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# northern child and youth

AN ELECTRONIC PUBLICATION OF THE UNBC TASK FORCE ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE,  
THE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.  
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A close-up photograph of a baby sitting in a green plastic walker. The baby is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt with yellow cuffs and blue denim overalls. The baby's hands are resting on the green plastic rim of the walker. There are several colorful toys on the walker: a red star-shaped toy, a white star-shaped toy, and a yellow gear-shaped toy. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

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CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE FOR CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING

Children and Adolescents with Special Needs

## Centre of Excellence for Children and Adolescents with Special Needs

Health Canada established the Centre of Excellence for Children and Adolescents with Special Needs to ensure that young people with special needs living in rural and northern communities receive the best services Canada has to offer.

The Centre is based at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, but works in partnership with five sites across the country to address specific areas of children's well-being: Memorial University in Newfoundland is focussing on nutrition, Lakehead University on learning and communication, Mount St. Vincent University in Nova Scotia on early intervention, the University of Northern British Columbia on substance abuse, and the Government of Nunavut on mental health.

The Centre is also involved with more than 300 community, government and corporate partners across Canada.

### The UNBC Task Force on Substance Abuse

The UNBC Task Force examines how substance abuse is related to a variety of special needs, including fetal alcohol syndrome and brain injury; how to design, develop and deliver substance abuse programs that meet the specific needs of young people in rural and northern communities.

### For More Information

For more about the Centre of Excellence for Children and Adolescents with Special Needs, visit [www.coespecialneeds.ca](http://www.coespecialneeds.ca).

For more about the UNBC Task Force on Substance Abuse, contact us at:

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## Special Needs and early education from an Aboriginal point of view

The Centre recently met with more than 60 representatives from First Nations and Inuit communities, researchers and policy makers on the issue of early intervention and special needs children.

The 110-page report on the roundtable is available from the Centre of Excellence for Children and Adolescents with Special Needs ([www.coespecialneeds.ca](http://www.coespecialneeds.ca)).

The report includes the background for a two-phase project on distance learning for early childhood educators in aboriginal communities with a specific focus on special needs as well as proceedings from the roundtable.

February's two-day roundtable built on previous reports and research done by the Centre, the Assembly of First Nations and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.

Centre representatives asked participants to share their perspectives on special needs and comment on definitions in use.

The result is a call for a paradigm shift in the way special needs are thought about and helped in Canada's aboriginal communities.

Roundtable participants were assigned to two discussion groups - a First Nations and an Inuit group.

Together, they made more than 100 very specific recommendations on fundamental issues relevant to early education and special needs children and youth in their communities.

Read about their perspectives in this issue of Northern Child and Youth.



**REPORT:  
EARLY EDUCATION AND SPECIAL NEEDS**

## Groups recommend change for early education and special needs children

How do you help children and youth with special needs in First Nations and Inuit communities? You talk to their communities and the people who care about them.

The Centre of Excellence for Children and Adolescents with Special Needs held a roundtable discussion February 27-28, 2007 in Ottawa.

The discussion featured 60 participants, including those from national aboriginal organizations including the Assembly of First Nations and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.

The roundtable also involved centre representatives and federal policy makers.

Their goal was to continue a discussion on how to better serve special needs children in First Nations and Inuit communities.

The Centre wanted input on its definition of special needs, as it pertained to those same communities.

It also wanted to find gaps in existing research, locate the next steps in developing new assessment tools and find additional training opportunities for early childhood educators.

The conference started with this definition, created by the Centres of Excellence in 2002:

*Special Needs includes all children and adolescents who require additional public or private resources beyond those*

*normally required to support healthy development.*

*This definition includes children and adolescents who require additional resources because of exceptional gifts and talents, physical, sensory, cognitive and learning challenges, mental health issues as well as problems due to societal, cultural, linguistic or family factors.*

Centre of Excellence hosts assigned participants to two groups, one facilitated by the Assembly of First Nations and the other by the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.

It asked each group to comment on the definition of special

## Special Needs:

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# Action Plan to kickstart change



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needs as it applied to their own communities.

The definition worked for both of them.

It became clear that many participants wanted a change in the way governments and workers identify and help special needs children.

They wanted a rethinking of special needs that recognizes its rights and strengths.

Each group aimed to include its own cultural values, traditions and language. They also wanted a more holistic approach to special needs' care that would be child centered.

