



# Community Action Plan



## Understanding the Early Years Halifax West & Area

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Sponsored by



Sackville Bedford  
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This report was co-authored by  
Rachel Boehm and Michelle Boudreau  
for Understanding the Early Years Halifax West and Area.

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*The view expressed in this Community Action Plan  
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## 1. Project Overview

*“The quality and capacity of our future population depends on what we do now to support early child development.”*

*-Dr. Fraser Mustard, Founder and Chair Emeritus,  
Council for Early Child Development*

### **What is Understanding the Early Years?**

Understanding the Early Years (UEY) Halifax West and Area is part of a national initiative funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada that enables communities to better understand the needs of their young children and families so that they can determine the best programs and services to meet those needs.

This project is based on a growing body of evidence that has shown that a child’s first six years are the most significant ones in his or her life.<sup>1</sup> Experiences in a child’s early years contribute

<sup>1</sup> *Early Years Studies 1 and 2*, The Founders Network ([www.founders.net](http://www.founders.net)).

to how well he or she will enjoy life and whether or not he or she will thrive now and in the future. Research has made it increasingly clear that:

- early experiences shape brain development;
- brain development strongly influences lifelong learning, behaviour, and health;
- families and communities matter;
- early childhood development programs can make a significant difference for children;
- the effects of early environment on children are long lasting;
- the environment affects the number of brain cells and the way they are wired.

*Source: The Founders’ Network, [www.founders.net](http://www.founders.net)*

*“Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see.”*

*-John W. Whitehead*

## **About Our Research**

UEY Halifax West and Area and its partners set out to determine how young children and their families in the Halifax area were faring in the early years. Between 2005 and 2007, UEY Halifax West and Area carried out community-based research on Grade Primary students and their families in thirteen elementary schools. The research aimed to provide communities with information on:

- the readiness to learn of their children;
- family and community factors that influence children’s development in our region; and
- the availability of local programs and services for families and their children.

UEY Halifax West and Area selected as its specific research area three regions within the boundaries of Municipal Electoral Districts 15, 18, and 23: Fairview-Clayton Park, St. Margaret’s Bay, and Spryfield-Herring Cove. All elementary schools within the research area were eligible to participate, with thirteen schools agreeing to take part in the study. These schools included:

- Atlantic Memorial Terence Bay Elementary School
- East St. Margaret’s Elementary
- École Burton Ettinger Elementary School
- École Grosvenor - Wentworth Park Elementary School
- Fairview Heights Elementary School
- Harrietsfield Elementary School
- École John W. MacLeod Fleming Tower Elementary
- École Rockingham Elementary School
- Rockingstone Heights Elementary School
- Sambro-Ketch Harbour Elementary School
- Shatford Memorial Elementary School
- Tantallon Elementary School
- William King Elementary School

The following research tools were used to gather information for the UEY Halifax West and Area project:

## **1. Early Development Instrument (EDI)**

Developed by the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University, the EDI is an instrument that measures children’s readiness to learn in school environments in five general domains: (1) Physical Health and Well-being; (2) Social Competence; (3) Emotional Maturity; (4) Language and Cognitive Development; (5) Communication Skills and General Knowledge.

The purpose of the EDI is to report on populations of children in different communities and to help communities assess how well they are doing in supporting young children and their families.

The EDI was completed by Grade Primary teachers on each Grade Primary child in the class who had the active, informed consent of a parent or guardian.

## **2. Parent Interviews and Direct Assessments of Children Survey (PIDACS)**

The PIDACS examined the relationship between children’s development and the various family and community factors that could influence their development. The survey interviewed parents or guardians of Grade Primary children to obtain information on the family, the child’s development, and the child’s experiences in the community prior to starting school. In addition, Grade Primary children were administered three direct assessments that examined their receptive or hearing vocabulary and copying or printing skills related to early literacy and number knowledge. The tests used for the direct assessments were the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT); the Who Am I? test; and the Number Knowledge test.

## **3. Community Mapping**

In addition to the research activities related to the EDI and PIDACS, UEY Halifax West and Area has produced a Community Mapping Report\* to display the various community factors that help shape a child’s early environment, such as the availability of community resources (i.e., recreation centres, libraries, and child-care centres); community socio-economic characteristics that tell us about the families living in a community; and various other demographic factors that contribute to children’s health and well-being in the early years.

*\*UEY’s Community Mapping Report is available on the Web site at [www.ueyhalifax.com](http://www.ueyhalifax.com).*



*"If our ... way of life fails the child  
... it fails us all."*

*-Pearl S. Buck*

### **Project Accomplishments**

UEY Halifax West and Area's research was completed by autumn 2007, after which the research findings were widely disseminated. Presentations about research findings were made in the community, in local schools and at the school board, and to various stakeholders at the municipal, provincial, and federal level. UEY staff worked with numerous government and community partners to highlight concerns raised by the research findings. UEY Halifax West and Area also made information available to the public through local media, advertising, articles in publications of our partner organizations, print and online newsletters, and on the UEY Halifax West and Area Web site ([www.ueyhalifax.com](http://www.ueyhalifax.com)), which will remain accessible to the public until 2012.

UEY Halifax West and Area published a number of tools to help share research findings and to educate the public about the importance of the early years. Publications, available on the website, include:

- UEY Halifax West and Area Brochure and Newsletters;
- UEY Halifax West and Area *Parent Handbook of Programs and Services*;
- Family Activities Calendar;
- On My Way to School Brochure;
- UEY Halifax West and Area Community Research Report;
- UEY Halifax West and Area Community Mapping Report;
- UEY Halifax West and Area Community Action Plan.

Throughout the research dissemination phase of the project, UEY Halifax West and Area staff consulted with and gathered feedback from a wide variety of organizations, community partners, and individual stakeholders on the concerns raised by the research findings. UEY staff worked collaboratively with local community organizations and schools to identify the concerns and needs of families with young children—and those who serve them—in the communities within our research area.

*UEY staff worked  
collaboratively with local  
community organizations and  
schools to identify the concerns  
and needs of families  
with young children.*



*“The test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children.”*

*-Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

## 2. Overall Research Findings

### ***Language and Cognitive Development : A Priority***

This document uses a number of research terms to describe the children of Halifax West and Area. For a complete list of terms and their definitions, please see Appendix A (page 24) or visit the UEY Halifax West and Area Web site at [www.ueyhalifax.com](http://www.ueyhalifax.com).

In Halifax West and Area, the developmental domain with the highest numbers of Grade Primary students rated “not on track” in Halifax West was Language and Cognitive Development. This domain includes age-appropriate reading, writing, and numerate skills.

