

DEC Presentation
April 9th 2015

Julie Craig

Chairperson Step Ahead-Bath Family Learning Centre

Good evening,

Let me begin by thanking the committee for being here tonight, and allowing us the time to present at this meeting. I am here tonight because I am a board member at Step Ahead Bath Family Learning Centre. I wanted to take this opportunity to talk to you about how important we feel it is to continue doing what we are doing. As you are no doubt aware, Step Ahead began as a pilot project, the goal of which was to 'implement and evaluate the integration of early childhood services and supports to offer a seamless experience for parents and young children'. We have been working steadily towards the 'integration of kindergarten, early learning and child care programs, parenting support services and community resources'.

I believe strongly that we have achieved the goal of that project here in Bath, and I am not alone in that assertion. The Health and Education Research Group (HERG) at the University of New Brunswick followed the pilot project from day one, and their findings were overwhelmingly positive, citing benefits to children, parents and educators. One of the major benefits of being located within the school setting is the opportunity to reframe relationships between the school and the parents, who may or may not have had a positive educational experience themselves. It was noted in the report that parents' 'comfort entering the school and engaging with the children's educators increased, as did their involvement in their children's early learning'. The children also had an easier time transitioning into school routines, and showed more confidence in the school setting. Here in Bath we have had the opportunity to have staff at the centre network with staff at both schools, which has created a continuum of learning allowing for a seamless educational experience.

I could talk more about the evidence based research which supports what we are doing, but I know that our time together is short so instead I will encourage you to read up on it by accessing the full report at www.mwmccain.ca

One of the reasons that we have been such a success story is the amount of community buy in that we had when we began the pilot project. At the local level, the people who got involved did so because they saw a need, and they believed that it was possible to come up with a community-based solution. An example of this is our involvement in community food mentor training, which had many positive spinoffs including a school breakfast program. We have also been supported by local residents and businesses, and we have grown to the point where we are a significant employer in the community. We now have seven employees – not to mention the students we have mentored through co-op programs, and those attending post-secondary who have benefited from a summer job in their home community.

At the provincial level, it goes without saying that Step Ahead probably wouldn't be here today if it weren't for the initial seed money from the pilot project. The government of New Brunswick provided that money to test early childhood centres as a way to better integrate early childhood services. Well the research in the conclusion is that here in Bath we are moving in the right direction! Why would we want to take a step backwards when the research shows that everyone else should be working to catch up with us?

I was very encouraged to read the platform commitments that the current government committed to in '*Moving New Brunswick Forward*', specifically:

- Implementing a comprehensive literacy strategy that involves the public education system, educational researchers, employers and community organizations, with a focus on schools and communities exhibiting lower literacy rates and greater socio-economic realities
- Offering high-quality, universally accessible early intervention services to those children who score at-risk on the Early Years Evaluation at age 4
- Promoting early eating habits by providing local foods in schools
- Implementing the Integrated Service Delivery (IDS) model for early, coordinated and interdepartmental interventions in the area of youth mental health

Step Ahead is not just a day care, and Bath schools are not just schools. Together we are a community hub. These buildings are access points to services, and places where people in the community come for education and information about a wide variety of things. What we have now is widely considered the model for how it should be.

The NB department of education and early childhood development says they are 'dedicated to providing the best public education system possible, where all students have a chance to achieve their academic best and where parents are involved in their children's education'. We believe that this is what we have here in Bath, and we wouldn't change a thing.

Thank you.

Julie Craig

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