

Grow Along With Me



2008-09 Progress Report

February 2009



Project Partners

Thanks are extended to the *Grow Along with Me Steering Committee members* for sharing their collaborative expertise in developing services that are evidence-based, responsive and promote optimal growth and development among children and their families

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Vision

To build a foundation for families to provide children with the best possible start, enhancing their readiness to learn, and giving them opportunities to reach their maximum potential. Through increased access to integrated community partnerships, increased awareness, education and collaboration, we will ensure that the whole community will assist parents to raise their children. We will strive to ensure the best emotional, social, communicative, intellectual, and physical development for all children in Chinook Health. It is our intent to have developmental checkups as an ongoing, regular activity that parents look forward to at each stage in their child's development.

Letter from the project co-leads

We've learned a lot since the start of the *Grow Along with Me* project. During our first year of service delivery and data collection for the provincially-funded innovation project, *Grow Along with Me*, service providers, staff, community partners, and researchers have come to a greater understanding of families—their perceptions, aspirations and challenges they face in providing their children with the best possible start, enhancing their readiness to learn, and giving them opportunities to reach their maximum potential.

Research has shown that comprehensive, integrated child developmental and parenting programs are instrumental in helping children to reach their optimal potential. *Grow Along with Me* partners have worked collaboratively to promote awareness, provide education and support families of children 18-36 months. This is an important time in a child's life as they experience rapid growth and development.

This progress report presents highlights for our past year,

including information on our successes, challenges, and efforts to share what we've learned.

We would like to extend our thanks to all of the families, staff and community partners who participated in this evaluation process and shared their stories with us.

Carolyn Irby & Mark Moland,
Co-leads, *Grow Along with Me*
Project

On behalf of the *Grow Along with Me* Steering Committee





“ (The developmental checkup) was good in a lot of ways. If you catch problems early you can do something.” - Parent

Understanding Grow Along with Me

Our Mission

- Support parents who have the primary responsibility for their children;
- Provide screening, assessment, intervention and family support services; and
- Offer educational information to parents to facilitate learning and development in their children;
- ...Thereby improving outcomes for children and their families.

Grow Along with Me is an innovative project funded by Alberta Health and Wellness (\$2.3 million). Approved in May 2007, the project is scheduled to end in September 2009. It is designed to enhance coordinated community based developmental checkups and follow-up services for children in Chinook Health aged 18-36 months. Community partners (Alberta Health Services - Chinook Health, Parent Link Centres, Parent as Teachers, Southwest Child and Family Services - Child Care Programs and Community Links, and University of Lethbridge) are working together to increase awareness and knowledge of developmental checkups and preschool developmental milestones, and improve service quality for families and children throughout Chinook Health.

The goals of the Grow Along with Me project are to:

1. To provide the right level of care, at the right time, by the right person as near to the child's residence as possible.
2. To identify children (18-36 months of age) who may have a developmental delay as early as possible and provide the appropriate follow-up services.

Success in reaching these goals is being evaluated in many ways and from various perspectives. In the first year of the project, surveys have been conducted with project partners and front-line staff; parents have participated in focus groups and telephone interviews. Information about the



current system is being compiled and a map of the child's journey through the health care system is currently underway. Most importantly, *Grow Along with Me* partners have provided parents with tools and current, evidence-based information on how they can encourage and support their child's development.





Ages and Stages Checkups

"I found it reassuring to know where my little guy was (in relation to developmental milestones)"

- Parent

In review:

To date, strategies employed to achieve *Grow Along with Me* goals have included:

- Fostering collaborative relationships among community partners;
- Providing region-wide community education featuring Dr. Brian Kolb and Dr. Fraser Mustard, prominent early childhood development practitioners, researchers and advocates;
- Providing education regarding early childhood development and developmental checkups (using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire or ASQ) to Public Health Nurses and multidisciplinary staff;
- Designing a coordinated approach to developmental checkups;
- Developing a coordinated communication strategy (including the development of the *GAWM* website - www.growalongwithme.ca);
- Promoting family involvement in service planning and quality improvement;
- Building on relationships with organizations that support Aboriginal and Low German-speaking Mennonite families to facilitate increased access to developmental checkups and information about healthy child development;
- Promoting consistent use of the ASQ at the 18-month well-child visit;
- Developing a coordinated system of referrals and standardized referral guidelines;
- Revising service timeliness through development of the Short Term Assessment and Response Team (START); and
- Searching out evidence, evaluating outcomes and applying the knowledge gained to continually improve services.

