their options and the pros and cons,
 - give parents a list of doctors and their areas of practice,
 - accompany families to doctor's visits to provide support,
 - help arrange access to literacy training and ESL classes for parents,
 - develop card boxes of professionals, activities, services and other benefits (e.g., coupons). Share the information with parents.
- Assist parents with referrals and connect parents to cultural supports such as the Mennonite Centre and Multicultural Health Brokers or to other services for issues such as grief, divorce and violence.
- Offer more assessments and information on assessments, including terms. Ensure that testing is authentic and culturally and developmentally appropriate. Make sure that information from specialists is written in layman's terms so that it is more understandable.
- Introduce mentoring by other parents.
- Work more closely with the school boards to make sure that the schools are aware of a child's challenges:
 - ensure families have access to professionals when children go to kindergarten. If there is a need to follow up, provide the phone number,
 - help parents contact school principals to exchange information about the child's needs.
- Include meal planning on a monthly basis in parent groups. Develop and run collective kitchens.
- Shorten the waiting lists for CASA, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists and physiotherapists.



To Help Parents

Recommendations for Impact 4: Help Me With My Parenting

- Increase opportunities to partner with other community organizations able to support parents at Head Start sites.
- Provide training for staff and parents on cultural competencies and mental health issues.
- Call home when the child has a good day as well as a bad day. Individualize the approach.
- Set up a parent library and resource room where parents can access or view videos and other resources, such as 1–2–3 Magic and Make World of Story when it's convenient for them.
- Offer parent groups in the evenings or on a weekend to accommodate working parents. Make the sessions more social and include more outings. Encourage parents to attend groups by collecting their suggestions about parenting issues and bringing in presenters to address them.
- Give parents more opportunities to share ideas and opinions:
 - set up a suggestion box,
 - help parents learn from other cultures and learn to respect other cultures,
 - provide time to vent,
 - introduce a buddy system matching parents from the same culture.
- Introduce new teaching methods or expand existing ones:
 - teach routines and problem solving techniques that help build structure,
 - provide a tool kit or have parents build tool kits. Hold a draw for a tool kit at the end of the year,
 - expand role modelling,
 - introduce a communication book,
 - offer mentoring using videos, books and interpreters,
 - encourage parents to come into the classroom more often to help the teacher or read a book or speak about their culture,
 - involve parents in literacy activities.

- Expand the home visit:
 - make home visits more structured,
 - bring mentors into the home,
 - increase the number of home visits or make the number flexible depending on need,
 - use home visits as a way to help parents feel more connected to the program and build relationships, so that when there is a problem, they have someone to talk to,
 - inform parents of the Home Visit objectives and the purpose of the questions, but ensure parents know that answering is voluntary,
 - set weekly goals for the child and parent on home visits.
- Find more ways to accommodate parents who want to volunteer, but have to bring little children with them (such as by organizing a babysitter).
- Introduce a system of weekly rewards and incentives in class to help children feel good about themselves.
- Maintain the ‘Incredible Years’ program for staff, parents and children.

Recommendations for Impact 5: Help Me To Solve Problems And Plan For The Future

- Provide families with information or training seminars related to financial planning, goal setting, problem solving, coping methods, dealing with stress, nutrition and exercise, etc. Help parents frame their problems so they know how, when and what to ask. Put the information on line.
- Increase support for immigrant families to enable them to settle their lives more quickly and help them adapt to Canadian culture.
- Help parents to further their own education by referring them to ESL, training, job opportunities, etc.
- Try to reduce staff turnover.
- Ensure all children and families have an Individualized Program Plan (IPP) that helps them set goals. Hold a meeting with parents and staff at the end of the school year to develop a plan for the future of every child.
- Link parents directly to other programs (e.g., Alberta Works, for income support; Health Link; 211; 311) and help them navigate the system.

