

Province funds child plan [NL] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Thousands of children and families throughout the province are expected to benefit from a \$36.6-million child development plan announced Monday by the provincial government.

Details of the first year of the five-year early childhood development (ECD) initiative were provided by acting health minister Gerald Smith, Education Minister Judy Foote, and the parliamentary secretary to the health minister, Yvonne Jones, who headed up pulling the initiative together.

Smith said it is the first comprehensive federal/provincial program under the National Children's Agenda, which will build on the solid foundation already in place in this province for children, families and their communities.

The program, entitled Stepping into the Future, has been designed specifically to meet the needs of Newfoundland and Labrador, and is a result of consultation with early childhood stakeholders.

The new funding will focus on four key areas of action: healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy; parenting and family supports; early childhood development, learning and care; and community supports.

"Our goal is to help children reach their potential and to help families support their children within strong communities," said Smith.

He said government's commitment to early childhood development initiatives will enhance what is already in place throughout the province and support the objectives of government's Strategic Social Plan.

Foote said reaching children early is critical to the development of their literacy skills.

"This early childhood development initiative goes a long way to promoting early childhood development and achieving our goal of raising the provincial literacy levels, a priority identified in the province's Strategic Literacy Plan," said Foote.

FIVE AREAS

The ECD funding will be spent in five specific priority areas:

- to introduce a mother/baby nutrition benefit for low-income families, which will incorporate the Mother Baby Food Allowance;
- to support early literacy and transition to school by funding early childhood literacy programs and pre-kindergarten orientation sessions;
- to enhance existing family resource programs and create new ones, as well as healthy baby clubs;
- to enhance child-care services by increasing the number of subsidized child-care spaces, introducing monetary supplements for early childhood educators and increasing supports for family home child care;
- to strengthen early intervention services for children with developmental disabilities and children diagnosed with autism.

Jones said the priority areas were determined after a great deal of work within government departments, other government jurisdictions and in consultation with stakeholders in the early childhood development community, many of whom were at the announcement and applauded the initiative.

-Reprinted from The Telegram [St. John's]

Region: Newfoundland ^[2]

Tags: health ^[3]

child development ^[4]

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