

**Evaluation
of the
Ladysmith 0-6
Community Development Project**

April 2009



By

Sarah Fletcher MSc

Rhonda Hinch

Robert Mitchell BA

Evaluation

Conducted Through

The Community Based Research Institute

Director: Jennifer Mullett PhD

Vancouver Island University

For information contact:

Community Based Research Institute

Vancouver Island University

900 Fifth St, Nanaimo, V9R 5S5

250 740-6618

Toll Free: 1 888 920-2221

Jennifer.Mullett@viu.ca

Sarah.Fletcher@viu.ca

TABLE OF CONTENTS



LADYSMITH 0-6 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT EVALUATION

Introduction

Through the Ladysmith Resources Centre Association (LRCA), the department of Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) funded the three year Ladysmith 0-6 Community Development Project. The project was designed to assist the Ladysmith Early Years Partnership (LEYP) in its work to support young families in the community.

The mission of the Ladysmith Early Years Partnership is to promote the healthy development of children ages 0 to 6.

The objectives of the project included:

1. Strengthen and enhance existing partnerships between groups working with children 0-6 and their families;
2. Ensure that the project is community driven;
3. Build on existing knowledge and research with the community, as well as information available from other sources;
4. Develop a community plan for programs and services for all children 0-6 and their families in the Ladysmith area;
5. Ensure that the objectives and timelines specified in the community plan are carried out effectively and;
6. Ensure the sustainability of the Ladysmith 0-6 coalition and if appropriate, of the Community Coordinator position.

Process of the Evaluation

The LRCA contracted the Community Based Research Institute (CBRI) at Vancouver Island University to carry out an impartial evaluation of project activities and their alignment with the objectives, activities and timelines described in Schedule A of the *Social Development Partnership Program Contribution Agreement* for the "Ladysmith 0-6 Community Development" project. An initial interview was carried out with the project Coordinator (Ladysmith Early Years Community Coordinator or LEYCC) and the Executive Director of the LCRA to determine the scope of the activities of the project. Copies of all records and reports produced by the LEYCC were given to the CBRI for analysis and evaluation. These documents included: Annual Reports to the LRCA board of directors, Quarterly Reports of activities and progress presented to the LRCA from 2006 to 2008, the drafts and final versions of



the LEYP Strategic Plan and the Early Childhood Development Plan, a Child Care Summary Report and the results of the Parent Questionnaires.

The project Coordinator also provided the CBRI evaluation team with a copy of the LEYP membership list and identified 10 key informants to be interviewed by CBRI researchers as part of the evaluation. A series of open ended interview questions was developed by the evaluation team based on a review of the written materials provided by the project Coordinator and the LRCA Executive Director (See Appendix A). These interviews were carried out by telephone, then transcribed and analyzed to determine key themes related to the functioning of LEYP and the 0-6 Community Development Project. The themes were first identified by individual researchers and then verified through discussions with the larger evaluation team to ensure reliability of the results. The analyses of the reviewed materials and of the interviews with key Partnership members are presented in the following evaluation.

Analysis of Documents Provided by the LRCA

Summary of Parent Questionnaire

A questionnaire was distributed by the project Coordinator in October and November of 2007 to parents with children ages 0-6 to assess what they appreciated about the programs and services available in Ladysmith and area. Ninety-six questionnaires were returned. The majority of parents who responded currently attend or previously attended Ladysmith Family and Friends (LaFF), Parent-Child Mother Goose, Healthy Beginnings, Library Storytime, and Family and Frolics Gym Time.

A high percentage of parents indicated that their child care was provided by a relative and almost half of the parents questioned said they did not access the child care subsidy. Of the ninety-six responses, sixty-four parents stated that they were not looking for child care at present, the remaining thirty-two described challenges in accessing care. When asked how programs helped caregivers and children, the parents listed: socialization, education, increased social skills, and exercise. This suggests that parents believe there are a range of benefits that early childhood development programs provide for their children.