To Help Community Connections

Recommendations for Impact 6: Help Me To Make New Friends and Connections in the Community

- Connect or collaborate with other sites and hold joint activities such as field trips and evening parent groups.
- Do more to connect families, including those in different classes or who attend at different times:
 - provide parent phone lists,
 - introduce a family mentoring program that matches new families with past ones,
 - identify ways families can help each other, for example, by babysitting or setting up a co-op,
 - bring families together more often for social and multi-cultural events and celebrations.
- Start up more Francophone sites to create a greater sense of community among Francophones.
- Make parent groups available at weekends and evenings.
- Increase the time parents are allowed to spend in the classroom working together and doing regular classroom things.
- Help parents find jobs or educational places. Provide translation services.
- Provide parents with lists of day homes, respite care, after school care. Ensure all information and pamphlets are in different languages.
- List services on line.
- Publish a parent newsletter describing practical information and addressing common concerns.
- Follow up with families and hold reunions every few years.



Recommendations for Impact 7: Help Me To Connect With Other Community Services And Health Care

- Use cultural brokers or parents of the same culture to help newcomers understand the program.
- Make sure all families are on Facebook as a way to increase their access to resources (classroom pictures, newsletter) and networking and volunteer opportunities.
- Provide bus tickets or bussing to increase families' access to transportation.
- Provide more information about the community through a community newsletter, bulletin board, emails or Facebook.
- Organize field trips to agencies and community resources; encourage parents to visit in pairs and bring back information to share.
- Connect to other agencies' websites; become part of their advertising and get on their phone lists; have parents check the websites.
- Locate services available to address families' diverse needs.
- Improve ease of access to the Food bank.
- Advocate for more clinics for low income families and increased subsidies for medical services.
- More information sessions with the Neighbourhood Empowerment Team.
- Offer sports activities and other extracurricular programming for low income families.



Conclusion

The approach undertaken for this evaluation (Social Analysis Systems approach appended) proved successful for this group and setting. Parents had no trouble understanding the process and demonstrated enthusiasm for it. →

→ Equally successful was the mix of “alumni” with parents presently enrolled in the program. Not only were alumni parents pleased to be reconnected with staff, but they were able to contribute to the session from their experience with the kindergarten and elementary school system.

One of the great advantages of Head Start is staff’s knowledge of families and children, and parents’ engagement in the sessions can be attributed in part to their comfort with staff. Since the sessions, staff has volunteered the information that they and parents enjoyed the experience, and both see merit in repeating it from time to time.

As with more conventional evaluations, the participation rate of parents was somewhat disappointing. Fifty-one of the 294 parents on the invitation list, or 17%, attended a session. When the rate is that low, the concern is that a broad enough perspective is not being measured and that only those feeling most positive (or negative) about Head Start turned up. The incentive of \$75 did not appear to influence parents’ decision to attend.

Appendices

Methodology

Format

The format (see appended Community Dialogue agenda) of the sessions was based on a Social Analysis Systems (SAS2) approach.* SAS is a system of concepts, tools and skills designed to help participants understand complex situations and to engage them in diagnostic thinking. SAS is a highly participatory process that combines qualitative and quantitative data, such as ratings, to generate collaboration and discussion. For these reasons, it was considered to be particularly appropriate for this audience. By incorporating techniques such as small groups, the format made it possible to systematically capture a range of perspectives and allow emerging themes to be identified and discussed. It also made possible comparisons between parents and staff and across programs.

Impacts

One key element of the approach was a hand-out called the Head Start Impacts and Activities Wheel (appended). The seven “impacts” were drawn from the intermediate and long-term outcomes described in the Edmonton Head Start Work Plan. The wording of the impacts was simplified somewhat for the exercise.

The intermediate and long-term outcomes identified in the 2009–2010 Work Plan are shown on the right.

In an attempt to measure intermediate and long-term outcomes, the consultant invited parents whose children had participated in Head Start between 2004–05 and 2009–10. Families with a child in the 2009–10 program were included only if they had also had a child in the program earlier. The breakdown of the 51 parent participants was as follows (Note: since several families had more than one child in the program, the percentages below do not add up to 100).

