



Understanding The Early Years



The Community Resources for Children Report

A Preliminary Report

November 2009



This report was prepared by Laurie Lafortune; Coordinator of the Red Deer *Understanding the Early Years* Project. November 2009

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

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The Community Resources for Children Report was created through the use of many sources. Existing local inventories of community programs, local research, interviews, and web sources were used to create this report. Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy; however, in response to changing needs, programs and services may change without notice. For the most up to date information on programs, fees, dates and times, please contact the agencies directly or access their websites.

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Overview: *Understanding the Early Years*: Red Deer, Alberta

The early years are critical for children's development, shaping long-term outcomes related to school achievement, employment success, health, and quality of life. *Understanding the Early Years* is a community research initiative funded by the Government of Canada. Over forty communities across Canada have completed or are currently working on UEY projects. The UEY Initiative's overall purpose is to enable members of communities to work together to address the needs of young children by:

- Raising awareness of the importance of family and community factors that can influence young children's development.
- Strengthening the community's ability to use local data to help make decisions to enhance children's lives.

The three year project includes the completion of research on four types of information:

- Readiness for school of kindergarten children
- Family circumstances and children's experiences at home and in their community
- Information about community resources and programs
- Local socioeconomic characteristics,

with the goal of creating an evidence-based community action plan for young children.

In Red Deer, Family Services of Central Alberta, in partnership with the Red Deer Catholic and Red Deer Public Schools, is the recipient agency responsible for the Red Deer Understanding the Early Years project. Red Deer UEY is part of the final cohort of 16 projects across Canada, and the only UEY project in Alberta. The UEY Advisory Committee, with membership from education, health, government, non-profits, and parents plays a vital role in providing input to the project. The work is also guided by a coalition made up of local organizations and individuals committed to helping children reach their full potential. This coalition, the Children's Working Group, meets regularly and, together with other stakeholders, will provide insight and guidance to the community action plan.

A large part of the UEY team's work has involved data collection. Information has been gathered from four sources:

- Early Development Instrument
- Parent Interviews and Direct Assessments of Children
- Community Resources and Services
- Socioeconomic Characteristics

The *Community Resources for Children* Report is one of several reports and products released by the Red Deer UEY project.

"Early childhood development affects education, health, the social capital, and overall equity within populations. This is key for stable, cohesive societies and economic growth" (McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007, p.2).

The Context: The Importance of Community

Although it is well known that parents are first and most important in supporting a child's development, there is a growing awareness of the impact of community in shaping experiences and providing support to children and families. (Hertzman, 2002; 2003; Buka, 2006; Kershaw, 2007; McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007). Socioeconomic conditions, along with available services and supports in communities, directly affect the development of children and their ability and readiness to learn at school (Doherty, 2004). The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, (NLSCY) completed every two years on large samples of Canadian children since 1994, has found many linkages between community factors and outcomes for children. For example, results from the NLSCY showed that children from low income families become more disadvantaged when their families live in poor neighbourhoods, and that their verbal language abilities decline and behavioural problems increase. Conversely, children from low income families do better in more affluent neighbourhoods (Kohen, Brooks-Gunn, Leventhal, & Hertzman, 2002).

The importance for young children to engage in activities is illustrated in a study which showed that regardless of income, participation in organized sports, lessons in physical activities and lessons in the arts were linked with higher scores on readiness to learn measures (Thomas, 2006).

It has become clear that looking only at individual and family characteristics does not give a complete picture of the factors impacting on child development. The Red Deer Understanding the Early Years Project examines the community resources that support our young children.

It is important to note that in this report, only tangible community resources are described; the inclusion of other types of assets is beyond the scope of this report.

Quick Facts about Red Deer

Red Deer's total population is 89,891 (City of Red Deer, 2009a). The population increased by 2.4% over 2008. The City of Red Deer divides the city into 44 neighbourhoods. The neighbourhoods with the strongest population growth were in the area of Vanier Woods with 682 new residents, Johnstone Park with 421 new residents, and Inglewood and Oriole Park each with 290 new residents. Transportation in the city is operated by the Red Deer Transit system with approximately 85% of bus stops located within a walking distance of 400 metres (City of Red Deer, 2007).

