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*Creating Pathways ~  
An Aboriginal Early  
Years Five Year  
Strategic Plan*





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**Creating Pathways — An Aboriginal Early Years Five Year Strategic Plan**

## In Appreciation


The journey taken to create this plan has been one of many voices, a combined hope for our people and a healthier future for our children and the next generations. We are optimistic and hopeful that the Province of British Columbia will use this plan to guide policy, funding and future community development. It is intended that communities and Early Years tables can use this plan in supporting and strengthening their work, as well as for future planning.

The team at Little Drum would like to thank the over 400 Aboriginal community members from all corners of the province who shared their hopes, ideas, visions and feedback throughout the creation of this plan.

A special thank you to the communities and organizations who hosted an engagement process:

- Kermode Friendship Society
- Prince George Native Friendship Centre
- Laichwiltach Family Life Society
- Hiiye'yu Lelum Society
- Métis Commission for Children & Families of British Columbia
- Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society
- Kla-how-eya Aboriginal Centre
- Mission Friendship Centre
- Vancouver Native Health Society
- Vancouver Native Friendship Centre
- Aboriginal Head Start Association of British Columbia
- Aboriginal Infant Development Programs of British Columbia
- Métis Nation of British Columbia

Thank you to the Aboriginal Advisory Circle members for all the time, energy, thoughtfulness and wisdom you shared throughout the entire journey of the creation of this plan. It is hoped your circle will continue and be seen as an influential group in regards to Aboriginal Early Years in the province of British Columbia.



Thank you to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and specifically the Early Years Team, together with the cross-ministry partners in the Ministries of Education, Healthy Living and Sport, and Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, for all your work and support on this project.

This plan is integrally a community plan and we hold our hands up in gratitude to all community members who shared their voices with us. This plan is in honour of you, your work, your families and the little ones yet to join us.

In Spirit,

The team at Little Drum

Yvette Bolduc

Alison Gerlach

Monique Gray Smith

Joyce Schneider

## The Team at Little Drum

### Facilitation of Community Engagement Sessions

#### Yvette Bolduc

Yvette is Ojibway from Ontario. She is a Certified Life Skills Coach who has facilitated both youth and adult groups. Yvette draws on her own experiences as well as on her training to provide people with the necessary skills to be successful in life. Yvette has facilitated and presented workshops in the areas of Head Start, health, child care, education and all aspects of life skills, including self-esteem, confidence building, problem solving, coping skills and time and stress management.

#### Joyce Schneider, MA

Joyce is a member of the Stl'atl'imx Nation, granddaughter of Kicya7, and mother to three boys and one girl. She completed her master's degree in First Nations Studies at UNBC in April of 2007 with a GPA of 4.13. Since then she has instructed in an Aboriginal university preparation program and contributed to numerous Aboriginal early years curriculum research and development projects as a sub contractor for Little Drum Consulting. In her private consultation work Joyce strives to offer her skills where they will best contribute to the continuing growth and development of strong, vibrant and healthy Aboriginal communities, particularly in the area of education.



## **Co-authoring of Aboriginal Early Years Five Year Strategic Plan**

### **Alison Gerlach, MSc, OT(C)**

In her journey as a Non-Aboriginal, independent consultant, Alison draws on 20 years of supporting and learning from families and children with special needs as an occupational therapist. Over the past 10 years, Alison has been privileged to have partnered with several First Nations and Aboriginal communities and agencies in B.C. on early intervention, school therapy, program development, cultural safety and community development. These experiences led to her writing 'Steps in the Right Direction: Connecting & Collaborating in Early Intervention Therapy with Aboriginal Families & Communities in B.C.'. Alison's ongoing learning of Aboriginal worldviews informs and enriches her personal life, including the raising of her two sons, and her professional commitment to building trust, partnerships and social justice.

### **Monique Gray Smith, Psychiatric Nurse**

Monique is a mixed heritage woman of Cree, Lakota, and Scottish descent. She comes from the Cardinal family and Peepeekisis First Nation and is the proud Mom of 5 year old twins. Her formal training is as a Psychiatric Nurse and her work experience has been in the areas of Aboriginal Education; with a focus on the Early Years; Stress and Trauma Recovery, and Staff Development. She is the founder and owner of Little Drum Consulting and the author of the Aboriginal Infant Development Programs Policy & Procedure Manual and the Aboriginal Supported Child Development Handbook.

## **Project Management**

### **Monique Gray Smith**

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# Vision, Principles & Goals at a Glance

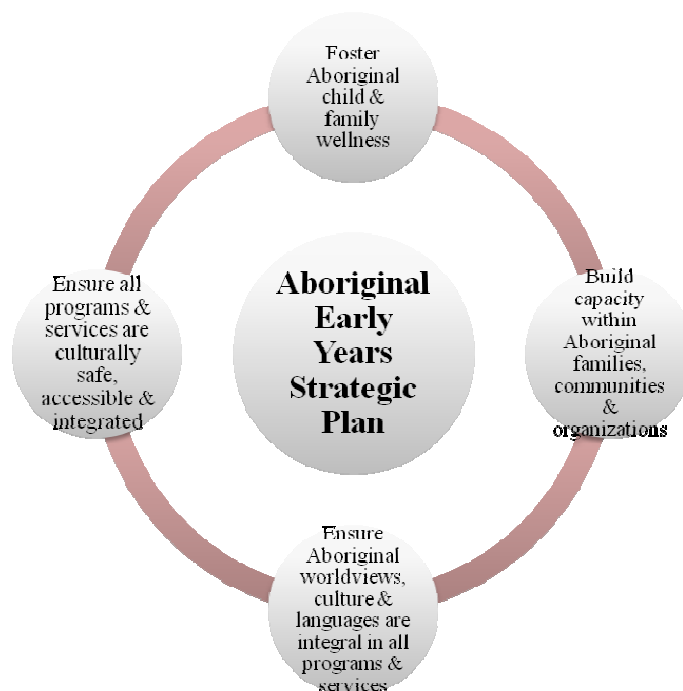
## Vision Statement

The Aboriginal Early Years Strategic Plan for British Columbia is rooted in Aboriginal culture and language, healthy families, a strong sense of community and self determination. It will ensure that all Aboriginal children and their families, regardless of where they live, have equal access to services that foster culture and language revitalization and promote holistic child and family wellness. Aboriginal worldviews and the uniqueness of children, families and communities will be respected, honoured and celebrated.

