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**Social Support in Early Childhood Development Programs**

**TEAM**

**Principal Investigator:**

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**Co-Investigator:**

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**Community-Agency Participants:**

Nutsumaat Lelum Child Care Centre, Chemainus First Nation, B.C.  
Smun'een Aboriginal Head Start, Penelakut Tribe, Kuper Island, B.C.

**Project Background**

Research indicates that early childhood programs can support parents, extended family members and communities. When parents feel supported in their role, they tend to have better mental and physical health, and to be more positive and responsive in their care-giving. Early childhood programs have potential to promote social cohesion and wellness in communities by connecting families with each other and with staff, providing a setting for the exchange of knowledge, and by alerting staff and families to emerging needs and ways to meet these needs.

With this in mind, many early childhood programs, such as Aboriginal Head Start in Canada, take a family-centred approach and use a range of strategies to encourage active parent involvement and to enhance social support. Parent involvement and experiences of social support are important indicators of program effectiveness. These can be difficult outcomes to measure. In particular, most research-based tools for measuring social support are long, intrusive, and often assume certain lifestyles and choices for parents. Parents in rural and remote communities, in low-income households and in low-income countries may be very constrained in terms of resources available for them and avenues to develop and rely upon social support networks. Tools are needed that are relevant and meaningful to local families and conditions, practical, non-intrusive, and culturally sensitive.

### **Project Goal**

The goal of the Measuring Social Support project was to develop a tested tool for assessing social support outcomes for parents when their young children attend an early childhood care program.

### **Project Objectives**

- To obtain both staff and parents' perceptions of how parents may be affected when their children attend child care or other children's programs, and how various impacts could be measured.
- To develop a tool for measuring social support that is practical, supportive, and culturally safe.

### **Project Outcomes**

- Generated insights about how parents are affected by their involvement in child care programs via their children, with particular focus on the quality, quantity and accessibility of social support that they perceive and receive.
- Produced a tool for measuring social support as one indicator of success in programs that take a family-centred approach.
- Enhanced understandings about how the parents' experiences of social support through their child's participation in an early childhood program can inform program delivery.

### **Funding**

B. C. Ministry of Children and Family Development: Human Early Learning Partnership, [www.earlylearning.ubc.ca](http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca)

### **KEY RESOURCES**

#### **ECDIP Publications, Presentations, and Reports**

Ball, J., & Elliot, E. (2009). *Measuring Social Support in Aboriginal Early Childhood Programs*. Unpublished manuscript. School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria.