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September 2011

Summative Evaluation of the Understanding the Early Years Initiative

Final Report
September 2011

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Final Report

***Evaluation Directorate
Strategic Policy and Research Branch
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada***

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Table of Contents

List of abbreviations	i
Executive Summary.....	iii
Management Response	ix
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Evaluation purpose and context.....	1
2. Initiative Profile	3
2.1 Overview: Initiative Rationale and Project Selection.....	3
2.1.1 Rationale.....	3
2.1.2 Project Selection	3
2.2 Initiative Resources and Activities	5
2.2.1 Resources.....	5
2.3 Logic Model	7
3. Evaluation Methodology.....	9
3.1 Formative evaluation.....	9
3.2 Summative Evaluation Questions	9
3.3 Data Sources and Collection Methods	9
3.3.1 Document and File Review	10
3.3.2 Updated Literature Review.....	10
3.3.3 Key Informant Interviews with Federal and Provincial Officials	10
3.3.4 Survey of UEY Community Project Team Members	11
3.3.5 Survey of UEY Community Coalition Members	11
3.3.5.1 Sampling and Data Collection	11
3.3.6 Case Studies of UEY Projects	12
3.3.7 Summary of data sources	13
3.4 Methodological Limitations	13
4. Findings.....	15
4.1 Findings Related to the Relevance of the UEY Initiative	15
4.1.1 Need for UEY	15
4.1.2 Consistency of UEY with departmental and federal government objectives.....	17
4.1.3 Alignment with Federal Roles and Responsibilities.....	18
4.2 Findings Related to the Performance of the UEY Initiative	19
4.2.1 Achievement of Immediate Intended Outcomes	19
4.2.1.1 Communities Are Able to Generate and Use Local Data Related to Children’s Development.....	20
4.2.2 UEY contribution to a better understanding of the early years’ experiences of Canadian children growing up in various social, economic, cultural and geographical environments.....	21

4.2.3	Achievement of Intermediate Outcomes.....	22
4.2.3.1	Communities Develop Action Plans to Address the Needs of Young Children.....	22
4.2.3.2	Communities Make Informed Decisions that Benefit the Lives of Young Children.....	23
4.2.4	Achievement of Value.....	24
4.2.5	Achievement of Longer-Term Outcomes	26
4.2.5.1	Inclusive communities that are responsive to the Needs of Children and Families	26
4.3	Lessons Learned	27
4.3.1	Key elements in the UEY approach that have contributed to achieving UEY’s objectives	28
4.3.2	UEY contribution to strengthening local networks and partnerships	29
4.3.3	Using community research as a tool to stimulate community action and the implementation of Action Plans.....	29
4.3.4	Transferability of the UEY approach to other populations and social issues.....	31
5.	Conclusions	33
5.1	Relevance	33
5.2	Performance.....	33
5.3	Lessons Learned and Transferability of the UEY Approach	34
	Appendix A: Evaluation Matrix – Questions, Indicators and Data Sources	37

List of Tables

Table 1	Number of UEY Projects Funded in 2005 and 2007	5
Table 2	Number of Participating UEY Projects and Interviews Completed	13
Table 3	UEY approach's contribution to generating changes in the community (n = 61).....	28

List of abbreviations

CDPD	Community Development and Partners Directorate
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EDI	Early Development Instrument
HRSDC	Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
PIDACS	Parent Interviews and Direct Assessment of Children Survey
UEY	Understanding the Early Years

Executive Summary

Background

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's (HRSDC's) Understanding the Early Years (UEY) Initiative aimed to enhance communities' capacity to support young children and their families. This was to be accomplished by developing and using quality local information to foster community mobilization and to make informed, collective decisions on concrete actions to enhance children's lives as well as building on the strengths of existing local approaches to support young children and their families. The objectives of the evaluation were to assess the impacts of the UEY Initiative in participating communities and to identify lessons learned using the UEY model.

The UEY Initiative was based on the following guiding principles:¹

- A good start in the early years of life enhances children's well-being and lays the foundation for learning, behaviour and health as they grow;
- A child's family and community are key influences on the child's development and overall well-being;
- Research and knowledge are critical to the development of informed policies, programs and service delivery approaches that can enhance early childhood development outcomes; and
- Communities can mobilize their citizens and resources to find creative and effective ways to address challenges facing their young children and their families.

The primary objective of the Initiative was to enable community members to work together to address the needs of young children aged six years and under by:

- Enhancing family and community understanding about the importance of young children's development and approaches to help children thrive; and
- Strengthening their ability to use local data to help them make decisions to enhance children's lives.²

Evaluation Strategy

The evaluation integrated results from six lines of evidence:

- Literature review;
- Document and file review;

¹ HRSDC, Overview of The Understanding The Early Years Initiative.

² Ibid.

- Key informant interviews with federal and provincial officials;
- Survey of UEY project team members;
- Survey of coalition members; and
- Case studies.

The evaluation findings include data from all 36 UEY projects through the document and file review. Twenty-one community projects ran from 2005 to 2008 and fifteen projects operated over the 2007 to 2010 period. Data from the survey of UEY team members, survey of coalition members and case studies were collected for 18 of the 36 UEY projects (50%). Of these eighteen projects, eight were funded in 2005 and ten in 2007. In addition to the 18 participating UEY sites, information was collected on one pilot UEY project to explore sustainability of the UEY Initiative. The case studies involved a document review, site visits and individual or group interviews with a total of 35 key informant interviewees. Twelve key informant interviews with federal and provincial officials and a literature review were also completed.

Limitations

As with any evaluation there were challenges encountered in implementing the methodologies for the UEY evaluation. These resulted in the following limitations to the findings and conclusions of this evaluation:

Lower than expected response rates in surveys and case studies, despite multiple solicitations. Possible explanations for low response rate include elapsed time since the end of the 2005 projects and data collection was conducted during the period when 2007 projects were nearing the end of the project, thus, wrapping up final project deliverables.

Possible bias in project reporting. The only line of evidence to include all UEY projects was the document and file review, which consisted of project self-reports to HRSDC as required under their funding agreements. The likelihood of their accuracy is enhanced because the reports would be circulated and therefore subject to quality control. However, the risk that the reports highlight successes and give less attention to challenges may exist.

Challenges in attribution of results to UEY. As identified throughout the report, for several of the expected outcomes, programs other than the UEY Initiative with similar objectives for early childhood development were also operating in some areas of Canada. As would be expected when evaluating the impact of projects with complex interactions with other activities and people in the community, it is difficult to attribute the observed results solely to UEY.

Findings

Evaluation findings were synthesized across the lines of evidence and across evaluation questions into three main issue areas: relevance, performance and lessons learned.

Relevance

The evaluation evidence suggests that the UEY Initiative was relevant to the needs of communities working to improve life chances for their young children, and that the Initiative was very much in keeping with federal government, HRSDC and provincial government policies and programming related to early childhood development. The UEY Initiative was conceived at a time when several converging factors created an ideal environment for the demonstration of federal leadership in an area that was cresting in terms of interest in other jurisdictions. There was demonstrable need for the contributions the Initiative offered within the many community coalitions working to improve early child development in their communities, at least sufficient to warrant the level of financial commitment established for the UEY Initiative. In addition, at the time it was implemented, UEY was highly relevant to federal objectives and roles. The evidence suggests that the UEY Initiative contributed to a broadening of efforts in early childhood development in Canada in the mid-2000s, catalyzing actions and drawing research into decision-making.

The evaluation found that the objectives of UEY fit well under the strategic outcome “Income security, access to opportunities and well-being for individuals, families and communities”. In addition, the UEY Initiative is in keeping with, and complements, a broader set of HRSDC and other federal government Initiatives targeting the well-being of young children. Building knowledge and gathering information were seen as appropriate roles for the federal government, as these activities brought a national perspective on early childhood development issues and in the use of standardized data collection instruments.

Performance

Through the UEY Initiative, participating communities produced research and community mapping reports, conducted planning sessions based on the research findings, and developed Action Plans. The evaluation results suggested that this contributed to: better understanding among community members of the experiences of Canadian children in their early years; participating communities addressing the needs of children age six and under; and communities making informed decisions that stand to benefit the lives of young children. The Initiative may also have contributed to the development of inclusive communities. The evaluation provided many examples of how the UEY research process and results have been used to inform the development of, and garner support for, changes in policies, programs and services for children and families.

The findings suggest that UEY communities have laid some groundwork for ongoing efforts to address child development. Most have established extensive partnerships with community organizations and individuals, and strengthened linkages with provincial and municipal governments and school boards. Decision-makers in health and social service institutions and various levels of government reportedly value and are using the data that the UEY Initiative has produced. In some cases, bodies other than UEY coalitions have adopted a new research-oriented approach to planning based on the UEY model. Moreover, the evaluation findings suggest that after the UEY funding ended, many participating communities continued to partner and build networks to address early childhood

development issues, and transfer knowledge to address early childhood development issues. Overall, the evaluation evidence suggests that UEY efforts are being sustained, at least to some degree, as communities commit to move forward with implementing their Action Plans and in trying to find other resources to support their efforts.

The evaluation findings suggest that through its activities, the UEY Initiative was supportive of building community capacity to better address early childhood issues. The UEY approach built on community-level collaboration and partnerships to help develop a collective response to early childhood needs. The networks of dedicated people, the combination of national instruments and community level data and the sharing of information and tools among communities were seen as especially valuable. The Initiative made an important contribution to increasing awareness of the importance of early childhood development within communities, as well as provincial governments. Key elements of the UEY approach – in particular the Early Development Instrument (EDI) and mapping approaches to understanding communities – have become, or are becoming, institutionalized in many jurisdictions, which although not attributable solely to UEY, this illustrates UEY’s convergence of interests with those of the provinces around early childhood development (ECD) in the last decade.

Lessons Learned and Transferability of the UEY Approach

Valuable lessons were learned by communities through the UEY Initiative about the use of research to inform the development of community programs and services. The UEY Initiative’s community research component was seen as having provided a unique and highly valuable contribution, providing an example of how data on the state of children’s development could inform community-level understanding, attitudes, and actions, and contribute to addressing areas of identified need. An additional lesson learned was that given the complexities and scope of the research component, and in order to maximise the benefits of the major investment in community-level research, a longer funding time frame and ensuring transition toward effective implementation of the Action Plan would have been beneficial.

The great majority of those who participated in the evaluation, including government and a range of community respondents believed that that the UEY approach is transferable to other populations and issues. The data suggest that successful transfer would necessitate a full alignment with provincial orientations and investment priorities.