In Halifax West and Area, 34.5% of students were rated as “not on track” for Language and Cognitive Development. Of those students, 24.8% of children fell into the “at risk” group (10th – 25th percentile) and 9.6% were rated “vulnerable”

(lowest 10 percentile). In some neighbourhoods, research findings showed that percentages of children rated “not on track” in this domain were as high as 70% with more than one in three children rated “vulnerable.”

These findings fit with other studies that have shown that literacy is a significant concern in Nova Scotia. According to Literacy Nova Scotia, four out of 10 adult Nova Scotians have difficulty using print materials ([www.ns.literacy.ca](http://www.ns.literacy.ca)).

### ***Pockets of Concern***

Overall, percentages of children rated “not on track” for school readiness in Halifax West and Area ranged from 24-34%, depending on domain—findings that are above Canadian norms. However, not all children in the research area fared so well.

In some neighbourhoods included in the UEY Halifax West and Area study, children rated “not on track” ranged as high as 50-70%. In these “pockets of concern” neighbourhoods, including Spryfield, Herring Cove, and parts of Fairview, as many as half of all children are entering Grade Primary at a disadvantage. Please see the charts on the following page for more detailed information about the disparity in research findings between the research area overall and the “pockets of concern” neighbourhoods.

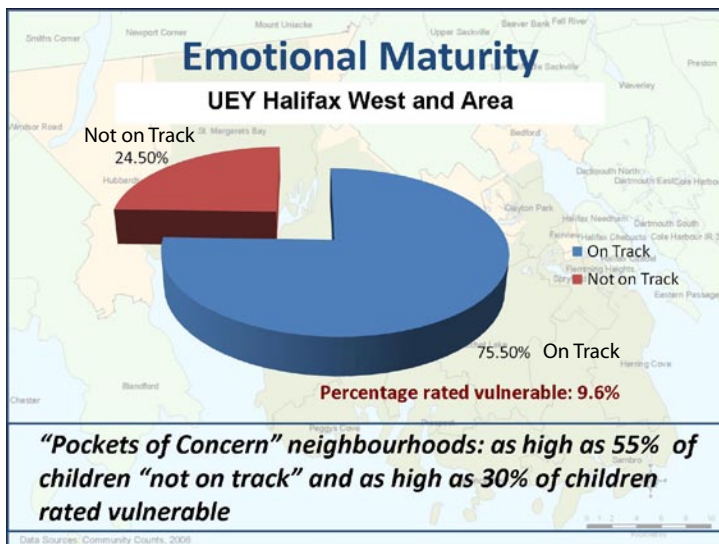
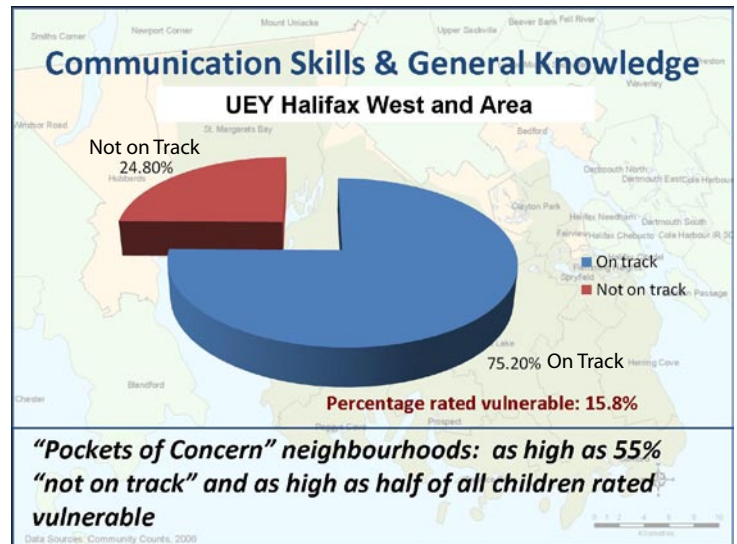
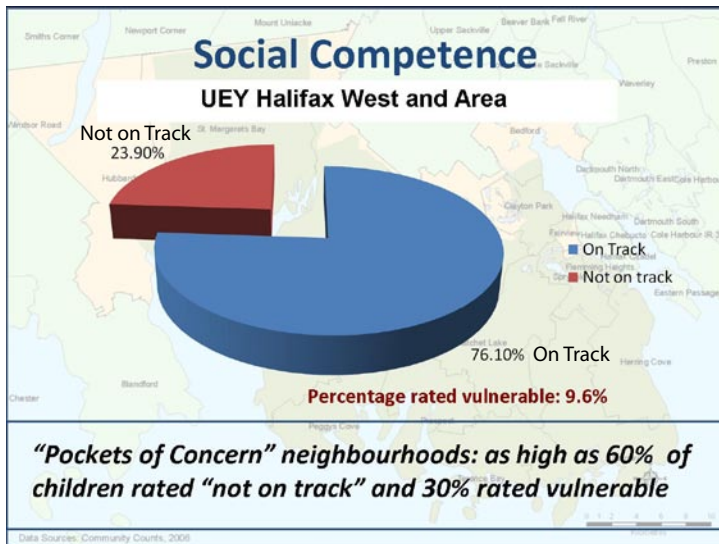
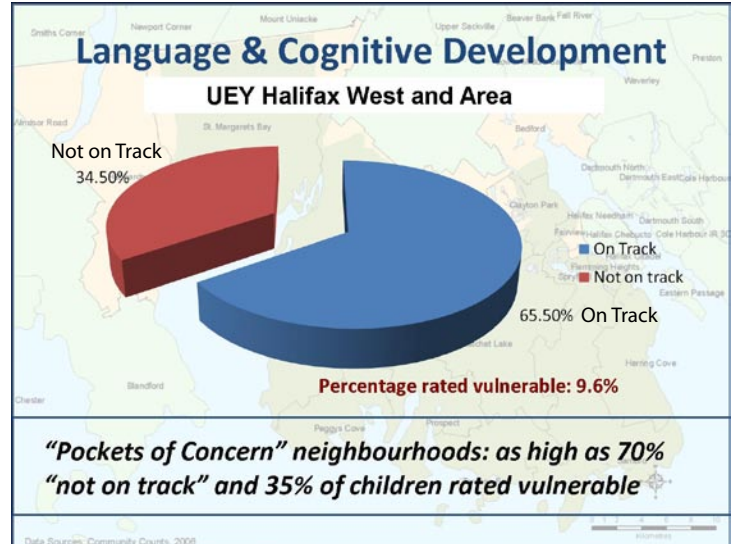
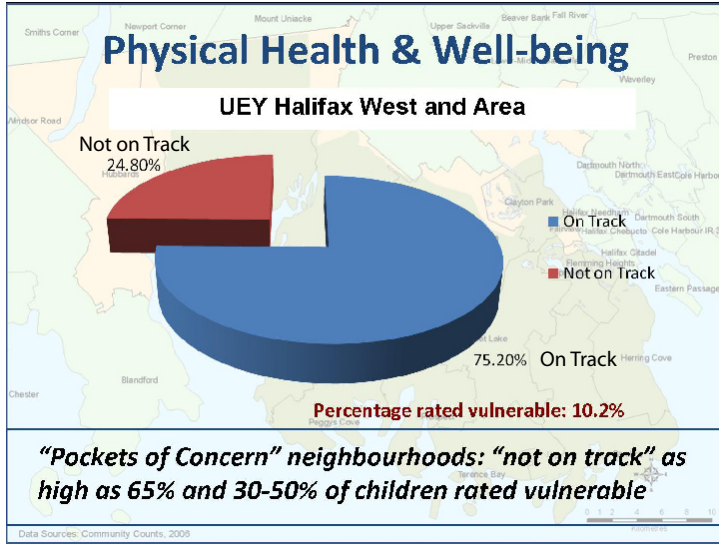
Consultations in the community and school visits confirmed the need for extra early-years support in areas where research showed particular concerns about the school readiness of children. These concerns are explained in further detail later in this report.

