



Maskwacis Early Years: Early Childhood Home Visiting in a First Nation Community

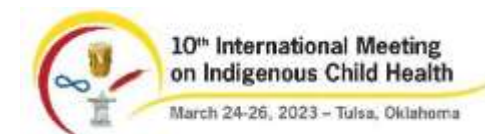
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- In the past 24 months, Charlene Rattlesnake has no relevant financial relationships with the manufacturer(s) of commercial services discussed in this CME activity
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Presentation Outline

- 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

- 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.



APPROACH

Aligning traditional knowledge with scientific research

Every child in Canada deserves the opportunity to reach their highest potential. Working hand in hand with Indigenous communities, the Early Years strengthens parents' engagement in their child's healthy development before birth and into their school years.





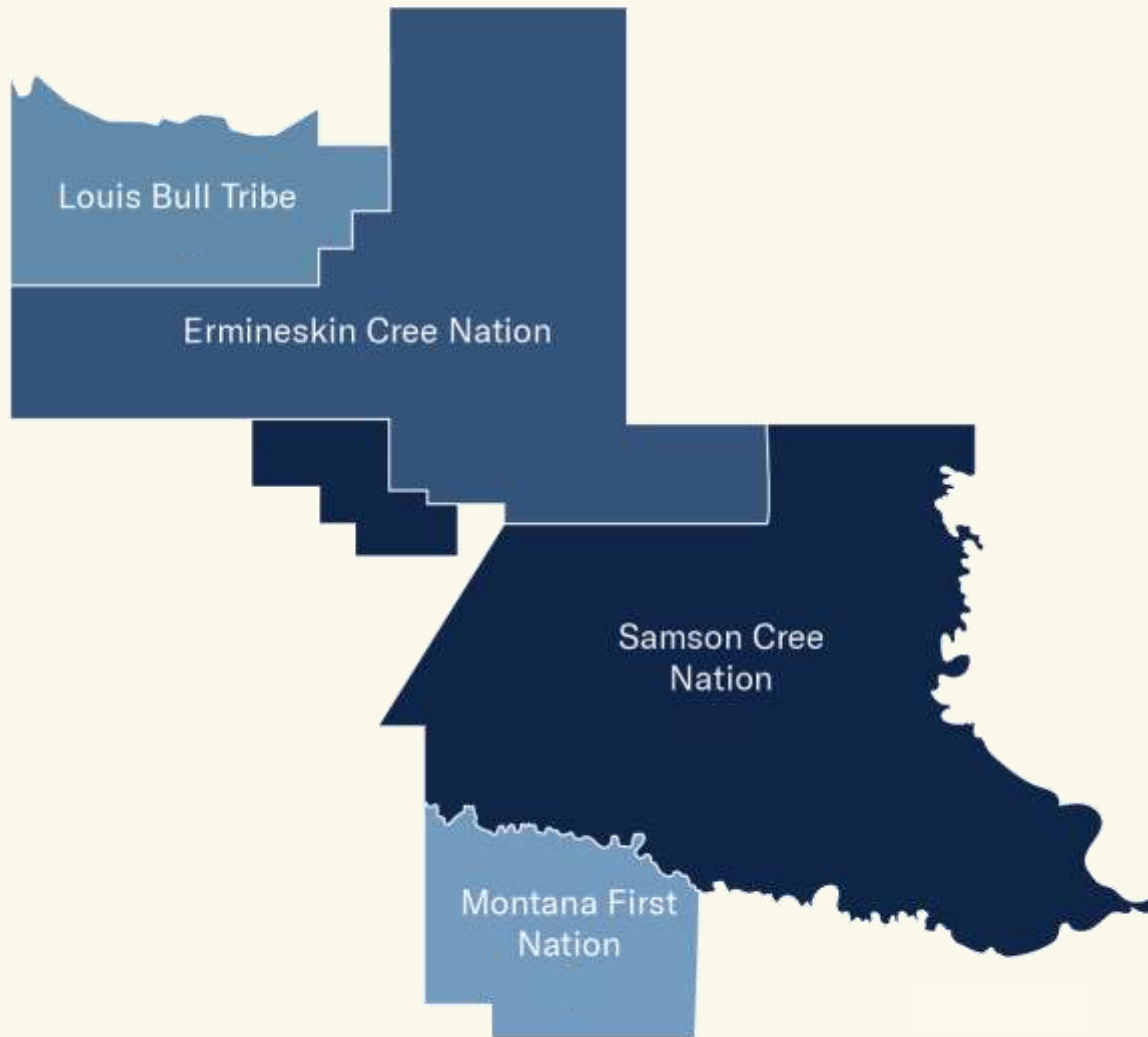
Early Years Pilot Project

- 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 (MESCC): educational authority in Maskwacis



Program Development

- Launched in 2018 in Ermineskin Cree Nation as a pilot project with 3 Visitors and a Program Manager
- Families and community is heavily involved in the planning and evolution of the program

Early Years Growth in Maskwacis

Over 400 families participated to date

	Program launch (2018)	Today (2023)
Staff	4	37
Families active in the program	28	190





Program Structure

- Home visiting: 1 on 1 with parents/caregivers and their children
- Group gatherings: group activities and events, often focusing on cultural activities