## Principles

- Children are at the centre of all circles
- Family is inclusive and reflective of all Aboriginal family structures. Families are healthy, strong and fully engaged in the delivery of early years programs and services for their children and community.
- Community driven programs will build capacity of families, staff and community members; while always respecting local cultural protocols and the uniqueness of each child, family and community.
- Aboriginal worldviews, culture & language are at the heart of all programs and services available for Aboriginal children and families.

## Goals



## Executive Summary

In September 2008, a 'day of dialogue' was held with key stakeholders in Aboriginal early years in the province of British Columbia (B.C.). At this initial session, it was agreed that for the time being, there will be two separate Early Years Strategic Plans; one for First Nations and one for Aboriginal peoples living off reserve, including Métis.

A discussion paper, *Creating Pathways for the Dreams of Our Children: Aboriginal Early Childhood Development and Care* <sup>(1)</sup> and an initial strategic framework on Aboriginal early years in B.C., have used the term 'Aboriginal' to refer inclusively and collectively to all the Indigenous peoples of this province. However, the authors recognize that the First Nations Early Childhood Development Council have not yet had an opportunity to create a discussion paper or engage in this dialogue and planning process for First Nations. It is the authors hopes that the two strategic frameworks can share a common vision and journey, one in which the diversity of Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia is recognized and built upon to '*strengthen the dreams for all our children*'.

**This Aboriginal Early Years Five Year Strategic Plan is specific to Aboriginal peoples living off reserve, inclusive of Métis.** It follows extensive community engagement with Aboriginal families, Elders, stakeholders, and organizations from across B.C. The Strategic Plan will be presented to the Provincial Government and is intended to inform and guide future implementation, including planning, allocation or reallocation of dollars. It is anticipated that Aboriginal communities and organizations will use the Strategic Plan as a foundation for planning and implementing programs and services. With the implementation of this Strategic Plan, it is envisioned that in five years time, we will see significant positive changes in the lives of Aboriginal children and their families.

All the quotes used in this report are taken from the community engagement process. A full summary of the '*Aboriginal Early Years Community Engagement Report*' <sup>(2)</sup>, and regional summaries are available at [www.littledrum.com](http://www.littledrum.com). The process of developing the Aboriginal Early Years Strategic Plan is summarized in Appendix A.

*"It's not just about physical health and school readiness, there needs to be emphasis on holistic development, in particular the cultural and spiritual aspect of development".*

## The Aboriginal Early Years Landscape in British Columbia

The Aboriginal early years landscape in B.C. has been, and continues to be, inextricably shaped and impacted by the intergenerational legacies of colonization. This includes a continued dominance of an American/Euro-colonial perspective in Aboriginal early years programs and services. The influence of society on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children, and the need to change how Aboriginal children and peoples are viewed within Canadian society was a recurring theme of the community engagement process.<sup>(2)</sup>



In response to the increasing recognition of the unique history, strengths and needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities, the landscape in B.C. has slowly been changing. In 2008, the Provincial Government released their Action Plan Framework called, *Strong, Safe and Supported*<sup>(3)</sup>: a commitment for B.C.'s Children and Youth. This Framework has 5 pillars with a strong focus on prevention, early intervention and a needs-based approach to supporting and protecting vulnerable children and youth – through a strong, integrated system.<sup>(3)</sup> Pillar 4 defines the Aboriginal Approach with the stated outcome: “We will see Aboriginal children, youth and their families receiving services through an Aboriginal service

system that strongly connects children and youth to their culture and tradition”.<sup>(3)</sup> In this changing landscape, Aboriginal knowledge on child and family wellness, traditional practices, and languages are starting to be integrated into *some* Aboriginal early years services and programs. Future government policies and legislation that promote greater self-governance in relation to Aboriginal early years would ensure that Aboriginal peoples have a central voice in how these programs are designed, delivered and evaluated.

The following characteristics of the Aboriginal early years landscape in B.C. are based on the community engagement process (involving over 400 participants)<sup>(2)</sup>, the previously mentioned discussion paper<sup>(1)</sup>, and the ‘day of dialogue’.

## Key Characteristics of Aboriginal Early Years Landscape in B.C.

- Poverty & Lack of Basic Needs
- Families in Recovery
- Culture and Language at Risk
- Lack of Aboriginal Curricula & Programming
- Lack of Cultural Competency
- Funding Challenges
- Lack of Self-Governance
- Jurisdictional Disputes & Jordan's Principle
- Uncoordinated and Inequitable Model of Service Delivery

### Poverty & Lack of Basic Needs

The current rate of poverty in Aboriginal families and communities continues to be an ugly landmark in the B.C. landscape. A dominant theme in both the literature and the community engagement process is the urgent need to improve Aboriginal children's health and wellbeing by addressing basic determinants of health; food, water, housing, and a safe environment. These basic needs are entrenched in chronic cycles of poverty, and account for the disparities in quality of life and health indicators for Aboriginal children compared to non-Aboriginal children in the province.

Families who are wondering where their next meal is coming from are likely to be less inclined to consider their child's educational, social and emotional development. For service providers working in Aboriginal early years programs, their work involves supporting families to meet basic needs for their children – safe water, enough food, adequate clothing and housing.

*"There are multiple barriers for our families that focus on their basic needs - we have children coming to our program very hungry, not dressed properly for the weather, etc. We need to ensure our programs take care of the whole child and their family, and this means the funding needs to make sure we can do this. How do children learn if they are hungry?"*

*"Poverty is so shameful in this country. We deal with the aftermath of poverty rather than the core issue of it".*

## Families in Recovery

In the community engagement process, a healthy and strong family life was identified as a key determinant of child health and wellness.<sup>(2)</sup> However, many Aboriginal families are in need of healing and support to overcome the intergenerational impact of colonization, including the residential school system, 'sixties scoop', and the continued high rates of Aboriginal children in care. Participants linked children's emotional health and wellbeing with having a healthy and stable family and home life, but also highlighted that families need increased supports to be able to provide this.