The survey revealed that the majority of parents and caregivers found out about local programs by word of mouth. The main barriers to participating in



programs were shortage of child care and parent scheduling problems. Specifically, parents commented that a lack of choices and options in services were the major obstacle. There were also concerns about shortage of spaces, lack of support and funding for programs for all ages from birth to 6, and a need for qualified and better paying jobs for Early Childhood Educators (ECE) emphasizing the need for inclusive and accessible child care and programs focused on supporting early childhood development.

The LEYP Strategic Plan

Over the course of the project the group changed its name from the Ladysmith 0-6 Coalition to the Ladysmith Early Years Partnership for purposes of clarity, and to support the use of common language. The 0-6 Community Development Project was designed to address the social inclusion of children and families in Ladysmith and the surrounding rural areas, to facilitate communication and partnership between existing programs, to build on community strength and to address gaps in services with the goal of ensuring a continuum of coordinated and accessible services for Ladysmith and area 0-6 children and their families.

LEYP's Strategic Plan includes guiding principles that reflect the objectives of the project and they include:

- ❖ being community driven; supporting community participation in project development
 - ❖ being inclusive; respecting the diversity of the community and supporting services that are accessible to all families with young children,
 - ❖ working collaboratively; with parents and children to enhance their well-being,
 - ❖ a strength based approach; building on the strengths and resources of the community to develop its own unique response to the needs of the community,
 - ❖ building an accountable partnership; basing initiatives on research that is evidence driven and focused on best practices.
- (LEYP Strategic Plan 2008)

The Ladysmith Early Childhood Development Plan



Over the course of the Ladysmith 0-6 Community Development Project an Early Childhood Development Plan was developed. The Ladysmith Early

Childhood Development (ECD) Plan was designed to strengthen the capacity of LEYP by promoting community driven services and best practices for children aged 0-6 and their families. The Plan describes the demographics of the population of Ladysmith and surrounding rural areas and provides practical evidence and research based support for the importance of early childhood development programs. The goals were to develop inclusive and sustainable initiatives that enhance services while providing community based support for families with young children.

The Plan identified priorities, gaps in services, opportunities, and goal oriented actions for LEYP to address in the community, with particular focus on the following areas:

1. **Child Care.** The importance of access to child care with qualified staff is a major concern for families in this community. With the loss of their only large group child care centre, LEYP supports initiatives that increase child care spaces and advocates for Early Childhood Educators.
2. **Child Poverty and Food Security.** Economic hardships are linked to a rise in the number of families with children accessing the Food Bank. LEYP supports increasing donations of food, clothing and toys to ECD programs; the Ladysmith Food Bank, and the work of the Ladysmith Food Action Coordination Team (FACT).
3. **Transportation.** There is an absence of public transportation in the region. LEYP supports grant applications to assist with transportation costs for families, and the efforts of the city of Ladysmith to provide a Trolley system.
4. **Demographic information.** The 2006 Census showed that 74% of Ladysmith and area households were occupied by families with 14% being lone parent families. LEYP supports initiatives that include isolated, vulnerable, and aboriginal populations.
5. **Early Childhood Development and Education.** The 2007 Early Development Instrument (EDI) indicated that 36.5% of all five year olds in the community were vulnerable in more than one area of development (physical health and well being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and



communication skills and general knowledge)

<http://ecdportal.help.ubc.ca/> LEYP will continue to support programs

that promote early literacy skills and early literacy initiatives such as the "Early and Often" media campaign.

Analysis of Interviews

Prior to the formation of the Ladysmith Early Years Partnership and the Ladysmith 0-6 Community Development Project the service providers in the Ladysmith area did meet, however they met as more of a networking group that was less effective in facilitating increased communication and strengthening partnerships between the various agencies. The more informal nature of the earlier networking attempts did not result in the group being able to engage all of its members and work collaboratively to set and achieve goals to better serve the families with children ages 0-6.

"For years and years it felt like we were spinning our wheels. It was a networking table."

