

Richmond, a child friendly community where young children thrive



Parent Voices

Richmond Parent Focus Group
Report

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Introduction

In 2007, Richmond Children First received funding from Success by 6 for Parent Connectors, a project that provided training to parents with young children, under the age of 6 years, to help them link to other parents in the community. One of the projects undertaken by the Parent Connectors in 2008 was to conduct a series of focus groups with parents. The goals of this project were to:

- Identify the needs and issues of parent with children prenatal to 6 years old as related to the distribution of program materials on early child development programs.
- Identify barriers to access families face in accessing early child development programs.
- Build capacity among volunteer parents to connect with other parents and gather information through focus groups.
- Inform early child development service providers on how they may better outreach and respond to the needs of parents in all aspects of diversity.

Methodology

Twelve (12) parents were recruited as focus group facilitators (Appendix 1). Four (4) of these parents had completed the Parent Connections training at Richmond Family Place. The other parents were recruited through word-of-mouth and advertising in the community. Eight parents completed the training.

Parent facilitators received 12 hours of training that focused on facilitation, barriers to access, community services, the importance of early child development and recruitment techniques. Parent facilitators worked with the Richmond Children First coordinator to design a series of questions based on similar surveys completed in other parts of Canada and the United States (Appendix 2)

A total of 15 specific parent populations were initially identified for focus groups. Parent facilitators were expected to offer to focus groups to a peer group. In total, nine (9) focus groups were held.

Parent Focus Group Type	Total Parents
Two-parent families	8
Low-income single parents	4
Grandparents	4
Mandarin speaking parents	8
Cantonese speaking parents	4
Spanish speaking parents	7
Arabic speaking new parents (children up to 12 months)	4
Arabic speaking parents	9
Muslim parents	7
Total participants	55

Parent facilitators were paid an honorarium of \$125 to attend the training and \$125 per focus group facilitated. Childminding was provided for the focus groups, transportation and food was provided and participants were all given a \$25 gift card for Superstore. Parent facilitators met once all focus groups were completed to debrief and discuss learnings.

Summary of Findings

Parents cited the Richmond Public Library, local parks and Richmond Family Place as the services that they used most often in the community. Parents preferred places that allowed them to bring the whole family or where their children could play while they connected with other parents. When asked what could be improved, parents felt that more programs were needed at more times and in more places in the community to provide better flexibility and reduce travel expenses. Transportation, cost, and availability of childcare were the biggest barriers to participation.

Parents used multiple sources of information to find out what was available in the community, including - bulletin boards, community newspapers, the Recreation and Culture Guide, and the Internet. The need for a single source (website, flyer, ECD guide) for all parent-related information was most often requested. Parents indicated that although they could find out general information about organizations, it was difficult to find out about specific events, workshops and programs. A number of parents also mentioned that they would find it useful to attend workshops that provided information about community services, similar to the focus group.

While many of the parents felt supported and reported positive experiences, some did not. Groups that did not agree with this statement included new immigrants, grandparents, and low-income single parents. These groups all felt unable to participate in the majority of services available due to lack of knowledge of programs, language difficulties and budgetary constraints, particularly transportation.

The sampling of parents for this report was small, only 55 parents. However, the experiences they shared echo the findings from previous research conducted by Richmond Children First (Parent Surveys, 2004). Parents' experiences are also substantiated by extensive research conducted by Dr. Clyde Hertzman and his team at the Human Early Learning Partnership (UBC):

We do not have a thorough understanding of "non-financial barriers to access", although from ad hoc and indirect sources, the following factors seem to be at issue: varying levels of parental knowledge and understanding of early child development, work-life and home-life time conflicts that make it hard to access services and programs at the times they are offered, transportation and local access constraints, and language barriers and feelings of illegitimacy in the face of middle class professionals.