*"We have to support families to care for their children in a much different way. If we ever want to end this legacy of other people caring for our children when they are at risk, then we have to provide much higher levels of support for those families. We need to help them recover from whatever is stopping them from being the loving parents that they are".*

## Culture and Language at Risk

The literature and the community engagement process identified culture and language as key Indigenous determinants of health and wellbeing. Whilst Aboriginal culture and language are currently integrated into *some* early years programs and services in B.C., many Aboriginal children are unable to access and participate in cultural or language activities.

The challenges of participating in cultural and language activities in an urban setting/off reserve include the diversity of the Aboriginal population and language dialects, difficulties in finding and funding Elders/knowledge holders, difficulties accessing programs and/or centres that could host such programs.

For the purposes of this strategic plan, it is important to note that Census Canada information, "in both 2001 and 2006, about 29% of First Nations people who responded to the census said they could speak an Aboriginal language well enough to carry on a conversation. The figure was higher for First Nations people living on reserve (51%) than off reserve (12%)"<sup>(4)</sup>. These statistics provide evidence of need, and compliment the community engagement feedback regarding the importance and necessity of funding language revitalization programming for Aboriginal children and families living off reserve.<sup>(2)</sup>

*"It's a huge challenge for urban Aboriginal people to expose our children to cultural ways and knowing their identity, traditions and ceremonies, when most often their home community is far away".*

*"We see funding for cultural inclusion for kids at risk and in care, but all our kids are at risk of growing up without their Métis culture and language, and we need that to support all our children; whether they are involved with the Ministry or not".*

Funding for Aboriginal cultural and language programs in urban settings has not to date been a priority. Integration of language in early years programs is emerging and needs to be an area of focus.

### **Lack of Aboriginal Curricula & Programming**

Aboriginal culture and language is currently an 'add on' in many early years programs and models of service delivery. Many Aboriginal children do not experience their cultural heritage reflected in their caregivers, the programs they attend, or the child care development services they receive. This is despite increasing evidence of the importance of culture for Indigenous children.

Aboriginal people have voiced their preference to have Aboriginal care givers and service providers caring for, supporting and teaching their children.<sup>(2)</sup> Several Aboriginal early childhood education programs have been developed in recent years, with the latest being a distance education program. However, recruitment and retention of Aboriginal people continues to be a challenge, particularly in more rural and remote areas, as the needs exceed the number of Aboriginal early childhood educators available, and the financial rewards are lacking.

The lack of Aboriginal curricula and programming is particularly relevant in relation to the lack of culturally safe and relevant child development evaluation tools, and licensing and hiring requirements for child care settings; specifically the flexibility to hire Aboriginal people with core cultural competencies.

*"Culture and language needs to be imbedded in the curriculum because if it isn't, it lets people off the hook and becomes an add on".*

### **Lack of Cultural Competency**

A highly recurring and prominent theme throughout the engagement process was one of 'cultural competency'.<sup>(2)</sup> This was prominent in discussions on improving the health and welling being of Aboriginal children, on revitalizing Aboriginal cultures and languages, and on improving models of service delivery. The lack of cultural competency of non-Aboriginal service providers continues to be a significant barrier for Aboriginal families and communities to accessing and fully utilizing existing programs

and services. This provides evidence of the importance of all non-Aboriginal professionals who are working with Aboriginal children and families to fully understand, respect and be sensitive to Aboriginal knowledge, languages, protocols and history, particularly the intergenerational impact of the Indian Residential School system.

*"Develop the cultural competence of the service providers, their managers and directors. Part of competency would be to know the protocol for example when you invite Aboriginal people to a gathering or event you feed them... Develop training opportunities where the service providers can practice and assimilate their learning".*

## **Funding Challenges**

Funding was a topic that came up repeatedly, passionately and across all regions in the engagement process.<sup>(2)</sup> The consistent themes were that funding needs to be stable, longer term (3-5 years), comprehensive and non-competitive in nature. Aboriginal children represent the fastest growing population in Canada. According to Statistics Canada <sup>(4)</sup> there are 16,195 Aboriginal children between birth and 4 years living in B.C.; totaling 8% of our Aboriginal population, compared to 5% of non-Aboriginal children in the province.



For the purposes of this Strategic Plan, it is also important to note that in B.C., 62% of Aboriginal people are now living off reserve <sup>(4)</sup>. Funding increases have not been proportional to population increases and demographic shifts of Aboriginal peoples. These funds have also often been reliant on one time only investments.

Communities who have the resources to negotiate proposal writing and complex funding structures are rewarded with more programs and services, compared to communities who do not yet have this capacity.

Currently there are communities who are the 'haves' and those who are the 'have-nots' where children are receiving very limited or no services. Current funding mechanisms leave gaps in services, but also leave some communities with limited programs and services for Aboriginal children and families. Short-term and one time only funding also limits communities' ability to recruit and retain qualified staff, and to develop long term visions for their programs and services.

*"In our case, we have a lot of communities who are doing great things for children and families to connect with their Aboriginal heritage as Métis families. We need to support them and build on their capacities. The communities who are doing it well know how to do all the accessing of resources, but where there are gaps we need funding to help that community get empowered and put infrastructure in place".*

*"It is really hard to plan for 5 years when we have only one year funding. It takes a lot of work, time and resources. This needs to be easier and more efficient so we have time for things that really matter".*

*"We need more funding to implement the programs that we want to. Our communities know what they want, many have done their own ECD plans and if they haven't they know what they need the most. Most of them are in critical need of quality child care services just like every other community in this province. But also, many of them need way more funding going into early intervention and there is huge gap in services to children with special needs. We have a patchwork of services coming down from many different sources and within these silos, communities still have huge gaps that remain unaddressed".*

Throughout the community engagement process, concerns were consistently expressed regarding the lack of dedicated and respectful funding for involvement of Elders in programming.<sup>(2)</sup>

Jurisdictional issues also need to be addressed by the government in collaboration with Aboriginal stakeholders.

### **Lack of Self-Governance**

Aboriginal autonomy and voice in planning and delivering Aboriginal early years programs and services was another dominant theme in the community engagement process.<sup>(2)</sup> Aboriginal family members, Elders, youth, service providers and managers have to date lacked a significant voice in how their early years programs and services have developed and been delivered in their communities.