Using a participatory approach, *Grow Along with Me* aims to understand how coordinated, targeted services enhance the capacity of parents and community partners to optimize children's growth and development, and improve service quality and outcomes for children with identified delays.

"Through the "Ages and Stages" checkup you can kind of track (your child's progress) yourself!" - Parent



What we've learned from families

During the summer of 2008, telephone surveys were conducted with a random sample of parents of children aged 18-24 months whose children had undergone a developmental checkup and who were not referred to Children's C.A.R.E. Services for further evaluation. The clear majority of parents (91.0%, 51/63) indicated that the developmental checkup was a positive experience. Parents valued knowing that their children were developing within the normal range of expectations.

The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) provided reassurance that all was "well" with their children.

"I liked it. I thought it was a good guideline and gave a good idea of what to focus on at a certain age."

A minority of parents (17.5%, 11/63) identified some concerns about their experience. These included: the person administering the ASQ did not listen to them (parents); it was difficult to answer some of the questions-- and having the questions in advance would have been helpful to the parents; the ASQ was not really optional; and, there was some burden associated with completing the ASQ (for example, managing the other children without assistance, trying to focus on the child's immunization while having to also complete the ASQ, and

not having the ASQ available on-line). Parents reported that the checkup experience was sometimes "chaotic" and appointments were rushed.

Most parents (74.6%, 47/63) reported that completing the ASQ helped them to learn more about their children's development. In particular, parents learned about developmental milestones, and children's abilities to complete certain activities or tasks. The clear majority of parents (81.0%, 51/63) observed that the ASQ checkup gave them ideas, suggestions, and activities to further support their children's development at home. Parents felt that the ASQ enabled them to be better parents by refocusing their attention to developmental areas that would benefit their children (Gregory, 2008).

Parents who attended focus groups at Lethbridge, Cardston, Coaldale, Vauxhall/Taber or Crowsnest Pass concurred - developmental screening was a valuable experience that promoted their knowledge about developmental milestones and enhanced their capacity to optimize their child's development. They offered suggestions as to how to best reach parents in their community and identified the messages that parents needed to hear in relation to developmental checkups and the ASQ.





"(Completing the *Ages and Stages* developmental checkup) helps everyone's learning and helps you find ways to give good care. It didn't tell you what you were doing or not doing; it just helped you find ways to augment your child's development."

- Parent

What we've learned from each other

While *Grow Along with Me (G.A.W.M.)* was designed to improve outcomes for children and families, it has also provided project partners with valuable insights into factors that contribute to seamless service delivery, project sustainability and effective partnerships.

G.A.W.M. project partners include:

- Alberta Health Services - Chinook Health;
- Community Links;
- Parent Link Centres;
- Parents as Teachers;
- Southwest Alberta Child and Family Services; and the
- University of Lethbridge.

The *Grow Along with Me* Steering Committee provides strategic direction and leadership for the innovation project. The committee, with partner representatives and others, meets regularly to identify and address emerging issues, integrate project learnings and evidence into clinical practice, and

ensure that project goals are met. Various smaller teams also support the work of the Steering Committee and the *Grow Along with Me* project. These include: the Communications, Training and Education, and Evaluation Subcommittees. Project leads include the Manager and the Director of Children's C.A.R.E. Services, Alberta Health Services - Chinook Health. Supported by Project Innovation funding, they promote coordination of partner activities and ensure that information is shared within and across committees - as well as with the general public.

To ensure that the partnership is as "effective and efficient as possible for all involved, (the *GAWM* Evaluation Subcommittee developed a Partnership Self-Assessment Tool) that identifies strengths and weaknesses, and guides strategies for improvement" (Families First, Edmonton, 2007-08). Project partners identified the following strengths in June 2008:



<i>Foundational factors</i>	<i>Architectural factors</i>	<i>Sustainability factors</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear vision, mission, and goals statement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of three sub-committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual respect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of terms of reference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective problem-solving
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitative and supportive leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of information technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency of project information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grassroots involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective adherence to established project processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong skill set of its members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

Consistent with a continuous quality improvement approach, the following opportunities for improvement (identified through the Partnership Self-Assessment Tool) will inform strategic planning in the coming year:

<i>Foundational factors</i>	<i>Architectural factors</i>	<i>Sustainability factors</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective understanding of project goals and objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The establishment of a sustainability sub-committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constructive approaches to feedback and consistent use of affiliation agreements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiring qualified staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop process whereby parent organizations are regularly informed of project activities, challenges, and processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of a problem-solving process 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparent decision-making processes and resource allocation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely and specific feedback and information sharing to committees and staff. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of working agreements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective understanding of project goals and objectives 		

What the research tells us

The early years of development from conception to age six provide foundational competence and coping skills that will affect a child's learning, behaviour and health throughout their lifetime (McCain & Mustard, 1999). "The evidence is compelling and overwhelming: well-funded integrated child development and parenting programs improve the cognitive and social functioning of all children" (Council for Early Child Development, 2007, p. 1)

Unrecognized developmental delays can impact the child throughout the course of their life.

"Early delays in communication impact the development of social relationships and problem-solving skills. This often leads to decreased opportunities for both positive social and educational experiences. Lack of early success in school has been associated with increased rates of bullying, depression, lower self-esteem, increased substance use, higher rates of school drop-out, unemployment, and incarceration" (M. Moland, 2006).

Early identification and follow-up of identified delays or disabilities has

the potential to reduce the impact of the delay on the child and family. Research supports the use of a systematic approach across multiple points in time to monitor children for developmental delays. Developmental checkups are often used to determine which children will receive more intensive evaluation or treatment. While pediatric rates of delay have been estimated at 13-16% (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001; Rosenberg, Zhang & Robinson, 2008.) Cohen (2005) has reported that less than half of delays are identified among children before entering school. Furthermore, Rosenberg (2008) reported that only 20% of children with delays received services (p. e1503). To ensure equity and promote health for all, the American Academy of Pediatrics (2001) has recommended that "all infant and children should be screening for developmental delays" (p. 195).

It becomes evident that strategies to monitor and ensure that children are provided with the opportunity to reach their optimal potential are vital strategies that have been incorporated into the *Grow Along with Me* project.

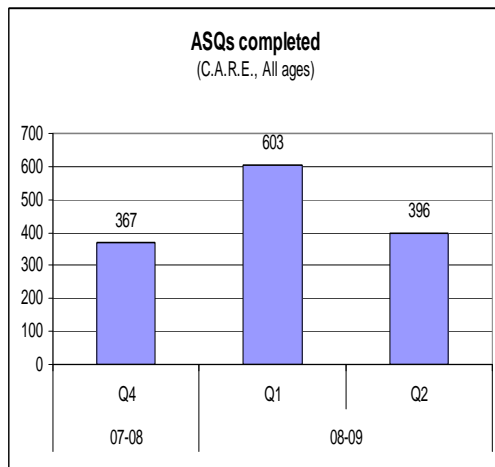


What service delivery tells us

The Grow Along with Me Steering Committee has been able to gather a great deal of information from the 777 children and families who have participated in the Grow Along with Me project to date.

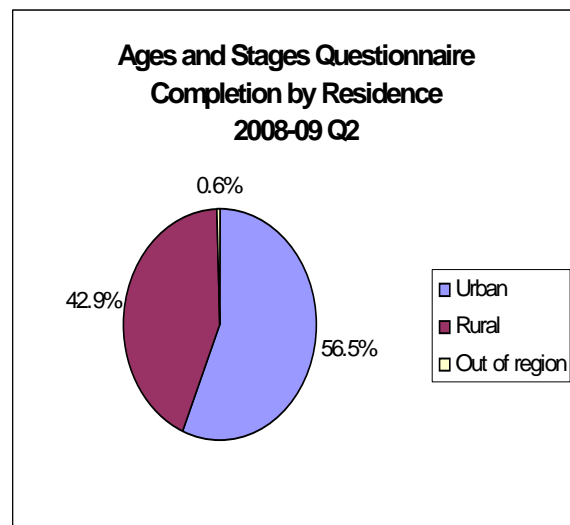
In the second quarter of 2008-09 progress toward achieving project goals was evidenced by:

- A 7.9% increase in Ages and Stages Questionnaires submitted in Q2 (n=396) compared to Q4, 2007-08 (n=367). Substantial increases in questionnaires completed in Q1, 2008-09 were concurrent with the annual screening blitz (spring 2008);



- Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of Ages and Stages checkups were for children 18-20 months of age;
- The majority of children (78.5%) had no developmental concerns identified;

- Communication (11.4%), personal-social (6.6%), and problem-solving (6.4%) accounted for the highest rates of children who scored below the ASQ cutoffs. Of children with ASQs submitted during Q2, 15% had experienced medical problems in the past year;
- 15.7% (52/331) of children with ASQs submitted in Q2 were referred to Children's C.A.R.E. services for further evaluation;
- Approximately half (46.5%) of children receiving developmental checkups were rural residents;



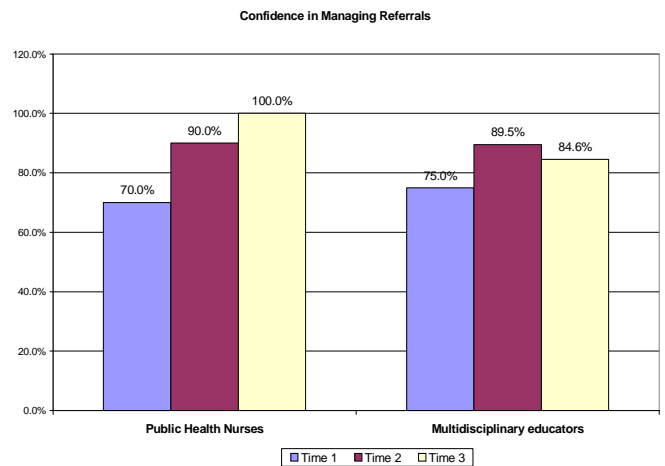
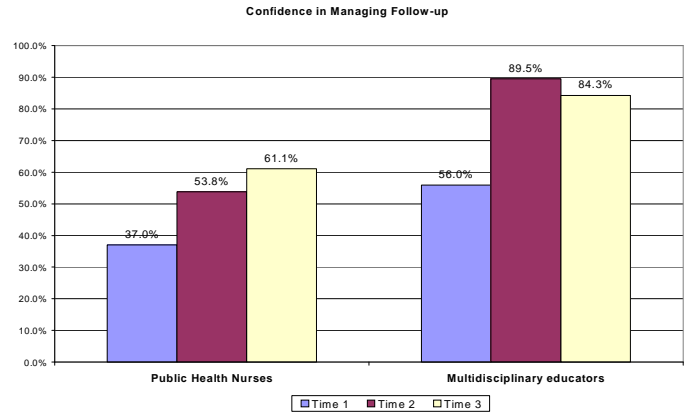
- Incomplete referrals (85.0%, n=44/52) were identified as a critical point of delay for children referred for follow-up. Referral processes were reviewed and revised in an effort to address this concern;
- Just over 9% (9.4%; 3/32) of children referred to Children's



C.A.R.E. services for further evaluation were deemed urgent; approximately one third (34.4%) were referred to the Short Term Assessment and Response Team (START). The remainder were referred for clinical or combined clinical/START services;

- Almost one-quarter (23%) of children (up to age 5 years) who received a dental checkup at the spring 2008 developmental checkup blitz had tooth decay present; education and/or follow-up were provided;
- Immediately following and 6 months after the spring 2008 educational sessions, public health nurses and Grow Along with Me partners reported increased knowledge regarding the Ages and Stages Questionnaire and increased confidence in managing referrals and follow-up. While the majority of respondents expressed confidence that services provided were appropriate, less than half

expressed confidence in follow-up service timeliness and accessibility.



Looking forward

GAWM provides an unprecedented opportunity for regional partners to collaborate and share information and ideas. We have already learned a great deal about how to improve our internal processes. We continue to work collaboratively across government, community and academic sectors. While it is too early to draw conclusions about our findings, we know from our families that the project has made a difference in their lives. Families report that *Grow Along with Me* project initiatives have improved their understanding of the importance of early development checkups and have enhanced their awareness of the role that they can play in optimizing their child's development.

As we move into the second half of the *GAWM* project, we look forward to continuing to work with our many partners to support and sustain the project. We will continue to host learning events and consultations and develop best practices. Most importantly, we will continue to learn

from our families and share what they have taught us with others who have an interest in improving the lives of children and families.



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