According to the most recent municipal census (2009), the population of children in Red Deer, age 0-19 is 19,958. Figures for children in the age group 0-6 were not available from the municipal census. Using the most recent Statistics Canada data available, the number of young children in Red Deer by age is as follows. (Red Deer UEY, 2006 semi-customized profile).

Number of Young Children in Red Deer by Age Group

under one year	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years	Total children 0-5	Total children 0-6
1060	1125	890	1010	890	990	890	5965	6855

Description of Community Resources for Children

A. Kindergartens

There are eighteen kindergarten classes located in seven Red Deer Catholic Schools. There are thirty-six kindergarten classes in 13 Red Deer Public Schools. There is one kindergarten class offered in River Glen School, located in Red Deer, (operated by Chinook's Edge School Division). French kindergarten is offered at Ecole la Prairie. As well as the above kindergartens operated by school authorities, there are 5 kindergarten programs not located in schools. These operate in conjunction with day care programs, but still function under the Ministry of Education and receive government funding. Kindergarten is not mandatory, but most children do attend. In Alberta, 95% of children attend kindergarten (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2002). Kindergarten programs are sometimes referred to as ECS (Early Childhood Services). This was the name originally used for the programs when introduced by the Alberta government in 1973.

To support children in this important transition, Welcome to Kindergarten bags are provided to selected incoming kindergarten students, to provide early learning activities and high quality children's books to children and families.

B. Early Learning Programs and Child Care

Preschools and Playschools

These are operated by private operators, non-profit groups, and parent groups and school authorities. Preschools are licensed by the Child and Family Services Authority. Fees vary at these early learning programs and program content varies. An Aboriginal Head Start program, providing early learning experiences to children of Aboriginal descent, is located in the downtown area at the Golden Circle seniors centre. The Children Services Centre operates an inclusive preschool at their centre, called PALS (Play and Learn Space). There are 476 preschool spaces located in 22 facilities, licensed by the Central Alberta Child and Family Services Authority.

Pre-kindergartens

Pre-kindergarten programs in Red Deer refer to programs operated by school authorities. These are typically targeted programs and do not charge a fee. Red Deer Catholic Schools operate pre-kindergarten programs for children identified with special needs, severe, moderate or mild delays, gifted and talented, or English as a second language. These pre-kindergarten programs are located in St. Teresa of Avila, Maryview and Ecole Camille J. Lerouge Schools, located in the Glendale, Morrisroe, and Downtown areas. Red Deer Public Schools operate pre-kindergarten programs called Bright Beginnings, for children with special needs or other challenges, in programs located in the Grandview, Fairview, Normandeau and Westpark Schools.

Child Care

Licensed child care is directed and funded by the Central Alberta Child and Family Services Authority. Through provincial funding called the "Creating Child Care Choices Initiative" started in May of 2008,

new child care spaces have been created and efforts to increase the number of child care spaces available are continuing (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009). According to the Central Alberta Child and Family Services Authority, as of September 2009, the following provisions for child care spaces were available in Red Deer.

- *Day Care Centres:* There are eleven licensed day care centres in the city. These day cares provide a total of 474 spaces. With the exception of one centre in the Eastview area, they are all located in the downtown, north or west sides of the city. There are both non-profit and commercially operated day care centres in Red Deer.
- *Approved Family Day Homes:* Family day homes in Red Deer homes are approved by agencies which contracts with the Central Alberta Child and Family Services Authority. A day home operator may care for up to six children, including their own. In Red Deer, there are four family day home agencies, which have approved homes that provide 451 spaces for children. These homes are distributed throughout the city.
- *Out of school programs:* In Red Deer, these programs (often referred to as before-and-after school care) provide 526 spaces in thirteen facilities.

In total, for all types of licensed or approved child care, (day care, family day home, out of school, and preschools) as of September 2009, there are 1927 licensed child care spaces in Red Deer. There are 9733 children in Red Deer ages 0-9 (City of Red Deer Municipal Census, 2009).

In addition to the above approved or licensed spaces, there are a number of informal or private day homes in the city. An individual may offer child care in his or her own home without being “approved” provided they care for no more than 6 children at one time, including their own. It is not possible to identify the private day home operators as they are unregulated. Many families use private, informal or family arrangements to meet their child care needs.