Challenges faced by the Ladysmith 0-6 Community Development Project

All LEYP and 0-6 project participants recognized that prior to the new meeting structure and hiring of the project Coordinator their goals and objectives related to early childhood development programming were not being met. People were very busy and "doing things off the sides of their desks" which was simply not working.

As the majority of agencies within the Partnership were from the non-profit sector, collaborative relationships were sometimes threatened by self preservation, often a consequence of agencies competing for resources and funding. LEYP was valued by agency representatives, because, as one participant commented, it provided "a chance [for us] to reflect on our roles and ask ourselves who are we here for?" However, as agency representatives are responsible first and foremost to their respective organization, activities directly related to one's role within his/her organization were naturally deemed more urgent than Partnership activities. Therefore, simple attendance and involvement was a challenge to participating in the Partnership for some agency representatives. For example, one representative reported, "meetings... with my funder were booked on the same day [as a LEYP meeting]... This month, I sent one of my front-line



staff down."

Competition for resources among non-profit agencies also led to barriers within collaborative relationships manifested as 'parachuting' and 'turfism.' Both 'turfism' and 'parachuting' occurred when LEYP participants operated within the group in order to meet the needs of their own agency rather than those of the Partnership resulting in pseudo collaborative relationships undermined by competitive goals. 'Parachuting' was characterized by agency representatives sporadically engaging in LEYP activities as the needs of their agency dictated. One representative described 'parachuting' as having "a mandate or a need and as soon as it is fulfilled... no longer need[ing] the Partnership." Similarly, 'turfism' is characterized by an agency assuming responsibility for certain program areas and subsequently employing tactics to ensure future funding allocations to those areas. One agency representative reported that 'turfism' leads to participating "with an eye to gain more knowledge and use that knowledge to be in a better position to compete for funding."

Contributors to Success

From the interviews clear themes emerged as to the reasons for the development of a significant and successful partnership. There were three major factors:

- ❖ A paid and dedicated time Coordinator position
- ❖ The skills and experience of the Coordinator
- ❖ The structure and processes of the LEYP meetings

The Coordinator

The Ladysmith 0-6 Community Development Project included funding for a part time Coordinator position, whose role and responsibilities included: coordinating monthly meetings, identifying programs and priorities, supporting the development of proposals, coordinating tasks, and initiating contacts within the community. The Coordinator was well known and respected in the community. She was able to open pathways of communication to enhance programs for children, parents, caregivers, grandparents and First Nations communities in the region. She also coordinated training opportunities for agency staff, collaborated with the



Greater Nanaimo Early Years Partnership and Communication Committee, and attended community workshops.

All of the participants in the interviews emphasized that the paid Coordinator position contributed greatly to the continued success of the Ladysmith Early Years Partnership and the 0-6 Project. The position was critical to the maintenance of a defined structure that gave the service providers the ability to share information and knowledge in a more collaborative way. The monthly meetings allowed the Partnership, under the Coordinator's leadership, to set goals, stay on track, and carry out projects effectively.

"The Coordinator is essential, because the group needs someone to implement its decisions. Each member has the more immediate needs of its agency to address and so asking the members to perform these roles would probably not be as effective as having a position that is solely responsible for organizing and initiating group outcomes. Without the Coordinator, the group would be more reluctant to make decisions, because of the time and investment required of it in order to act on those decisions."

An essential quality of the Coordinator, described by the interviewed service providers, was the ability to communicate and organize the group, as well as provide a sense of inclusion for all members. The prior experience of the Coordinator and her dedication to the community were also seen as valuable assets. Many described the importance, not only of the coordinator role, but of having the right kind of person in the role, someone who is able to bring people to the table, and win the trust of service providers and the wider community while ensuring that the project stays on track.