Overall Conclusion

While some of the results of this evaluation cannot be extrapolated to the full set of 36 UEY given the response rate, the findings suggest that the UEY Initiative contributed to the achievement of its expected longer term outcome: progress toward inclusive communities that are responsive to the needs of children and families. The unique contribution made by UEY is harder to ascertain, as UEY contributions were closely linked to ongoing increasing prioritization and investment in children’s early years, especially in some provinces. There is nonetheless evidence to suggest that UEY contributed to, supported and in some cases catalyzed actions that should benefit children’s developmental

outcomes. The evaluation shows the value of the research component of the UEY Initiative in generating and building knowledge in the area of early childhood development for communities and governments. This approach may have applicability for other areas that require local solutions to complex social issues.

Management Response

Introduction

The Understanding the Early Years (UEY) Initiative summative evaluation was designed to examine issues related to the relevance and performance of the Initiative, as well as lessons learned and transferability of the UEY model. This model used community research as a tool to stimulate and inform community action and investments.

The Community Development and Partnerships Directorate (CDPD) within the Income Security and Social Development Branch had responsibility for the UEY Initiative. The evaluation identified lessons learned with respect to the design and performance of the Initiative. These lessons learned as outlined in the evaluation report, and the experience of those closely involved in the UEY Initiative, can be used to inform subsequent policy and program design that involves working with communities to find solutions locally for groups facing complex and continuous social challenges. These lessons can be applied to the work the Government of Canada is planning to undertake to complement community efforts to address social issues by encouraging the development of government/community partnerships as announced in Budget 2011.

Lessons Learned

The community research component was a unique and highly valuable tool to inform and engage community understanding and involvement. However, given the complexities and scope of the research a longer funding time frame and ensuring transition to implementation of the Action Plan would have been beneficial

CDPD management acknowledges the importance that the UEY Initiative's research component played in enabling communities to generate reliable local evidence related to early childhood development, and upon which to base decisions about local approaches to address the issues identified. Participants in the evaluation indicated that the data collected from each UEY project's two sets of data collections (i.e. the Early Development Instrument and the Parent Interviews and Direct Assessment of Children Survey) were the most valuable aspect of the Initiative, because these data generated local information that could be used to influence attitudes and understanding in the community. The information forged new partnerships within the communities and influenced changes in public policy and delivery of services related to early childhood development. For example, several of the provinces and territories have adopted the Early Childhood Development Instrument for use throughout their jurisdictions, with others exploring province-wide or territory-wide coverage in the future.

The information obtained from UEY projects' two sets of data collections has been of particular importance and value to each of the communities that participated in the Initiative. In the effort to share the research findings of the UEY projects more broadly, the Community Research Reports for each UEY project have been posted on HRSDC's

website. It is recognized that more consideration could have been given at the planning stages as to how the community data sets would continue to be used to inform future policy analysis, both at the community and national level.

As pointed out in the evaluation report and by project participants who participated in the “UEY Legacy Forum” in March 2010³, projects that involve mobilizing partnerships centred around research require sufficient time and ideally would be funded for a minimum of four or five years. In addition, it was suggested that sustainability of the projects should have been considered by all partners from the beginning and that governments need to work together to facilitate effective complementary policy development and funding.

In applying these lessons learned to the current Social Partnerships work being done by the Department, recognition also needs to be given to the fact that programs must be informed by reliable and attainable evidence that is relevant for the specific user, which in many cases is at the local or community level. There is a role for the federal government in supporting the collection of data, especially in the case of multiple communities doing similar research given the economies of scale and the benefit of using standardized instruments.

Value of facilitating partnerships and opportunities for information sharing

As indicated above, the summative evaluation report’s findings indicated that the UEY Initiative facilitated partnerships and opportunities for information sharing at the local level. The experience of CDPD project staff has also indicated that the Initiative provided the opportunity for the UEY projects to do this at the regional and national level as well. Many of the UEY projects, particularly those in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Nova Scotia, forged successful partnerships, which allowed for significant exchanges of information and knowledge. For example, businesses in many UEY communities began to understand that healthy families and children had an impact on the economic success of communities and provided in-kind and cash resources to support the projects. For example, in one community, a school bus was donated and outfitted to respond to the need for a mobile “hub” to service families living in outlying areas. As a result, UEY projects from a particular region often provided a regional analysis or perspective on the status of children and families in the communities comprising their respective projects.

Throughout the duration of the Initiative, UEY project members were brought together in Ottawa to undertake training on various aspects of the project, such as use of survey instruments, community-mapping software, or preparation of research reports. These meetings often led to significant and invaluable information-sharing opportunities between the UEY projects. Furthermore, the “UEY Legacy Forum” also provided a valuable opportunity for participants to meet face-to-face to share key factors that contributed to the success of their projects and to discuss how aspects of the community-mobilization approach could inform policy and program development to address issues other than early childhood development. One of the key messages reiterated by the forum

³ As the Initiative was sunsetting, CDPD held a forum bringing all 49 project participants and federal representatives together to gather knowledge and to exchange ideas based on their experiences.

participants was that the position of the UEY community coordinator, which was supported by HRSDC's project funding, was invaluable as they were the liaison with the community and were essential in facilitating partnerships and enabling the data collection. Future community-based social partnership supported by HRSDC need to continue to recognize that successful outcomes are linked to supporting local capacity.

Similar to the current Social Partnerships approach being examined, where local partners are actively engaged, the UEY Initiative recognized the importance of a community coalition in mobilizing the community, both in terms of identifying their needs through active participation in the data-collection phase and in developing the Community Action Plan. Through their shared values of recognizing the importance of early childhood development, the coalition was able to leverage support at the community level. In moving forward, it is important to acknowledge that community coalitions need financial and in-kind supports from various partners if they are to be successful.

In conclusion, the UEY Initiative demonstrates that solutions to local social challenges can be addressed by equipping community partners with relevant evidence with which to fully understand the issue. This information can catalyze communities and build on existing partnerships and can foster new linkages which can lead to action. In addition, building effective social partnerships also takes time upfront to effectively plan, carefully consider the longer-term outcomes, and evaluate.

1. Introduction

1.1 Evaluation purpose and context

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's (HRSDC's) Understanding the Early Years (UEY) Initiative aimed to enhance communities' capacity to support young children and their families. This was to be accomplished by developing and using quality local information to foster community mobilization and to make informed, collective decisions on concrete actions to enhance children's lives as well as building on the strengths of existing local approaches to support young children and their families. The objectives of the evaluation were to assess the impacts of the UEY Initiative in participating communities and to identify lessons learned using the UEY model. The evaluation addressed the UEY Initiative's:

- *relevance*: the extent to which the Initiative addressed a demonstrable need, was appropriate to the federal government, and was responsive to the needs of Canadians;
- *performance*: the extent to which effectiveness and value were achieved by the Initiative and;
- *lessons learned and transferability of the model*: lessons that have been learned using the UEY model and the feasibility of using it elsewhere.

Drawing on the experiences of a number of government initiatives relating to early child development and the results of 12 UEY pilot projects, the UEY Initiative was implemented in 2004. In total, 36 projects were funded, 21 community projects ran from 2005 to 2008 and 15 projects operated over the 2007 to 2010 period. The focus of the summative evaluation is on the UEY Initiative and not the pilot projects.

The UEY Initiative, which ended in March 2011, used a distinct approach for achieving community-level impacts. The evaluation is expected to contribute to an understanding of the importance of research to inform the development of community programs and services, to assess the impact of the Initiative in funded communities and to provide lessons learned for future programming of a similar nature.

2. Initiative Profile

2.1 Overview: Initiative Rationale and Project Selection

2.1.1 Rationale

The UEY Initiative was developed as a pilot research initiative from 1999 to 2007 to enhance knowledge of community factors that influence early childhood development. Based on the results of 12 pilot projects (five funded from 1999 - 2000 to 2005 - 2006 and seven funded from 2001 - 2002 to 2006 - 2007), the seven-year national UEY Initiative was implemented starting in 2004. Twenty-one community projects ran from 2005 to 2008 and a further fifteen projects operated during the 2007 to 2010 period.

The UEY Initiative was based on the following guiding principles:⁴

- A good start in the early years of life enhances children's well-being and lays the foundation for learning, behaviour and health as they grow;
- A child's family and community are key influences on the child's development and overall well-being;
- Research and knowledge are critical to the development of informed policies, programs and service delivery approaches that can enhance early childhood development outcomes; and
- Communities can mobilize their citizens and resources to find creative and effective ways to address challenges facing their young children and their families.

The UEY objective was to enable community members to work together to address the needs of young children aged six years and under by:

- Enhancing family and community understanding about the importance of young children's development and approaches to help children thrive; and
- Strengthening their ability to use local data to help them make decisions to enhance children's lives.⁵

2.1.2 Project Selection

UEY community projects were selected through a Call for Proposals process. Information and application forms and guides were disseminated mainly by Call for Proposals through on-line networks that link HRSDC and community organizations active in early childhood development. Applications then underwent a multi-stage review process. In a

⁴ HRSDC, Overview of The Understanding the Early Years Initiative.

⁵ Ibid.

first, internal review, it was determined whether applications met the following set of mandatory eligibility criteria:⁶

- The applicant organization was a legally incorporated not-for-profit organization and was actively pursuing social development issues;
- The proposed community was place-based: located within a certain geographical location defined by boundaries understood by residents. The geography had to be continuous or contiguous, and people within these boundaries shared a sense of belonging and identify with all, or parts, of the geographic community;
- The proposed community had to have an existing community coalition with experience and a record of accomplishments in dealing with social issues, such as early childhood education, homelessness or poverty. It was intended that each community project would involve the participation of parents, teachers, schools, school boards, community organizations and others interested in the well-being of children;
- Applicants were required to identify (in advance) all local schools/school boards (or their equivalent) that were willing to participate;
- Within the community, there had to have been suitable potential candidates (with appropriate skill sets and leadership qualities) for the UEY position of community coordinator;
- The proposed community was required to have at least 300 five-year old children entering senior kindergarten (or equivalent) in the upcoming school year.

Applications were then subject to an internal review by regional and national HRSDC staff using a structured scoring grid⁷, and then to an external review by provincial government officials.

There were a total of 36 successful applicants selected during the 2005 and 2006 Call for Proposals. Thirty-five proposals were received in response to the 2005 Call for Proposals, of which 21 (60%) were funded. In 2006, the Call for Proposals resulted in 31 proposals being received, of which 15 (48%) were funded.

UEY communities selected for funding included both urban and rural communities that were home to children from diverse cultural, linguistic and economic backgrounds, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, and children in immigrant families and low-income families. Table 1 summarizes the number of UEY projects funded by region and setting in 2005 and 2007.

⁶ CFP Application Template, Final, February 2005.

⁷ Internal Assessment Scoring Grid, April 2005.

