



# The Many Faces of Childhood Well-Being: The Early Years (2 to 6) Symposium Evaluation Report

## Executive Summary

**Background.** The Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research (ACCFRCR) is currently hosting a series of symposia under the name, “The Many Faces of Childhood Well-Being.” The first in the series was hosted in November 2005 in Calgary, Alberta. On November 30, 2007, ACCFCR hosted a second symposium in Edmonton, Alberta titled, “The Early Years (2 to 6).” Representatives from ACCFCR and the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families (CUP) undertook the evaluation of the second symposium to determine whether the event was considered effective and useful by participants. The evaluation was a component of the Mobilizing Knowledge About Development (MKAD) project, a collaboration between ACCFCR and CUP. MKAD team members seek to develop effective, evidence-based, knowledge-mobilization (KM) strategies and to increase capacity to engage in community-based research (CBR) on local, post-secondary campuses and across broader communities.

**Participants.** Of the 481 people who attended the Child Development Symposium, 190 (39.5%) completed and returned the evaluation survey and consent form. Participants were mainly female practitioners/service providers who had an undergraduate education. They had responsibilities such as program planning, program implementation, and service delivery; had been in their roles/areas an average of 7.26 and 12.08 years respectively; and had a relatively high amount of prior knowledge about child development in the preschool years. About a quarter of participants attended a complementary event hosted by the ACCFCR on November 29, 2007 and a similar proportion had attended other Centre events in the past. Participants learned about the event mainly through colleagues/employers and email/listservs.

### Key findings

**1. How effective (e.g., quality of presentations, relevance and usefulness of content) was the event and what factors contributed to effectiveness?** In general participants expected that the Symposium would be research-oriented and most viewed the Symposium as effective, particularly those who were highly educated, who had more experience (more years in role, more years in area, and more prior knowledge), and who engaged in networking at the Symposium. Participants offered suggestions for improving future symposia, which included incorporating a greater variety of perspectives (e.g., research, practice, and policy) and kinds of knowledge (e.g., *new research*, *how-to*, and *first-hand experience*) at future events. That is, in addition to expecting to hear about current *research knowledge*, participants also anticipated gaining *how-to knowledge* (i.e., ways to apply *research knowledge*) and expressed a desire for *first-hand experience knowledge* (e.g., as possessed by parents of young children and by service providers) during the Symposium.

**2. Did participants see opportunities to apply the knowledge gained from the Symposium and what factors contributed to the application of knowledge?** The majority of participants reported that they could identify opportunities to make or influence changes to their own practices, organizations, or fields after attending the Symposium. They identified not only that they had the ability to make change

but that they would also likely make changes to practice/programs though not to policy and research; this latter finding was not surprising considering that most of the participants were service providers. Specifically, participants reported that they would share the *research knowledge* that they gained with colleagues, use it to make broad changes (e.g., creating tools, reviewing practices), and/or use it to make specific changes (e.g., including parent voices in programs).

Several factors were identified as possibly influencing the potential of participants' future application of the *research knowledge* presented at the Symposium. Participants who thought the Symposium was more effective and who networked at the Symposium, particularly if they developed a relationship with someone who was new to them, were more likely to intend to apply the research information gained at the Symposium. Participants who believed their organization highly valued evidence-based decision making also felt they were better able to change policy and research.

By analyzing participants' comments, MKAD team members have enhanced their understanding about KM. To "translate" *research knowledge*, participants sought information about how to apply the knowledge in their work settings. This suggests that *research knowledge* may not be mobilized successfully to a mixed audience (e.g., service providers, researchers, and policymakers) if not presented with *how-to knowledge*. Considering that participants suggested that more time be dedicated in future symposia to networking and discussion time, this *how-to knowledge* might be generated through dialogue and exchange between presenters and participants and among participants.

**Conclusions.** The evaluation of the current ACCFCR Child Development Symposium has resulted in enhanced understanding of effective KM strategies for MKAD team members. In response to the three MKAD project questions regarding ACCFCR learning events, the following have been learned:

1. "How are ACCFCR learning events accessed and used by target audiences? In what ways?" ACCFCR symposia may involve mixed audiences of researchers, service providers, and policymakers who may have diverse expectations about the types of knowledge to be exchanged. Following this Symposium, participants intended to share the *research knowledge* that they gained with colleagues, use it to make broad changes, and/or use it to make specific changes.
2. "Do participants respond to the events in different ways that relate to their roles as researchers, policymakers, service providers, and community members?" Symposia audiences may well have expectations specific to their roles and may respond in ways that reflect their roles. This specificity may be related to participants' demographic characteristics and may influence participants' perceived effectiveness of symposia. With regard to this Symposium, the majority of participants were practitioners, and as a result insufficient variation in roles existed in the data to study this question.
3. "How do learning events contribute to KM and what other factors influence KM?" The evaluation findings point to the need for future study of multiple types of knowledge and their interrelationship with KM phases, contexts, and moderating factors in MKAD's working, KM model in the field of child, youth, and family development.

While this evaluation report does not hold all of the answers to these MKAD project questions, the analyses and findings from this evaluation begin to respond to these questions. MKAD members will build on this report through analysis of a follow-up survey to be administered to Symposium participants four to six months after the original event in November 2007. Through this next phase, participants' application of the Symposium's *research knowledge* will be studied and compared to participants' intentions for knowledge application as assessed in the first survey.