*“In some parts of the research area, children may be twice as likely to enter school at a disadvantage.”*

*-UEY Halifax West and Area Project Overview*

# Pockets of Concern

The charts below demonstrate the disparity in research findings between the Halifax West and Area research region overall versus the “pockets of concern” neighbourhoods:



## **Strengths of Halifax West and Area**

The majority of children in our study were “ready” or “very ready” to start school.

Children in Halifax West and Area scored significantly higher than the normative sample in all five EDI domains.

Overall, children in the UEY Halifax West and Area scored highest in the domain of Communications Skills and General Knowledge, which includes the ability to understand others, to communicate so others understand, and knowledge of the world around them. These high scores in the Communications Skills and General Knowledge domain provide an interesting contrast to the overall concerns raised in the area of Language and Cognitive Development.

In fact, in Halifax West and Area, 55% of students were rated in the top 25% (“Very Ready for School” category) in the Communication Skills and General Knowledge domain. Staff of Read to Me!, a hospital-based family literacy program that targets the parents of newborns, noted that additional research would be of value in order to determine how strengths in the area of Communication Skills and General Knowledge could be used as a foundation on which to build stronger literate and numerate skills.



## **Community Action Plan Components**

The concerns identified by UEY Halifax West and Area research and the feedback gathered from the community and stakeholders has been analysed and summarized in this UEY Halifax West and Area Community Action Plan. The goal of this plan is to mobilize action in support of young children and their families.

For the purpose of this report, and with the goal of highlighting priority areas around the “pockets of concern” neighbourhoods identified above, UEY Halifax West and Area has divided our research area into the sub-communities of:

1. Spryfield
2. Herring Cove
3. Sambro and the Pennants-Harrietsfield
4. Prospect and Area
5. St. Margaret’s Bay and Area
6. Fairview-Clayton Park

For each community, the plan identifies:

1. Community Snapshot
2. Key Partners
3. Research Highlights
4. Community Strengths
5. Community Early-Years Concerns
6. What’s needed?

## 3. Spryfield

### **Community Snapshot**

Spryfield is one of two urban portions of our research area. Settled in the mid-18th century, Spryfield is rich in natural and cultural heritage. In recent years, Spryfield has become an attractive option for new residential development, in part because of its close proximity to downtown Halifax and its abundance of green space. The Herring Cove Road business area in the central part of Spryfield features a variety of retail options such as large grocery stores, pharmacies, medical centres, and a shopping centre.

Spryfield has a younger population than that of the Halifax Regional Municipality and of Nova Scotia as a whole, and includes a mix of housing and income levels. The percentage of lone-parent families in Spryfield is more than twice that of other areas of Nova Scotia.

Numerous community resources exist in Spryfield, including a large, centrally located multi-purpose recreation centre, which features a swimming pool, library, and community meeting rooms. Also located in Spryfield are a number of food banks, community-based social support agencies, recreation programs, and family-based services. The community was recently selected as an initial site for a Community Health Team, which will focus on chronic disease prevention and management.

### **Key Partners**

#### *Spryfield and Area Family Support Task Force*

In Spryfield, UEY Halifax West and Area worked in close partnership with an existing collaborative group, the Spryfield and Area Family Support Task Force (FSTF), to disseminate research findings and raise awareness of the early years. FSTF is an initiative of the Chebucto Communities Development Association (CCDA) and is made up of representatives from nine community-based and public-sector partners<sup>2</sup>.

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2 Partners include: Chebucto Communities Development Association, Halifax Regional School Board, Progress Centre for Early Intervention, YWCA, Public Health Services - Capital Health, Edward Jost Children Centre, Chebucto West Com-

The FSTF was established over two years ago in an effort to address the lack of child-care in Spryfield and the need for a more coordinated approach to delivery of child and family services in Spryfield.

During the years of the UEY Halifax West and Area project, Spryfield was experiencing a crisis in availability of licensed child-care spots. Based on numerous community consultations and research, the FSTF had identified obtaining increased affordable, quality child-care services as a priority for the community. (There are currently 157 child-care spaces available in the community with an approximate waiting list of 225 children. The YWCA was recently awarded a provincial expansion grant to develop a child-care centre in Spryfield.)

UEY Halifax West and Area staff began attending and actively supporting the work of the FSTF in 2006, offering expertise to the group around early-years issues as well as providing specific information about Spryfield-area research findings as they became available. Together with the FSTF, UEY Halifax West and Area organized a Lunch and Learn to share early-years research findings with key community stakeholders. UEY staff regularly supported the work of the FSTF in trying to obtain funding for early-years programming in the community. UEY staff also supported the FSTF in making applications for increased child-care funding and in meeting with elected representatives and government officials.

#### *Rockingstone Heights Elementary School*

UEY Halifax West and Area also worked closely with Rockingstone Heights Elementary School, where research findings had revealed an urgent need for increased support of young children and their families. School administrators identified the need to offer Spryfield-area parents increased access to information about practical ways in which parents can work with their children to nurture healthy development, to build healthy relationships between parents and the school as early as possible in a child's life, and to improve access to supportive services in the community.

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munity Health Board, Dalhousie School of Nursing, and Understanding the Early Years Halifax West and Area.