Early Child Development in Vancouver,
*Clyde Hertzman, Sidney A. McLean,
Dafna Kohen, Jim Dunn, Terry Evans,
and Jacqueline Smit-Alex*

Individual Focus Groups

Two-Parent Families

In general, the parents in this focus group had attended a variety of programs and had positive experience. In responding to what programs they attended, the ones mentioned the most included the library, playgrounds/parks at Garden City and Steveston, Richmond Family Place, and drop-in gym-time at community centres (Steveston and South Arm specifically). Parents in this group indicated a need for more drop-in programs throughout the city, available at different times (particularly evenings). They also mentioned that programs such as community-based preschools and swimming classes filled up too quickly. Coordinated programs that allowed for children of multiple ages to participate at the same time were also requested.

Low-Income Single Parents

All of the parents in this focus group were recruited through the Richmond Food Bank and, in general, felt unsupported by programs in Richmond. Parents in this group used services such as parks that were close to home or schools. Although parents were aware of the free and subsidized programs in the community, the cost of transportation, especially for multiple children, was cited as the biggest barrier to participation. Parents in this group felt that they would benefit from some sort of training or walk-through of programs and services that would include information to help them overcome the expense of programs in the community.

Grandparents

Of all the focus group participants, grandparents were the least aware of programs in the community. Few grandparents are able to drive so they often stay in their local neighbourhood, taking grandchildren to smaller parks that are fenced in so children were safe and in easy reach. Programs that identify grandparents as caregivers were requested so they would feel welcomed and encouraged to attend. They mentioned the importance of seating and availability of chairs as a particular requirement when attending programs.

Mandarin Speaking Parents

The Mandarin speaking parents were aware of many services in the community, particularly ones based at the library or community centers. They felt that there were many programs available for their children but that they would like more that allowed them to connect with other Mandarin speaking parents while their children were taken care of. The cost of certain programs was cited as a barrier, as was language.

Cantonese Speaking Parents

Cantonese speaking parents participated in many of the same programs as Mandarin speaking parents, with the addition of more in-depth programs such as Nobody's Perfect and Keys to Success. They felt that programs at Richmond Family Place, swimming pools, and skating rinks filled up too quickly as did preschools. The capacity of programs was cited as the biggest barrier, while cost and transportation were not mentioned. They also requested longer preschool programs and more quality childcare programs.

Spanish Speaking Parents

The Hispanic community is rapidly growing in Richmond. Most parents were aware of Richmond Family Place, the community centres, libraries and parks. Although parents felt that there were probably a wide variety of programs available, they had a difficult time finding out about programs. Transportation and availability of child minding were the biggest barriers to participation. All of the parents felt that there were not enough programs available in Spanish and that this was a community need.

Arabic Speaking Parents

Like the new parents, Arabic speaking parents were aware of the library, Richmond Family Place, and community centres. They were also well connected to programs such as community kitchens, Mitchell Strong Start Centre, and Healthiest Babies Possible. Many had large families and were unable to participate in certain programs because of a lack of programming for older children. Cost (especially to enroll multiple children), language barriers, and transportation were also cited as barriers. Parents tend to keep their children at home until kindergarten, fearing the loss of their first language. More programs in Arabic were requested. This group pointed out that many Muslims feel unable to participate in programs due to a lack of prayer space, since prayers take place throughout the day.

Arabic Speaking New Parents

The parents in this focus group were aware of libraries, Richmond Family Place, and preschools but were unaware of other services and supports in the community. Language, cost of programs, child care and transportation were cited as the biggest barriers to participation. Mothers in particular requested ladies-only fitness programs (with child care) so that they could participate and meet other mothers.

Muslim Parents

Parents within this group came from many different countries including Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Pakistan, India, and Africa. Most were aware of the library, community centres, ESL courses and Richmond Family Place. Like the Arabic speaking parents, most families are large and as such, cost of enrollment of multiple children and lack of childminding were cited as barriers as well as not enough space in programs. They also stated that there was a lack of advertising about programs. Providing price breaks to large families was cited as one area that could be improved, as well as services/signage in different languages. Parents also indicated that they are unsure if programs fit with their values and beliefs. Parents have found a lack of understanding of culture between the Muslim and non-Muslim community and feel that programs that bridged the gap would be much welcomed.