*"Communities need to be given the autonomy and flexibility to develop, deliver and evaluate their own programs based on their own needs, priorities and capacities".*

*"Our people must be actively included in decision making and developing programs. Our ways of thinking, acting, and working must be acknowledged and accepted within these programs. Our people have to be seen as more than just tokens, not invited only to say 'Yes we have x number of Aboriginal representatives' and then, when we speak and they don't like what we say, or they simply don't have time for what we have to say, we are excluded".*

*"Coordination and integration needs to start from the top down. Government needs to quit working in silos and begin integrating ECD at the provincial and federal levels so that we can support this happening at community levels".*

In B.C. there are several Provincial Ministries that influence the current Aboriginal early years landscape and the lives of Aboriginal children and families– including, but not limited to: the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), the Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport, the Ministry of Health Services, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation. Funding mechanisms and program policies have historically been developed and delivered with minimal representation and collaboration with Aboriginal communities.

### **Jurisdictional Disputes & Jordan's Principle**

A collaborative plan to implement Jordan's Principle in B.C. is under development by MCFD so that jurisdictional funding disputes do not prevent or delay First Nations children from accessing available health and social services in the child's geographic area.



*"We need to rise above the politics between agencies and on/off reserve. Keep the children and families the focus and not who gets more money".*

Currently, many early intervention therapists and some Aboriginal early years programs are limited in their ability to provide community-based services and programs, due to jurisdictional confusion and disputes. Geographical and social distances continue to impact if and/or how often families access such programs in nearby, or not so near, urban centres.

### **Uncoordinated and Inequitable Models of Service Delivery**

Some Aboriginal communities have developed the infrastructure for a 'hub' or 'family circle' model of service delivery. This approach provides community-based, community-driven, intergenerational programs in an integrated model in which health, child care, child development, education, community kitchen, are all housed together. This model often reflects local cultural traditions, protocols, strengths and needs.

Unfortunately though, there are many families who lack access to this model of service delivery. There is no universal baseline of Aboriginal early years programs or services that are currently available to all Aboriginal children, regardless of where they live. This is due to a variety of reasons, including but not limited to: the often complex and competitive funding mechanisms, the challenges in staff recruitment and retention, and jurisdictional disputes.

The identified barriers for participation in early years programs currently include: physical distance to program, transportation, lack of awareness/knowledge of existing services, inflexible hours (for working parents), and cultural risk, including fears of child protection.

*"We need to improve access to service. Having a number of agencies providing the same services in the same city is confusing for families. Encourage one agency with multiple services available such as a community hub. Create partnerships and make services more visible in the community. Also create a 'stream lined' integrated service so that families just have to fill out one form to access a variety of services".*

*"A lot of families don't even know that the services exist. We need to open the doors of communication between all service providers and programs".*

## Why Develop an Aboriginal Early Years Five Year Strategic Plan?

Perhaps there has been no more critical time in history, so soon after the Indian Residential School apology, to truly take stock of the investments the province of B.C. is making in our future as Aboriginal peoples; and specifically with our children and their families. It is time to create positive change that will facilitate closing the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal British Columbians. The significant quality of life and health inequities experienced by too many Aboriginal children, as compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts, has been well documented, both nationally and internationally.<sup>(5,6)</sup> A loud and consistent voice from the engagement process was the priority of meeting Aboriginal children's basic needs.

Provincially, the Transformative Change Accord,<sup>(7)</sup> the Métis Nation Relationship Accord<sup>(8)</sup> and the Strong Safe and Supported<sup>(3)</sup> documents all acknowledge the importance of First Nations, Aboriginal, and Métis communities being responsible for the education, health, and care of their children. The increasing momentum towards self-governance in B.C. provides the political framework to put decision-making, and the delivery of services and programs for our children and their families back into the hands and hearts of Aboriginal peoples.

The Aboriginal Early Years Strategic Plan is the start of this process for Aboriginal and Métis children and their families. It aims to rebalance the cultural nature of early years education and programs, away from its current American or Euro-colonial bias, and towards one which is rooted in Aboriginal cultures, languages and worldviews. The Strategic Plan recognizes and honours that Aboriginal peoples come with much knowledge and experience, particularly in regards to their children, families and communities. This knowledge and experience needs to be prevalent and relied upon within the work that is to be done. Failure to do so, risks a continuation of the status quo – whereby decision-making and strategic planning is controlled by the few, and Aboriginal families and communities are expected to “fit into” a mainstream model that inevitably does not work for them.

*"My dream for our children is that we are able to give them a childhood that they don't have to recover from".*

There will be many different paths taken by Aboriginal peoples in B.C. in their journey of realizing the dreams for their children and families. On the journey of creating this Strategic Plan, the following foundations were of immense support and can be found in more detail in the appendices.

- An initial discussion paper, '*Creating Pathways for the Dreams of our Children ~ Aboriginal Early Childhood Development and Care*'<sup>(1)</sup>. (Available at [www.littledrum.com](http://www.littledrum.com))
- A 'Day of Dialogue': Initial community engagement on September 4, 2008.
- Community engagement with over 400 participants, including Aboriginal families, Elders, early years stakeholders and organizations from across the province.
- An Aboriginal Advisory Circle to provide guidance, direction, feedback, and support for the creation of this strategic plan.

As we continue building this Strategic Plan and facilitate the implementation across the province, it is hoped that the work done allows us to make a positive difference in the lives of Aboriginal children, their families and the children yet to come.



# Community Voice

*"Each community's needs are different, although similarities can and do exist. Pieces of the information must be gathered and brought together to identify what needs to happen next to reach desired goals and outcomes for the community."*

Throughout the engagement process, community members voiced their knowledge and wisdom regarding how early years programs and services can more effectively improve the health and wellness of Aboriginal children. Six major inter-related themes emerged and are outlined below. These are described in more detail in the *Community Engagement Report* available at [www.littledrum.com](http://www.littledrum.com).