Together with school administration, UEY Halifax West and Area partnered with Rockingstone Heights Elementary School to begin to address some of these identified needs. In partnership with the school, UEY Halifax West and Area:

-Sponsored a Coffee House for parents at the school, making a presentation entitled “On My Way to School,” which focuses on practical ways parents can nurture the healthy development of their preschool children.

-Organized a Wellness Clinic for School Entry for the Spryfield community at the school, offering free screenings, information, and resources on how to promote the healthy development of children in the years prior to school entry.

#### *Other Partners*

In Spryfield, UEY Halifax West and Area partnered with Michele Raymond, MLA; Public Health Services – Capital Health; and the Chebucto West Community Health Board to organize a Wellness Clinic for School Entry. UEY also worked individually with member organizations of the FSTF, such as the Edward Jost Children’s Centre and the YWCA.

### **Research Highlights**

In the area of Spryfield considered in our research project, a majority of children were rated “not on track” in the following developmental areas:

1. Language and Cognitive Development;
2. Physical Health and Well-being.

In addition, nearly half of the children studied were rated “not on track” in the domain of Communication Skills and General Knowledge.

School administrators, Grade Primary teachers and other community-based organizations and service providers echoed the concerns raised by the research in the domains identified above.

In addition, school administrators and teachers felt that undiagnosed mental illness of parents was having a significant and negative impact on young children in the Spryfield area and was hampering children’s capacity to benefit from

school curriculum and the activities offered during a typical school day.

### **Community Strengths**

A strength of the Spryfield community was its pre-existing collaborative approach to addressing community concerns, including an existing commitment to early-years-related issues. Community-based, non-profit and public-sector organizations were already meeting regularly at the FSTF table to identify needs and develop appropriate responses. An additional strength was the fact that the partners were already well-informed about the early years of a child’s life and their importance in providing a solid foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour, and health.

Spryfield is also fortunate in that it has an abundant variety of community-based programs and family-oriented services. Moreover, the staff and leaders of organizations in the community have demonstrated an openness to working together to address issues. Resources include a community centre, swimming pool, public library, skating rink, and a parent resource centre. Community forums and consultations are well attended by individuals from a broad spectrum of organizations, and the collaborative spirit that exists in the community is a definite strength. A monthly Roundtable meeting offers a place where the many organizations working in the community can bring concerns, share information, and identify needs. UEY Halifax West and Area was able to present its research findings at this Roundtable as well.

Finally, the community of Spryfield benefits from the presence of dedicated school administrators and teachers who demonstrate a willingness to help the community address challenges related to the early years. The schools actively participated in disseminating UEY Halifax West and Area research findings and offering parent education and information to the broader school community. The local schools actively supported UEY Halifax West and Area community events and helped in promoting them to their parents.

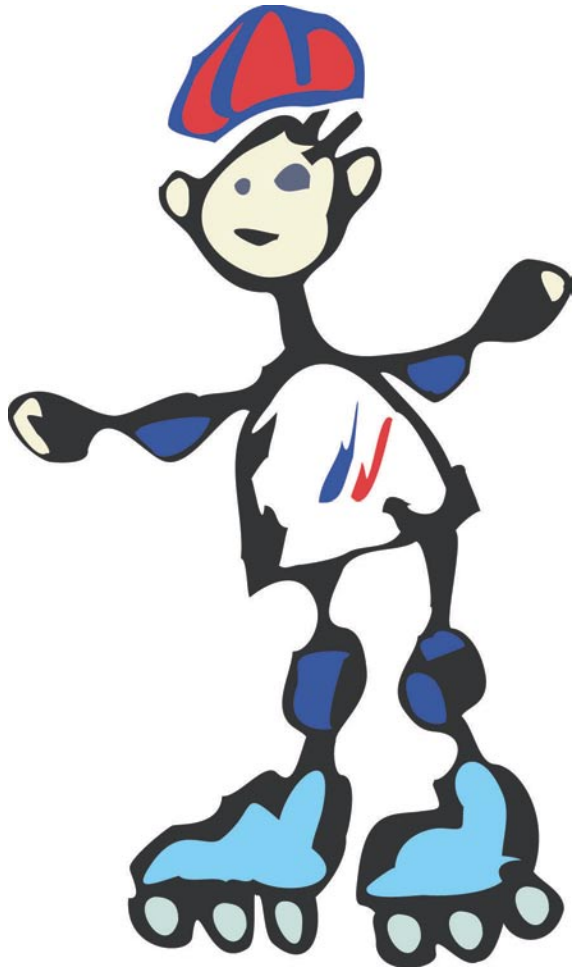
## Community Early-Years Concerns

As a result of analysing the UEY Halifax West and Area research findings for the Spryfield area, and in consultation with school administrators, school advisory councils, the FSTF, local elected representatives, and public-sector organizations, the following priority issues and concerns have been identified for the Spryfield area:

1. There is a lack of affordable, quality child-care in Spryfield. This is a well-documented, urgent need.
2. Multiple service providers offer an abundant variety of services across the age spectrum but there is a patchwork of access points and funding opportunities that makes it confusing for families to navigate.
3. Undiagnosed and untreated mental health issues are causing serious challenges for families and children and hamper children's ability to thrive in school. School administrators note that untreated mental illness in the community has a direct impact on children's readiness to learn.
4. Early childhood development in the domain of Physical Health and Well-Being (which includes gross and fine motor skills, physical readiness for the school day and physical independence) is a major concern for young children in Spryfield.
5. Parents are not engaged in thinking about their children's school readiness until age 4 or 5, and the first point of contact with a child's school does not occur until just months before school entry.
6. Parents are unaware of the many no-cost or low-cost activities that can be done in the home and in the community to nurture healthy early development.
7. UEY Halifax West and Area research showed that age-appropriate literate and numerate skills are a major concern for those entering Grade Primary in Spryfield.

## What's Needed in Spryfield?

1. Increased licensed child-care spots located in the community of Spryfield (transportation is an issue in this community, and any child-care solution must ensure local access).
2. Early literacy and other early-years programs that promote language, cognitive and communication skills, located directly in the most at-risk neighbourhoods or offered at the local elementary school. Programs could include parent and child social gatherings, preschool programs, drop-in play centres, neighbourhood-based parent and child literacy programs, etc.
3. An efficient system that would connect families with services in the community via a single access point, addressing the varied needs of families across the age spectrum. A full-time community coordinator could ensure an efficient system and is required immediately.
4. Targeted approach to educate parents about mental illness, how to access treatment, and how to provide support for children when affected by a parent's mental illness.
5. Support for local elementary schools in developing outreach programs that (a) nurture positive relationships or experiences with parents prior to school entry and (b) provide a way for schools to interact with parents of 2- or 3-year-olds about what they can do to help nurture early childhood development **in the years** prior to school entry. (Currently, the first contact with parents occurs at age 4 or 5, just months prior to school entry.)
6. Targeted promotion to parents of no-cost or low-cost activities available in the community and in the home that will help children develop in a healthy way.
7. Literacy programs that target families with preschoolers (i.e., a program similar to "Read to Me," but with preschoolers in mind).