"[The Coordinator's] skill set [facilitated] the Early Years Strategic Plan, which gave us a tangible, living document to use while pursuing future goals for the Early Years Partnership. There are some outcomes that have been met in terms of our collaboration and we have identified needs that should be met through the Partnership and as a result we have been able to stay on track. Louise facilitated the Early Years Strategic Plan by staying focused on what needed to happen"

The focused approach combined with the trust and understanding the Coordinator engendered created an environment that supported team building and empowerment of the group to work towards implementing decisions. Participants described the importance of a shared goal and vision,



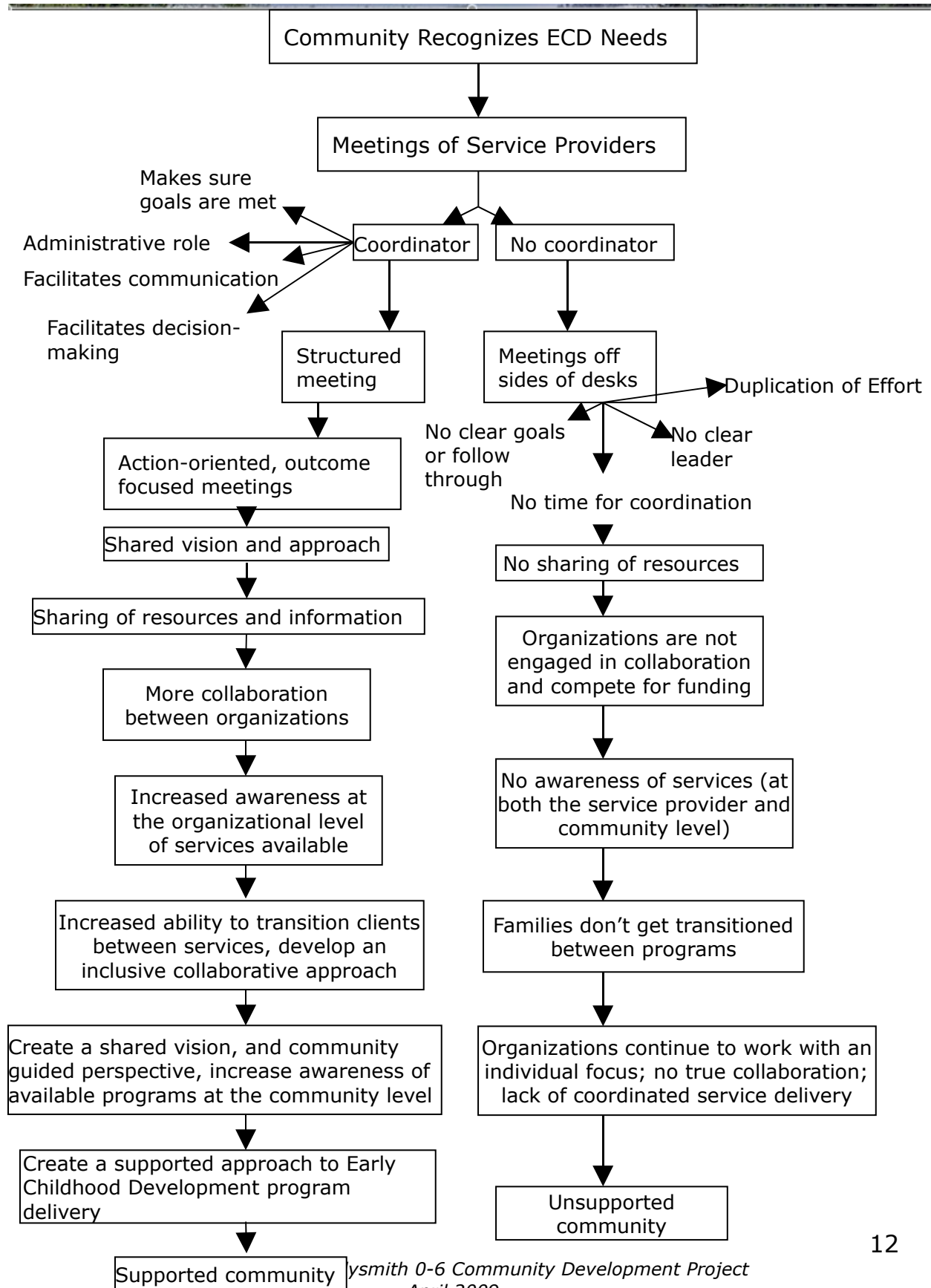
in this case, the recognized need and desire to provide better, more inclusive community services for families and children.