Table 1 Number of UEY Projects Funded in 2005 and 2007		
Funding in Region and Setting	Number of projects funded in 2005	Number of projects funded in 2007
Region		
BC	6	6
Prairies (AB, SK, MB)	2	5
Central (ON, QC)	9	2
Atlantic (NB, NS)	4	2
Setting		
Rural	4	4
Urban	9	5
Mixed	8	6
Total	21	15

2.2 Initiative Resources and Activities

2.2.1 Resources

UEY Initiative resources

The 2004 federal budget set aside \$68 million (\$34.5 million in operating funds, and \$33.5 million in contribution funding) over seven years for the UEY Initiative. UEY provided Contribution Agreement funding and was managed centrally within HRSDC. The operating funds for UEY included funding to undertake the research component and funds for staff to administer the program.

The September 2006 Expenditure Review reduced the Initiative's original budget to \$45.3 million (\$23.9 million for operating and \$21.4 million for contributions). A subsequent financial decision in late 2007 reduced the budget to \$39.8 million (\$23.4 million in operating funds and \$16.4 million in contribution funding).

Funds per community

The UEY Initiative provided three years of Contribution Agreement funding to recipient organizations, who hired a project coordinator to mobilize community partners and strengthen community coalitions by means of three activities of the UEY projects: 1) generating information; 2) building knowledge; and 3) enabling the community. UEY funds were used to pay for:⁸

- Salary of the project coordinator and other project staff such as a researcher;

⁸ CALL FOR PROPOSALS, Social Development Partnerships Program (SDPP), *Understanding the Early Years (UEY) Initiative, Guide for Applicants*, February 2005; CALL FOR PROPOSALS, Social Development Partnerships Program (SDPP), *Understanding the Early Years (UEY) Initiative, Guide for Applicants*, June 2006.

- Replacement costs for teachers who attended training sessions and for their time spent completing questionnaires;
- Data analysis costs and data collection costs for some projects;
- Non-salary costs such as utilities, materials, supplies, travel, insurance, rental of premises, leasing or purchasing of equipment and supplies, translation, costs of evaluations and assessments, performance monitoring and reporting costs, data collection and communications; and
- Knowledge transfer and community engagement activities.

Community-level activities

UEY Initiative activities were sequentially launched in three distinct phases:

Phase I: Generating information

Research was conducted by independent contractors and the local UEY project staff, using a set of tools and data collection methods that included: the Early Development Instrument (EDI) that measured the school readiness of kindergarten children prior to Grade 1; the Parent Interviews and Direct Assessments of Children Survey (PIDACS) which examined the relationship between the development of kindergarten children and various family and community factors that could influence that development (an adaptation of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) for community-level research); the inventory of Community Programs and Services and; community socioeconomic characteristics based on the 2001 and 2006 Canadian Censuses.

Phase II: Building knowledge

Information generation activities of Phase I led to the production of two main reports: a Community Research Report providing UEY community projects with the results of the PIDACS (and the EDI for the 2005 projects); and, a Community Mapping Report presenting EDI, inventory of community programs and services and Census data. Both the EDI and the PIDACS reports indicated areas of strength and gaps in the community.

Using these reports along with additional tools and resources provided to UEY projects, the UEY recipient organizations and co-ordinators then worked collaboratively with their community coalitions and other community members to create an evidence-based Community Action Plan. Community coalition members consisted of school board representatives, parents, officials from non-profit organizations and others interested in early childhood development issues. The purpose of the Action Plan was to build on community resources and strengths to address identified gaps in programs and services for young children and their families.

Phase III: Enabling the community

Strengthening of local networks and partnerships and the transfer of knowledge were important processes that enabled communities to develop and share UYEY research and implement the Action Plans. To support these processes, UYEY projects were provided with a resource to provide guidance in and dissemination of research findings out into the communities.⁹ In addition, workshops in Ottawa were held to provide UYEY communities with an opportunity to exchange information and knowledge and to share their experiences with respect to the project.

Monitoring and reporting

UEY projects provided monitoring data as required by Contribution Agreements, including the submission of quarterly Activity and Progress Reports based on templates provided by HRSDC,¹⁰ and quarterly financial reports. HRSDC staff also completed forms that provided internal updates on project progress.

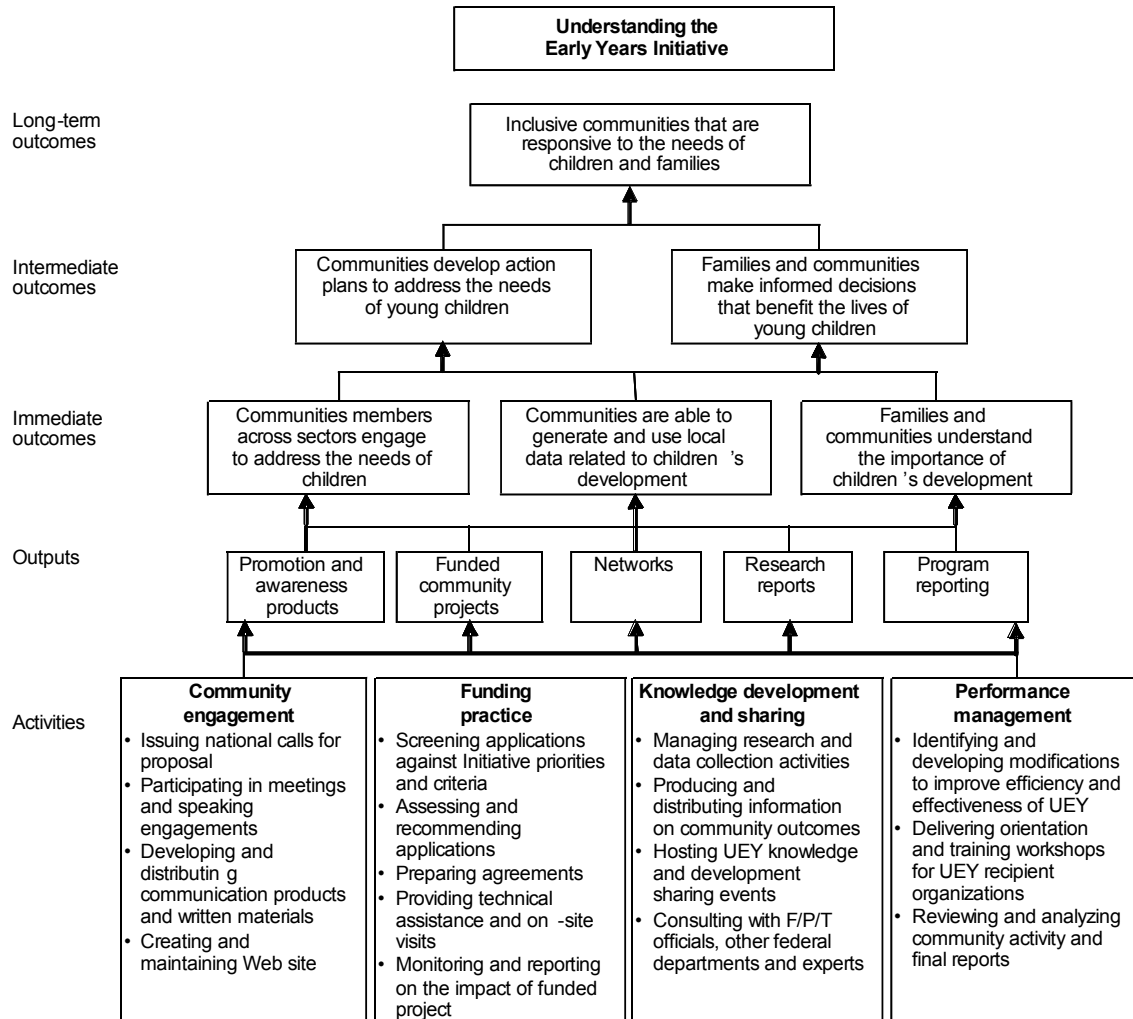
2.3 Logic Model

The logic model for the UYEY Initiative demonstrates the intended relationships between the Initiative's activities and its expected immediate, intermediate and long-term outcomes.

⁹ Human Resources and Social Development Canada, Social Development Sectors Branch, *Sharing the Knowledge*, January 2007.

¹⁰ UYEY Activity and Progress Report Template.

Logic model of the UEY Initiative¹¹



¹¹ HRSDC, *Understanding the Early Years Initiative ACCOUNTABILITY, AUDIT AND RISK FRAMEWORK An Integrated Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework and Risk-Based Audit Framework*, August 2007, p. 19.

3. Evaluation Methodology

3.1 Formative evaluation

A formative evaluation¹² of the UEY Initiative was completed in June 2009. It addressed the Initiative's design and implementation, progress toward achieving objectives and accountability issues. This evaluation identified several potential operational improvements for UEY and guidance on the design of the summative evaluation.

3.2 Summative Evaluation Questions

The summative evaluation addressed the issues of relevance, performance and lessons learned. Appendix A sets out the evaluation matrix showing the evaluation issues and questions addressed by each method.

3.3 Data Sources and Collection Methods

The evaluation integrated results from six lines of evidence:

- Literature review;
- Document and file review;
- Key informant interviews with federal and provincial officials;
- Survey of UEY project team members;
- Survey of coalition members; and
- Case studies.

These research methods were undertaken between July and December 2010. The evaluation findings include data from all projects as collected through the document and file review. Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with key informants who were knowledgeable or had experience with early childhood programs. In addition, data from case studies, survey of UEY project team members and survey of UEY community coalition members was collected for 18 of the 36 UEY projects (50%). Of these eighteen projects, eight were from 2005 and ten were from 2007. In addition to the 18 participating UEY sites, information was collected on one pilot UEY project to explore sustainability of the UEY Initiative. The projects participating in the data collection covered all provinces, all types of project recipient organizations (school boards, non-profit agencies and other public sector agencies) and rural, mixed and urban settings.

¹² HRSDC, Evaluation Directorate, *Formative Evaluation of the Understanding the Early Years Initiative, Final Report*, June 2009, p. 47-48.

3.3.1 Document and File Review

The review collected and synthesized relevant background documents, project files and pre-existing secondary data to provide evidence for some of the evaluation questions. The review examined available UEY and other federal government documents, and Initiative files that included reports from participating projects in the 2005 and 2006 Calls for Proposals. The review did not include projects undertaken in the pilot phases. The review was organized around the set of questions identified for the evaluation, and a set of pre-determined indicators for each question.

For information on the impacts of the UEY Initiative the document and file review relied heavily on project reports submitted by the recipient organizations in each community as part of their contribution agreement with HRSDC. These reports contained information about the activities undertaken in the communities, and the proponents' assessments of what had been achieved.

Based on the project reports and the other supporting documentation, the review was able to identify findings in three areas: relevance, performance and lessons learned.

3.3.2 Updated Literature Review

This line of evidence was an update of the formative evaluation's literature review. The literature review was aimed at providing current information on federal, provincial and territorial interest and funding for early childhood initiatives. It also updated research and evaluation findings of similar programs since the formative evaluation. Sources of information for the literature review included published national and international literature on early childhood development programs similar to the UEY Initiative.

