

Early Childhood Development

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories has made a commitment in its mandate to continue implementing the Early Childhood Development Action Plan to improve early childhood development, and by enhancing access to early intervention services for children zero to five years of age, and supporting community wellness initiatives with early childhood development funding and subject matter expertise.

Today, I want to share with you some of the progress our government has made in supporting children and their families through the first three years of the Right from the Start Framework.

Three early childhood intervention pilot projects enhancing access to services for children zero to five years of age, in specific regions are showing early successes. These projects have improved access to rehabilitation services and increased uptake in early childhood development programs.

The Dehcho Region Early Childhood Intervention Plan saw a 100 percent increase in the number of children and families attending follow-up appointments with the service or program specialists to whom children and their families had been referred to. Four workshops on early childhood development topics were also offered to parents, schools and the community to help increase awareness of community resources.

Results from the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation Early Childhood Program have seen a 50 percent increase in accessing speech language pathology services, including increased clinic time and services in three communities through the

addition of a half-time speech language pathologist. Nine workshops were held with early childhood educators that improved staff's speech and language intervention skills by 24 percent, based on testing before and after the training in addition, six parent speech language workshops were conducted in three target communities to increase awareness of the program.

The Tłıchǵ Community Services Agency Speech Language Pathologist Plan showed a 300 percent increase to accessing speech language pathology services. This included increased clinic time and services in Behchokǵ through the addition of one new speech language pathologist. Improvements were also seen in the quality of services through the growth in children's speech and language practice.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT has also made a commitment in its mandate to develop options to enhance access to birthing services and prenatal and postnatal care for mothers and their families, including the development of a territorial midwifery model. As part of our work on this commitment, the Department of Health and Social Services will be hosting sharing circles in several communities over the next few weeks to discuss the potential for a territorial midwifery program. The Department is looking to hear from women and their family members with experience receiving maternity care services. People interested in attending these sharing circles or taking an online survey can visit the Department's website for more information.

How we deliver the Healthy Family Program is also being reviewed Mr. Speaker, to determine if there are more effective ways to reach families-at-risk. The Healthy Family Program is a voluntary home-visitation program that supports parents and caregivers with children under five years of age. This early intervention program promotes the importance of the nurturing parent-child relationship and aims to increase the child's developmental opportunities, while fostering positive interaction for improved outcomes in the child's future. The Department is looking at building on the strength of the program with the potential of expanding it from

the current 16 communities it serves. A learning evaluation framework and a territorial workshop are also being organized to support continuous quality improvement.

Mr. Speaker, even though we have made progress in supporting children and families, we still have much work to do. As part of this work, the Departments of Education, Culture and Employment and Health and Social Services have collaborated in the development of a renewed Action Plan that my colleague, the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment will be tabling at a later date.

The renewed Early Childhood Development Action Plan supports the GNWT's efforts to offer high quality, inclusive and accessible early childhood development programs that are community-driven, sustainable and culturally relevant. The GNWT is committed to developing a system that serves the needs of children and their families, so that children are healthy, school ready and can reach their full potential.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.