- Get Ready for Preschool: 8 week program for 2-4 year olds
- Pe Metawe bus: mobile preschool
- Transportation provided to participants







Minibeasts FACTS

EMERGENCY EXIT
SORTIE DE SECOURS

EMERGENCY EXIT
SORTIE DE SECOURS



“It is bringing the community together...every mother knows that her and her baby are important and that they’re part of a bigger picture.”

- Early Years participant





Early Years Staff

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

“I think just having a sense of feeling the rewards of your job at the end of every day, just feeling accomplished, like you've done something, is rewarding.”

- Maskwacis Early Years Visitor





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



Cree Phrases



TOOLBOX CARDS

MASKWACIS
EARLY YEARS

Love Builds Brains



Showing a child consistent and thoughtful love before, during and after birth is the most important way to build her brain.

Showing a child consistent and thoughtful love before, during and after birth is the most important way to build her brain.

Baby Lullabies



Sing a lullaby and rock the baby.

Sing a lullaby and rock the baby.

Breastfeeding Connection



Breastfeed your baby.

Breastfeeding is an opportunity for skin-to-skin contact, which is one way for a baby to build a strong brain.

Starting to Crawl



During tummy time, place an object for the baby to reach for.

A baby will learn to reach for the object and move toward it.

This Is Your Family



Introducing children to friends and family will help them build their community and let them know they belong.