## 4. Herring Cove

### **Community Snapshot**

Herring Cove is a small fishing village located on the rugged coastline south of Halifax.

Services for young children and families in this less densely populated part of the research area are few, and the families of Herring Cove must drive long distances to access formal programs, such as preschools, recreation programs, libraries, and licensed child-care centres. In-home care of children by a relative or care in someone else's home by a non-relative are the most commonly relied upon forms of child-care here. With significant distances between Herring Cove and other communities, and many needed services located outside of the community, accessible public transit has become a priority for many residents. On the other hand, Herring Cove offers safe, non-threatening neighbourhoods that promote active, outdoor play—an asset that contributes to the health and well-being of children and families.

Today, a growing number of families living in Herring Cove no longer work where they live but commute each day to the city's core. The time spent driving to and from work and accessing programs and services contributes to a hectic pace of life for many households.

### **Key Partners**

In Herring Cove, UEY Halifax West and Area worked in partnership with William King Elementary School. Currently, there are no child or youth-oriented community organizations based in Herring Cove, though many Spryfield-area programs service the needs of families there. UEY Halifax West and Area met with school administrators, teachers, parents, and the School Advisory Council on numerous occasions to discuss the needs of young children and their families living in Herring Cove.

### **Research Highlights**

In the Herring Cove area, UEY research findings revealed that a majority of children were rated “not on track” for school readiness in the following domains:

1. Language and Cognitive Development;
2. Social Competence;
3. Physical Health and Well-being;
4. Communication Skills and General Knowledge.

### **Community Strengths**

Herring Cove offers children the opportunity to grow up in a healthy, natural environment where opportunities for informal outdoor play and physical activities abound. Unfortunately, research findings show that children in Herring Cove are not benefiting fully from these opportunities, and further research is needed to determine why children's scores in Physical Health and Well-Being are relatively low (with more than six out of every 10 Grade Primary students rated “not on track” in this developmental domain).

Herring Cove is fortunate to have a dedicated and caring school community. School administrators have a genuine concern for the well-being of children in the school and are active in promoting programs that strengthen not only the school but the community as well. The Herring Cove School Advisory Committee, when presented with UEY Halifax West and Area research findings, took the results very seriously and immediately began to develop a plan to raise awareness of the key early-years issues in their community.

## Community Early-Years Concerns

As a result of analysing the UEY Halifax West and Area research findings for the Herring Cove area, and in consultation with school administrators, the school advisory council, parents, and service providers who interact with families from the area, the following priority issues and concerns have been identified for Herring Cove:

1. Availability of child-oriented services overall is a major concern. In Herring Cove, there are currently no licensed child-care centres, only one part-time preschool, and no other early-years-oriented social or recreational programs.
2. A majority of Herring Cove's preschoolers are not on track in the domain of Physical Health and Well-Being.
3. UEY research findings showed that children's ratings in the Social Competence domain (60% rated "not on track" in this area) are a cause for urgent action. School administrators and teachers confirmed that Social Competence has been an issue of growing concern in classrooms and the school in recent years.
4. The Language and Cognitive Development of children in Herring Cove needs to be supported in a more direct way. Currently, there is a need for opportunities for early literacy programs in the community. The closest library is in Spryfield.

## What's Needed in Herring Cove?

1. Increased services located directly in the community of Herring Cove. In particular, programs are needed that address the main areas of concern shown in the research: Physical Health and Well-Being, Social Competence, Language and Cognitive Development, and Communications Skills and General Knowledge.
2. Targeted messaging to parents about what they can do to increase their child's healthy development in the area of Physical Health and Well-Being, including things parents can do at home and programs that can be accessed in the community.
3. Programs that nurture the development of early literacy skills and social competence, including preschool programs, drop-in play centres, library programs, reading circles, etc.
4. Support for local elementary schools in developing outreach programs that (a) nurture positive relationships and experiences with parents prior to school entry and (b) provide a way for schools to interact with parents of 2- or 3-year-olds about what they can do to help nurture early childhood development **in the years** prior to school entry. (Currently, the first contact with parents occurs at age 4 or 5, just months prior to school entry.)
5. Targeted promotion to parents of no-cost or low-cost activities available in the community and in the home that will help children develop in a healthy way.



## 5. Sambro and the Pennants-Harrietsfield

### **Community Snapshot**

Sambro, the Pennants, and Harrietsfield are small villages located in the rural region south of the Halifax urban core. Much of this region, located on the southern portion of the Chebucto Peninsula, is uninhabited, with the majority of homes scattered along a few main roads that lead to or follow the coast. With significant distances between communities and many needed services located outside of the region, accessible public transit has become a priority for many residents in the area.

Services for young children and families in this less densely populated part of the research area are few, and families must drive long distances to access formal programs such as preschools, recreation programs, libraries, and licensed child-care centres. In-home care of children by a relative and care in someone else's home by a non-relative are the most commonly relied upon forms of child-care here.

Today, increasing numbers of families living in the area no longer work where they live but commute each day to the city's core. The time spent driving to and from work and accessing programs and services for children and families contributes to a hectic pace of life for many households.

### **Key Partners**

In Sambro and the Pennants-Harrietsfield, UEY Halifax West and Area worked in partnership with Sambro Elementary and Harrietsfield Elementary schools. UEY Halifax West and Area met with school administrators of both schools and with the School Advisory Council of Sambro Elementary to discuss the needs of young children and their families living in this geographic area.

### **Research Highlights**

In Sambro and the Pennants, UEY Halifax West and Area research findings revealed that 80% of children were rated "not on track" in the domain of Language and Cognitive Development. School administrators and Grade Primary teachers also indicated that they were concerned about the language and cognitive skills of children entering Grade Primary in the area.

On the other hand, the Sambro area also revealed a surprisingly high result in the domain of Physical Health and Well-being, with 100% of Grade Primary students rated "on track" in this area during the year of the study.

In the catchment area of Harrietsfield Elementary children rated "not on track" for school readiness ranged from 25 to 42%. School administrators and Grade Primary teachers did not raise any concerns about the school readiness of children in the area, but they did mention that obtaining increased services for young children and families was a priority for many residents.