3.3.3 Key Informant Interviews with Federal and Provincial Officials

The objective of the key informant interviews was to assess the relevance of the UEY Initiative's alignment with HRSDC and federal government objectives, progress toward the achievement of intermediate and longer-term outcomes, lessons learned and transferability of the model.

Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 12 key informants who were knowledgeable or had experience with early childhood programs, including six from three federal departments and six representatives from provincial governments. All had some knowledge of the UEY Initiative.

These qualitative data were analyzed using a matrix approach, where responses and evaluation questions were arrayed, and emerging themes were synthesized for each question.

3.3.4 Survey of UEY Community Project Team Members

The objective of the survey of community team members was to assess the progress toward the achievement of intermediate and long-term outcomes as well as the Initiative's efficiency. The survey also collected information on the lessons learned and transferability of the UEY model to other populations and issues.

The survey population consisted of the main community project team members from 24 UEY sites that had not been invited to participate in the case studies. Each UEY site was considered to have three main project team members: the Executive Director of the UEY recipient organization, the UEY co-ordinator and the UEY researcher, with a total potential sample of 72 respondents. Eleven of the 24 projects ultimately participated in this survey, four of which were funded in 2005, and seven of which were funded in 2007. From the 11 participating UEY sites, 19 project team members completed the survey. Nine respondents represented 2005 funded projects and 10 represented 2007 funded projects.

To maximize the response rate, respondents were asked to complete a web survey followed by a telephone interview. The web survey was used to obtain factual information that required respondents to refer to documents to provide information. It also allowed respondents from the 2005 projects sufficient time to recall information dating back a few years. The subsequent telephone interviews allowed for further clarification or for obtaining more in-depth information than was provided in the web survey. Fifteen of the 19 community project team members who completed the web survey participated in the subsequent telephone interview. The survey was divided into two sections: project performance; and lessons learned and the transferability of the UEY project to other populations and social issues.

3.3.5 Survey of UEY Community Coalition Members

3.3.5.1 Sampling and Data Collection

The objective of the survey of community coalition members was to assess progress toward the achievement of intermediate and long-term outcomes, and to collect information on the lessons learned and transferability of the model to other populations and issues. The community coalitions consisted of groups of individuals and organizations working with the UEY project in the communities (e.g., parents, teachers, local businesses, and social or health service providers).

The survey population consisted of the coalition members of UEY sites not selected for case studies. Each project had 10 to 15 coalition members. In order to obtain contact information (i.e. names, mailing addresses, and telephone numbers) of the coalition members, UEY project Executive Directors were asked to contact their coalition members and obtain their agreement to participate in the evaluation. Of the 91 coalition members who agreed to participate, 61 interviews were completed. Evaluators were not able to reach the remaining contacts. The successful survey interviews included 32 from projects

funded in 2005 and 29 from 2007. The 61 completed surveys represented 12 UEY sites, 6 projects funded in 2005 and 6 projects funded in 2007. This includes the same projects that responded to the survey of community project team members and two additional projects.

The questionnaire had three sections: the nature and length of the involvement of the coalition member with the UEY project; the performance of the project (including questions about the Action Plan); and lessons learned and the transferability of the UEY project to other populations and social issues.

The unit of analysis for the survey was the survey respondents. However, as there were multiple responses about the same projects, the number of different projects represented in each response category was identified.

3.3.6 Case Studies of UEY Projects

The objective of the case studies was to gather information on the longer term results of the program and the sustainability of the activities, lessons learned and transferability of the model, along with details of the community contexts within which the projects were implemented.

Initially, 10 potential case studies were randomly selected, taking into consideration their region of Canada; urban, rural or mixed setting; language; type of project recipient organization (school board, other public sector entity; or not-for-profit organization or coalition); and relative level of socio-economic advantage or disadvantage.¹³ A sample of 10 backup case studies was also selected, using the same criteria and aiming for the same overall distribution of characteristics.

All 10 initial cases were then invited to participate in the case studies. The most similar case studies from the back up list were selected to replace those among the initial 10 case studies that declined to participate. As the case study solicitation process from the initial list of 10 potential cases and 10 backup cases had yielded only five case studies and none from the 2007 group by the data collection deadline, a sixth was solicited from among three 2007 projects that had not responded to the survey invitations. One of these accepted and was included, for a total of six completed cases out of 15¹⁴ that were contacted for the case studies.

The cases studies included the following elements:

Document review. A document review was conducted of all materials on this project held by HSRDC. This included: proposal and supporting documentation; contribution agreement and amendments; documents from any prior or parallel projects or activities

¹³ This variable was intended to allow taking into consideration the socio-economic context of communities as they moved toward implementing their action plans, in the context of the recent economic downturn. It was proxied by percentage change between 2008 and 2009 in employment insurance beneficiaries receiving regular benefits by census agglomeration (Statistics Canada, employment insurance and other transfers tables: e.g. <http://www40.statcan.gc.ca/l01/cst01/labor03b-eng.htm>).

¹⁴ Of the 10 sites that were designated as “case study backups”, five were subsequently included in the surveys as the project data collection deadline approached.

related to the UEY project; research, mapping reports and other information collected by projects; promotional materials; knowledge translation and outreach materials; site visit reports prepared by UEY staff; project websites; and any other relevant documentation.

Key informant interviews. Once the project had accepted to participate as a case study, a visit was arranged to the project site and in-person interviews were conducted with individuals identified in the project documentation and /or through discussion with the project recipient organization. Follow-up telephone interviews with relevant individuals who were not available on the day of the visits were also conducted. For the last recruited case, only telephone interviews were conducted. Depending on the site, those interviewed included: the project's community coordinator; members of the community coalition including its chair or president; the recipient organization sponsoring the project; and researchers involved in the UEY research process. Individual or group interviews were conducted with a total of 35 case study participants.

The interviews used a semi-structured interview guide based on the evaluation questions. The qualitative data for each case were synthesized into narrative case reports using basic content analysis, by each evaluation question. The case reports were then subject to a cross case analysis using a matrix approach, summarizing key findings by evaluation question.

3.3.7 Summary of data sources

The table below summarizes the data sources for the evaluation.

Table 2 Number of Participating UEY Projects and Interviews Completed				
Data source	Pilot project	2005 (n = 21 projects)	2007 (n = 15 projects)	Total (n = 36 projects)
File review	N/A	21	15	36
Survey of community project team members (72 potential respondents)	N/A	4 projects 9 interviews	7 projects 10 interviews	11 projects 19 interviews
Survey of community coalition members (190 potential respondents)	N/A	6 projects 32 interviews	6 projects 29 interviews	12 projects 61 interviews
Case studies (15 projects invited)	1 project 6 individuals interviews	4 projects 26 individuals interviews	1 project 3 individuals Interviews	6 projects 35 individuals interviews

3.4 Methodological Limitations

As with any evaluation there were challenges encountered in implementing the methodologies for the UEY evaluation. These resulted in the following limitations to the findings and conclusions of this evaluation:

Lower than expected response rates in surveys and case studies, despite multiple solicitations. Possible explanations for the low response rate include elapsed time since

the end of the 2005 projects and data collection was conducted during the period when 2007 projects were nearing the end of the project, thus, wrapping up final project deliverables. When a response was received, the reasons for refusal given were most often lack of time.

Possible bias in project reporting. The only line of evidence to include all UEY projects was the document and file review, which consisted of project self-reports to HRSDC as required under their funding agreements. The likelihood of their accuracy is enhanced because the reports would be circulated and therefore subject to quality control. However, the risk that the reports highlight successes and give less attention to challenges may exist.

Challenges in attribution of results to UEY. As identified throughout the report, for several of the expected outcomes, programs other than the UEY Initiative with similar objectives for early childhood development were also operating in some areas of Canada. As would be expected when evaluating the impact of projects with complex interactions with other activities and people in the community, it is difficult to attribute the observed results solely to UEY.

4. Findings

This chapter presents the evaluation findings, synthesized across the lines of evidence and across evaluation questions into three main issue areas: relevance of the UHEY Initiative, performance as measured by achievement of value and progress toward achievement of intended outcomes, and lessons learned.

4.1 Findings Related to the Relevance of the UHEY Initiative

The evaluation evidence suggests that the UHEY Initiative was relevant to the needs of communities working to improve life chances for their young children and that the Initiative was in keeping with federal government, HRSDC and provincial government policies and programming related to early childhood development. Building knowledge and gathering information were seen as appropriate roles for the federal government, as these activities brought a national perspective on early childhood development issues and assisted in the use of standardized data collection instruments.

It is important to recognize that the UHEY Initiative was expected to operate for a specified period of time (i.e. seven years) after which the funding for the Initiative was to end. As such, findings suggest that the Initiative served its intended purpose in enabling communities to better understand the needs of young children and families so that communities can work together to enhance programs and services to meet those needs.

4.1.1 Need for UHEY

Data in this section are drawn from: document and file review, literature review, key informant interviews, and case studies.

Initial need

Evidence from all the lines of evidence suggests that there was a demonstrable need for the UHEY Initiative within many communities working to improve life chances for children. The document and file review found that a total of \$14.7 million out of the available \$16.4 million (about 90% of available funds) was used by the recipient organizations. Most of the remaining funds were allocated to projects but not spent for a variety of reasons. This suggests that the level of need was at least sufficient to warrant the level of financial commitment established for the UHEY Initiative.

In addition, federal and provincial key informants concurred that the UHEY Initiative responded to a demonstrable need. All federal representatives interviewed stated that the UHEY Initiative was conceived at a time when several converging factors created an ideal environment for an initiative that aimed at gathering empirical knowledge about the impact of the community on children's development during the early years. Moreover, its

design was aligned with emerging research showing that supportive communities for young children in the early years contribute to later positive developmental outcomes.

In considering whether there is a continued need for the UEY Initiative, findings are less clear. The document and file review focused on evidence of Initiative uptake with the view that evidence of demand for the Initiative among communities across the country would indicate continued need. In two UEY Calls for Proposals, a total of 66 applications were received – 35 in 2005 and 31 in 2007. Of these sixty-six applications, a total of 36 projects (55%) were successfully funded (21 in 2005 and 15 in 2007) in eight provinces. Thus, uptake on the Calls for Proposals exceeded funding capacity. This can be seen as an expression of need for the kind of research and organizational support offered by the UEY Initiative.

Federal and provincial government representatives agreed that there is a continued need for governments to focus on early childhood development, especially in terms of school readiness. The findings from the key informant interviews show that the circumstances that led to the creation of the Initiative are still present. The continued need in communities for support in collecting and applying empirical data on young children's development is demonstrated by an increased use of EDI in planning and policy development by provinces and territories.

