



# Bright Beginnings

**SUPPORTING  
ENGLISH-SPEAKING  
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

in the Gaspé  
and Magdalen Islands

**2017-2020**

MARCH 2017

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Collaborating to build and strengthen the  
vitality of the English-speaking community  
of the Gaspé and Magdalen Islands.



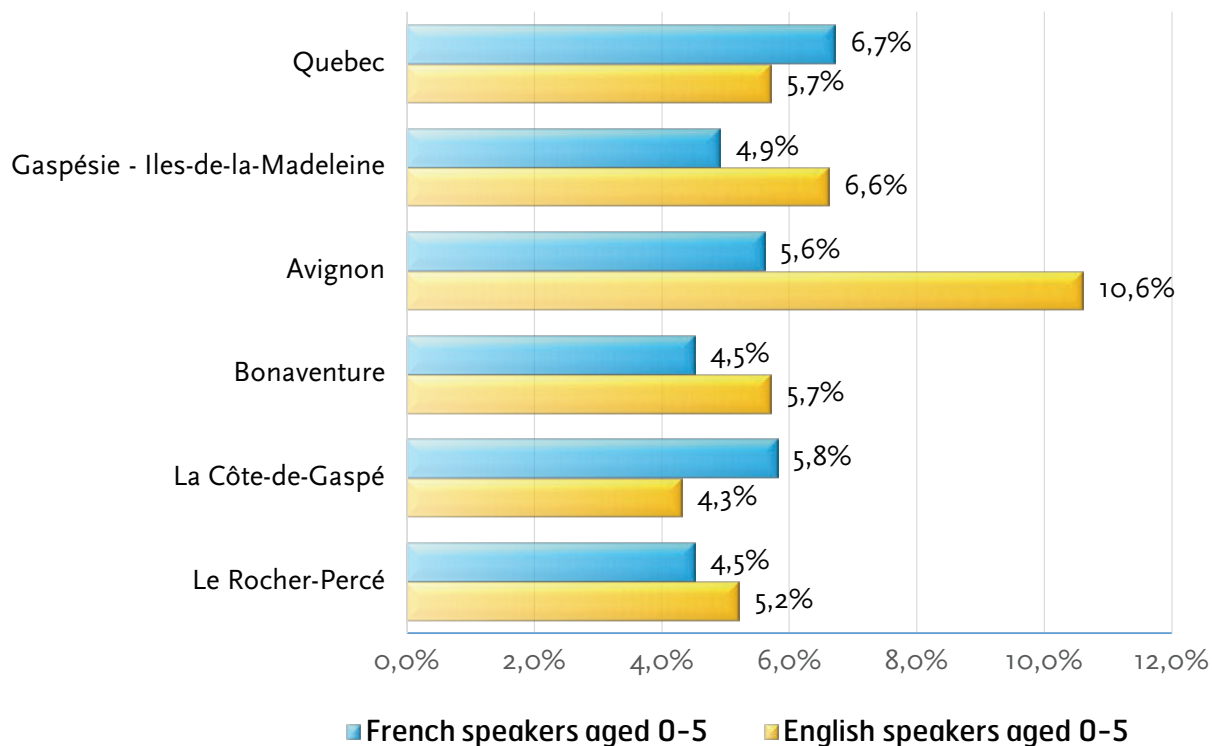
# A PORTRAIT OF English-speaking children in the Gaspé and Magdalen Islands



The official language minority community of this region has the poorest socioeconomic status in Canada when aspects such as low education levels, unemployment and low income tendencies are analyzed. Children are particularly affected by this status.

Children ages 0 to 5 make up 6.6% of the total English-speaking population.

Proportion  
of Children (0-5)  
in the English- and  
French-speaking Population



Thirty-six percent (36%) of 0-5 year olds live in lone-parent families, as compared to 15.3% of Francophone children.

Generally,  
their parents  
(ages 25 to 44):

- Have low education attainment (49.4%), this is substantially greater than Francophones of the same age (36.1%).
- Face an unemployment rate of (27.2%) which greatly exceeds the proportion of unemployed French speakers (11.1%).
- Have a greater tendency to live on an income of less than \$20,000 when compared to French speakers (39.2% compared to 22.3%).
- Have a greater tendency (10.8%) to live below the poverty line (LICO), when compared to French speakers (8.3%). This is most pronounced in the Bonaventure MRC where 16% of English speakers live in poverty as compared to 4.8% of French speakers.