Children's Enrolment Year in Head Start	% of Participants
2004–2005	35
2005–2006	25
2006–2007	37
2007–2008	20
2008–2009	31
2009–2010	25

* See: Chevalier, J. M. & Buckles, D. J. (2008). *SAS2 A Guide to Collaborative Inquiry and Social Engagement*. SAGE Publications. New Delhi, India: Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd.

2009–2010 Work Plan Outcomes

Intermediate Outcomes

Children are healthy and show developmental gains in:

- Speech and language
- Cognitive and readiness skills
- Gross and fine motor skills
- Social emotional skills

Children's developmental difficulties receive appropriate assessment, consultation, and therapy services.

Children will be prepared for a successful entry into kindergarten.

Parents will:

- Increase their knowledge of child development
- Learn and be able to apply positive parenting strategies
- Establish informal social support networks
- Acquire enhanced coping and problem-solving skills

Families will be:

- Able to identify their own strengths and family goals, and develop a plan to achieve these goals
- More aware of and able to access helpful community resources
- Empowered to act as advocates for themselves and their children
- Linked with community health care providers

Staff are actively implementing and demonstrating knowledge and skills learned, in all aspects of the program i.e. children's programming, family programming and human resources.

Long-Term Outcomes

Children will remain healthy, and acquire skills, which will promote success in school, in their families, in the community, and later in life.

Parents will become more confident and comfortable in their role as the first and most important teacher of their child and will be better able to meet their children's social, emotional, physical, and intellectual needs.

Child and family resiliency will be strengthened.

Parents will feel more empowered, and ready to set long-term goals for themselves, such as upgrading education and or return to the work force.

The family environment will remain safe and nurturing for all family members.

Families will become better connected to their community, feel less isolated, and develop strong social support networks.

Programming related to children and families are continually developed and enhanced to address current issues, trends and needs of the population participating in the program and reflects current practice standards.

Human resource documents and approaches address current and future planning needs and practices.

Recruitment of Parents and Staff

Parents were sent an invitation letter with the offer of an incentive of \$75.00 to attend. Each staff member attending also received \$75.00. Lunch and childcare were provided. The sessions were held on Saturdays for the convenience of working parents. One workshop was held with E4C's Clareview Head Start and one with Oliver Centre's Calder Head Start. Due to its larger enrolment two workshops were held with ABC Head Start, one for its north sites and one for its south sites.

The initial recruitment plan involved randomly selecting names from the lists and making a maximum of three calls to each family. However, due to the extreme difficulty of reaching people, all families were telephoned in the end. On the day of the Oliver Centre's workshop only two parents showed up for the session, and phone calls had to be made on the spot to the others who had agreed to participate. An

additional nine parents turned up. Consequently, it was decided that on the Thursday or Friday before the two remaining sessions that a confirmation call would be made to parents who had agreed to attend. This added to the number of calls being required, the total of which was 580 calls.

The consultant and executive directors of the program decided to invite up to ten staff for each workshop. The executive directors recruited these staff, ensuring that participants included a mix of teachers, social workers and teacher aides. Seven of the staff attending had the personal experience of having a child in a Head Start program.

Survey

On the flipside of the schematic was a survey requesting information about the families and their involvement in Head Start. This information was used to cross-tabulate parents' responses with their characteristics.

Parents' Characteristics

The following information was taken from the survey completed by parents:

- 61% of parent participants were in two-parent families; 35% were single parents; and one participant (2%) was a grandmother,
- 45% of parents had (or had had) one child in Head Start; 35% had two children in the program; and 20% had three or more in Head Start,
- the number of children under 18 years was as follows: one (12%), two (29%), three (29%), four (18%) and five or more (12%),
- parents' number of years residence in their present home was as follows: less than one year (10%), one to two years (20%), three to five years (35%) and six or more years (35%).

