



Speaker handouts and presentations from the 11th International Meeting on Indigenous Health posted to the conference website are intended for educational use only.

These conference handouts and presentations may not be distributed, reproduced or cited in other presentations, publications or linked online without written permission from the speaker and the CPS.

CPS Education Department
Tel.: 613-526-9397, ext 263
education@cps.ca



Lessons Learned from the Early Years Pilot Project: Indigenous-Led Early Childhood Programming

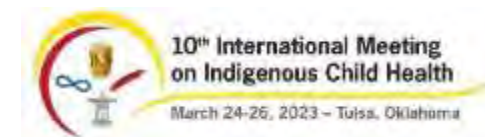
Charlene Rattlesnake, RN
Melissa Tremblay, PhD, RPsych

March 2025

Faculty/Presenter Disclosure

- In the past 12 months, Charlene Rattlesnake has no relevant financial relationships with the manufacturer(s) of commercial services discussed in this CME activity
- I do not intend to discuss an unapproved/investigative use of a commercial product/device in my presentation.

All speakers must complete this slide; information should match the disclosure of conflicts of interest that was submitted. If you have co-presenters, include all names.



Presentation Outline

- Early Years program overview
- Program development in Maskwacis
- Importance of embedding culture into the program
- Key results from the Maskwacis Early Years
- Program growth across Canada





Early Years programming

- Started in 2018 as a pilot project in Ermineskin Cree Nation
- Unique, flexible programming developed and adapted to the community's culture and context
- Prenatal to preschool program

ABOUT

Co-creating early childhood
programming with Indigenous
communities

The Early Years believes that First Nations,
Inuit, and Métis parents must be honoured and
held up as their children's first, best and most
important teachers.





