

## **Revelstoke Poverty Reduction – Creating Shared Prosperity**

### **~ Early Childhood Development ~**

*by Jill Zacharias, Social Development Coordinator*

Since 2003, the Revelstoke Early Childhood Development Committee has been working hard to support children aged 0 to 6 in our community. From a poverty reduction point of view, the importance of this work cannot be underestimated. Poverty can affect a child's development, ability to learn, do well in school, and even future employment options. A child's early experiences literally 'sculpt' the developing brain. Community-wide support for early childhood development is a high priority community goal in the Revelstoke Poverty Reduction Strategy. By providing accessible programming, resources, support for child care and families, the ECD committee is helping Revelstoke children establish a solid foundation that will likely support them into adulthood.

First Call's Child Poverty Report Card (based on Statistics Canada) tells us that in 2013 BC had a child poverty rate of 18.6% - the worst rate of any province in Canada. BC children under age 6 had a poverty rate of 20.7%, which is 8% higher than the Canadian average. This means that in BC, one in five young children are poor. In our Poverty Reduction Strategy, we found that a child from a single-parent family in Revelstoke had a 50% chance of living in a household that is lower income. While numbers for children aged 0 to 6 are not readily available, taxfiler data tells us that in 2010, there were about 280 children aged 0 to 17 in lower income families in Revelstoke. Just recently, Linda Chell, Executive Director of the Revelstoke Child Care Society, Child Care Resource and Referral, and Chair of the ECD Committee, stated that the early learning and child care sector is seeing more families than ever before who are struggling to make ends meet. The ECD Committee is undertaking several initiatives to address child poverty in Revelstoke.

The work of the ECD Committee is based on beliefs outlined in the Revelstoke Children's Charter and a vision that sees Revelstoke as a caring community that "acknowledges, values and support the shared responsibility of investing in young children so that they may live, learn, play and dream in safe and healthy surroundings". The success of their work is measured by Revelstoke consistently having the lowest Early Development Instrument (EDI) scores in the province for a number of years. The EDI measures the vulnerability of children as they enter Kindergarten, in five areas known to be good predictors of adult health, education and social outcomes – physical health and well being, emotional maturity, social competence, language and cognitive development, communication skills and general knowledge.

Collaboration is an essential piece of the ECD committee's mission. Committee members include everyone from parents and early learning service providers to reps from Community Connections, Interior Health and the School District. Working together has long been a priority. This level of collaboration is unique and has been upheld as a positive example throughout the province.

So, although it was exciting and meant a great deal to many people, it was no real surprise that in July of this year Revelstoke was chosen as one of the first 12 Early Years Centre sites by the provincial government as part of the BC Early Years Strategy. The provincial goal is to provide families with meaningful access to a range of services and supports, information and referrals. The additional funding was welcomed by the committee and will be used to step up the commitment to young children in our community by deepening collaboration and coordination, strengthening early screening opportunities, addressing barriers to accessing programs and services, and ensuring program continuity. In other words, do what they are already doing, only better and with a community early years team approach.

Early childhood development is the first and most critical phase of human growth. By providing a range of services for both families and children, we can increase the likelihood that children will receive the benefits of both rich learning opportunities and responsive caregiving experiences. This supports healthy brain development and a positive social environment. The end goal is to enable children to grow as individuals, achieve in school, become productive contributors to society, have improved lifelong health and well-being – and will go far to prevent poverty down the road. For more information visit [www.revelstokeearlychilddevelopment.com](http://www.revelstokeearlychilddevelopment.com) or contact Tracy Spanner, ECD Coordinator at [revelstokeecd@gmail.com](mailto:revelstokeecd@gmail.com) or 250-805-2305.