## 1. Culture & Language

### 2. Family

- Family Healing and Support
- Universal Quality Child Care
- Child Welfare

### 3. Community Development

- Self-determination
- Positive Role Models & Leadership
- Community Planning
- Economic Development
- Community Strengths

### 4. Cultural Competency

- Awareness
- Knowledge
- Training

## 5. Model of Service Delivery

- Collaborative Relationships & Networks
- Strengths Based
- Community Hubs
- Accessible & Equitable
- Out Reach
- Coordinated & Seamless
- Prevention
- Early Intervention

## 6. Funding

- Stable
- Comprehensive
- Non-competitive

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## **Vision Statement**

**The Aboriginal Early Years Strategic Plan for British Columbia is rooted in Aboriginal culture and language, healthy families, a strong sense of community and self determination. It will ensure that all Aboriginal children and their families, regardless of where they live, have equal access to services that foster culture and language revitalization and promote holistic child and family wellness. Aboriginal worldviews and the uniqueness of children, families and communities will be respected, honoured and celebrated.**

## Principles

The following guiding principles provide a foundation on which to build diverse Aboriginal early years programs and services that are grounded in, and reflect the literature, the day of dialogue, and the extensive community engagement process. They represent Aboriginal worldviews, and provide a foundation for Aboriginal communities, stakeholders and government to plan, design and deliver a range of flexible and diverse Aboriginal early years programs and services.

### **Children are at the centre of all circles**

Children are at the centre of all decision-making and planning circles involving their families, communities and the organizations that serve them. Aboriginal children's health and wellbeing is directly linked to basic needs (food, clean water, warmth and housing), cultural identity and pride, and a sense of belonging and connectedness with their family and community.

### **Family is inclusive and reflective of all Aboriginal family structures. Family members are healthy, strong and fully engaged in the delivery of early years programs and services for their children and community.**

The health and well being of Aboriginal children is inextricably linked to the health and wellbeing of their family. The healing that needs to occur within families (and communities) is recognized, addressed, and honoured. Family members are an essential part of any successful early years programs.

### **Community driven programs will build capacity of families, staff and community members; while always respecting local cultural protocols, and the uniqueness of each child, family and community.**

Communities are empowered, connected, and have a strong sense of self-determination. The traditional role of the community in the raising up of a child will be situated prominently within all Aboriginal early years programs and models of service delivery. Those who will be most closely influenced by policies and actions – Aboriginal children, families and communities – will have a strong and ongoing voice in how their early years programs and services are designed and delivered. All programs will focus and build on the diverse strengths of the child, family and community. Governance and funding models will be developed and supported by Aboriginal leaders and communities. This will be aligned with the continuing devolution of decision-making and service delivery planning.

Equitable and respectful partnerships in the design, delivery, and evaluation of Aboriginal early years programs will be supported through informal and formal alliances; inclusive of all early years stakeholders, and supported with adequate funding and resources. All Aboriginal children and their families will have equitable access to a range of culturally relevant & respectful services and programs; regardless of jurisdiction, age and geographic location.

**Aboriginal worldviews, culture & language are at the heart of all programs and services available for Aboriginal children and families.**

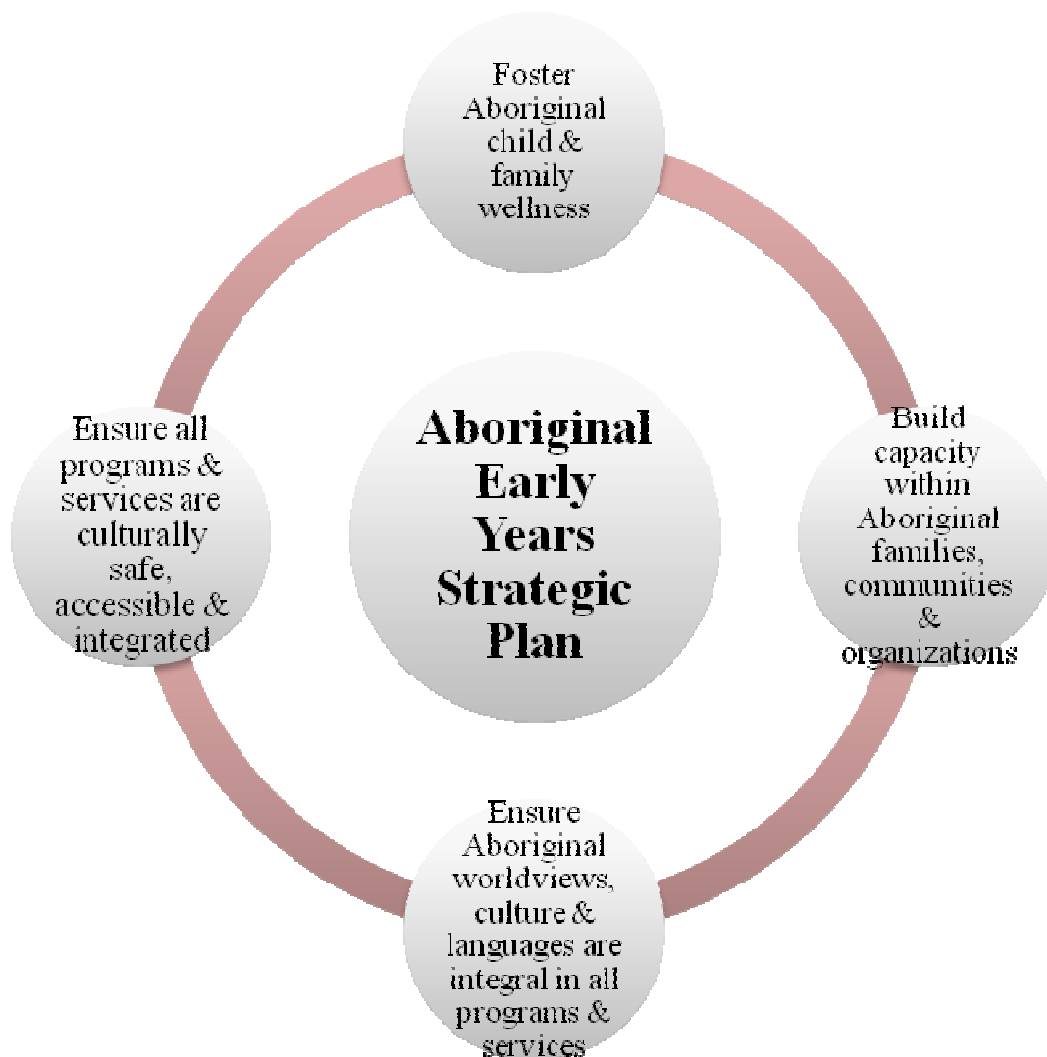
All Aboriginal early years programs and services will encompass the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical wellbeing of the child, family and community. Cultural, social, linguistic and geographic diversity within and between Aboriginal children, families, communities and Nations will be recognized and honoured. Aboriginal knowledge will be valued and honored as a valid way of knowing and understanding the world, and integral in all programs and services. All non-Aboriginal people involved with Aboriginal children will understand and respect Aboriginal history (as told by Aboriginal peoples), worldviews, knowledge, local territories, protocols, traditions and languages. Programs and services will be culturally safe, integrated, accessible, and equitable.