Edmonton Head Start Parents and Staff Community Dialogue Agenda

A Welcome to All 10:00 am

- The purpose of our community dialogue.
- Review of the agenda.
- Personal introduction and responses to the following: *‘When I think about the value of Head Start to children and families the one word that comes to my mind is...’*

Measuring the Impact of Head Start 10:20 am

- Distribute the Head Start Impacts & Activities Wheel to all participants and describe the task in detail.
- Have a brief discussion in each group to make sure that the impacts are well understood.
- All participants are to rank each of the impacts on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is ‘no impact at all’ and 5 is ‘very significant impact’.
- For the top three impacts the participants are to record the two Head Start activities that they believe contributed most significantly to that particular impact.
- All participants are to also complete the survey on the other side of the sheet.

Finding Your Friends! 11:00 am

- Parent participants are to find ‘two or more friends’ whose wheel picture looks very similar (e.g. two or three impacts that are ‘very significant’).
- A staff member will join each group of three to help facilitate and record the discussion.
- What are the characteristics that the members of each group have in common that might explain the similar impacts?
- For the group’s ‘top impacts’ which activities did they all list? Which activities were listed by some but not by others, including additional activities?
- Facilitators to place completed ‘post-its’ on characteristics and activities on wall sheets provided.

Time for Lunch! 12:00 noon

Helping Us Prepare for the Future 12:45 pm

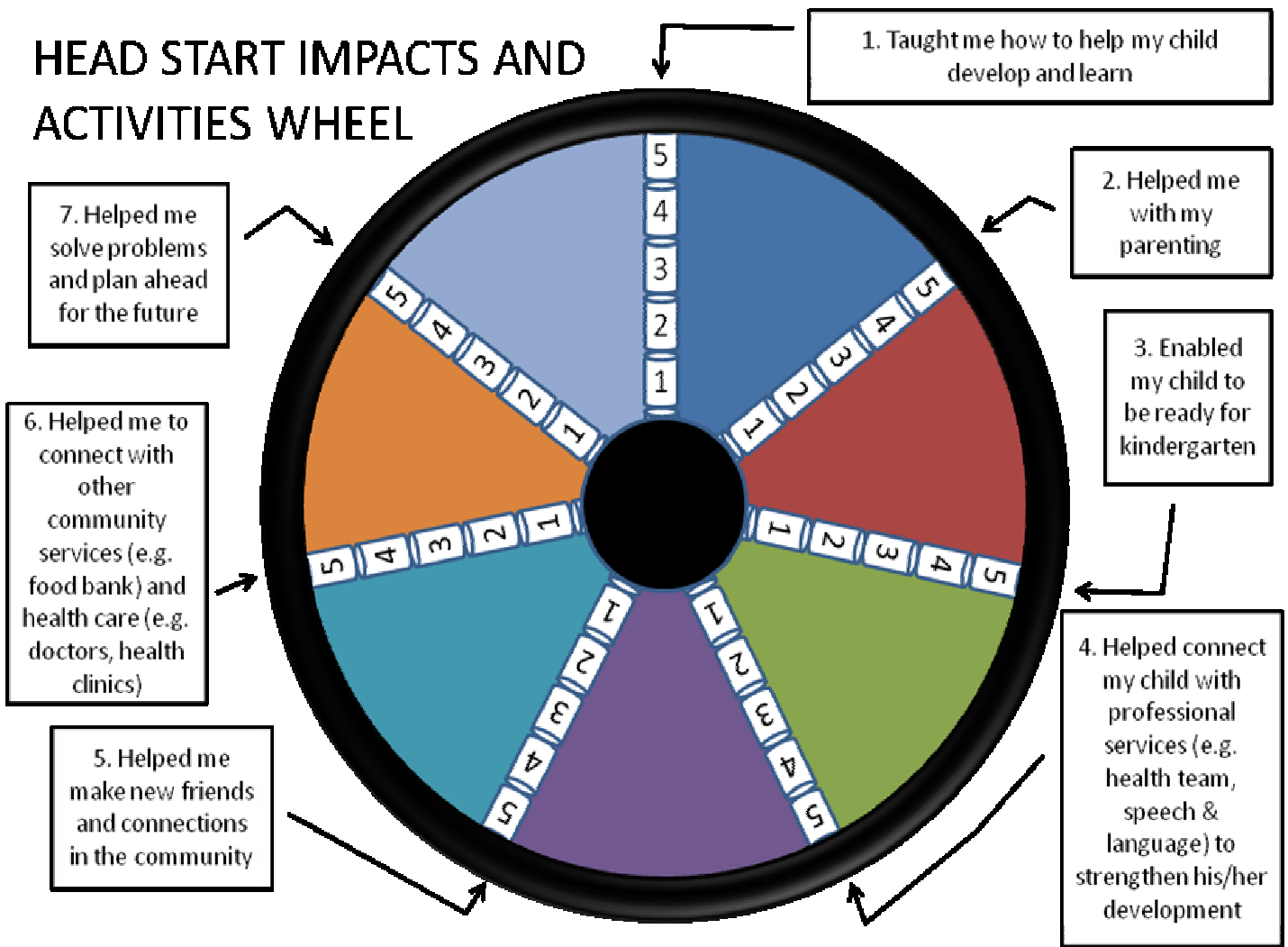
- Form random groups of parents around each of the impacts where you would like to see some possible changes, with staff to assist as facilitators and recorders, if required.
- Group response to the following statement: The five most significant changes in the needs of Head Start families over the next decade will be...
- Post possible changes in needs on wall sheets provided.
- Each group to discuss possible adjustments in Head Start programming relating to their selected impact, as a result of the changing needs of families.
- Select an ambassador to present your group's ideas to other groups.
- Return to initial group and discuss comments from 'group visits'.
- Each group asked to offer a maximum of two recommendations to the full group, with all recommendations to be recorded on post-it notes provided.
- What did we recommend that was common?

