



## B.C. First Nations Head Start Developing Outreach Programs

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DEVELOPING A FULLY FUNCTIONING HEAD START PROGRAM TAKES TIME. Much creativity, hard work and resources go into just getting a program operational.

Many communities are doing amazing work overall, but only a handful of communities have been incorporating outreach in their programming. For whatever reason, there will always be a number of children and families in the community who do not access centre-based services. These may include at-risk children and families who would most benefit from Head Start. This gap area presents a challenge.

When thinking about outreach and your community and its Head Start program, some questions to ask are:

- Is there a need to reach children who aren't accessing centre programs?
- Are there too few children in the community to offer a centre-based program? (usually minimum of 10)
- Is the community widely scattered over large geographical distances, and are there transportation difficulties?
- Does the community have facilities for centre-based programming? (Outreach can be an excellent alternative if there is a lack of suitable facilities)
- Are parents and families able to be involved in a centre-based program? (seasonal employment can impact participation)
- Is there a large population of young parents or parents with large families or elderly caregivers who find it difficult to leave the home?

In August each year, Nzenman Family Services in Lytton, B.C. looks at band lists to identify prospective outreach families. "Then we do an introductory package to all of those children that we identify who aren't going to daycare or aren't in a preschool program. We focus on these children and set up initial home visits and introduce the program to parents."

"One of the biggest challenges for the home-based programs is the lack of social interaction with other children. We all know that's how children learn—through playing. In the home visiting,

that's what may be lacking, so we do group sessions every two weeks and invite the parents and children to come. We do all sorts of fun activities like circle time, snack, making different health information available."

"We get a lot of compliments from parents and grand-parents. When the staff are out doing their home-visits, the kids are so excited and feel so special. They say, "My teacher comes to my house." Basically, if we weren't doing an Outreach Program, those kids wouldn't have any access to early childhood programs. We are able to offer that choice to parents."

Outreach can complement centre-based Head Start programs or it can be set up as a its own stand-alone program. Depending on community size and need, outreach can range from part-time to full-time services. Some outreach activities could include play group, Mother Goose, theme boxes and educational resources for lending, recreation activities, and more.