Source: JPocock Research Consulting, based on data from the 2011 National Household Survey, Statistics Canada. Language concept is First Official Language Spoken with multiple responses.

All these factors can contribute to a poor start in life for children in the English-speaking community. They face a specific set of challenges and a lack of access to services that help to promote their well-being and development, particularly when developing cognitive and motor skills essential to literacy and learning.



# THE IMPORTANCE of early learning

A growing body of evidence shows that early learning experiences are linked with later school achievement, emotional and social well-being and reduced incidences of juvenile delinquency, and that these outcomes are all factors associated with later adult productivity.

Literacy development must start early in life to ensure school success. Learning to read and write starts long before first grade and has long-lasting effects. The more limited a child's experiences with language and literacy the more likely he or she will have difficulty learning to read. Children who fall behind in oral language and literacy development in the years before formal schooling are less likely to be successful beginning readers and their achievement lag is likely to persist throughout the primary grades and beyond.

Source: Preschool Policy Brief, National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), Rutgers University, April 2006.

The following factors have been identified as impediments to early childhood learning in the Gaspé and Magdalen Islands for English speakers.

## **A** ACCESS TO LEARNING AND LITERACY TOOLS FOR INFANTS, TODDLERS AND PRE-SCHOOLERS

Access to libraries, book stores and services that offer English books is extremely limited in many communities, often depriving children of familiarizing themselves with reading for pleasure outside of school-based literature. In addition, access to resources where one can borrow or purchase educational toys is rare.

Books and educational toys can be ordered online, but disadvantaged families sometimes do not have the means to purchase materials that assist children in developing essential skills required for literacy and education.

## **B** SUPPORT TO PARENTS

Parent involvement and home-based learning is essential in generating future success for children. Responsive adults have a special role in supporting children's ongoing self-generated learning.



However, English-speaking parents often face challenges in supporting their children and do not always know where to turn to or the services available to them. In addition, teaching parents about the importance of early learning within the home can be difficult. Reaching out to a new parent can be challenging, however effective collaboration can make this possible.

There is also a lack of access to services in English for parents. Few group sessions that have a specific focus to increase parental education exist. Those that do exist are centralized and outreach efforts are challenging and often depend on resource capacity.

## **C** LACK OF ENGLISH SERVICES

In order to reach out to and gain the support of entities in the region with mandates to work directly with and for the English-speaking community, CASA established a regional committee of all organizations offering services to 0-5 year olds.

### **REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT**

CASA	La Maison de la Famille Parenfant Gaspé
CAMI	Développement Social MRC Bonaventure
Vision Gaspé-Percé Now	Développement Social MRC Rocher-Percé
Family Ties	Développement Social Îles-de-la-Madeleine
Eastern Shores School Board	Santé Jeunesse Côte-de-Gaspé
Community Learning Centres	CAB Paspébiac
CISSS Gaspésie	Baie-des-Chaleurs active et en santé
Santé Publique	Avenir d'enfants

Partners around the table completed a survey to gather information on existing programs and services in the region and their availability to Anglophone families. Partners were asked specifically what activities for 0-5 year olds their organization offered, and whether these activities were offered in English, bilingually or only in French. They were also asked to describe the participation level of English speakers in the activities that were made available to them.



## The results of the survey showed that:

- Out of the 37 programs offered by Francophone organizations, only six (16%) were available in English and the participation rate by English speakers in these available services was from 0 to 20%.
- Of the five activities available on the Magdalen Islands, four were not financially supported, and the other was under-financed.
- In MRC Rocher-Percé, despite receiving financial support, only two out of 13 activities were accessible to Anglophone families, leaving English-speaking parents and children with very few opportunities within their own municipality.
- In MRC Bonaventure, though organizations such as CASA and Family Ties have succeeded in implementing programs for English-speaking families and gaining higher participation rates, the majority of these programs are underfunded, which puts intense pressure on the organizations that struggle to ensure the sustainability of the programs.
- In MRC Avignon, five out of nine activities are made available to English speakers through bilingual animation. However, Anglophone participation in these programs was between 0 and 20%, suggesting that a bilingual approach is perhaps not effective.
- After MRC Bonaventure, MRC Côte-de-Gaspé had the highest selection of activities and programs offered in English or bilingually (mostly bilingually), however Anglophone participation level remained around 20%. Furthermore, parents and children in Côte-de-Gaspé remain excluded from nine programs for 0 - 5 year olds that could easily be transferred to English.

