



The Alberta Child Care Accreditation Project

In January 2003, the Provincial Government announced pre-accreditation funding for Alberta's child care programs to recognize and support quality child care. As you are no doubt aware, in late June, the Alberta Child Care Network Association and the Canadian Child Care Federation (The Partners) were selected to partner with Alberta Children's Services to develop the first province-wide accreditation program for licensed and contracted child care in Canada.

Accreditation is:

- a rigorous, voluntary process through which licensed child care services for young children demonstrate that they meet standards of child care excellence;
- a process that provides a provincial standard by which child care providers may measure themselves and improve their services to children and families;
- a self-managed process of quality improvement using prescribed standards and on-site review of services by an independent agency, which confers, defers and renews accreditation status.

Accreditation differs from licensing. **Licensing** establishes and regulates *minimum, mandatory* government standards with the intention of preventing harm to children enrolled in child care programs. **Accreditation encourages the provision of higher levels** of quality care. The goal of licensing is to maintain compliance to regulations, whereas the goal of accreditation is to recognize achievement. Accreditation is an ongoing process: the child care program engages in a process of continual self-improvement, not just a one-time evaluation.

ACCAP is managed jointly by the Alberta Child Care Network Association and the Canadian Child Care Federation on behalf of Alberta Children's Services. There is an Advisory Committee, two Project Coordinators and several teams developing the different pieces of the project with community consultation. Most of those working on the project live and work in Alberta.

The accreditation process is being designed for licensed child care centres and contracted family child care agencies in Alberta. Although there are many similarities in the requirements for quality between centres and agencies there are also some distinct differences which must be acknowledged and addressed. Therefore, two sets of standards have been developed, one for centres and the other for family child care agencies. The first draft standards were developed following an analysis of seven sets of centre-based standards and four sets of family child care standards and the Partners in Quality standards developed by CCCF.

During September, these standards were presented at three two-day focus group workshops in Edmonton, Calgary and Grande Prairie with stakeholder representation: child care operators, college instructors, CFSAs, parents and individuals from the broader community. In addition we held a teleconference with participants in Region 9. The feedback and suggestions we received from these workshops (and we got lots!) have been built
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into the revised standards and materials that are going forward to the pilot sites for testing. The first of the pilots begins in mid October. There will be 18 pilot sites in total (at least one site in each region) - 15 child care centres and 3 family child care agencies.

An evaluation team of six ECD instructors from various community colleges and twelve "external examiners" recruited from the child care community will be working with the pilot sites in three phases - 6 programs in each phase. We expect that the standards and the materials will be revised as we learn from the experience of our pilot programs.

While all of this has been happening or been planned, the draft design of the Accreditation Agency has been developed and will be presented to a focus group in late October. The design of the agency includes how it is structured, how it will be governed, managed and operated. The Accreditation agency will be the voice and face of the quality of the child care services it accredits with the consumers of these services, the people who work in them, the professional communities of interest and the government ministries that regulate the sector. The Agency's role will be to provide an endorsement of quality to consumers and the community that the child care service that is accredited is one that has been objectively and critically assessed, was found to meet the required quality standards and is strengthening the quality of its services.

To ensure that information about the progress of ACCAP is accessible to as many people as possible we have just introduced a website specific to this project and will be presenting Information Sessions in each region over the next few months (dates will be posted on the website and advertised regionally). www.abccaccred.ca

We want to hear from you, so there is an email address attached to the website for you to get in touch with us and to provide us with your comments, questions or concerns. If you do not have access to the internet you can call Wendy Reid, the Alberta Project Coordinator at (403) 289-5032. We hope to have a 1-800 number in the near future! Your participation demonstrates your commitment to quality child care and ensures that the system that is developed responds to the needs and reflects the complexity of the child care community in Alberta.

The Alberta Child Care Accreditation Project (ACCAP) team believes that Accreditation is a tool that promotes quality child care. Accreditation recognizes the quality of particular child care programs and provides parents with additional information to enable them to choose quality care. Perhaps most importantly, we believe that Accreditation can be a tool that supports child care programs in their efforts to improve the quality of their services thereby raising the standard of care children receive in Alberta. The model that we are developing with the participation and consultation of our child care community will strive to be inclusive and educative so that the broad range of programs operating in Alberta will voluntarily participate in the Accreditation process.