



March, 2009

Grow Along with Me (GAWM) is an innovative project funded by Alberta Health and Wellness. Approved in May 2007, this project is scheduled to end in September 2009. This is an executive summary of the 2008-2009 Progress Report released in February, 2009. The purpose of this letter is to emphasize the tremendous success we have had to date in the project and to respectfully encourage continued support for such prevention and early intervention projects.

GAWM is a region-wide initiative that focuses on developing a comprehensive continuum of services for children 18 to 36 months of age. Services (provided by professional and paraprofessional staff) include: increased access to developmental checkups, availability of universal and targeted core educational programming and interdisciplinary collaboration.

The project is led by a Steering Committee with membership from Alberta Health Services, Southwest Child and Family Services, Parent Link Centers, Parents and Teachers, regional school divisions and community organizations. There is a strong collaborative effort to design, implement and evaluate services that maximize resources and reduce duplication.

The Grow Along with Me Project has two goals. These goals are aligned with Alberta Health and Wellness's VISION 2020: The Future of Health in Alberta, Phase 1, December 2008.

Goal 1: Develop a comprehensive continuum of services that provides the right level of service, at the right time, by the right person, as near to the child's residence as possible.

Goal 2: Identify children with a developmental delay as early as possible using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ).

The project is about improving outcomes for children and their families and we have highlighted some of the very exciting achievements to date.

Increased Access

GAWM provides services in urban and rural (towns, villages, and hamlets) settings, as close to the family residence as possible.

- Provides training to staff across Southwestern Alberta in evidence-based core programs, increasing the availability of these groups to parents and children.
- Makes available timely multidisciplinary assessment and intervention services to rural and urban communities.
- Maximizes the practice scope of professional and paraprofessional staff to optimize the use of scarce resources.
- Fosters culturally relevant and responsive service delivery within Aboriginal and Low German communities by working with organizations that support these families.

"The number of ASQs I have distributed has doubled in the last 6 months" - Public Health Nurse

Coordinated Care Delivery

GAWM coordinates consistent service delivery by pooling expertise and resources, thereby reducing duplication of services. Ministries and community organizations collaboratively plan core educational groups. The GAWM website (www.growalongwithme.ca) provides centralized information regarding how to access developmental checkups, core educational groups, and associated services.

- Coordinates regular development checkups and promotes consistent referral guidelines across partner organizations.
- Fosters partnerships that maximize the use of existing resources. Provides the foundational structure for future linkages with the Primary Care Initiative, Children's Mental Health Plan and Early Child Development Mapping Project.
- Allows for a permanent record of a child's development (All Ages and Stages Questionnaires are entered into the Meditech database).
- Provides the ability to look at trends in child development over time and across geographical boundaries.

"I am learning a lot about partnership and collaboration" - GAWM Steering Committee member

Efficiency and Effectiveness

GAWM strengthens connections among public health nurses, speech language pathologists, infant preschool development educators, parenting coaches, etc., and with families through Well Child Clinic Visits, Parent Link Centre activities and developmental check-ups (screenings).

- Provides comprehensive, coordinated, timely and universally accessible developmental check ups and follow-up in a variety of locations, closest to the family's home.
- Focuses service delivery for children at a critical time of brain development.
- Connects with children and families on a formal or informal basis as opportunities presents themselves.

"I learned different speech games to encourage my son to talk. We now practice those together" - parent

Sustainability

GAWM empowers families. It is these individuals who will have the greatest opportunity to influence the development of their children. By guiding and coaching parents they will be better prepared to optimize their children's development, readiness for school and long-term health and social well being.

- Provides information to parents and caregivers about the growth and development of children, how to support healthy child development, and where to go when they have questions or concerns.
- Promotes an upstream approach with a focus on health promotion. Knowledge and skills are increased by incorporating evidence-based practices that support optimal health outcomes for children and their families.

"It's a great opportunity to see strengths and weaknesses and catch it when they are really little, because sometimes it can slip by when they're older. It's definitely helpful" - parent

Accountability

GAWM is child and family focused. A comprehensive evaluation framework and a regular reporting process provide accountability to the public, funders, and the ministries.

- Makes use of a participatory research design: In partnership with the School of Health Sciences, University of Lethbridge, this dynamic project mobilizes evaluation, quality improvement and knowledge translation to incorporate evidence into practice.
- Incorporates continuous quality improvement in its evaluation process.
- Uses parent feedback to develop service planning and quality improvement.

For further information, please see the attached 2008-09 Progress Report or contact Mark Moland, Project Lead and Manager, Alberta Health Services - Chinook Health, Children's CARE Services at (403) 388-6575 or mmoland@chr.ab.ca.