### **Community Strengths**

This area offers a wonderful natural setting for young children to grow up in, with many opportunities for active, outdoor play in all seasons. This strength is reflected in the high ratings Sambro's Grade Primary students received in the Physical Health and Well-being developmental domain (100% of children on track). Harrietsfield also reflected this strength, with nearly 70% of children rated on track.

Another strength in this region is the important role the local schools play in the communities, and the schools' interest and concern for the well-being of children and families in the area.

### **Community Early-Years Concerns**

As a result of analysing the UEY Halifax West and Area research findings for Sambro and the Pennants-Harrietsfield, and in consultation with school administrators and the school advisory council, the following priority issues and concerns

have been identified:

1. The Language and Cognitive Development of preschool children is a priority need of children living in Sambro and the Pennants.
2. Parents and caregivers must drive long distances to access programs.
3. Public transportation is a concern for residents.
4. Lack of early-years programs and supportive programs for parents and child-care providers.

### ***What's Needed in Sambro and the Pennants-Harrietsfield?***

1. A literacy program in Sambro targeted at families with preschoolers, perhaps offered at the local school.
2. More preschool or early-years and child-youth programs available in the community.
3. Support for local elementary schools in developing outreach programs that (a) nurture positive relationships and experiences with parents prior to school entry and (b) provide a way for schools to interact with parents of 2- or 3-year-olds about what they can do to help nurture early childhood development ***in the years*** prior to school entry. (Currently, the first contact with parents occurs at age 4 or 5, just months prior to school entry.)
4. Since few formal programs are available, families would benefit from targeted promotion of no-cost or low-cost activities that can be done in the home to help children develop in a healthy way.



## 6. Prospect and Area

### **Community Snapshot**

Prospect and Area is made up of a number of small villages scattered along and in proximity to Prospect Road or the nearby coast. The natural setting of this area offers children many opportunities for outdoor play and recreation. Most families have easy access to hiking trails, swimming, and winter sports. The rural nature of the area means that many homes have large properties, offering safe and secure settings for outdoor play.

The area is becoming home to growing numbers of families who work in the urban core and commute each day to and from the city. The time spent commuting for work and other programs contributes to a hectic pace of life for many families.

### **Key Partners**

In Prospect and Area, UEY Halifax West and Area worked in partnership with Atlantic Memorial-Terence Bay Elementary School. UEY Halifax West and Area met with school administrators to share research findings and to discuss the needs of young children and their families living in the Prospect area.

Other partners in this part of the research area included Public Health Services – Capital Health and the Chebucto West Community Health Board, organizations that helped to sponsor the Atlantic Memorial Wellness Clinic for School Entry, held in the spring of 2008.

### **Research Highlights**

In the Prospect area, UEY Halifax West and Area research findings revealed that, overall, ratings of Grade Primary students revealed higher-than-average outcomes in all five developmental domains. No particular areas of concern were identified in the research findings.

### **Community Strengths**

A strength of the Prospect area is its strong sense of community despite the fact that it is scattered over a wide geographic area linked mainly by the heavily travelled Prospect Road. The area is well serviced with child-care centres and preschool programs, especially when compared to other rural areas in our study, and the community Web site “Prospectcommunities.com” provides an important forum for the community to share information with its residents. There is an active medical centre and a number of active churches that offer support to families with children. Many children in the community are able to attend preschool since there are a number of local options.

### **Community Early-Years Concerns**

School administrators and teachers in Prospect and Area noted the need to reach parents of preschool children prior to Grade Primary orientation in order to share helpful ways in which families can nurture healthy development at home.

Concern was also raised in this community that Grade Primary students in the more isolated community of Terence Bay (the school’s satellite campus) were generally not as developmentally ready for school as children from other parts of the school catchment area. This concern could not be confirmed by research findings as UEY data did not differentiate students by their community of origin but rather by school catchment area. However, the concern was confirmed in discussions with other community service providers and public-sector partners, and, hence, this Community Action Plan raises it here.

Should further research show this perception to be evidence-based, children from Terence Bay face disadvantages at school entry when compared to other students in the community.

## ***What's Needed in Prospect and Area?***

1. Support for local elementary schools in developing outreach programs that (a) nurture positive relationships and experiences with parents prior to school entry and (b) provide a way for schools to interact with parents of 2- or 3-year-olds about what they can do to help nurture early childhood development ***in the years*** prior to school entry. (Currently, the first contact with parents occurs at age 4 or 5, just months prior to school entry.)
2. Further research to examine the school readiness of children from Terence Bay.
3. Further research is needed to determine which priority areas of developmental concern need to be addressed to enable children from Terence Bay to reach their full potential upon school entry.



## 7. St. Margaret's Bay and Area

### **Community Snapshot**

St. Margaret's Bay and Area is a rural area of scattered villages and subdivisions. The rapid growth of the HRM and increasing housing prices in the city's core have led to suburban growth along the coast of St. Margaret's Bay, with many new family-oriented subdivisions and homes springing up in this area.

Family support centres and services have not kept pace with the changing demographics of this area, with the closest family resource centre located in Chester and not accessible by public transit. According to school administrators, the most prevalent form of child-care in the area is unregulated, home-based care, and many families have identified the need for a community centre and recreation facilities closer to home.

Commuting to Halifax for employment is a common practice, and it is about a half hour's drive to the city centre (not factoring in traffic patterns).

### **Key Partners**

In St. Margaret's Bay and Area, UEY Halifax West and Area worked in partnership with East St. Margaret's Elementary, Tantallon Elementary, Tantallon Public Library and Shatford Memorial Elementary School. UEY Halifax West and Area met with school administrators, Grade Primary teachers, and library staff to discuss the needs of young children and their families living in the St. Margaret's Bay and Area.

### **Research Highlights**

UEY Halifax West and Area research findings revealed that, overall, ratings of Grade Primary students revealed higher-than-average outcomes in all five developmental domains. Grade Primary students in the catchment area of Shatford Memorial Elementary School indicated some concern in the domain of Emotional Maturity. Moreover, this research finding was confirmed by school teachers and administrators, who had identified this as a concern in the school prior to the research study.

### **Community Strengths**

The Tantallon region of St. Margaret's Bay has many resources such as a library, child-care centres, preschools, community centre, rink, outdoor pool, and medical centres, while residents living in the outlying areas around St. Margaret's Bay have to drive significant distance to access these programs and services.