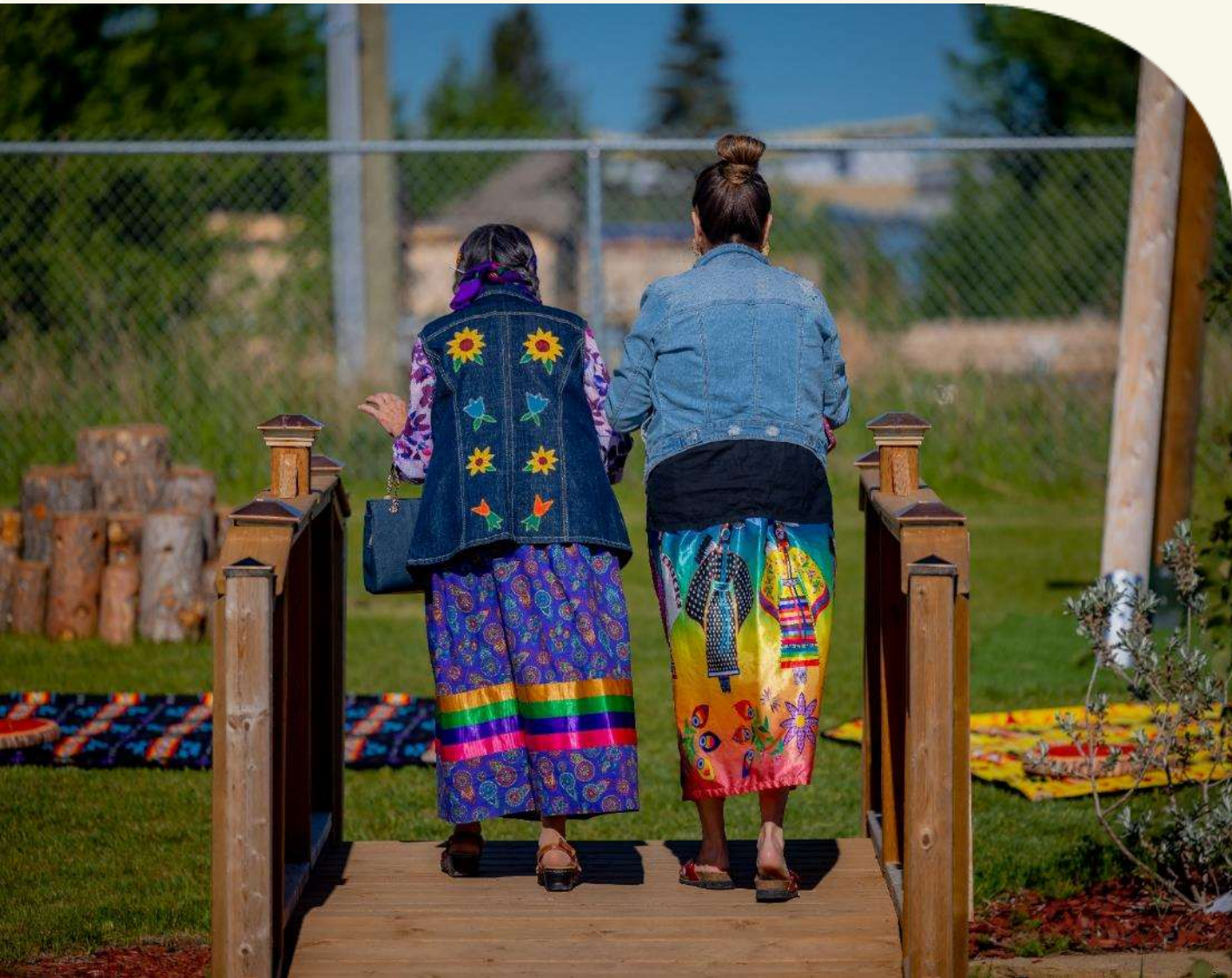
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Beauty and Aesthetic



A child should explore with art and aesthetics in both the outdoors and the indoors.

Creating art and exploring with art and aesthetics in both the outdoors and the indoors will help a child build a strong brain.



Connecting Participants to Cultural Resources

- Cultural group gatherings, cultural teachings
- Connecting families to Elders
- Annual culture camp

“For mothers, we learned how to make a ribbon skirt and bonnets. I never had anybody show me those kinds of things. I didn’t learn any of that growing up so it was really good to learn that.”

--Early Years participant



Culture camp



174
attendees

33
presenters



Program Evaluation

- Evaluation of the program is ongoing
- Impact database: custom case management system for program staff
- Regular case management meetings