## Goals

For many, the goals and actions necessary to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and families in B.C. feel overwhelming. However, four inter-related strategic goals, as shown in the visual below, emerged from the vision statement and guiding principles. As repeatedly raised during the community engagement process, an important prerequisite for achieving these goals is a guaranteed investment in stable, equitable and non-competitive funding mechanisms.<sup>(2)</sup> This fundamental change will support the design and delivery of culturally relevant and respectful services for all Aboriginal children and their families; regardless of jurisdiction, age, and geographical location.

### Visual Representation of Inter-Related Strategic Goals



## Strategies for the Goals

The goals and strategies are closely inter-related, and in many ways mutually dependent. For the successful implementation of the strategic plan, these strategies will need to be reviewed and further developed by the Provincial Aboriginal Early Years Advisory Circle and the Inter Ministerial committee.

**Accountability** will be shared by all involved. Government through policies and funding; programs and service providers through delivery of authentic, respectful services; families and communities through respectfully contributing at all stages of program design, delivery and evaluation.

### Provincial Aboriginal Early Years Advisory Circle

To build on a 'new relationship' with the Provincial Government; to move this strategic plan forward, and to translate the broad strategic goals and objectives into tangible action and change requires the establishment of a permanent Provincial Aboriginal Early Years Advisory Circle. A provincial, cross-sectoral Aboriginal Early Years Advisory Circle has played a crucial role in the development of this strategic plan. (The current members of this advisory circle are listed in Appendix B).

### Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee

The formation of an Inter-ministerial Steering Committee is essential to the successful implementation of this strategic plan. Many of the strategic goals and objectives cross jurisdictional boundaries and Ministry mandates. Federal involvement in this Steering Committee will ensure the inclusion of key Federal initiatives in B.C.

**Goal: To foster Aboriginal child and family health and wellness.**

A healthy and stable family and home life has been identified as a key determinant of child health and wellness. However, many Aboriginal families continue to be disrupted and put at risk by the ongoing intergenerational impact of colonization. An essential goal and priority of early years programs and services is to promote healthy and strong families. To achieve this goal, adequate funding is essential. The important role that family members play in the raising of Aboriginal children needs to be understood and explicit in the design and delivery of all early years programs.

**Goal: To build capacity within Aboriginal families, communities and organizations.**

A strong and consistent message from Aboriginal early years stakeholders across all regions of the province is the need to change the policies for funding and accountability. This is viewed as a fundamental requirement in order to address the goals outlined in this strategic plan. Aboriginal families and stakeholders want and need to have a real and meaningful voice in the design, delivery and evaluation of programs and services available to their children. This is inclusive of Aboriginal specific programs and mainstream programs and services offered to Aboriginal children and families.

**Goal: To ensure Aboriginal worldviews, cultures & languages are integral in all programs and services.**

This goal has risen out of a shared vision and common desire to retain and revitalize Aboriginal culture and languages. Cultures and language are seen as key Indigenous determinants of health and wellness; including cultural and linguistic knowledge, pride and sense of identity. Aboriginal cultures, languages, and worldviews must be the foundation or root of all programs and services for Aboriginal children and families.

**Goal: To ensure all programs and services are culturally safe, accessible and integrated.**

In the design and delivery of all Aboriginal early years programs and services, Aboriginal children and their families will be the focus. Regardless of where Aboriginal children and families live, they need to have equal access to culturally safe, and well integrated early years programs and services. Developing the cultural competency of all those involved in the planning, design and delivery of Aboriginal early years programs and services is crucial to achieving the goals.

## Implementation of Strategies

\*Year one goals reflect the projected uncertainty in funding increases and allocations for Aboriginal early years programs and services. The strategies that have been allocated in years 2-5 require longer term sustainable investments.

### **Goal: To foster Aboriginal child and family health and wellness.**

#### **Year One: April 2009 to March 2010**

1. To prioritize the formation of an Inter-ministerial Steering Committee and the continuation of the Provincial Aboriginal Early Years Advisory Circle.
2. To increase the participation and contribution of Elders and cultural teachers in all early years programs serving Aboriginal children. (This must include funding for appropriate supports such as respectful financial compensation and transportation.)
3. To research the training & educational needs of Aboriginal parents and families at a community level.
4. To develop promotional resources for early years stakeholders, to support their message of 'why' children and the early years are so important to their community members and leaders.
5. To review and develop strategies for early referral to specialized programs and reduction of existing wait lists for all programs and services serving Aboriginal children and families.

#### **Year Two to Five: April 2010-March 2014**

1. To develop and deliver training & educational programs for Aboriginal parents and family members. This will be based on community needs and strengths.
2. To advocate for healthy public policy in collaboration with partners, and stakeholders on community or regional Aboriginal child development priorities.
3. Identify key policies and processes for effective management of healthy infant and child development programs. This would be inclusive of, but not limited to: community based planning, community development, capacity building, and collaboration.
4. To incorporate funding and resources in early years programs so that they are able to address basic determinants of health for the Aboriginal children they are serving.
5. To support the research and development of Aboriginal indicators for child health and wellbeing.
6. To develop a provincial strategic plan for quality, affordable and culturally relevant child care.

## **Goal: Build capacity in Aboriginal families, communities and organizations.**

### **Year One: April 2009 to March 2010**

1. Evaluate the success of Aboriginal early years programs and services in a collaborative process that is reflective of both Aboriginal and western forms of 'evidence'.
2. To mandate Aboriginal representation at decision-making levels with government and within government.
3. Targeted funding to develop comprehensive community plans and partnerships that bring together health, education, economic development, social wellness, culture, language and self determination.
4. To develop a provincial Aboriginal early years mentorship network.
5. To have at least one in person gathering for the First Nations Early Childhood Development Council and the Provincial Aboriginal Early Years Advisory Circle to share and collaborate on future steps forward.



