

## **Sustainability Study for Bath Elementary School and Bath Middle School Presentation April 9, 2015**

### **Presenters for the Early Childhood Initiatives (ECI) – Upper River Valley**

- Anne Turner, Talk with Me Early Language Services
- Susan McLaughlin, Valley Family Resource Centre
- Patricia Harding-Chase, Family and Early Childhood West

The Early Childhood Initiatives (ECI) committee for the Upper River Valley is a group of community partners who meet to share information and provide education to both ECI members and community partners about local resources, best practices and best evidence from research on the early years. Our aim is to promote optimal support of families with young children in the Upper River Valley. As well as being representatives of the ECI committee, we are also community partners who work with families and young children. We would like to thank you for this opportunity to present and to discuss the continuum of education for children in ASD-W from birth to high school, in particular as it applies to the community of Bath.

We trust that you are familiar with the 'Early Years Study 2', which illustrates the very important connection between the Early Years and children's success in school. It is no longer an "us" (preschool services) vs "them" (education) relationship; therefore, it is important to have a continuum of school and early childhood services. Step Ahead - Bath Family Learning Centre, as part of the school, has become the hub to the service providers and the families. It has also provided the link from birth to grade 9.

Our ECI membership and terms of reference are included with this presentation. Membership includes professional representation from ASD-W (Talk with Me Early Language Services), from other provincial departments such as Public Health (PH) and from not-for-profit organizations such as Family and Early Childhood (FACE- West), the Valley Family Resource Centre (VFRC) and the VON Healthy Baby & Me program.

#### ECI Partnerships with Step Ahead:

- Talk with Me Early Language Services provides information for parents, caregivers and community partners on speech-language development as strong oral language skills are the foundation for children's learning in school. Talk with Me provides consults and support to the educators in the daycare and preschool. The program consults with families with concerns re: speech-language development in preschool children and we do workshops for parents and sessions for parents/children with strategies and activities to enhance children speech and language development. The program has benefitted from the Step Ahead connecting families with our program, providing childcare so parents can attend sessions and from having a space to provide programming and meet with families.
- FACE-West provides home support to children and families in the community, approves Developmental Childcare funding, supports and monitors program development for children in Step Ahead Childcare Centre, administers the PreK assessment to all children attending Kindergarten and links home to school and other services.
- VFRC hosts free drop in playgroups for families and childcare providers where, in addition to playing with their peers, children experience preschool activities like story time, songs and rhymes and crafts. It also provides an opportunity for parents and caregivers to meet and share information. VFRC also supports specialized programming for families through the Step Ahead.

- Public Health provides preschool screenings at Step Ahead. Because of this presence at the school, families are more aware of Public Health services; similarly, they are more aware of Step Ahead through their visits with Public Health at the school.

Benefits for the community and for the families and children we support:

Having services offered in one location strengthens the relationships between community partners, service providers (Step Ahead, FACE-West, PH, Talk with Me, HB & Me) and families.

- Familiarizes families (and children at the school) with agencies like FACE-West, PH, Talk with Me and encourages access to the Childcare Centre (daycare, preschool, VFRC playgroup, parent workshops and sessions). This is less threatening for parents, for example: daycare/preschool staff encourages families with children who need more social interaction to access programs like the VFRC playgroups or FACE-West. This visible presence of the community partners within the school means parents know we are there, are more aware of the services we offer and get to know who we are.
- Having families access service in one location has also meant less confusion about the various programs - a step towards "one door" policy for parents where a parent connects with any of the services and can access a network of service providers.
- Builds connections between families and the education system, particularly for families who may not have had success with school.
- Step Ahead is a secure, comfortable place to meet with parents in a non-threatening environment. The space is parent AND child friendly. With our emphasis on prevention, it is important to have a "healthy" environment as opposed to bringing families to hospitals or more formal institutions.
- The space can be used as an alternate "safe" space if home visits aren't appropriate in the home.
- At Step Ahead, there is dedicated space that allows privacy for consults, hearing screenings, PH screenings and individual meetings with parents.
- In addition there is dedicated space for presentations and workshops with parent and community partners.

In a rural community like Bath, many families are unemployed, seasonally employed, working in minimum wage jobs or have one family member working outside the province. 52.8% of families who currently access Step Ahead are single parent families. Transportation is often an issue and many families may have a history of negative experience with school. It is extremely important that we support these smaller schools in rural communities where there are opportunities to build stronger connections with families.

In conclusion, we hope that through this process of reviewing the use of BMS, BES and Step Ahead - Bath Family Centre, the District Education Council and the province will see this as an example of best practice and leadership for our province re: integrating the early years and the school years. For this to continue, we need to maintain the spaces that have been allocated within the school for the Step Ahead Childcare Centre, the Family and Early Childhood West office, a preschool room, an 'after school' room where community partners can offer programming (playgroup, parent/child sessions) and a private space (hearing and PH screenings, private meetings with families). The government has recognized the importance of the Early Years as the foundation for a child's education. Therefore, schools cannot be limited to classroom space alone; they must be committed to accommodating programs and services that support families with young children. If our government's mandate of Education and Early Childhood truly includes EARLY CHILDHOOD, then Early Years spaces must be counted when Districts are looking at school capacity. Regardless of your decision for these two schools, we would like this District Education Council to bring this recommendation to the Minister of Education.

**ECI ADVISORY MEMBERS - Revised March 2015**

NAME	AGENCY	ADDRESS	PHONE #	FAX #	E-MAIL ADDRESS
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Sears, Tracey	URVH Women & Children's Health	11300 Route 130 Waterville, NB E7P 0A4	375-2822	375-2911	tracey.sears@horizonnb.ca
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VACANT	Public Services Librarian for Haut-Saint-Jean Region				
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Early Childhood Initiatives – Upper River Valley  
Terms of Reference  
Updated: March 2015

**Purpose:** The purpose of Early Childhood Initiatives (ECI) is to share information and provide education to both the ECI members and community partners about local resources, best practices and best evidence from research on the early years to promote optimal support of families with young children in the Upper River Valley.

**Membership:** Any individual or agency that serves young children and families in the Upper River Valley.

**Communication:**

- Using roundtable or other format, share updates/issues from team members.
- Minutes of all meetings to be circulated within 1 week of meeting and made available to all ECI members.

**Functions:**

- In-service/educational opportunities for members.
- Promote/ensure collaboration between local agencies.
- Identify potential areas of duplication and promote efficient service delivery.
- Promote opportunities to provide education to community groups and families about the importance of the early years.
- Share knowledge about best practice and best evidence in the early years
- Centralize knowledge exchange about early childhood services in the Upper River Valley.
- Provide a network to facilitate information sharing among Early Childhood services.

**Frequency and Duration of Meetings:**

The fourth Wednesday of the month or as needed, and having a duration of 2 hours. No meeting in December, July and August. April meeting may be cancelled to allow members to attend Connecting for Our Children. If school is cancelled in Woodstock, meeting is cancelled.

**Location of meetings:**

Woodstock Education Support Centre, 138 Chapel St Woodstock Council Room

**Role of Members:**

- Attend a minimum of 4 meetings per year
- Add relevant items to the agenda
- Participate in the discussion, problem solving and decision making
- Assist the chair person in the facilitation process
- Assume the role of minute taker on a rotational basis
- Update the representative organizations.

**Role of Chairperson:**

- Plan and chair meeting
- Solicit items for and prepare/circulate the agenda prior to the meeting.
- Send reminder to members for each meeting.
- Ensure minutes are prepared and sent to all members.

**Decision Making:** by consensus at a meeting with a minimum of 6 members present