

## Research Summary

### *Preliminary Results from the Parent Interviews and Direct Assessments of Children Survey (PIDACS)*

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This summary is based on information collected by the Parent Interviews and Direct Assessments of Children Survey in the City of Red Deer.

The Parent Interviews and Direct Assessments of Children Survey (PIDACS) has its origins in the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY). The PIDACS has two components:

- ▶ A parent interview of about one hour in length, covering family, social and economic circumstances; children's activities at home, community involvement, and the child's behaviour and health.
- ▶ Three assessments of children's cognitive development; including activities completed with children to determine vocabulary, copying and printing skills, and number knowledge.

Among the children enrolled in kindergarten in 2008-2009, 564 completed the direct assessments and 468 of their parents or guardians were interviewed. Direct assessments and parent interviews were completed by the end of December 2008. The average age of the children was five years and six months. The PIDACS data collection was conducted by an independent contractor, R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., hired by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. The collection was done collaboratively with school authorities, schools, local UEY staff, trained assessors, and participating parents and children.

### Key Findings:

**Family Income:** For families in the Red Deer sample, the median income was about \$80,000, however, 14% of the children surveyed were living in families with annual incomes below \$30,000. This is lower than the national average of 15.1% but higher than the percentage for Red Deer of 10.9% (2006 Census of Canada).

**Parents' Employment:** About 44% of mothers surveyed were not employed, while 4% of fathers were not employed.

**Family Life:** About 13% of mothers surveyed were experiencing depression. Forty-nine per cent of parents reported a positive, "authoritative" parenting style, which is below the Canadian average of 56%. Seventy-seven per cent of parents read to their children at least once a day, which is similar to the Canadian average. The average time per day children spent watching television or playing video games was 2 hours, above the Canadian average of 1.6 hours.

In four of eight parent-child interactive activities, Red Deer parents were less engaged than Canadian parents as a whole. These activities included teaching the child to read words; taking the child outside to play; teaching the child to print letters or numbers; and playing cards or board games with the child.



## Key Findings Continued:

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**Children's Participation in Community Activities:** Approximately 22% of Red Deer children attended activities at a family resource centre at least once per month, which is above the Canadian average of 17%. Ninety-one per cent of children used libraries, which is above the Canadian average. Twenty-nine per cent went to the movies at least once a month, higher than the Canadian average of 20%. About 96% of families used parks, play spaces, and recreational facilities at least once a month, while only 87% of Canadian families did. Child participation in organized sports was low, 1.1 times per week compared to the Canadian average of 1.4 times per week.

**Barriers to Participation in Children's programs** were reported by parents as follows: 54% of parents reported that programs were not held at convenient times, 50% reported that programs had no space available, 45% of parents said that programs were too costly, while 44% said that programs were only available for older children. Finally, 41% of parents said that there was not enough time to participate in children's programs.

**Parents' Level of Education:** About 6% of fathers and about 6% of mothers reported that they had not completed high school, which is comparable to Canadian averages.

**Family Structure:** Approximately 14% of Red Deer's children were living in single-parent families, compared to 15% of Canadian children.

**Developmental Skills:** Average scores on receptive vocabulary and pre-literacy skills were comparable to Canadian averages, with almost 13% of kindergarten children having low scores. Average scores on number knowledge were considerably higher than the Canadian average; only 4% of children had low scores.

**Behavioural Outcomes:** Based on the parents' reports for Red Deer kindergarten children, scores of inattention, anxiety, depression and physical aggression, were comparable to the Canadian averages. However, 16% of children in the sample displayed low positive social behaviour, above the Canadian average of 13%.

*"It is our responsibility to ensure bright futures for today's children so that tomorrow's society will benefit."*

**– Dan Offord**



## Key Findings Continued:

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**Health Outcomes:** The prevalence of children with asthma was 13%, with allergies 13% and those with other chronic conditions was 5%. About 1% of children were considered by their parents to be in fair or poor health. The prevalence of poor general health, asthma, and allergies did not differ significantly from the Canadian average. For chronic conditions, however, the prevalence was lower for children on whom the survey was conducted.

**Use of Child-Care Arrangements:** Forty per cent of parents used some form of child-care arrangement while they were working or studying. Of these, about 41 % used two or more different types of arrangements. On average, children were cared for in child-care arrangements for about 21 hours per week. Only 5% of the parents of kindergarten children used day-care centres or before-school or after-school programs. Twenty per cent of children were cared for by a non-relative in someone else's home.

**Neighbourhood Characteristics:** 87% of parents considered their neighbourhoods to be safe, lower than the Canadian average of 90%, while 86% rated their neighbourhoods as being cohesive, which is below the Canadian average of 91%. About 80% of parents in Red Deer indicated that they felt that they had high levels of social support from family, friends and others.

Children who tended to have lower scores on the direct assessments were boys, children whose fathers were unemployed or had not completed high school, and children living in single-parent families, and Aboriginal children. Boys were more likely than girls to have low positive social behaviour and to display problems of inattention and physical aggression.

*“Learning starts in infancy, long before formal education begins and continues throughout life... Early learning begets later learning and early success breeds later success.”*

**– James Heckman, Nobel Laureate, Economics**

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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