Conclusions

Most of the parents and caregivers interviewed in this series of focus groups felt well-supported by some of the services in the community, particularly at libraries, Richmond Family Place, certain community centres, and local parks. Transportation costs (gas and bus tickets) is the biggest barrier faced by most parents, whereas the cost of programs was a bigger factor for single parents and parents with larger families. Spanish speaking and Arabic speaking parents felt the largest need for language-based programs. All parents asked for more flexible programs that would allow multiple children to participate in locations around the city. The community centres frequented most often by parents were Cambie, Steveston and Richmond Cultural Centre. Parents from the Arabic, Spanish and Muslim groups all indicated an interest in getting involved in the community, volunteering and building bridges across cultures. Most of the parents also indicated that they would welcome public spaces where they could just sit and visit, sometimes with their children and other times with child care provided.

Parents found it difficult to access information about organizations and specific programs. Many are unfamiliar with how services are delivered in the community and need detailed information about what is available. Some mentioned the importance of relationships with service providers and placed more emphasis on the people than the actual programs. Parents indicated that a central source of in-depth information would be useful, it electronic or printed, where they could find all the programs, services, and activities available for them and their children. Some also mentioned that it would be useful to talk to someone about availability of programs and services.

When asked what the important issues are that families face these days, the overwhelming response was juggling parenting with life (finding affordable housing, accessing the food bank, finding work, finding child care, etc.) – referred to as time poverty.

Young children can have improved conditions for healthy development when the right mix of programs and supports are available in a community. However, barriers that impede access need to be addressed. The Human Early Learning Partnership at the University of British Columbia has worked with community service providers to identify eleven (11) barriers families confront when trying to access services for their young children. Parents who attended the focus groups confronted nearly all of these barriers. A summary of these barriers can be found in Appendix 3.

Appendix 1

Parent Facilitators

The following parents actively participated in Parent Voices: Parent Focus Groups, attending the training and/or facilitating parent focus groups:

Maha Abdelhamid	Wasanthi Naidu
Duha Alhabbal	Jennifer Ng
Maria de la Cruz Sanchez	Jeanine Parisian
Arzeena Hamir	Gina Trentin
Hala Kapani	Melanda Wong
Cecilia Manriquez	Jessica Yang

Appendix 2

Focus Group Questions

Each focus group asked the following:

- What programs and services for families do you know about in Richmond?
- What are your favourite things to do as a family in Richmond?
- What programs and services have you attended?
- What was your experience like at these programs?
- How are families supported in Richmond?
- What could be improved at programs?
- Do you face any BARRIERS in attending programs?
- How do you find out about what is available to parents in Richmond?
- Is there a better way to get information to you?
- What are the important issues facing families in your community?
- What other programs/supports can be offered to help/serve families?

Appendix 3: Barriers to Access

	SPANISH PARENTS	NEW ARABIC PARENTS	ARABIC PARENTS	CANTONESE PARENTS	MANDARIN PARENTS	MUSLIM PARENTS	LONE PARENTS	2-PARENT FAMILIES	GRAND PARENTS
PROGRAM OR SERVICE NOT AVAILABLE Families unable to access service because it does not exist.	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓
COST Families unable to access service because of financial constraints.	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
TRANSPORTATION Lack of transportation to and from services or not accessible to family.	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
TIME PROGRAM OFFERED Times of the day or week offered presents a barrier for families.								✓	
TIME POVERTY Parents struggle to juggle multiple roles and activities leaving insufficient time to attend programs.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
LANGUAGE The language in which the service is offered prevents families from attending.	✓	✓	✓	✓					
FRAGMENTATION Families have children of various ages and are unable to attend due to conflicting schedules or locations of programs.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
LACK OF INFORMATION Families do not attend programs because of lack of information available about programs.	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓
CONFLICTING EXPECTATIONS Parents do not use program because they disagree with what the program should look like or how it should be delivered.	THIS BARRIER NOT ADDRESSED IN FOCUS GROUPS.								
SOCIAL DISTANCE Parents are from different class, social or cultural circles and a lack of trust, embarrassment, etc. may result in unwillingness to access services		✓	✓			✓			
PARENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS Parents are unaware of the benefits to their children of the available programs.	THIS BARRIER NOT ADDRESSED IN FOCUS GROUPS.								