

Caribbean Child Development Centre, UWI Open Campus
UNESCO-Supported Project: Strengthening ECD in the Caribbean

Summary Report on the Regional Teleconference:

Strengthening Supports for Children from Birth to Three Years

Held June 24, 2011
Via UWI Open Campus Country Sites

I. Background

The teleconference on Strengthening Supports for Children from Birth to Three Years was the second of the 2011 series of Early Childhood Development (ECD) Regional teleconferences, hosted by the Caribbean Child Development Centre (CCDC), with support from UNESCO.

This teleconference was planned in conjunction with the regional policy forum on **Supporting the development of children zero to three, particularly the most vulnerable**, scheduled for 27-30 June, in Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Several teleconference participants indicated their countries would be participating in the forum. The outputs of this teleconference were expected to inform the forum of health, education, social development and parenting support agencies.

II. Attendance

In attendance were 56 participants from 13 countries, including: Antigua & Barbuda (7), Bahamas (3), Barbados (2), Belize (11), Bermuda (5), British Virgin Islands (Tortola 1), Cayman Islands (2 - Grand Cayman 1, Cayman Brac 2), Dominica (3), Grenada (4), Jamaica (5), Montserrat (1), St. Vincent & the Grenadines (6), and Trinidad & Tobago (4).

III. Introduction

The Coordinator opened the meeting sharing excerpts taken from the Zero to Three Policy Forum Concept Note, particularly citing research findings. Participants were asked to elaborate on the status of young children and related supports in their country, specifically, to share on:

- What/where are the existing gaps in addressing the needs of children from birth to three, particularly the most vulnerable?
- How can we better reach children, birth to 3, and provide quality parenting education and EC services in an increasingly challenging economic climate?

IV. Discussion

The issues raised in the pre-teleconference e-forum and in this teleconference are summarized below and each includes an example of participants' comments..

- A) Valuing play: We must promote the value of play and the connection between playing and learning; we need to educate parents and train caregivers to understand the importance and dynamics of play, their role in facilitating play (focus less on ABCs and 123), and to encourage language and the natural progression of growth development. The

community has to be involved and help to facilitate play, for the social, emotional, physical, intellectual and creative development of young children. A holistic approach is needed in order to keep the joy in learning, engagement and involvement of children. Child-friendly spaces need to be created and maintained. Play should be addressed in programme development, public education, parenting education, training, and policy (regulations).

- B) Programme development: A major focus should be on helping children to develop their communication and social skills, rather than on children being able to give the ‘right answers’, such as how to spell words correctly.
- C) Parenting education: Parenting education begins in most countries with mothers in the prenatal and neonatal phase as provided by community health personnel, depending on the status of the mother. Greater coordination between parenting educators (various ministries and NGOs) and expansion of provisions for the most vulnerable are needed. Despite seeing an increase in father involvement, more programmes are needed and fathers should be targeted.
- D) Institutional strengthening: We need to work with the institutions responsible for monitoring and ensuring standards of care; how we can support the strengthening of national mechanisms to facilitate greater sensitization, coordination and collaboration.
- E) Early interventions: We need to assess the impact of existing early stimulation and intervention programmes, such as the Roving Caregivers Programme (RCP) and Early Childhood Health Outreach (ECHO) and share findings. Policy directives need to be developed to support and monitor birth to three services. Interactions between children and caregivers/parents in the earliest years must be encouraged; births to three are the critical foundation years.
- F) Policy development: The importance of supportive policy was repeatedly noted. A profile of the status of ECD policy would be helpful to countries that are in the process of developing policy, and should soon be available from the Caricom ECD Working Group. The CaribECD website’s Country Pages will provide links for such information.
- G) Parenting policy and guidelines are needed to provide parents, particularly young parents, with the necessary support and ‘know how’ to take care of their children and understand their role. Parenting education should begin in secondary school.
- H) Public Education: We need to raise the awareness of various stakeholders of brain development in the early years, on parenting responsibilities, and standards of care.
- I) Research: We need to examine best practices and utilize what is most effective.
- J) Community involvement: Meaningful ways in which community organizations contribute to supporting young children were outlined. Greater efforts need to be made to involve community organizations, including religious institutions, in the provision of public education and services for young children.

Participants elaborated on local initiatives and challenges, posed questions and noted available resources. Further details are provided in the Narrative Report of this teleconference.

V. Announcements

1. Details of the renovation and upgrading of the CaribECD Website were shared and participants encouraged to visit the site and to contribute material and suggestions.
2. The availability of the CCDC, UWI publication *Learning Outcomes for Early Childhood Development in the Caribbean – A Handbook for Practitioners* was announced and its contents described. Some participants noted they had not seen it nor were aware of its availability, others noted they have it and are finding it useful, and

several noted interest in getting a copy. Copies can be ordered from CCDC and colleagues will be notified when the next print run is ready.

3. The report on the first teleconference was e-mailed to participants and posted on the CaribECD website. Subsequent teleconference reports will be posted on the website and participants will be prompted to view them there.
4. The Coordinator conducted an informal evaluation of the E-Forum and of the two teleconferences. Most participants did not visit the electronic forum prior to the teleconference but were expected to as reports and resources will be posted there.

Several participants expressed gratitude for the teleconferences, noting the need for such opportunities for knowledge sharing, resource exchange and professional development. Many also noted they would invite personnel from other ministries and NGOs to participate in future teleconferences.

VI. **Next teleconference**

The next teleconference is scheduled for Thursday September 22 at 9:30 a.m. EST, 10:30 a.m. AST and will focus on *Positive discipline in early childhood and effective alternatives to corporal punishment*, with guest speaker, Dr. Helen Henningham. Colleagues were urged to suggest other resource persons and possible guest speakers, from across the region.

The final teleconference in the 2011 series will be held on Thursday November 17 and focus on: *Child rights training (CRT): Lessons learned and regional ECD sector CRT needs*.

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