From a provincial perspective, the extent to which a continued need was perceived for a UEY-like program depended largely on the jurisdiction under consideration. The evaluation found that provinces are continuing to invest in early childhood development, drawing on research that describes children's development. All provincial jurisdictions interviewed stated they have the desire, intent or commitment to continue the ongoing EDI administration. There is, however, variation in political prioritization, level of resourcing, and degree of organization of action in ECD across jurisdictions. Some provinces are providing ongoing support to community coalitions and mobilization, including continued funding of UEY sites as well as many others. In the larger jurisdictions provincial investments in ECD continue and have considerably exceeded, or will exceed, the UEY support, which was in a relatively small number of communities in each province. It is important to recognize that the UEY Initiative was expected to operate for a specified period of time (i.e. seven years) after which the funding for the Initiative was to end. As such, findings suggest that the Initiative served its intended purpose in enabling communities to better understand the needs of young children and families so that communities can work together to enhance programs and services to meet those needs. There is nonetheless the view that the federal government demonstrate commitment to and leadership in early childhood development, in a national child care plan and other forms of support.

The evaluation findings suggest that there is continued need for federal support for research-driven and other types of early childhood development initiatives in certain jurisdictions but not necessarily for the full UEY approach where relevant data and operational support are available provincially or regionally.

The UEY Initiative was designed to culminate in Community Action Plans based on empirical evidence. The case studies and surveys suggest that more investment is needed to implement UEY Action Plans. Coalition and community project team members reported

that they lack time and resources to ensure implementation of their Action Plans in order to maximize the gains made under the UEY Initiative. This suggests that, in some jurisdictions at least, communities would continue to benefit from some form of continued government support.

Evidence from the research literature

The review of provincial initiatives on ECD found that there has been a burgeoning growth in early childhood interventions across Canada since UEY was launched, and new investments continue to be announced. While research still supports the importance of early intervention, evidence also suggests that the issue may be more complex than originally envisioned, and in particular that parenting variables may largely outweigh community or neighborhood effects. Research questions continue to be framed around the influences of communities and community-based intervention on children's development, but findings are not always supportive of either a strong or a direct link, and some neutral and negative findings as well as positive ones have been reported. Nonetheless, the evidence is now much stronger that early intervention – at least intervention in the early school years – is associated with improved long-term educational and social outcomes, supporting one of UEY's key underlying premises.

4.1.2 Consistency of UEY with departmental and federal government objectives

Data in this section are drawn from: document and file review and key informant interviews.

From these two lines of evidence there was convergence that at the time it was implemented, UEY was relevant to federal government and HRSDC objectives. Interviews with HRSDC officials and other federal and provincial representatives indicated that, following on the 1999 National Children's Agenda¹⁵, the Initiative was one demonstration of federal leadership in ECD, an area that was cresting in interest across jurisdictions. The Communiqué on Early Childhood Development (ECD) of 2000 involved the transfer of funds to the provinces and territories to target healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy; parenting and family supports; early childhood development, learning and care; and community supports¹⁶. Under the Multilateral Framework Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care (2003), the federal government transferred funds to the provinces and territories to fund community-based early learning and child care programs and services. Both agreements have been extended to 2013-2014.

An examination of a 2006-2007 inventory of federal activities reported under Federal/Provincial/Territorial agreements that targeted young children, found that HRSDC was supporting the development of young children through a range of programs including,

¹⁵ Canada, Ministerial Council on Social Policy Renewal, National Children's Agenda Backgrounder, 1999.

¹⁶ Government of Canada, (April 2004). A Canada Fit for Children, p. 7, SD13-4/2004E.

among others,¹⁷ parental and maternity benefits via employment insurance, universal child care benefits, and the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY).

In terms of current alignment, the document and file review found that the objectives and approaches of the UHEY Initiative fit well under HRSDC's current mandate and its strategic outcomes¹⁸, and in particular with its social development program area, which is directed to "support individuals, families and communities in overcoming barriers to social/economic inclusion and well-being."

4.1.3 Alignment with Federal Roles and Responsibilities

Data in this section are drawn from: document and file review, key informant interviews, and case studies.

Interviews with federal and provincial government representatives found that when the UHEY Initiative began it was seen as showing an appropriate federal leadership role, in that some jurisdictions had not yet undertaken any action in ECD, or in using research to support ECD investments. However, the federal government was not the only jurisdiction with interest in acting to improve children's outcomes during the 2005-2010 period. Although the UHEY pilot phase first introduced the Early Development Instrument (EDI) in 1999, by the time the 2005 UHEY projects began, the EDI as well as mapping approaches to understanding communities, and the community coalition model, were already being used in some jurisdictions. The document and file review found evidence that the UHEY Initiative was designed and implemented with provincial/territorial support in a social policy environment that provided assurance that the Initiative was complementary to provincial and territorial roles and minimized the risk of duplication. Provincial and territorial officials were informed of federal plans for the national UHEY Initiative and assisted with the assessment of UHEY proposals.

Although the UHEY Initiative was designed to complement provincial/territorial roles, evidence from the case studies and interviews with provincial government representatives showed some overlap with initiatives focusing on ECD and a research-based approach in some provinces. In particular, by 2007, there was notable sustained investment in this approach. This is reflected in the pattern of interest in the UHEY Initiative. Provinces with existing activities had the highest number of projects: these were British Columbia (12 projects) and Ontario (9 projects). The result of this was that there was both some convergence of approaches and some complementarities with initiatives being implemented by some provinces. The case studies indicated that although there was overlap of funding from other sources in some UHEY projects, these were reportedly used to complement and not to duplicate efforts. In other jurisdictions, where there was less investment in using research to support programming at the time, UHEY gave communities unprecedented

¹⁷ Federal Activities and Expenditures for Young Children (FAEYC) Database, http://www.socialunion.gc.ca/ecdelcc_ae/2007/en/a_e_report.pdf.

¹⁸ HRSDC, 2010-2011 Report on Plans and Priorities, <http://www.tbs-sct.ca/rpp/2010-2011/inst/csd/csdpr-eng.asp?>; HRSDC, 2008-2009 Departmental Performance Report for Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, <http://www.tbs-sct.ca/dpr-rmr/2008-2009/inst/csd/csdpr-eng.asp?>

access to new data about children's developmental status and community resources and new ways of looking at their needs and resources for young children.

In terms of current alignment, federal and provincial government representatives noted that current federal priorities have changed, so early childhood development has declined in importance. In addition, at this point in time, not all parts of the UEY approach are seen as appropriate for direct federal investment. While research and the creation of demonstration programs are still seen as relevant federal roles especially in areas where leadership is needed, government representatives, especially at the federal level, see that the federal government now prefers to play a lesser role in community mobilization for ECD issues than when UEY was first implemented.

4.2 Findings Related to the Performance of the UEY Initiative

The evaluation results suggest that the UEY projects produced research and community mapping reports, conducted planning sessions based on the research findings, and developed Action Plans. The findings suggest that UEY communities have laid important groundwork for ongoing efforts to address child development. The evaluation results also suggest that the UEY Initiative contributed to: better understanding among community members of the experiences of Canadian children in their early years; participating communities addressing the needs of children age six and under; and communities making informed decisions that benefited the lives of young children. In this way the UEY may also have contributed to the development of inclusive communities.

4.2.1 Achievement of Immediate Intended Outcomes

Data in this section are drawn from the document and file review. Available reports and documents indicate in anecdotal terms that community engagement in early childhood development existed prior to UEY. The presence of a community coalition with a mandate to address social development issues such as ECD was a UEY eligibility requirement. Although it was difficult to assess the extent of pre-existing community engagement, the project reports reviewed do indicate uniformly that the UEY Initiative successfully expanded the level of community engagement. The reports also indicate that this expansion of engagement has been accomplished through a number of different types of efforts:

- Early project presentations to community members and organizations of intermediaries such as school board members, teachers, health and social service workers and care givers, describing the UEY Initiative and seeking to recruit participation;
- The UEY research process itself, whereby organizations and individuals became aware of the Initiative and had an opportunity to participate;
- Periodic community events reporting on progress, reporting on research findings and actively seeking advice from the community as a basis for developing the Action Plans;

- Dissemination of UEY materials and reports to prospective participants; and,
- Community involvement, for example in-kind or financial contributions from the business community, in specific UEY projects.

4.2.1.1 Communities Are Able to Generate and Use Local Data Related to Children's Development

A substantial number of children and their parents contributed to knowledge of the experiences of young children in Canada as part of the UEY Initiative, by the application of the two main research elements: the Parent Interviews and Direct Assessment of Children Survey (PIDACS) and the EDI.

For the 36 participating communities, a total of 14,169 children and 13,084 responded to the PIDACS. Participation in the EDI was also substantial with 43,632 children participating in the EDI research.

As noted above, EDI was in use prior to the 2005 and 2007 UEY projects in some communities. It must be recognized that the EDI is used more widely than just for the UEY Initiative, in particular by school boards. As well, the PIDACS was a community-level adaptation of an existing national survey, the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY). This means that care must be taken in attributing the knowledge gained through the use of these tools exclusively to the UEY Initiative.

Production of research and use in decision-making

The document review showed that research was used in decision-making in every participating community. Every community based its project on the collection of local data and on data provided by HRSDC-supported research at the national level. In every case this led to a mapping report and a research report that together described in considerable detail the state of the communities' young children, the facilities, programs and services available to them and their parents, and the gaps that existed. Furthermore, every project used this information as a basis for developing an Action Plan for pursuing the community's objectives.

The most common direct use of the UEY research, as demonstrated in the Action Plans, was to identify the range of issues that the community needed to address, and then to set priorities for action in the short and longer terms. For example, communities typically identified from the research findings that they needed more of a certain type of program or service such as more child care spaces, programming geared to specific population groups, or services in outlying areas where children were lagging behind in certain measures of development.

UEY community products developed

The document and file review described the number and types of products that were produced as a result of the UEY, based on the UEY data and the efforts of the community coalitions to draw research findings into a coherent plan for their communities. These

included: resource guides (29 projects); research briefs (29 projects); website page/web tools (23 projects); presentations (21 projects); UEY brochures/fact sheets (19 projects); posters/calendars (17 projects); parenting tools (16 projects); a UEY Newsletter (15 projects); and, news articles, press releases, media interviews, television ads, CDs/DVDs/videos, and various other items. They were designed to provide information about early childhood development status and resources to the general public, intermediaries such as teachers, care givers and people working in health and social services positions, and parents.

4.2.2 UEY contribution to a better understanding of the early years' experiences of Canadian children growing up in various social, economic, cultural and geographical environments

The evaluation findings suggest that UEY helped participating communities better understand the early years' experiences of their children. All the lines of evidence converge on the finding that the data provided through UEY was useful to communities. As the previous section showed, there was considerable evidence from project reports that an extensive and broad array of products and community events were carried out, focusing on local UEY research findings and what they showed about needs and assets within communities for programs, resources and coordination to better support early childhood development.