C. Recreation

Red Deer is situated in a parkland area of the province, with rolling hills and forested areas. Using the Red Deer River Valley, and several creeks and ponds, city parks and recreation planners have utilized these natural areas to create green space and walking trails. Three Mile Bend is a popular area for family use, as is Discovery Canyon, Great Chief Park and Rotary Park. Most park areas have picnic and playground facilities. Picnic shelters for larger gatherings are available at McKenzie Trails, Great Chief Park, Rotary Park and Heritage Ranch. Another popular destination for families is the Gaetz Lake Sanctuary. There are more than 120 parks in the city (City of Red Deer Website, Budget Fast Facts, 2009). According to a survey of Red Deer residents, 77.4% of citizens take part in outdoor leisure activities. (City of Red Deer, 2008).

There are over 142 km of trails, both paved and unpaved, for hiking and biking (Recreation Parks and Culture Community Assets Needs Assessment, Oct. 2008). Red Deerians consistently rate the green spaces and parks system as one of Red Deer’s greatest strengths. (Red Deer Vital Signs Report, Sept 2009). In winter, trails are groomed for cross-country skiing. There are four designated areas in the city for cross-country skiing, one found in the north end at River Bend Golf Course, in the west end at

Heritage Ranch and Great Chief Park, and there are also trails at Red Deer College. There are no cross-country ski areas in the south and east part of the city.

Spray pools are located in the downtown area, Rotary Recreation Park, Kin Canyon and Discovery Canyon.

Playgrounds are found in all residential communities and parks. There are 106 playgrounds owned by the City of Red Deer. The City jointly owns another 30 playgrounds, and there are 13 privately owned publically accessible playgrounds within the city, for a total of over 140 playgrounds. A key goal of the parks department is to ensure that all neighbourhoods in Red Deer have an equitable number of quality neighbourhood parks and playgrounds. A standard is to place three playgrounds within a quarter section of land, (160 acres). Tot lots are small playgrounds designed for children under 5 years, junior playgrounds are designed for ages 18 months to 5 years and senior playgrounds are designed for the 5-12 age group. Considerations for locating playgrounds include future school sites and safe set-back distance from roadways. All play structures, including independent and jointly owned structures meet or exceed the most recent Canadian Standards Association standards for children's playspaces and equipment. Older playground equipment has been replaced and/or upgraded. By 2008, all replacements and upgrades were completed. Parks staff are trained and certified to inspect and make repairs on the structures and a regularly scheduled playground inspection schedule is in place. There are 80 sports fields, and 93 ball diamonds which include soccer and ball fields as well as asphalt courts throughout the city. Asphalt courts typically have basketball hoops and tennis courts. It is notable that all of the above outdoor recreation opportunities are free or with nominal cost (e.g., for the rental of garden plots, or large picnic shelters.) This avoids the barrier of cost, which parents often point out as a barrier to participation in recreational activities. Community garden plots are offered in 4 locations in the city for a seasonal fee. Families can be observed participating in planting, weeding and harvesting during the spring, summer and fall. These are located in the north part of the city (off Nash Street), east side of city (on the Red Deer College property) south end of the city (south of the city landfill) and in the downtown area (Parkvale).

Recently, outdoor fitness resources have been installed in 4 locations throughout the city, through the Primary Care Network (a network of family physicians) and the City of Red Deer. These outdoor fitness areas provide weight training and aerobic equipment and are well-used by Red Deerians. They are located in Victoria Park in Anders, Oriole Park, Parkvale, and Glendale.

There are 69 public outdoor skating rinks, located throughout the neighbourhoods. There are 16 neighbourhood community shelters, most often located next to the skating rinks.

One issue raised by residents is that pathways do not always exist in the parks and playground areas, in newer neighbourhoods, that connect to the larger green spaces of the central Waskasoo Park areas. (Recreation, Parks and Culture Community Assets Needs Assessment Oct. 2008)

Major Recreation Facilities and Programs

There are four indoor pools in Red Deer; one is located on the north side of the river, two are centrally located and one is in the south east. Fitness facilities are located in these recreation centres. At Roland Michener Recreation Centre and the downtown Recreation Centre, children under 2 years of age are admitted free. A variety of programs are offered for young children such as swimming lessons, skating,

and gymnastics, which are outlined in the City of Red Deer Activity and Program Guide, published three times per year. There is a subsidized program to assist low income parents to access organized recreation; however, on a survey of 468 kindergarten parents conducted in the fall of 2008 for the UEY project, 45% of parents indicated that cost is a barrier to participation.