### **Community Early-Years Concerns**

1. Low rates of Emotional Maturity in the Shatford Memorial Elementary School catchment area.
2. There is no public transportation throughout much of the area.
3. Many parents in this region must drive long distances to access early-years programs and support.
4. Due to the high growth of new housing in the area, programs for children and youth are in high demand and most are operating at capacity. Many families are turned away at registration times.
5. There are limited recreational resources in this part of the HRM, increasing the time demands and financial strain on families wishing to access these types of programs.

## **What's Needed in St. Margaret's Bay and Area?**

1. Support for local elementary schools in developing outreach programs that (a) nurture positive relationships and experiences with parents prior to school entry and (b) provide a way for schools to interact with parents of 2- or 3-year-olds about what they can do to help nurture early childhood development ***in the years*** prior to school entry. (Currently, the first contact with parents occurs at age 4 or 5, just months prior to school entry.)
2. Children in the Shatford Memorial area would benefit from having opportunities to visit or attend the school for brief introductory sessions prior to starting Grade Primary. An introduction-to-school program offered at the school (perhaps on Saturday mornings or on weekdays, after school is over for the afternoon) may help increase children's comfort level with the school environment.
3. Further research is required to determine what role lack of transportation plays in preventing parents from accessing early-years-related programs and services.
4. Increased support, and additional spaces in, child and youth programs, so that all children can have a chance to participate and benefit from these activities.
5. Additional local recreational and community facilities are needed in order to serve the needs of families in this growing area.



## 8. Fairview-Clayton Park

### **Community Snapshot**

Fairview-Clayton Park is another urban part of the UEY Halifax West and Area research area. It is a largely residential community with scattered clusters of small businesses and large shopping centres, a modern library, sports fields, medical centres, and eight public schools. Public transit provides several routes through the area, enabling access to various services and amenities.

Many newcomers to Canada settle in this area, which offers more affordable housing than other parts of the city core. The area is home to many low-income, working families. Local school administrators point to a growing need for lunchtime and after-school programs for children whose parents are employed.

A food bank has recently been established to respond to growing concerns about hungry families in the area. Within the community there are pockets of densely populated housing concentrations of low-income and fixed-income families, particularly in the older section of Fairview. The population of this community has grown quickly, with new residential development spreading out from the city core. The Fairview-Clayton Park area is probably one of the most diverse communities within HRM.

### **Key partners**

#### *Local Elementary Schools*

In the community of Fairview-Clayton Park, UEY Halifax West and Area worked with Fairview Heights, Burton Ettinger, Rockingham and Grosvenor-Wentworth Park Elementary schools. Principals and teachers actively supported and participated in the research study. Fairview Heights Elementary School, where research findings showed significant concern about the well-being of young children, played a lead role in a number of research-response activities, including a Wellness Clinic for School Entry.

#### *Fairview Family Resource Centre*

UEY Halifax West and Area also worked with Fairview Family Resource Centre to initiate a community task force to address the needs of young children and families in the neighbourhood. The Fairview Family Resource Centre hosted a number of UEY events and was a key supporting partner of the Fairview Wellness Clinic for School Entry.

#### *Other Partners*

Other Fairview partners included MLA Graham Steele, MLA Diana Whalen, Halifax Public Library, Chebucto West Community Health Board, Halifax Regional Police, Public Health, Halifax Peninsula Community Health Board, Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association, Halifax Immigrant Learning Centre, Family SOS, YWCA, and YMCA.

### **Research Highlights**

The community of Fairview-Clayton Park showed considerable disparity in the school readiness of children, with children in the catchment area of three schools (Burton Ettinger, Rockingham and Grosvenor-Wentworth) scoring above the norm in all five developmental domains. The children in the catchment area of Fairview Heights Elementary School, however, revealed areas of significant concern in all development domains. The disparity of results within the Fairview-Clayton Park community warrants further research to determine which factors within the community are allowing the majority of children to thrive while other populations of children—and their families—are struggling and entering school at a serious disadvantage.

In the catchment area of Fairview Heights Elementary School, for instance, at least one-third to more than half of the children were rated “not on track” in the following domains:

1. Language and Cognitive Development;
2. Emotional Maturity;
3. Social Competence;

4. Physical Health and Well-being;
5. Communications Skills and General Knowledge.

The four Fairview-Clayton Park area schools included in the UHEY Halifax West and Area study, with their very different research outcomes, represent distinct neighbourhoods within the community. The neighbourhood surrounding Fairview Heights Elementary School has considerably higher social risk factors in terms of income, education, employment, and mobility than the catchment areas of some of the other schools that participated in this study.

In addition, school administrators and teachers, as well as the local MLAs and other service providers, echoed the concerns raised by UHEY Halifax West and Area research findings.

Fairview-Clayton Park is a community of significant disparity in terms of the well-being of children and their families. Certain parts of the community are facing significant challenges in supporting the healthy development of preschool children, and additional supports are needed that are directed specifically to these areas of highest need. Further consultation with Fairview Heights Elementary School and public-sector and community-based service providers would help to identify parts of the community of greatest concern.

### ***Community Strengths***

A strength of the Fairview-Clayton Park community is the active role the schools play in identifying and responding to community needs. Another strength is an abundance of resources, a large library, recreational facilities, several medical walk-in clinics, a family resource centre, and numerous parks for outdoor play.

Given the concerns raised by the research findings for Fairview Heights Elementary School, it is a real asset to have school administrators who are highly knowledgeable and committed to the well-being of families in that particular neighbourhood. These individuals are keenly aware of the challenges faced by children upon school entry. Fairview Heights Elementary School played a key role in the Wellness Clinic for School Entry held

in the community in the spring of 2008, with the goal of reaching parents earlier with messages about how they can contribute to their child's healthy early development.

All four schools in Fairview-Clayton Park actively participated in disseminating UHEY Halifax West and Area research findings and offering parent education and information to the broader school community. The local schools actively supported UHEY Halifax West and Area community events, such as the Wellness Clinic for School Entry held last spring, and helped in promoting them to their parents.

An additional strength of the Fairview community is the existence of an active family resource centre (Fairview Family Resource Centre), which offers a variety of early-years and family-support programs. Although the Centre is not centrally located to some of the high-needs neighbourhoods surrounding Fairview Heights Elementary School, satellite or mobile programs may be an option to consider. Overall, programs are needed within easy walking distance of the Fairview Heights Elementary School, given that many of the families most in need of support often lack transportation and include small children, which can make walking to programs difficult.

The Fairview-Clayton Park community is aware that some of its young children need additional support. Community leaders, including local MLAs, are eager to make a difference. When a meeting was held to discuss the formation of a collaborative family support task force in the spring of 2008, more than 30 people attended and offered their ongoing support to form such a group. The group has continued to meet, and plans are well underway to form a task force with the mandate of improving the community's support of children and families.