All 19 of the community project team members surveyed agreed that the UEY Initiative led to a better understanding and increased knowledge of the early years' experiences of Canadian children, as did all but one of the 61 coalition members interviewed.

Data from the case studies illustrate ways in which the UEY Initiative made contributions to communities' understanding of the early years' importance for later developmental outcomes. In one case, the access to information provided through the research was seen as having been of enormous benefit to inform and mobilize stakeholders. The research also served to validate service providers' perceptions that the community faced significant challenges. The project increased the perceived importance of prevention among providers. It reportedly increased awareness among the general public of the importance of parents' role in children's development. In another case study, stakeholders reported gaining a better and more broadly shared understanding of their community, and it was realized that crucial data was not being collected and updated.

The findings suggest that gains in understanding considered to be most important were not necessarily among early childhood stakeholders, where the data were often seen as having confirmed what was already suspected by people working with children and families. Gains were more likely among external stakeholders such as municipal governments.

Three of the case studies found that the UEY Initiative gave information about children more credibility to stakeholders who were less directly involved in the front-line work. Much was learned about inequities in the socioeconomic and geographic distributions of developmental outcomes within communities, which was often new to these external stakeholders.

The case studies and document review found that problems in implementing the data collection meant that some projects only had access to their PIDACS data very late; in one of the case studies, the data were not available for dissemination and use with partners before the project ended. The document review noted that these projects were left with the challenges of disseminating the information and forward planning.

Case study respondents in three cases noted that the mapping component of the UEY approach was viewed as highly successful, bringing new insight to communities about inequities in the geographic distributions of socioeconomic characteristics and developmental outcomes. This facilitated the engagement of new partners who had not previously been connected to early childhood actions, in particular municipal governments.

The research process itself was also viewed to be useful by many community members. Almost all of the coalition members surveyed agreed that the research process was useful for orienting future collaboration and action. Case study respondents in two cases noted that they had developed community capacity to engage more critically with research and to understand how research could be beneficial to decision-making for policy and program development that could affect children's outcomes.

4.2.3 Achievement of Intermediate Outcomes

Findings in this section are drawn from: document and file review, surveys of community project team members and community coalition members, and case studies.

All data sources indicate that the UEY initiative achieved its intended outcomes, with greater perceived success among the earlier project wave: coalition members from 2007 projects were less positive in their assessment of overall success than members of 2005 projects (75% of respondents from 2005 projects versus 55% of 2007 projects said the project had been very successful). Fourteen out of 19 community project team members agreed that their project had been very successful. Data on specific expected outcomes are described below.

4.2.3.1 Communities Develop Action Plans to Address the Needs of Young Children

As required under the Contribution Agreements, all the UEY projects surveyed had developed Action Plans, and the file review found that the Plans were directed toward benefiting the lives of young children. While the document review could not determine the quality of the recommendations, or how suitable they were for the communities, it can be said that the large majority of Action Plans included clear statements of objectives and specific, targeted actions to achieve set objectives.

Converging with the findings of the file review, the case study projects' Action Plans' contents ranged in scope from detailed strategic and operational plans with action items and responsibilities identified, to an identification of actions that could be carried out.

The review of the projects' Action Plans documented considerable range and diversity in the action strategies established by the UEY projects. The majority of projects focused on three strategic areas: 1) continued expansion of community awareness and engagement to keep ECD on the public agenda; 2) continued emphasis on collaboration and joint planning; and 3) continued development of new knowledge and continued dissemination of knowledge to help ensure informed decision-making. The majority of projects also emphasized the improvement of specific services for young children and their parents.

Almost all of the community project team members (16 out of 19 respondents) said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the Action Plan that was developed as part of their UEY project. Among the coalition members surveyed, 47 out of 61 (77%) said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their Action Plan.

Survey respondents were asked to rate the extent to which their Action Plans addressed the needs of young children. These ratings confirmed that the Action Plans were seen as achieving this Initiative outcome – although a few respondents were not able to answer the question. All who did answer agreed that their Action Plans addressed the needs of young children at least to some extent.

Although implementation of Action Plans was not part of project funding through the UEY Initiative, it was intended that after developing Action Plans based on sound research and a planning process, communities would continue to implement the Plan once the project was completed. The data suggest that not all the communities surveyed had implemented their Action Plans by the time of the summative evaluation. Eight of the 19 community project team members (42%, equally split between 2005 and 2007 sites) said their Action Plans were implemented, while among coalition members surveyed, 69% (72% of 2005 projects, 66% of 2007 projects) said their Action Plans were implemented. The case studies provided examples of how some Action Plans have been integrated into other, expanded initiatives, such as ones targeting children and youth aged 0 to 17. Case studies also suggested that the Action Plans were generally developed at the end of UEY project funding, and because the research component had taken longer than expected to be carried out, there was not as much time as desired to develop, validate and disseminate the plans.

4.2.3.2 Communities Make Informed Decisions that Benefit the Lives of Young Children

The evaluation provided evidence that UEY helped the participating communities make informed decisions about the lives of young children. Almost all of the surveyed coalition members (92%) and all 19 community project team members agreed that their communities used UEY information for that purpose. According to the survey responses, the UEY research results were most often used in improving services (89% of community project team members and 75% of coalition members reported this) and filling gaps in services (84% of community project team members and 67% of coalition members reported this).

In addition, a majority of the community project team (17/19) and coalition members (2007 – 86%; 2005 – 65%) agreed that as a result of UEY, new or improved services were put into place. Examples of new or improved services or policies based on UEY research data were documented in the case studies and the file review. These were grouped into several types:

- Enhanced planning and coordination: using data to make a case for new services or sites, to identify locations for new services, to improve coordination among providers and reduce duplication of services;
- Redirection of resources towards addressing young children’s physical health and well-being needs and to improve future EDI scores;
- Resource allocation decisions that take specific groups of children’s needs into account rather than making decisions based solely on population;
- Early detection and referral: new mobile early screening programs; enhanced kindergarten registration processes for earlier screening, and new transition to kindergarten programs;
- Integration of EDI results into municipal and regional family-related policies;
- Wraparound services for families of young children: school-based integrated educational, health, social services for parents and preschool children; and
- Professional development for daycare and early school staff focusing on early recognition and attention to developmental delays.

Because Action Plan implementation was at an early stage when the evaluation was undertaken, there was little information available from the case studies on impacts on children and families. However, one case study provided an example. Based on identification of a high rate of deficits in a specific cognitive domain, an intensive intervention was implemented in one school and neighborhood. EDI results are now showing a plausible linkage between this intervention and improvements in cognitive outcomes.

4.2.4 Achievement of Value

Data in this section were drawn from: document and file review and case studies.

As the above sections indicate, the UEY Initiative is found to have made a contribution to moving communities toward an evidence-based, inclusive, collaborative Action Plan to address ECD issues. Thus, its main intended value may have been realized, and given that it is not an ongoing program, it is not necessarily relevant to look for sources of ongoing efficiency or economy as a statement of value for money. Nonetheless, the achievement of value was examined through one other main indicator in this evaluation - leveraging of additional resources. Leveraging of investment from provincial/territorial governments, not-for-profit or private sector sources was not a stated objective of the UEY Initiative, and the terms and conditions for contribution funding included no requirement for matched funding from any source. However, the evaluation results suggest that the

UEY Initiative achieved value in that its funds had a leveraging effect. Survey respondents were asked whether investments had been made in the early years in their communities as a result of UEY. About two-thirds (61%) of coalition members were aware that such investments had been made, mostly through in-kind contributions. The document and file review confirmed these reports, showing that almost all projects reported receiving substantial in-kind contributions from a wide range of partners.

The evaluation also reviewed project reports and financial documentation for evidence of leveraging that may have occurred despite it not being an explicit objective. It was found that only one of the projects reported specific financial contributions, in this case annual commitments from the provincial government and a local non-profit organization. Several other projects reported financial contributions from other than HRSDC but did not specify the amounts.

Almost all projects reported receiving substantial in-kind contributions from a wide range of partners. These were typically in the form of the use of office space, the use of equipment, dedication of the time of managers and staff of organizations, contributions of professional expertise for guidance or for workshops and conferences, and a range of other contributions. The projects did not report the estimated value of these commitments, but they did emphasize how substantial they were and how critical they were to the success of their projects. For eight of the fifteen 2007 projects, the review found reported estimates for the value of the in-kind contributions of the recipient organization. These ranged from about \$14,000 to almost \$200,000, with an average in-kind contribution of about \$75,000.

In the same vein, in all the case study projects at least some resources were obtained from other sources. Case studies suggested that potential duplication was avoided through effective collaboration. In addition, the community collaboration approach created conditions where agencies could share resources, achieving synergies and thus increase value for money and cost-effectiveness.

Aside from an expected finding that projects taking place in a broader geographical area incurred higher travel costs, the file and document review did not find any clear linkage between project expenditures and broad community characteristics. The case studies found that rural and multi-ethnic communities reported having higher costs associated with reaching these communities, because of higher transportation and translation costs, respectively. As well, case study projects that covered multiple governments (for example, several municipalities and/or First Nations) also reported higher costs.

Unanticipated impacts (positive and negative) of the Initiative

The document review found an unanticipated positive impact of one UEY project. This was the creation of a team of teachers and school administrators working toward conduct of the UEY research. The case studies documented some unanticipated positive impacts in terms of engaging municipal governments that had previously been more concerned with economic than social development (two cases), and school boards that had not seen early childhood as part of their mandate (two cases). This was reported to have shifted ideas about resource allocation and policy issues. For example, one case study reported that whereas prior to UEY, municipal and school board elected officials

had tended to allocate equal resources across all parts of the region. UEY data provided an understanding of different levels of risk and social conditions, and consequently different amounts of resources are considered acceptable. In another case, the UEY findings along with other evidence prompted a school board to invest in the development of an Action Plan. This resulted in the creation of several committees with the mandate to address different issues related to ECD.

4.2.5 Achievement of Longer-Term Outcomes

Data in this section were drawn from: document and file review, surveys of community project team members and community coalition members, key informant interviews, and case studies.

4.2.5.1 Inclusive communities that are responsive to the Needs of Children and Families

In this long-term outcome, the UEY Initiative aimed to increase broader community participation and sustainability.¹⁹ As previous results suggest, progress is being made toward these outcomes. In addition, although UEY was not specifically targeted to low income communities or to reducing social and economic exclusion that would reduce inequity in developmental outcomes, increased inclusivity and responsiveness were reflected in communities' approaches to addressing disparities within their boundaries identified through the UEY research. Coalition members agreed that UEY helped their community progress: 89% of those surveyed agreed that UEY made communities more inclusive, and 97% agreed that UEY made their communities more responsive to children's needs. This pattern was similar for the community project team members: 89% agreed that in their community, progress was made toward inclusive communities that are responsive to the needs of children and families. Several ways of addressing inclusivity were identified in the case studies, such as improving reach of services to reach vulnerable children and families, those with poorer access to services and those in low-income sectors.