### **Year Two to Five: April 2010 to March 2014**

1. To increase the number of Aboriginal early years services devolved to Aboriginal agencies, and delivered by Aboriginal service providers and professionals.
2. Funding will be stable, long term (3-5 years) and non-competitive.
3. Funding formulas and new funding will specifically target communities who are currently under-served.
4. Funding will be comprehensive in nature to promote well co-ordinated and integrated programs that are more accessible and user-friendly.
5. To undertake regional program mapping to increase understanding of existing resources and disseminate information on regional programs that have been successful.
6. Targeted funding for community development and capacity building.
7. To support the research and development of Aboriginal indicators for community development.
8. To support the research and development of provincial Aboriginal core competencies for early child care staff and programs.
9. To support the research and development of Aboriginal licensing and hiring regulations for early child care programs.
10. To develop and fund a provincial recruitment strategy to attract and increase the numbers of Aboriginal ECE's.

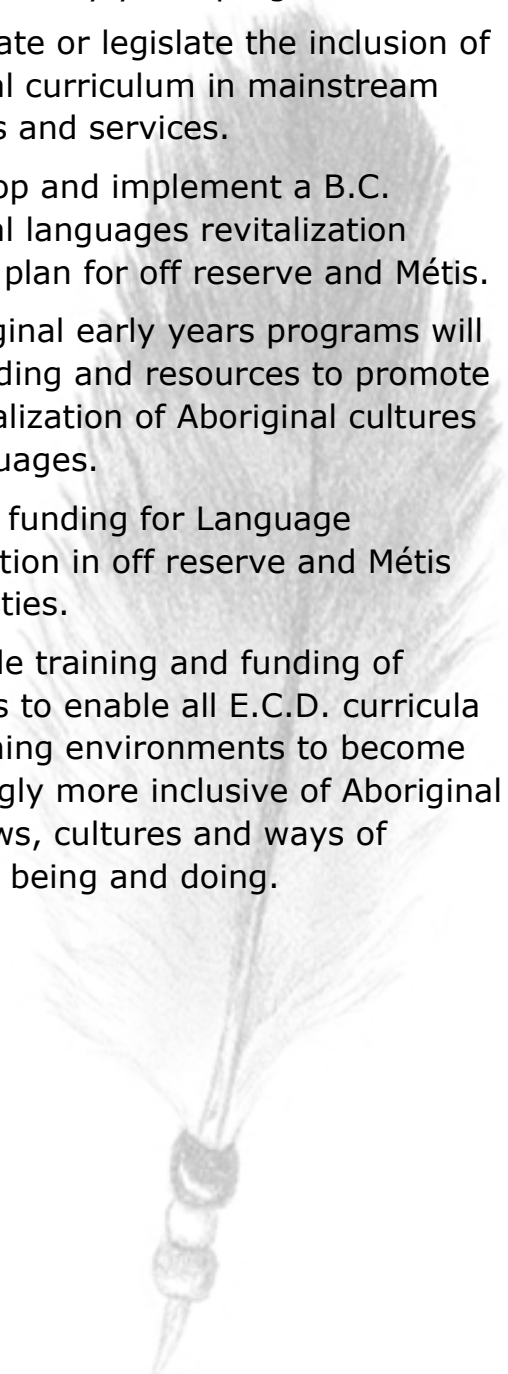
**Goal: To ensure Aboriginal worldviews, culture & languages are integral in all programs and services.**

**Year One: April 2009 to March 2010**

1. Targeted funding to increase and support the participation and contribution of Elders and cultural teachers.
2. To create community/regional forums in which Aboriginal stakeholders, Elders, youth and family members can come together to strategize how to ensure culture and language are in all parts of early years programs and to build capacity.

**Year Two to Five: April 2010 to March 2014**

1. To research and develop a culturally safe and meaningful outcome measure for Aboriginal early years programs.
2. To mandate or legislate the inclusion of Aboriginal curriculum in mainstream programs and services.
3. To develop and implement a B.C. Aboriginal languages revitalization strategic plan for off reserve and Métis.
4. All Aboriginal early years programs will have funding and resources to promote the revitalization of Aboriginal cultures and languages.
5. Targeted funding for Language revitalization in off reserve and Métis communities.
6. To provide training and funding of resources to enable all E.C.D. curricula and learning environments to become increasingly more inclusive of Aboriginal worldviews, cultures and ways of knowing, being and doing.