## Community Early-Years Concerns

As a result of analysing the UEY Halifax West and Area research findings for the Fairview-Clayton Park area, and in consultation with school administrators, school advisory councils, the Fairview Family Resource Centre, local MLAs, and service providers, the following priority issues and concerns have been identified for the Fairview-Clayton Park area:

1. Lack of early-years programs located directly within the neighbourhoods of greatest needs.
2. The overall development and school readiness of children in the catchment area of Fairview Heights Elementary School is a significant concern. Children's lack of school readiness is definitely impacting the ability of children to benefit from the school curriculum and typical activities in the school day. It is also having a long-term impact on children, who, upon entering school at a disadvantage, continue in a downward academic trajectory.
3. Parents throughout the area are not engaged in thinking about their children's school readiness until age 4 or 5, and the first point of contact with a child's school does not occur until just months before the child starts school.
4. There is high mobility in the neighbourhood surrounding Fairview Heights Elementary School. Therefore, programs must take into consideration that people move frequently. Mobility also affects students' ability to thrive in a school setting, as frequent moves are disruptive to the learning process.
5. There are many newcomers to Canada in Fairview-Clayton Park. Therefore, English as a Second Language and cultural factors must be considered in the development of effective programs.

## What's Needed in Fairview-Clayton Park?

1. Free drop-in and informal social programs for parents of preschoolers located directly within the neighbourhoods of greatest concern, and these programs must provide translation services for newcomers to Canada.
2. Support for local elementary schools in developing outreach programs that (a) nurture positive relationships and experiences with parents prior to school entry and (b) provide a way for schools to interact with parents of 2- or 3-year-olds about what they can do to help nurture early childhood development **in the years** prior to school entry. (Currently, the first contact with parents occurs at age 4 or 5, just months prior to school entry.)
3. Targeted promotion to parents of no-cost or low-cost activities available in the community and in the home that will help children develop in a healthy way.
4. Literacy, social, and active-play programs that target families with preschoolers in the most at-risk neighbourhoods and within several blocks of the highest density housing (i.e., a program similar to "Read to Me" but with preschoolers in mind).



## 9. CONCLUSION

This Community Action Plan, based on UEY Halifax West and Area research findings, was developed in consultation with schools and their staff, community-based groups, public-sector organizations and service providers, as well as the individuals and families who live in the communities identified above.

The UEY initiative in Halifax West and Area was funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC). Special thanks to HRSDC for the crucial funding it provided.

Sackville Bedford Early Intervention Society (SBEIS) played a critical role in the UEY initiative as lead sponsor or partner in the region. UEY recognizes SBEIS—its board and executive director, Caroline Gallop—for faithful leadership of the project, for bringing UEY to the Halifax region, and for the ongoing supervision and support of the project during its lifespan. Special thanks to Caroline Gallop for chairing the Advisory Council throughout the years and for her unrelenting commitment to bettering the health and well-being of children in the region.

The recommendations presented in this Community Action Plan were developed for and by the communities identified in this report. Advocating for implementation of the recommendations identified in the Plan will be a priority for these communities in the coming years.

The UEY Halifax West and Area project thanks everyone—individuals and organizations—who contributed to this Community Action Plan and who offered their feedback and suggestions to enhance the content of this plan at Community Forums held throughout the autumn of 2008. UEY staff also thanks Andrea Cochrane of the Chebucto West Community Health Board and Sarah Melanson of Public Health Services – Capital Health for assisting in the facilitation of this process.

In particular, UEY Halifax West and Area wants to recognize the outstanding support of the thirteen schools that participated in this study and the staff, Grade Primary teachers, Grade Primary

students and their families represented by these schools. Without their active involvement and ongoing support, this project would not have been possible. UEY's sincere thanks also goes out to the Halifax Regional School Board for their partnership in this project and for making it possible for UEY to carry out research at the schools within the region.



### ***UEY Halifax West and Area Participating Schools:***

Atlantic Memorial Terence Bay  
Elementary School

East St. Margaret's Elementary

École Burton Ettinger Elementary  
School

École Grosvenor - Wentworth Park  
Elementary School

Fairview Heights Elementary  
School

Harrietsfield Elementary School

École John W. MacLeod Fleming  
Tower Elementary

École Rockingham Elementary  
School

Rockingstone Heights Elementary  
School

Sambro-Ketch Harbour Elementary  
School

Shatford Memorial Elementary  
School

Tantallon Elementary School

William King Elementary School



UEY also wishes to thank the dedicated individuals who served on the project's Advisory Council between 2005 and 2008. They, and the organizations they represent, actively supported the project with time and expertise, assisted with organizing events, obtained feedback from the communities and stakeholders identified in this report, and worked diligently with UEY staff to share research findings with a wide variety of organizations and individuals in the region.



### UEY Halifax West and Area Advisory Council:

- **Sharon Aucoin**, Former Principal, Halifax Regional School Board
- **Rose Couch**, Coordinator, Early Childhood, Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection
- **Caroline Gallop**, Executive Director, Sackville Bedford Early Intervention Society
- **Margo Kirk**, Executive Director, Dalhousie University Children's Centre
- **Sarah Melanson**, Early Childhood Consultant, Public Health Services - Capital Health
- **Janice Silver**, Consultant, Community-Based Educational Projects, Halifax Regional School Board
- **Nancy Taylor**, Early Learning Coordinator, Nova Scotia Department of Education



*"The true meaning of life is to plant trees  
under whose shade you do not expect to sit."*  
-Nelson Henderson

### **Shaping a Brighter Future**

The recommendations contained in this report have the potential to bring about lasting change for the communities represented in the Halifax West and Area research area. By making this commitment to work together to enhance the environments in which the youngest among us develop, learn and grow, these communities are shaping a brighter future not only for today's children but for the generations to come.

Special thanks are also extended to Margie Fowler, Rachel Boehm, and Michelle Boudreau, each having served as Community Coordinator for a portion of the three-year project. Michelle Boudreau also filled the role of Research Assistant.

Finally, UEY thanks the many organizations, community volunteers, service providers, elected representatives, and other concerned individuals who assisted with the project over the past three years.

# Appendix A

## ***Research Definitions:***

At Risk – those children who score between the 10th and 25th percentile of the site’s distribution.

Vulnerable – those children who score below the 10th percentile of the site’s distribution.

On Track – those children scoring above the 25th percentile.

Not on Track – those children scoring below the 25th percentile.