UEY contribution to continued efforts of UEY communities to address child development

The coalition member survey data suggested that after their projects ended, the 2005 UEY communities continued to engage in partnership- and network-building, transferring knowledge, and carrying out research to understand and build knowledge in the area of early childhood development. Almost all (97%) of coalition members reported that their communities continued to engage in partnership and relationship building for ECD, and 97% also reported that they continued to transfer knowledge. Fewer reported that they continued to carry out research (59%).

¹⁹ HRSDC, *Understanding the Early Years Initiative ACCOUNTABILITY, AUDIT AND RISK FRAMEWORK An Integrated Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework and Risk-Based Audit Framework*, August 2007, p. 18

Carrying out research to understand and build knowledge in the area of early childhood development was considered by the respondents to be the most difficult to continue after the UEY funding ended. The 2007 project coalition members were also divided on whether the community will be likely to continue to carry out research activities: four (14%) think it is extremely likely, seven (24%) that it is very likely, 12 (41%) that it is somewhat likely and four (14%) that it is not very likely. This is similar to the community project team members' survey responses: eight out of nine team members from 2005 projects (89%) said that after UEY funding ended in their community, the community continued to carry out research activities to understand and build knowledge in the area of early childhood development.

All of the case study projects – and this may be the dimension where selection bias in the cases that were able to participate is strongest – have fully sustained, if not further developed their actions in early childhood development. In most cases, this has been enabled by an influx of funding from other sources, most notably provincial and regional government investment in early childhood development – before, during or after UEY. For example, in one case, the project has received ongoing provincial funding from two sources. Although community-level coordination resources have been reduced with the end of UEY funding, implementation of the Action Plan continues. Some communities within that project's territory have obtained funds for Action Plan projects through private or charitable sources. In another case, the project network and its service delivery are now fully sustained through funding from other levels of government. In a third, although the community has had exceptional volunteer support that has succeeded in carrying the efforts forward, there is no ongoing funding other than what participating agencies are willing to commit to specific projects, and ensuring a county-wide response across the many small rural towns remains a challenge. The case studies suggested that many projects (five of the six cases studied) have on-going access to provincial EDI data, some of it prior to their UEY project. This is allowing them to track evolution in children's development and school readiness over time.

In examining UEY's contribution to stimulating investment in research-focused ECD actions by provincial governments, the various factors are hard to untangle. In some provinces, UEY as well as their own jurisdictions' actions may have catalyzed ongoing support. In others, however, provincial government representatives reported that their provinces are continuing with their ECD related activities irrespective of the UEY Initiative.

4.3 Lessons Learned

Many lessons were learned through the UEY Initiative about the use of research to inform the development of community programs and services. The UEY Initiative's community research component was seen as having provided a unique and highly valuable contribution, providing an example of how better data on the state of children's development could inform community-level understanding, attitudes, and actions, and contribute to addressing areas of vulnerability. However, a main lesson learned was that given the complexities and scope of the research component and for the potential of the major investment in community-level research to fully pay off, a longer funding time frame and ensuring transition toward effective implementation of the Action Plan would have been beneficial.

4.3.1 Key elements in the UEY approach that have contributed to achieving UEY's objectives

Data in this section were drawn from: surveys of community project team members and community coalition members, key informant interviews, and case studies.

The table below summarizes findings from the coalition members' survey about the contribution of the three UEY phases in generating changes in the community. Although all three approaches were rated similarly, "generating information" was most highly rated, with 90% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing to this statement.

Table 3	
UEY approach's contribution to generating changes in the community (n = 61)	
	% agree or strongly agree
Generating information	55 (90%)
Building knowledge	51 (84%)
Mobilizing communities	52 (85%)

Responses from the interviews and case studies found that the combination of national instruments and community-level statistically valid data in the research component was seen as the most valuable of the UEY contributions. This component provided access to a pan-Canadian perspective that allowed communities to measure themselves against other parts of the country, while ensuring that specific local and regional issues could be addressed. Within the research component, the mapping work demonstrated how social conditions are related to children's outcomes.

A second key element of the Initiative that contributed to achievement of objectives, noted by provincial government respondents and case study participants, was that it facilitated the participation of networks of community-involved people highly committed to improving outcomes for children. It was noted by some UEY coalition members, as well as by some federal and provincial representatives, that to be most effective, this network required the presence of a full-time coordinator. In this context of community-level collaboration, networking and partnership, the community-level research became a valuable tool to strengthen local networks and partnerships. It stimulated collaborative planning and action, brought people together to discuss the needs of their community's children, encouraged community involvement, and supported the work of a broadly based community coalition in developing, sharing and using knowledge.

Another key contribution to achievement of UEY's objectives, reported by case study participants and community project team members, was the sharing of information and tools among community projects when they had opportunities to interact. This was facilitated by the coordinated national approach and in particular by the national meetings of UEY projects organized by HRSDC.

4.3.2 UEY contribution to strengthening local networks and partnerships

Data in this section were drawn from: surveys of community project team members and community coalition members, and case studies.

In most projects, the community coalitions have continued and adapted after the UEY funding ended. Most of the 2005 projects' community team members surveyed (7 out of 9) said that after the UEY project ended, the community continued to partner and build networks to address early childhood development issues and all of the community project team members from 2007 projects thought that this would be at least somewhat likely. Similarly, 89% of coalition members surveyed indicated that their community either had (for 2005 projects) or would (for 2007 projects) continue its partnerships for early childhood development.

The case studies provided qualitative descriptions of the role of UEY in strengthening local networks and partnerships for community engagement in early childhood development. These indicated that as required by the initiative's eligibility criteria, prior to UEY there was a strong existing level of partnership involving multiple sectors concerned with early child development. All of these partnerships remained strong throughout the UEY project. In one case, there was no discernable change in the strength or structure of early childhood partnerships during or after the UEY project, likely because the partnerships were already highly developed due at least in part to the co-existing provincial initiatives. In the others, the UEY project coincided with and may have contributed to an overall evolution in partnerships. This happened, for example, through the engagement of new partners (e.g., school boards, municipal governments) and through the development of more articulated partnership structures (e.g. the creation of subcommittees tasked with particular aspects of support for early childhood development; consolidation of an overarching regional coalition). In two projects, the UEY partners have become part of an overall expansion of partnerships as their regions broaden their focus to include older age groups. Two case projects led by not-for-profit agencies also reported ongoing challenges in engaging institutional partners, and in particular, school boards.

4.3.3 Using community research as a tool to stimulate community action and the implementation of Action Plans

Data in this section were drawn from: file review, surveys of community project team members and community coalition members, key informant interviews, and case studies.

The evaluation identified many lessons learned about using community research as a tool to stimulate community action. Project proponents were asked to comment in their final reports on the aspects of the Initiative that worked well or not as well, to offer what lessons they had drawn from their experience with the UEY approach, and to offer suggestions for future projects of a similar nature. Many positive themes were identified, relating to:

partnership, collaboration, and inclusion; UEY data and data products; the comprehensive nature of the UEY approach; and building on existing community strengths.

According to the coalition members and community project team members surveyed, the community research approach had two major strengths:

- Research carried out locally, by and for the community, helped by involving more than one sector and by bringing together different community agencies, organizations and schools to have an evidence-based discussion about the needs of children and families in the community. Sharing information, making contacts and working together was beneficial for the whole community and encouraged community involvement. It focused their work on the needs of the community members and allowed the community to develop its own solutions; and
- The collection of locally meaningful data allowed for the identification of the groups who needed the most support, revealed differences among communities and neighbourhoods, uncovered community resources and created greater awareness. This led to solid deliverables that could be used for planning and action.

Synthesis of the responses of the coalition members and community project team members surveyed identified three major challenges in the UEY community research approach. Overall, the majority of coalition and team members indicated:

- Three years was inadequate for gathering sufficient information, evaluating the data collected and mobilizing the community. According to the coalition members, one more year should be allocated, and some thought that the process could take up to ten years;
- Funding for implementing the Action Plans was necessary. A majority of coalition member respondents noted that there had not been funding to implement their Action Plan and to expand services. Community project team members stated that while the funding provided for the research had been necessary and needed within each community, extending it to cover the dissemination and action phases would have helped ensure the sustainability of the initiative. In particular, the absence of the community coordinator after the end of funding left implementation to volunteers, and reduced capacity for further action. While it is clear in the UEY objectives that the Initiative was not supposed to support implementation, many respondents nevertheless consider that support is necessary to implement the Action Plan; and
- Mobilizing and engaging the community was found to be time consuming and challenging.

The other lines of evidence also identified challenges with the UEY approach. These included: limited time and resources; issues, such as concerns about privacy, in working with school systems; dealing with diversity; and challenges due to the large project scope (number of elements, number of contributors to be brought together); and, newness (lack of guidance on how to proceed in the early stages).

These challenges were also raised by case study respondents, who reported that at least one more year would have been helpful, and that the five-year time frame of the pilot projects was cited as more ideal.

Coalition member survey and case study findings suggest that there may also be a need to ensure that both urban and rural communities can benefit from the research and knowledge building process. More coalition member survey respondents from urban than from rural settings reported that their UEY project led their community to make informed decisions about the lives of young children.

4.3.4 Transferability of the UEY approach to other populations and social issues

The majority of those consulted for the evaluation agreed that the UEY approach can be applied to other social issues. Those suggested as possible areas of application included: poverty, violence, health and mental health, unemployment, homelessness and housing issues, food security, crime, addiction and literacy. There was also broad agreement that the approach would be useful and relevant with other populations, including: seniors, older children and adolescents, single parents, women, First Nations people, Francophones, people with disabilities, and immigrants.

Evaluation participants in the key informant interviews and case studies were asked what considerations should be made in transferring the UEY approach to other populations and issues. They identified the following considerations:

- Increased flexibility in design to allow for innovation, capturing community complexities, and tailoring so the approach can be appropriated by communities. i.e., a balance between gaining a national perspective, promoting community-based research, and allowing local innovation;
- Firm engagement of the main public sector and institutional (as opposed to not-for-profit) stakeholders, with greater representation of relevant professionals in the community coalitions;
- Reduced burden of data collection and management requirements;
- Framing data not in terms of identifying and labeling problem areas, but as providing snapshots that could more fully inform movement going forward;
- Further supporting the development and testing of hypotheses about effective interventions;
- More complete alignment with provincial/territorial orientations and investment priorities and more generally, involvement of strategic partners at all levels at the onset of the initiative and ensuring willingness to invest in subsequent action; and
- Above all, more time and resources to support the mobilizing community component.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Relevance

The evaluation evidence suggests that the UEY Initiative was relevant to the needs of communities working to improve life chances for their young children, and that the Initiative was very much in keeping with federal government and HRSDC policies and programming related to early childhood development. The UEY Initiative was conceived at a time when several converging factors created an ideal environment for the demonstration of federal leadership in an area that was cresting in terms of interest in other jurisdictions. There was demonstrable need for the contributions the Initiative offered within the many community coalitions working to improve early child development in their communities and sufficient to warrant the level of financial commitment established for the UEY Initiative. In addition, at the time it was implemented, UEY was highly relevant to federal objectives and roles. The evidence suggests that the UEY Initiative contributed to wide-ranging efforts in early childhood development in Canada.