Red Deer has six indoor ice surfaces. With the exception of the Dawe Centre, these are located either downtown, (Red Deer Arena and Kinex) or in the south and east. (Kinsmen Twin Arenas and the Collicutt Centre).

D. Arts and Cultural Programs

Arts and Cultural Programs include activities such as dance, art and music programs, theatre and visual arts classes. Arts and cultural programs are offered at the recreation centres as well as various schools, at Red Deer College, and by private operators. The city-operated Cultural Centre, located in the Morrisroe area, houses the administrative offices and offers a range of programs. In addition, there are six city-owned, community operated cultural facilities and private operators also offer arts, dance and music programs. Red Deer Public Library, the Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery, the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame and Museum, Kerry Wood Nature Centre, and Sunnybrook Farm offer opportunities for arts and culture.

Public art is supported by the City of Red Deer civic capital project budget, to bring art to all residents. There are over forty pieces of public art available both outdoors and indoors.

Festivals are a large part of the arts and cultural milieu of Red Deer. The festival created specifically for children and families in Red Deer is the Central Alberta Children's Festival, held each June. Over forty tents and activity stations provide activities that encourage parent-child interaction, child development, and fun. Families can choose from many festivals and special events throughout the year, Westerner Days, Centrefest Street Performers Festival, Canada Day Celebrations, Winterfest and the Art Walks Festival. Other festivals include the Biggest Christmas Tree Festival and Parade in downtown Red Deer, and the Festival of Trees which many families attend.

The Red Deer Festival of the Performing Arts provides over 6000 performances of dance, music, vocal, speech and poetry. Central Music Festival supports independent music and has children's activities.

E. Medical Services

Three community health clinics operated by Alberta Health Services, one regional hospital, and nine family medical clinics serve the city. One clinic is located in the north end, one downtown, and one in the south end.

Services include immunization clinics, dental, nutrition and injury prevention education, pre-natal education and post-natal follow up. Audiology, speech and language therapy, occupational and physical therapy are offered. Mental Health Services are provided for children including a disordered

eating program. Alberta Health Services partnered with Family Services of Central Alberta in the Growing Together Early Screening and Assessment Project, to carry out early developmental screening and assessment of children 18-26 months. Over 1500 children were screened and services were provided to support development.

F. Faith and Worship

Religious and spiritual centres serve as gathering places and support systems for individuals and families. Many offer programs, supports and services for young children. There are almost 50 places of worship in Red Deer, located in all areas of the city.

G. Family and Parenting Programs

Group Programs

Most of the agencies that offer programs are located in the downtown area; however, there are programs offered off-site, in various neighbourhoods where more young families live, with drop-in programming that better meets parents needs. For example, programs are offered in the two main malls of the city; Bower Place Shopping Centre and Parkland Mall. Children's Indoor Play Spaces (ChIPS) are offered at various churches. The agencies offering parenting groups provide a range of topics on parenting skills and information, with a combination of child care, or parent/child interactive groups. Red Deer Public Library locations offer story time and family literacy programs for children and families. Other agencies that offer family and parenting programs include Central Alberta Women's Outreach Society, Children's Services Centre, Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association, and Central Alberta Refugee Effort. (Inventory of Community Services for Newcomers in Central Alberta, 2008).

Many programs are designed to meet specific needs of families, such as Basic English and Play, My Daddy and Me, Immigrant Family Program, Blended Families, Kid Power, and Kids Matter. Some programs are by registration, but more and more families are indicating a preference for less structured programs and prefer drop-in programming to suit their needs. Both Village Gate Parent Link Centre and Children's Services Centre offer summer programming at the city parks, with trained leaders who provide activities for children.

Family Services of Central Alberta's Village Gate Parent Link Centre, funded by Central Alberta Child and Family Services through Alberta Children and Youth Services, is one of 46 provincially funded Parent Link Centres in the province. Village Gate Parent Link offers parent support groups, the Triple Parenting Program, parent/child play groups, a toy-lending library, parent resource library, and developmental screening for infants and young children.

There are toy-lending libraries at Red Deer College, Family Services of Central Alberta, and the Red Deer Public Library.