Our Final Reflections 2:30 pm

- An opportunity to revisit your Head Start Impact Wheel. Given the dialogue you have been involved in, would you want to change any of your earlier impact ratings? If so, mark the changes with a different coloured pen.
- Personal reflections on the community dialogue.
- What happens next?
- Thank you to all participants.

To conclude at 3:00 pm

Head Start Impacts and Activities Wheel



SCALE. 1 - no impact at all 2 - little impact 3 - moderate impact 4 - significant impact 5 - very significant impact

Activities List

Impact 1 Taught me how to help my child develop and learn:

- Parent/teacher conferences
- Home visits
- Parent groups

Impact 2 Helped me with my parenting:

- Classroom observations
- Contacts with Head Start staff
- Parent/child activities

Impact 3 Enabled my child to be ready for kindergarten:

- In classroom 4 days a week
- Learning to play and share
- Self-help skills (e.g. dressing)

Impact 4 Helped connect my child with professional services (e.g. health team, speech & language) to strengthen his/her development:

- Primary health team
- Early childhood education
- CASA

Impact 5 Helped me make new friends and connections in the community:

- Social events and celebrations
- Field Trip
- Parent groups

Impact 6 Helped me connect with other community services (e.g. food bank) and health care (e.g. doctors, health clinics):

- Food Bank
- Doctors and dentists
- NET team

Impact 7 Helped me solve problems and plan ahead for the future:

- Home visits
- Setting family goals
- Connecting to community schools

One Word

When parents and staff who helped the evaluate the Edmonton Head Start Project first gathered together, they were asked to introduce themselves and provide one word to describe the value of Head Start to children and families — a different word from the person before them. The words from all the sessions were then entered into wordle.net, a program that produces schematics where the size of the word is based on the frequency of its mention. The schematic on the right is the result.