The evaluation found that the objectives of UEY fit well under this strategic outcome “Income security, access to opportunities and well-being for individuals, families and communities”. In addition, the UEY Initiative is in keeping with, and complements, a broader set of HRSDC and other federal government Initiatives targeting the well-being of young children. Building knowledge and gathering information were seen appropriate roles for the federal government, as these activities brought a national perspective on early childhood development issues and in the use of standardized data collection instruments.

5.2 Performance

The UEY Initiative progressed according to plan, with participating communities producing research and community mapping reports, conducting planning sessions based on the research findings, and producing Action Plans. The evaluation results suggested that this contributed to: better understanding among community members of the experiences of Canadian children in their early years; participating communities addressing the needs of children age six and under; and, communities making informed decisions that benefited the lives of young children. It may also have contributed to the development of more inclusive communities. The evaluation provided many examples of how the UEY research process and results have been used to inform the development of, and garner support for, changes in policies, programs and services for children and families.

UEY communities have demonstrated that they have laid important groundwork for ongoing efforts to address child development. They have established extensive partnerships with community organizations and individuals, and strengthened linkages with provincial and municipal governments and school boards. Decision-makers reportedly value and are using the data that the UEY Initiative has produced. In some cases, bodies other than UEY coalitions have adopted a new research-oriented approach to planning based on the

UEY experience. Moreover, the evaluation findings suggest that after the UEY funding ended, many if not, most participating communities continued to partner and build networks to address early childhood development issues, and to transfer the knowledge that was gained from the UEY project to address early childhood development issues. Overall the evaluation evidence suggests that UEY efforts are being sustained at least to some degree as communities commit to move forward with implementing their Action Plans and finding other resources to support this.

It is clear from the evaluation findings that through its activities, the UEY Initiative was instrumental in building community capacity to better address early childhood issues. The UEY approach effectively built on community-level collaboration and partnership to ensure a collective response to early childhood needs. The networks of dedicated people, the combination of national instruments and community level data and the sharing of information and tools among communities were seen as especially valuable. The Initiative made an important contribution to increasing awareness of the importance of early childhood development within communities, as well as among decision-makers. Key elements of the UEY approach – in particular the EDI and mapping approaches to understanding communities – have become, or are becoming, institutionalized in many jurisdictions. Although not attributable solely to UEY, this illustrates UEY’s convergence of interests with those of the provinces around ECD in the last decade.

5.3 Lessons Learned and Transferability of the UEY Approach

Communities reported many lessons learned through the UEY Initiative about the use of research to inform the development of community programs and services. The UEY Initiatives’ community research component was seen as having provided a unique and highly valuable contribution. It provided a compelling example of how better data on the state of children’s development could influence community-level understanding, attitudes, and actions, and contribute to a sense of urgency to address areas of vulnerability. Examples were also reported of the UEY research-based approach being used for other purposes for a range of initiatives beyond the specific objectives in the UEY Action Plans.

An important lesson learned was that given the complexities and scope of the research component and to maximise the benefits of this major investment in community-level research, a longer funding time frame in ensuring transition toward effective implementation of the Action Plan would have been beneficial.

The great majority of those consulted for this evaluation believed that the UEY approach is transferable to other populations and issues. It is important to underscore that this is the case even among those who would not be in any position to benefit from initiatives in other areas. The findings suggest that successful transfer would necessitate a full alignment with provincial orientations and investment priorities.

Overall conclusion

While some of the results of this evaluation cannot be extrapolated to the full set of 36 UEY projects given the response rate, the findings suggest that the UEY Initiative contributed to the achievement of its expected longer term outcome: progress toward inclusive communities that are responsive to the needs of children and families. The unique contribution made by UEY is harder to ascertain, as UEY contributions were closely linked to ongoing increasing prioritization and investment in children's early years, especially in some provinces.

Appendix A: Evaluation Matrix – Questions, Indicators and Data Sources

Evaluation questions	Indicators (<i>referent</i>)	Methods / data sources
1. Relevance		
1.1 Is there a continued need for UEY?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions of stakeholders on the continued need for UEY; • Research-based evidence that communities influence children's development; • Existence of other federal/provincial/territorial programs that address similar issues, with non-duplication and complementarity; • Program uptake: number of successful applicants and total number of applications received; and • Effectiveness of UEY compared to other early childhood development initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated literature review; • Document and file review; and • Key informant interviews with HRSDC, federal, provincial/territorial officials.
1.2 To what extent is UEY consistent with departmental objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions of stakeholders; • Number of identifiable linkages between UEY and departmental priorities; and • Extent child development issues are explored in other departmental areas (Presence of departmental documents/ action plans that focus on young children or that identify young children as primary intervention targets). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated literature review; • Document and file review; and • Key informant interviews with HRSDC, federal, provincial/territorial officials
1.3 To what extent is UEY consistent with federal government objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions of stakeholders on the extent to which UEY is consistent with identified government priorities; • Number of identifiable linkages between UEY and federal government priorities; and • Coherence of UEY with federal government programming in early childhood development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and file review; and • Key informant interviews with HRSDC officials, federal, provincial/territorial officials.

Evaluation questions	Indicators (<i>referent</i>)	Methods / data sources
1.4 To what extent are the three components of the UEY Initiative (i.e. gathering information, building knowledge and enabling communities) aligned with federal programs and interest in the area of early childhood development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions of stakeholders on the extent to which the three components of UEY ((i.e. gathering information, building knowledge and enabling communities) are aligned with federal programs and interest in the area of early childhood development. • Extent UEY harmonizes and is complementary with provincial and territorial roles; and addresses duplication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and file review; and • Key informant interviews with HRSDC officials, federal, provincial/territorial officials.
2. Achievement of value		
2.1 To what extent are the UEY outputs/ outcomes impacted by community characteristics?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent outcomes are being met; • Leverage effect of funds (cash and in-kind) (generated by UEY projects); and • Identification of community characteristics that have an impact on costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and file review; • Key informant interviews with HRSDC officials; • Case studies; • Survey of main project team members; and • Survey of coalition members.
2.2. What have been (if any) unanticipated impacts (positive and negative) as a result of the Initiative?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence and nature of unanticipated impacts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and file review; and • Case studies.
3. Progress toward the achievement of intermediate and longer-term outcomes		
3.1 To what extent has UEY contributed to a better understanding and increased knowledge of the early years' experiences of Canadian children growing up in various social, economic, cultural and geographical environments?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of children and parents involved in UEY community research activities; • Extent to which stakeholders perceive that research results, reports and other information compiled contributed to new knowledge, better understanding; and • Stakeholders' views of the value of the research process and results for future collaboration and action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and file review; • Case studies; • Survey of main project team members; and • Survey of coalition members.
3.2 To what extent have communities developed action plans to address the needs of children aged six years and under in funded UEY communities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and percentage of action plans developed by UEY communities; • Level of satisfaction that action plans are addressing the needs of young children; and • Perceived sustainability of action plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and file review; • Case studies; • Survey of main project team members; and • Survey of coalition members.

Evaluation questions	Indicators (<i>referent</i>)	Methods / data sources
3.3 To what extent have communities made informed decisions and investments (financial and non-financial) that benefit the lives of young children?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and quality of community products developed; • Number and quality of community events participated in/held; attendance at these events; • Level of community involvement in early childhood development before and after the onset of UEY; • Perceived benefits for young children; • Scope of recommendations / decisions identified in action plans and other relevant decision making processes; • Extent to which the community made decisions based on UEY research; • Extent to which communities used the information collected; and • Nature of investments (financial and non-financial). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and file review; • Case studies; • Survey of main project team members; and • Survey of coalition members.
3.4. To what extent has there been progress toward inclusive communities that are responsive to the needs of children and families?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of reported UEY community networks, coalitions and sectors engaged; • Perceived benefits for children; • Level of response by communities to identify issues / and gaps with respects to the needs of children; • Number of new and/or improved services/activities/projects put in place for young children in response to newly identified needs; • Use/uptake of new and/or improved services by families of young children); and • Level of community involvement before and after the onset of UEY. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case studies; • Document and file review • Survey of main project team members; and • Survey of coalition members.

Evaluation questions	Indicators (<i>referent</i>)	Methods / data sources
3.5 To what extent has UEY contributed to the continued efforts of UEY communities to address child development in communities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and extent to which communities continue UEY related activities (network building, knowledge transfer and research), after cessation of UEY funding; • Number and type of partnership contributions (financial, in-kind, mobilization, networking); • Perceptions of stakeholders of UEY contribution; • Number of social policies and programs developed that use UEY data; • Extent to which UEY influenced similar initiatives in the UEY communities; and • Extent to which UEY influenced provincial and municipal early childhood programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case studies; • Document and file review; • Survey of main project team members; • Survey of coalition members; and • Key informant interviews with federal and provincial/territorial officials.
4. Lessons learned and transferability of the model		
4.1 What are the key elements in the UEY model that have contributed to achieving UEY's objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders' view of elements of UEY model that did and did not contribute to objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and File review; • Case studies; • Survey of main project team members; • Survey of coalition members; and • Key informant interviews with HRSDC and provincial/territorial officials.
4.2. To what extent has UEY contributed to strengthening local networks and partnerships?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and diversity of partners engaged in UEY projects; among these number newly engaged in early childhood initiatives; • The extent to which UEY contributed to strengthening local network and partnerships; • Strength of ties among network members: frequency of contacts, resources engaged, level of participation in meetings; • Likelihood that partnerships will be sustained post-UEY; and • Degree of implementation of action plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and file review • Case studies; • Survey of main project team members; and • Survey of coalition members.

Evaluation questions	Indicators (<i>referent</i>)	Methods / data sources
4.3 What lessons can be drawn from using community research as a tool to stimulate community action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengths of the community research approach: design, delivery, and outcomes; and • Challenges of the community research approach and mitigating strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and file review • Case studies; • Survey of main project team members; • Survey of coalition members; and • Key informant interviews with HRSDC officials.
4.4. To what extent is the UEY model transferable to other target populations and issues?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified transferability potential; • Extent to which UEY model is transferable to other target populations; and • Extent to which UEY model is transferable to other issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case studies; • Survey of main project team members; • Survey of coalition members; and • Key informant interviews with HRSDC and provincial/territorial officials.