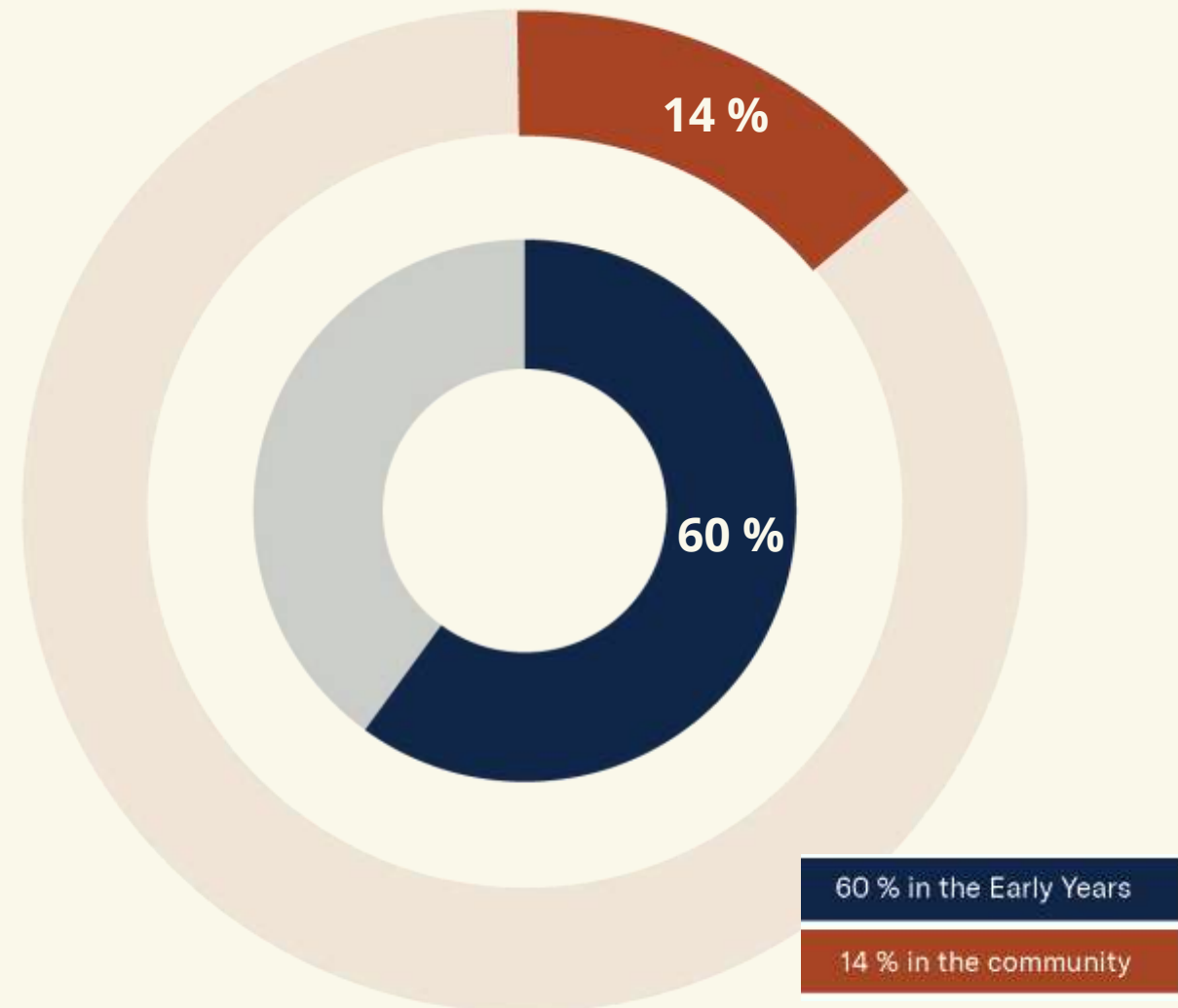
Key Results of the Program

- Participants form trusting relationships with their Visitors
- Participants report program is culturally safe
- Participants are accessing other community services
- Program has a good reputation in the community




Immunizations

- Early Years participants are supported to access other health services including immunizations
- Transportation is provided
- In 2021, participants in the Early Years were immunized at a rate of up to 5 times higher than the community rate
- For 2 year olds in 2022, the rate is 4 times higher



Percentage of 2-year-olds with complete primary series or up to date immunizations, 2022



"[The Early Years] is kind of like that gap and like that glue to all of the different community programs. There's so many little things that kind of just helps be that middle ground and pick up where some of the limitations of community-based programs leave off."

— Community Service Provider

Experience during COVID

- Program adapted to a virtual delivery
 - Visiting over video call
 - Virtual group gatherings
- Supply deliveries to homes
- Challenges
 - Participant engagement and retention





Early Years Growth Across Canada

The program has inspired almost 20 individual First Nations and Inuit communities in six regions across Canada to start or enhance their own Early Years programming.

Thank you!