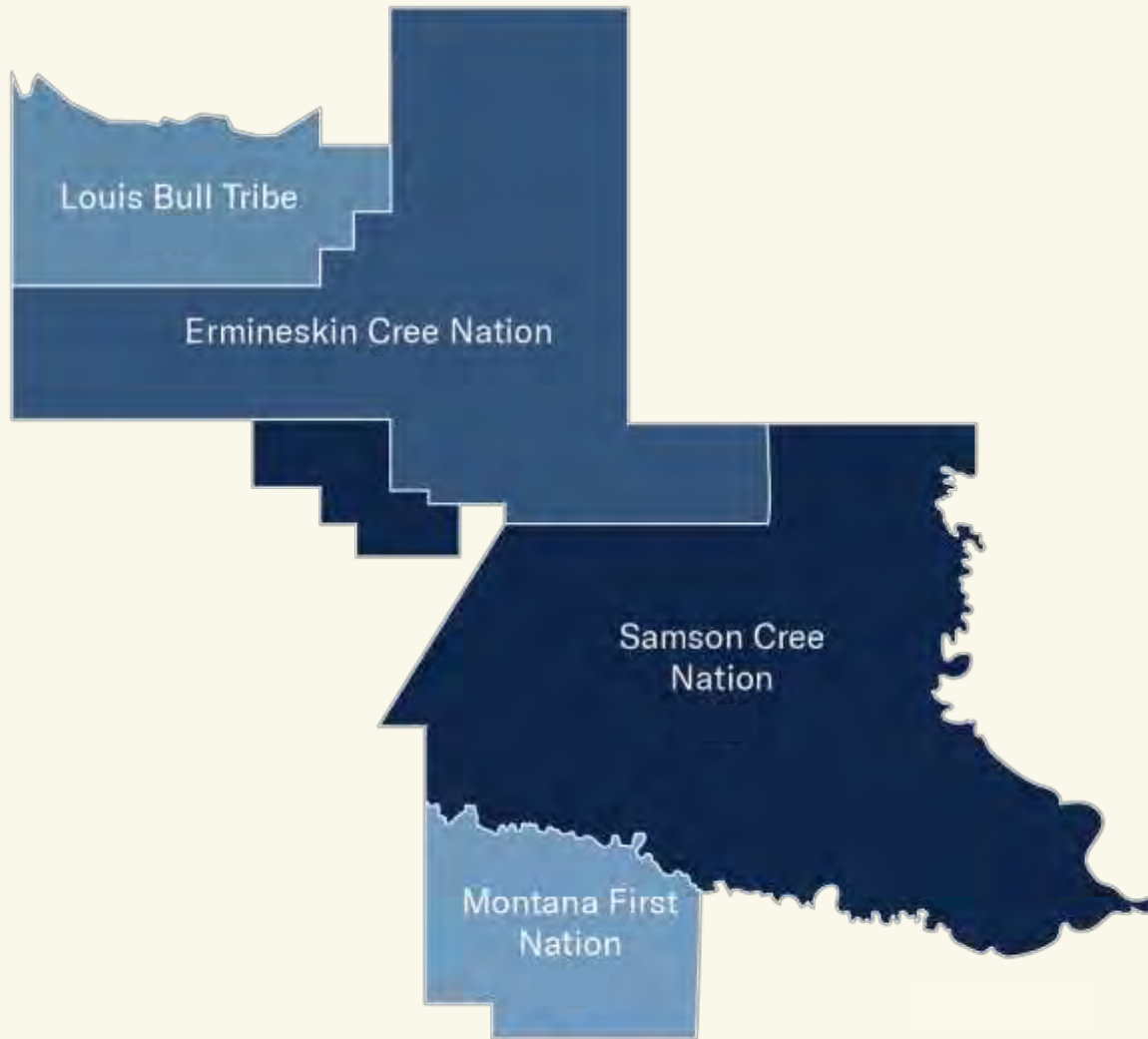
Early Years Pilot Project

- Researching the implementation of a prenatal to early childhood intervention program in a First Nations community
- Funded by Brain Canada Foundation (2018-2024)



Program Goals

1. Supporting healthy pregnancies and maternal wellness
2. Enhancing children's language development and overall school readiness
3. Providing play-based learning opportunities for children
4. Enriching children's pride in identity and culture
5. Strengthening parenting capacity and family well-being



Program Partners

- Martin Family Initiative: registered Canadian charity committed to improving education, health and overall well-being outcomes for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people.
- Maskwacis Health Services: Health centre that services about 17,000 members of the four Nations of Maskwacis –Samson Cree Nation, Ermineskin Cree Nation, Louis Bull Tribe and Montana First Nation, in Alberta
- Maskwacis Education Schools Commission (MESC): educational authority in Maskwacis



Program Development

- Started with 3 Visitors and a Program Manager
- Families and community is heavily involved in the planning and evolution of the program
- Program materials were developed in collaboration with MFI, MHS, MESC

**Since the program's
launch in 2018, over 400
families have
participated.**





Program Structure

- Home visiting: 1 on 1 with parents/caregivers and their children
- Group gatherings: group activities and events, often focusing on cultural activities
- Transportation provided to participants





EMERGENCY EXIT
SORTIE DE SECOURS

Types

EMERGENCY EXIT
SORTIE DE SECOURS

Minibeasts FACTS





Early Years Staff

- Staff are community members, often parents or caregivers
- Very low turnover
- Many staff roles have developed over the last 5 years



Grounded in Culture

- Family and Cultural Coordinator role created
- Elders Advisory Committee
- Traditional knowledge from Elders embedded in training and curriculum materials
- Cultural building built in 2021

Curriculum and Training Materials

- Understanding the Early Years course
 - Videography with Elders
- Toolbox cards
 - Culturally specific images and Cree phrases



TOOLBOX CARDS

MASKWACIS
EARLY YEARS



Program Evaluation and Research

- Evaluation of the program is ongoing
- Impact database: custom case management system for program staff
- Regular case management meetings
- Formal research project (2018-2024) is complete



Key Results

- Program's reputation in the community
- Wrapping responsive supports around families
 - Meeting immediate needs
 - Parenting support
 - Child development
- Relationships
 - Visitor-participant relationships
 - Social and emotional support
- Bridging and strengthening community
 - Cultural connections
 - Building a support system
 - Service navigation
 - Job creation



Key Results

- **Program's reputation in the community**
 - More than half of new participants self-referred
 - 22% active in program with more than 1 child
 - Collaboration with other community agencies



Key Results

- **Wrapping responsive supports around families**
 - Meeting immediate needs
 - Parenting support
 - Child development



Key Results

- **Relationships**
 - Visitor-participant relationships
 - Visitors are Indigenous mothers, grandmothers, and/or Aunties
 - Non-judgmental
 - Non-hierarchical
 - Social and emotional support
 - Reminders of parenting gifts
 - Coping with sadness, loneliness, stress