Individual Programs

Healthy Families, Infant/Preschool Wellness, Building Incredible Babies and Home Instruction for Parents of Preschoolers (HIPPY) are examples of free, voluntary in-home support programs available in Red Deer that are delivered by non-profit organizations. These programs are designed to address the common barriers of transportation, time constraints, cost, and child care, which many parents face when accessing programs, by bringing services to the family home at a time convenient to the parent. The programs are designed to assist families in parenting skills and child development knowledge and literacy. Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association also provides outreach programs on cross-cultural parenting, and prevention of family violence and bullying. All new mothers in Red Deer receive an in-home visit from a public health nurse after returning home from the hospital, who may then refer families for more long term in-home support.

Counselling is offered by a number of private operators and non-profit agencies in the area of family counselling, as well as play therapy and a therapeutic group for children who witness violence.

Big Brothers/Big Sisters, operated by the Youth and Volunteer Centre can provide a Big Brother or Big Sister to act as a mentor and supportive adult for children ages 5-15 years of age.

H. Resources for Children with Special Needs

It is important to note that group programs for children with special needs are typically inclusive in design. "In Alberta, an inclusive education system means a value-based approach to accepting responsibility for all students. It also means that all students will have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical learning environment or program of choice." (Alberta Education, 2009).

Central Alberta Child and Family Services Authority provides funding for Family Supports for Children with Disabilities and an inclusive child care program. Alberta Health Services provides services for children with physical disabilities as well as developmental, speech and language delays. The Children's Services Centre is a regional centre located in the downtown area that provides assessment, diagnosis and intervention for children with special needs. They also provide in-home support to families through the provision of outreach workers. Prekindergartens operated in the Catholic and Public Schools provide learning opportunities to children with developmental delays. Fairview First Steps Child Care Program provides child care for children and families with unique needs and offers respite care.

I. Supports for Children's Basic Needs

(Does not include Government of Alberta income support programs)

Food

The Red Deer Food Bank, located in the north end of the city, provided 4328 hampers in 2008. More hampers have been provided in 2009 than in previous years with a 65% increase in children served

from July 2008 to July 2009 (CBC News, 2009, July 13). Emergency hampers are available. Support agencies such as Loaves and Fishes, People's Place, and the Salvation Army serve meals regularly. R Own Food Coop, operated by Central Alberta Women's Outreach assists families in obtaining quality nutritious food. The Building Incredible Babies Program provides coupons for nutrition support to pregnant women in need, to support a healthy pregnancy and delivery. Food for Thought Collective Kitchen Program at Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association assists immigrant women to purchase and prepare low cost nutritious meals.

Clothing

The Red Deer Clothing Bank, in the downtown area provides free clothing to those in need. "Coats for Kids" is a campaign to collect winter coats in good repair which are then cleaned and distributed to children.

Shelter

The Red Deer Housing Authority is the body that administers rent supplements and creates affordable housing options for families. There are 290 affordable housing units in Red Deer, and 785 rent subsidies are provided. A new program, "The Road Home" is offered at Family Services of Central Alberta where outreach workers provide supports to families with a child under the age of 6 to avoid loss of housing and to achieve a safe and supportive home.

Recreation and Fitness

CARE for Kids Subsidy Program, operated by the City of Red Deer, provides the registration fee for recreation programs to eligible applicants. KidSport Alberta, Red Deer chapter, supports the costs of sports programs for children 5-18 based on family income. The Canadian Tire Jumpstart Program in conjunction with the Youth and Volunteer Centre for children provides funding for children 4-18 years of age so that they may participate in sports and recreation programs. The Sports Equipment for Kids Foundation accepts donations of sports equipment, reconditions it and then provides it to children and youth so that they are able to participate in organized sport.

Seasonal Support Programs

The Christmas Bureau arranges gifts, to ensure that children will receive a gift at Christmas, and food hampers are provided to those in need. Central Alberta Women's Outreach offers the Adopt-A-Family Program at Christmas, which coordinates support for families to receive food hampers and gifts. The annual 'Tools for Schools' drive for children whose families may struggle to pay for school supplies has wide community and corporate support. Backpacks containing basic school supplies are provided.

Conclusion

The impact of community on positive outcomes for children has been well documented. Red Deer residents are fortunate to have a variety of programs and services for children and families, with active organizations and associations. Through research and collaboration, parents, educators, service providers, government and other stakeholders can work to ensure that all Red Deer's children have the community resources they need in order to thrive.

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