Over the past few years and throughout the development of LEYP and the 0-6 Community Development Project, the Coordinator has worked to accomplish many of the steps that LEYP members described as key factors to the success of the project. The Strategic Plan was completed and a Steering Committee was established. In the quarterly reports produced by the Coordinator the following benefits and changes were seen as a result of work completed through LEYP and the 0-6 Project:

- 1.** Parents are now better informed of the services available in the community
- 2.** Outreach and support to families has increased;
- 3.** There is now more community awareness of the importance of ECD;
- 4.** Town Council and businesses are more fully engaged in their support for 0-6 programs; and
- 5.** LEYP members are working together more collaboratively.



Figure 1: Two Ways to Approach ECD Needs at a Community Level





The Structure and Processes of the Partnership Meetings

It was clear from the interviews with participants that the more structured approach to Partnership meetings was instrumental in achieving more concrete goals. There were several techniques used to facilitate knowledge and resource sharing and collaborative action.

The Ladysmith Early Years Partnership provided a forum for agencies to focus on community issues and programming available to children ages 0-6. In this way service providers gained knowledge and insight and a more comprehensive picture of the gaps in services in Ladysmith and area. As a result of the Partnership they set goals with the intention of increasing awareness and improving programs for the community. Participants described how LEYP provided an excellent opportunity for otherwise isolated service providers to meet, listen, and share knowledge about the needs of young families.

“It is part of my job to do the community development work and the Partnership is a much more expedient way of doing community development work. It makes my job easier in a sense, because I am getting in touch with many people by collaborating with agency representatives. By connecting to a network of agency representatives with common goals, I have a lot more reach and my work is leveraged beyond what I could do without them”.

Over the past three years the membership of LEYP has met on a regular basis, on the third Monday of each month, with special meetings convened as necessary. Public guests were also welcome to attend these meetings which were all facilitated by the LEYP Chair and coordinated by the project Coordinator.

The following provides examples of activities, and ‘ways of working’ that contributed to the development and solidification of partnerships among those organizations involved in LEYP:

- 1. Shop Talk.** As part of the meetings of the Partnership, agencies are given an opportunity to present an overview of the services they offer. This allows each agency to share information, which ensures that more people exchange information, thereby benefiting the community. One interviewee provided the following example of how ‘shop talk’ worked to increase the awareness of services in the group:



"We gave an overview of the services we offer this month that are available to them in Ladysmith and how they access them, and I'm sure from that we will come up with a plan of how better to get the message out to families in Ladysmith for children with special needs, as well as what services we can provide to support agencies that are providing services already in Ladysmith that may need to have that little extra bit of knowledge or support around children with special needs".

2. **Literacy Kits.** In collaboration with the Vancouver Island Regional Library, LEYP was able to purchase 12 Early Literacy kits for the local library. Research from the Early Development Instrument (EDI) showed that the language and communication skills of children in this area were deemed vulnerable.
3. **A bi-annual Family Magazine.** The magazine includes articles by local service providers with a calendar of activities that are available for families with young children. Agencies are provided with the magazines making it easier for service providers to provide up-to-date information to their clients. The magazine, produced by the Ladysmith and Nanaimo Early Years Partnerships, is also distributed to businesses, and municipal and provincial leaders. This is based on the philosophy that investing in children is the responsibility of all citizens in the community.
4. **Messaging Campaign.** "Play Early, Play Often; Sing Early, Sing Often; Talk Early, Talk Often; Listen Early, Listen Often; Read Early, Read Often because the first 6 years are so important." These slogans have been produced on posters, sandwich and larger message boards, and magnets that have been distributed throughout the community.
5. **Renovation of Aggie Hall.** The largest program gathering of 0-6 families attends LaFF at the Aggie Hall. In order to continue to serve the significant number of families who use this city owned facility, LEYP members sent letters recommending that the renovation go forward. In collaboration with LaFF, the funding was granted for the renovation.
6. **Outreach Initiative.** Additional funding was given to the LRCA and LaFF to implement an outreach initiative whose focus was to engage isolated families. Program staff provided information to mothers completing the Born Healthy program and directed them to other



beneficial services in the community. They also linked doctors' offices with programs for young families.