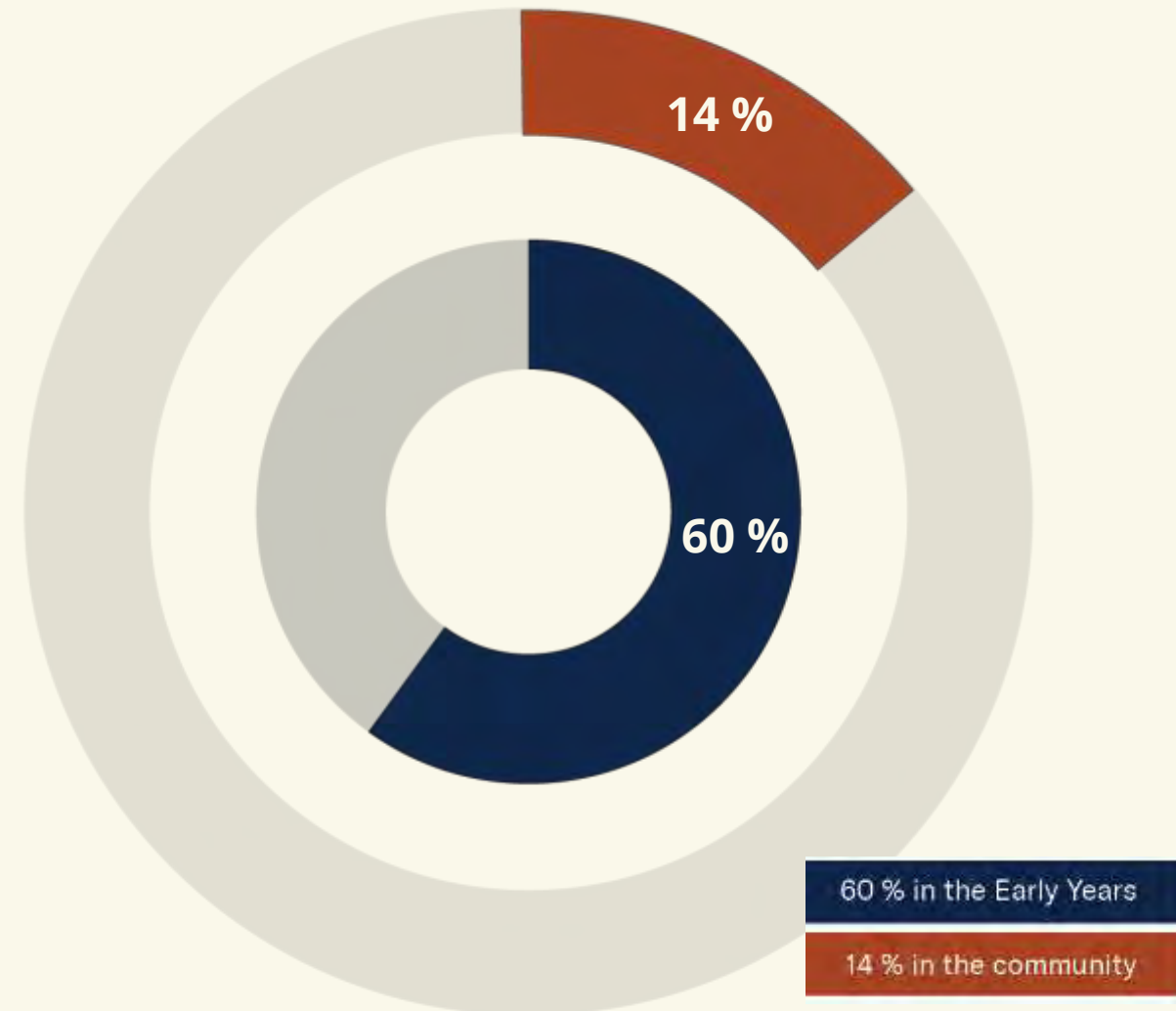
Key Results

- **Bridging and strengthening community**
 - Cultural connections
 - Building a support system
 - Service navigation
 - Job creation



Immunizations

- Early Years participants are supported to access other health services including immunizations
- Transportation is provided
- In 2025, participants in the Early Years were immunized at a rate of up to 5 times higher than the community rate



Percentage of 2-year-olds with complete primary series or up to date immunizations

Yukon



Thank you!