**Goal: To ensure all programs and services are culturally safe, accessible and integrated.**

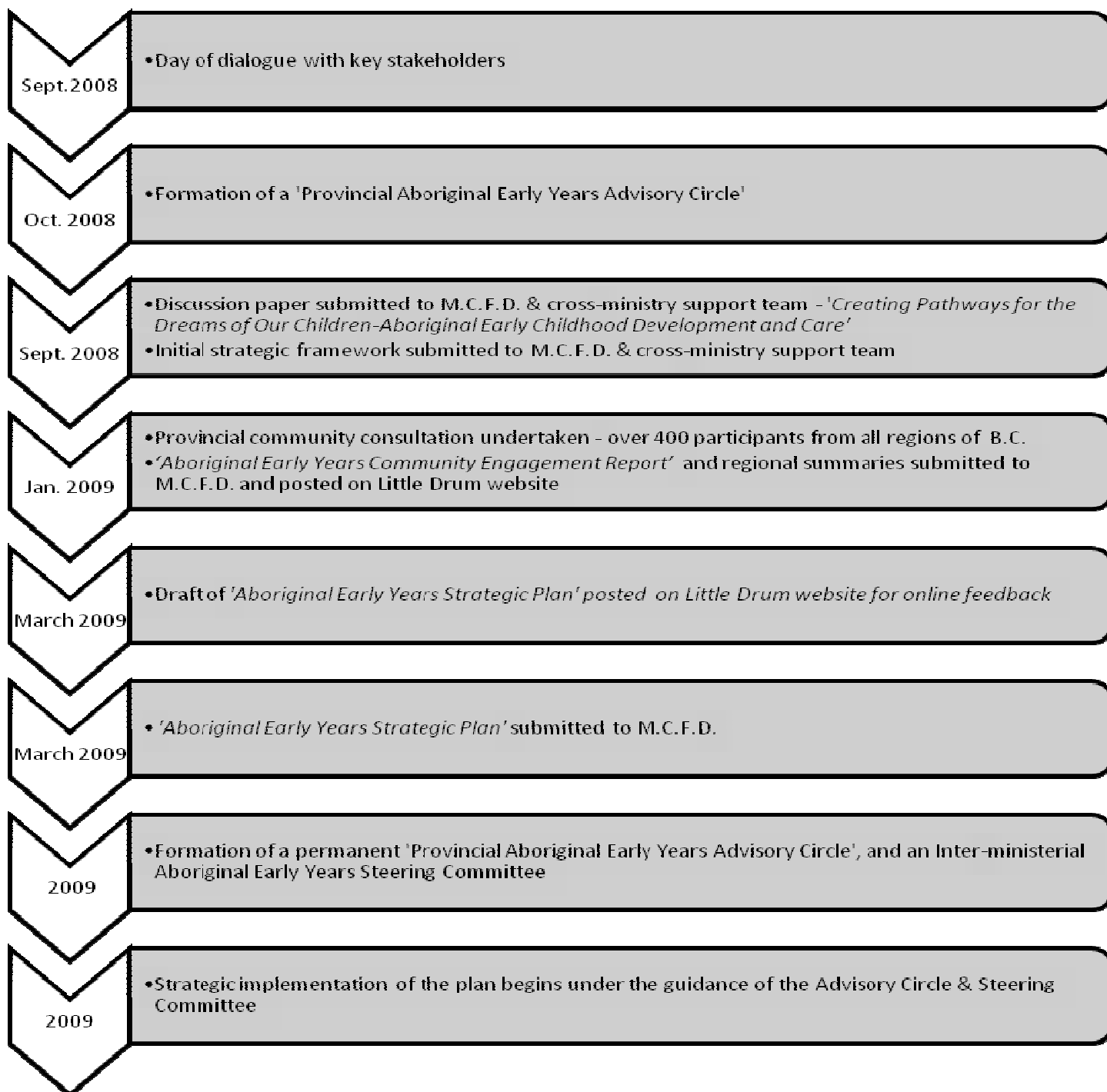
**Year One: April 2009 to March 2010**

1. To provide sustainable funding for the continuation of the Provincial Aboriginal Early Years Advisory Circle.
2. To support and fund an Aboriginal Early Years Advisory Circle for each region with the goal of improving service access, integration and co-ordination, and building regional capacity more strategically.
3. Allocate funding for Aboriginal early years stakeholders to host gatherings to build capacity in best practices and connections between all agencies and service providers that are invested in the health and wellness of Aboriginal children and families in their geographical location.
4. To collaborate with the First Nations ECD Council over the translation of Jordan`s Principle and its impact for Aboriginal early years.

**Year Two to Five: April 2010 to March 2014**

1. To develop an on-line information resource that profiles services and programs, both Aboriginal and mainstream. (Information to include, but not be limited to; transportation, daycare, culture and language programs, and recreational facilities).
2. Explore collaborative funding models by bringing together the government (Provincial, Federal, and Municipal), business and voluntary sectors.
3. Capital funding for infrastructure.
4. Review the mandates of all agencies providing early intervention therapy services to ensure equitable and culturally safe programs are available for all Aboriginal children and families.
5. To develop a cultural safety educational program for all non-Aboriginal stakeholders involved with Aboriginal children, families or communities. Long term goal is for all non-Aboriginal people working with Aboriginal children and families to participate in a cultural safety program within their first year of employment.

## Appendix A: Summary of steps so far in the development of the initial 'Aboriginal Early Years Strategic Plan' for B.C.



## Appendix B:

The following members have guided the development of the first provincial strategic plan for Aboriginal children and families, living off reserve, in B.C. It has been strongly recommended that this Advisory Circle continue in order to ensure the successful implementation of the plan and strategic goals. Membership may change over time; however, there will be consistent regional representation.

### Provincial Representatives

**Jessie Nyberg:** Elder Advisor

**Co Chair: Diana Elliott:** Provincial Advisor: Aboriginal Infant Development Programs of BC

**Co Chair: Monique Gray Smith:** Little Drum Consulting

**Tanya Brown:** Provincial Advisor: Supported Child Development Programs of BC

**Deborah Canada:** Chief Executive Officer: Métis Commission for Children and Families of BC

**Marcia Dawson:** Provincial Aboriginal Coordinator: Success By6

**Joan Gignac:** Executive Director: Aboriginal Head Start Association of BC

**Colleen Hodgson:** Director of Education: Métis Nation of BC

**Karen Isaac:** Executive Director: BC Aboriginal Child Care Society

**Paul Lacerte:** Executive Director: BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres

### Regional Representatives

**Anita Zakresky:** Northern Region Representative: Director of Child and Youth Services, Prince George Native Friendship Centre

**Flo Lewis:** Vancouver Coastal Representative: Team Leader, Vancouver Aboriginal Supported Child Development Program, Vancouver Native Health

**Jody Bauche:** Vancouver Island Representative: Aboriginal Early Childhood Development Coordinator for the South Vancouver Island, Victoria Native Friendship Centre.

**Kelly Terbasket:** Interior Region Representative: Aboriginal ECD Consultant for Ministry of Children and Family Development

**Fraser Region:** currently not filled.

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## Ex Officio Support Members

**Aleksandra Stevanovic:** Acting Director: Early Childhood Development Policy, Ministry of Children and Family Development

**Carla Springinotic:** Manager Early Childhood Health and Screening: Population and Public Health, Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport

**Christine Burgess:** Manager of Children and Youth Programs: Public Health Agency of Canada

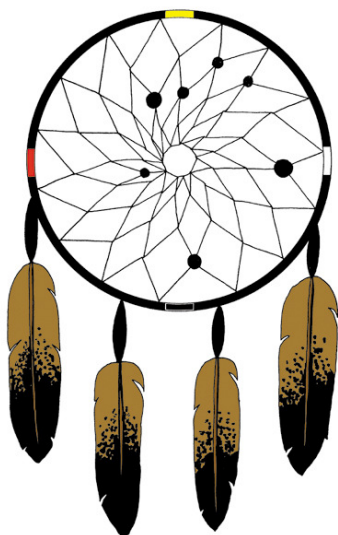
**Mariann Burka:** Executive Director: Partnerships and Community Renewal, Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation

**Susan Kennedy:** Executive Director: Early Learning, Ministry of Education



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**“My dream for our children is that we are able to give them a childhood that they don’t have to recover from”.**

**Community Engagement  
Participant, 2008**

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