Participants commented that once governments, communities and politicians thought about healthy development in a First Nations and Inuit community context, a very specific definition of special needs would be created.

In turn, a new sense of community

ownership would be developed.

That ownership would foster new partnerships between governments, parents, families and communities that valued all the needs, abilities and traditions of communities.

It would also recognize the rights and strengths of children, parents and communities.

Ideally, it would do all of this in an inclusive and integrated way to harmonize services to special needs children and youth.

To implement the change, participants developed a strategy to convince communities, chiefs and leaders, as well as government policy makers and top-level politicians to shift their thinking.

Roundtable participants also made key recommendations on special needs care in seven different areas.

Included in the seven areas are many specific recommendations,

## A Few Recommendations:

- Research what is being done internationally;
- Create a certificate in special needs that includes assessment training and hands on fieldwork is essential to competency;
- ECE educators must be recognized as professionals, with professional standards and appropriate and equitable pay across the sector of early childhood education;
- Develop long-term mentoring program for isolated communities;
- Review how new technology could improve distance education training;
- Share knowledge with whole community; no private ownership for best possible outcomes for the children;
- Professionals must develop tools sensitive to culture and language;
- How, when and where does funding flow; communities must know this to influence funding organization agendas and better direct funding imperatives;
- Find out how to give children with special needs a higher profile;

## Priorities yet to be determined

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including building on existing programs and strengths; recognizing, educating and training early childhood educators as professionals; developing a strategy and shared knowledge base within the ECE community; developing more culturally and linguistically appropriate screening and assessment tools; reviewing how technology could improve distance education; researching how money is distributed to communities; and finding out how to give special needs children a much higher profile.

Roundtable leaders then asked each group to prioritize their recommendations.

That's where the groups paused.

Both the Inuit and First Nations groups thought it may be too early in the process to prioritize.

Rather, they decided to take the recommendations back to their communities for consultation.

The ITK working group is planning to follow up via teleconferencing and to survey the community on special needs.

The Assembly of First Nations is planning do an environmental scan, asset mapping and literature review to find out what is being done on special needs to help them prioritize their recommendations.

For more information on the roundtable discussions, or to see the report yourself, visit [www.coespecialneeds.ca](http://www.coespecialneeds.ca) and look under *What's New*.

**Life expectancy** of registered First Nations children at birth is seven to eight years less than other Canadians

**Death rates** from injuries for First Nations infant is four times the rate of non-First Nations infants

**Fetal Alcohol Syndrome rates** are 30 times the general population.

The **Cost** of meeting the needs of an FAS affected person for their entire life is \$1 to \$1.5 million



## Want to Attend? Upcoming conferences and events

### Early Childhood Education

**Promoting Healthy Child & Youth Development: A Pre-conference Symposium of the 19th IUHPE World Conference** Hosted by The Human Early Learning Partnership - A research institute of six BC Universities.

Sunday, June 10, 2007

Vancouver Convention & Exhibition Centre, Vancouver

<http://iuhpeconference.org/en/conference/symposia.htm>

**Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario 57th Annual Northern Provincial Conference in Thunder Bay**

September 27 - 29, 2007 Visit [www.aecce.ca](http://www.aecce.ca) for updates

#### CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR POSTER PRESENTATIONS

The School of Early Childhood Education, Ryerson University and the School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria invites conference session participants to submit a poster presentation proposal. June 15-17, Halifax. For more information see the conference website at <http://www.ccnns.org/ocean.html>

#### 2007 Summer Institute in Early Childhood Education:

Frameworks for Creating Generative Learning (ECED 480/96A)

Mon - Fri, 9-13 July, 2007; 8:30am - 3:30pm

Application deadline is June 6, 2007.

Presenter Barbara Burrington, University of Vermont

Location UBC main campus, Vancouver, BC

Cost \$464.82, textbook extra

Open to both graduate/undergraduate as well as early childhood educators and professionals. It may be taken for three credits or on a non-credit basis, and can be applied toward UBC's Certificate in Early Childhood Education.

For complete information, visit [www.eplt.educ.ubc.ca/di/courses.htm](http://www.eplt.educ.ubc.ca/di/courses.htm), or contact Joanne Chilton at 604-822-3999 or at [joanne.chilton@ubc.ca](mailto:joanne.chilton@ubc.ca)