"In Ladysmith we lost a large child care centre and we know that loss was impacting our families. We had the Resources Centre and the Boys and Girls Club sitting at the table and they applied for some funding, a Ministry grant, to create child care spaces. They got \$750,000 to build a child care facility and a hub to bring child care services under one roof. That came out of everyone being engaged at that table. Looking at issues collaboratively, not as separate individuals".

Key Features of Success: Collaboration in the Community

As participants made the transition from self preservation to a cohesive relationship based on trust, several key features of success resulted. First, agencies were able to move from being isolated to meeting their needs synergistically through the Partnership. LEYP served as a microcosm of the greater early childhood community and allowed participants to represent their agencies and clients before the community. As one agency representative reported, "the Partnership is a much more expedient way of doing community development work...it makes my job easier in a sense... because I am getting in touch with many people by collaborating. By connecting to a network of agency representatives with common goals, I have a lot more reach and my work is leveraged beyond what I could do without them." Another representative put it this way "the Partnership gave us a voice and allowed us to keep on top of what was going on in Ladysmith."

On the other hand, information was also made available to agency representatives from the collective knowledge of the Partnership milieu, which in turn could be relayed to clientele. For example, one LEYP member stated "the fact that we have monthly meeting with agency representatives through the Partnership means that we get information about upcoming programs, services and events, that might be appropriate for targeting... clients" and another reported "through the Partnership I was always up to date on current child care information that I could distribute to my [clients]." Through collaborating, agencies were also able to engage in transitioning clients between programs. One agency representative reported "we were involved in going to the Born Healthy Program, which gave us access to high risk moms who we wouldn't have been able to reach otherwise."



Another feature of success occurred when Partnership activities moved beyond satisfying the needs of individual agencies and began to address needs related to early childhood development within the broader community. "The Partnership has really attempted to 'step outside the box' and remain focused on what's important for children and families in the community..." LEYP provided the support to service providers to allow them to ask the question "Who are we here for?" Activities such as planning collaborative events were facilitated through the 0-6 Project and the Partnership. These activities included: health fairs, community picnics, raising awareness in the community through advertising and identifying needs and setting goals related to early childhood development through writing a strategic plan. Describing the intent of advertising published through collaboration of LEYP members, one agency representative explained: "this is not only for parents, but businesses, municipal and provincial leaders. The goal is to let them know that it's everybody's business to invest in children and we need to put children on the radar in making policies. Investing in children is critical."

Conclusion

The activities of the Ladysmith 0-6 Community Development Project and the Ladysmith Early Years Partnership over the past three years have promoted community driven services and best practices for children ages 0-6 and their families in Ladysmith and the surrounding area. As a result of the 0-6 Project, service providers and non-profit organizations are now working more collaboratively and increasing the awareness of programs available in the region. This not only helps them reach otherwise isolated families and children but also creates an inclusive, community driven approach to early childhood development. Upon evaluation, the role of the Coordinator emerged as a key contributor to the success of this project. In addition to the value of the dedicated time of a paid coordinator, the facilitation and community development skills of the particular Coordinator, Louise Ward, made the Partnership a success.

LEYP created a formal structure that was focused, action oriented, purposeful, inclusive and collaborative. Its decision-making focus and action orientation gave it its value. LEYP supported the sharing of resources and information in the community, building the trust necessary to develop a community driven vision and bigger picture and ensuring an inclusive approach to delivering ECD programs and services. Although there had been a series of incarnations of partnerships in the past, the role and skills of the Coordinator facilitated action and was central to LEYP's success. The



diagram on p.11 describes the role of the Coordinator in creating a supported community as well as activities that contributed to the success of LEYP and the Ladysmith 0-6 Community Development Project.

The left side of the diagram in Figure 1 “with a coordinator” indicates how successful ventures and the collaboration developed. The right side of the diagram indicates respondents’ views of the situation prior to the Coordinator assuming responsibility for the planning, facilitating and the processes and structures of Partnership meetings.

Recommendations:

1. The Coordinator position should remain accountable first and foremost to the Partnership.

A major barrier to collaboration, as identified in the analysis of interviews with service providers, was self-preservation and the need for service providers to focus on the more urgent needs of their respective organizations. Beyond providing the structure necessary to facilitate collaboration, the Coordinator acted as a representative of the Partnership itself; having a vested interest in the needs of the Partnership and the 0-6 project, advocating for them and remaining accountable for the sustainability of the Partnership and the project. Most agency representatives identified the importance of the Coordinator remaining independent and objective. Therefore, it is recommended that the Coordinator position be a single position, responsible first and foremost to the Ladysmith Early Years Partnership rather than be a responsibility shared among LEYP members.

Many service providers acknowledged the importance of the Coordinator's ability to keep the group on task and set and achieve goals. As has been described, prior to the Coordinator's involvement with LEYP, decisions were made but because there was no person directly responsible and accountable for implementing outcomes, a degree of reluctance and hesitation was involved in the decision-making process. Having an independent leader who was tasked with implementing decisions gave the group the ability to make decisions with confidence.



2. The Coordinator should ensure that all partners are at the table.

As non-profit agencies are continually faced with competition for resources and funding, the Coordinator position is essential to facilitating a functional Partnership that allows members to transition from self-interest to trust. Recognizing the pressure that leads to self-preservation, the Coordinator is responsible for structuring the Partnership, community development and planning its activities to ensure that all partners are at the table. This involves the practical aspects of arranging meetings and communicating with LEYP members to ensure full participation to the extent possible. Beyond this, it entails creating an environment conducive to team building and empowering the Partnership to be biased toward action. This results when the Coordinator has a combination of the personality, skill set, knowledge of pertinent community and child care issues and focus to engage partners and the broader community. A Coordinator, then, should not only remain independent, but also possess the ability to create a sense of belonging among partners.

3. The Coordinator position should be maintained. The Coordinator position and role in supporting community development contributes to sustainability of the Partnership.

(a) Prepare a job description for the Coordinator position that outlines the importance of specific skills.

A number of key abilities were identified as playing a central role in the success of the Coordinator position. These include:

- 1) A background knowledge of community development work;
- 2) Good leadership skills;
- 3) The ability to actively listen and engage agencies, families and the broader community;
- 4) Strong organizational skills and focus;
- 6) The capacity to facilitate communication between partners
- 7) A focus on community strengths versus deficits;
- 8) The ability to be dedicated, focused, and action-oriented; and
- 9) The will to work with people collaboratively.



Appendix A:

Questions for service providers:

1. Can you tell me in what ways your program was involved in the Ladysmith 0-6 Community Development Project? (How did your program participate in the project?)

2. Can you give me an example of:
 - a) partnership activities that you are engaged in?

 - b) a new collaboration or partnership that occurred as a result of the partnership?

 - c) what difference did these partnerships make to your ability to reach more families?

3. What was it that encouraged you to get involved with the partnership?

4. What challenges, if any, did you encounter in participating in the partnership?

5. a) Do you think the Coordinator position was essential to the outcome?

b) What did the Coordinator do that contributed to the success of the partnership?

6. In the future, what do you think could be done to make sure the collaboration continues?

7. In your opinion, are there any programs that are missing from the partnership?

8. Overall do you feel that the Partnership has been able to address the gaps in service and increase social inclusion in the community?