The results of the survey also highlighted the lack of funding available for these activities, with the majority of programs offered in English struggling from lack of financial support or receiving no financial support at all.

In order to address these issues, the members of the Regional Committee for Early Childhood Development examined the current situation and created this action plan.

# Regional Action Plan FOR ENGLISH-SPEAKING CHILDREN AGES 0 TO 5

2017-2020



To ensure that English-speaking children have early learning opportunities and strengthened families for lifelong success.

By working together across health, education and the voluntary and community sector, the Regional Committee will deliver on the following objectives:

1

The needs of 0 to 5 year olds are determined and effectively communicated to partners, stakeholders and service providers.

- Conduct a needs assessment.
- Create a knowledge base.
- Determine evaluation methods.

2

The delivery of 0-5 programming that assists with the development of school-readiness skills is facilitated.

- Create branding for action plan.
- Hold regular meetings, networking and communications between members of the Regional Committee.
- Implement Train the Trainer.

3

Parents and their children have increased access to community-based learning experiences in socially engaging settings.

- Analyze possibility of a Bright Beginnings transportation.
- Deliver community-based parent-child programming.
- Assist service providers with adaptation of existing programs.

4

The participation and engagement of socio-economically challenged parents is fostered.

- Establish outreach methods.
- Offer parental workshops.



# Deliverables

## OBJECTIVE 1 ▶

**The needs of 0 to 5 year olds are determined and effectively communicated to partners, stakeholders and service providers.**

### **A CONDUCT A NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

In order to better understand the needs of parents, to share information with decision-makers, and to collaborate with partners to meet the needs of Anglophone parents, a survey will be distributed to parents through day cares and elementary schools. There will also be an electronic version that can be filled out online. It may also be necessary to visit parents in their home to gather information.

### **B CREATE A KNOWLEDGE BASE**

Working with the Community Health and Social Services Network and various organizations, demographics will be gathered regarding English-speaking children and their parents. This knowledge base will be maintained, updated regularly and distributed.

### **C DETERMINE EVALUATION METHODS**

The regional committee will establish evaluation parameters for each activity within the action plan.

## OBJECTIVE 2 ▶

**The delivery of 0-5 programming that assists with the development of school-readiness skills is facilitated.**

### **A** CREATE BRANDING FOR ACTION PLAN

Mascots can be very effective when used as part of a learning strategy. Even with the youngest learners the concept of introducing a supportive character can help them to be more comfortable and more receptive to what they are learning, especially if they are in socially vulnerable situations. A familiar interactive visual that encourages children and parents through various early development stages and milestones will be created.

### **B** HOLD REGULAR MEETINGS, NETWORKING AND COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN MEMBERS OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE

For entities in the region with mandates to work directly with and for the English-speaking community, it is crucial that meetings take place pertaining directly to the Anglophone community, in order to achieve targeted objectives.

To ensure that regular communication is maintained, one meeting per year (two for the first year) is anticipated for the network to meet in person for an all-day deliberation.

### **C** IMPLEMENT TRAIN THE TRAINER

To address the gap in the availability of parent-child activities in English and to facilitate the delivery of programming, a 'train the trainer' approach will be used for multiple parent-child activities in order to facilitate sustainability. By implementing a train the trainer approach, parental education programming will be accessible in more than one area.

## OBJECTIVE 3 ▶



### DELIVER COMMUNITY-BASED PARENT-CHILD PROGRAMMING

Parents and their children have increased access to community-based learning experiences in socially engaging settings.

#### ● *Analyze Possibility of Bright Beginnings Transportation*

Reaching isolated parents, lack of transportation and available spaces to meet have been identified as major hurdles to delivering programs and activities to English speakers in the Gaspé. A solution to this, and many other challenges in reaching rural communities, would be to purchase or lease a “**Bright Beginnings**” van, which could be packed with toys, books and other learning materials.

The van would be branded with the Bright Beginnings logo, so families can easily identify it. It would travel to every English-speaking community on the coast to bring 0-5 programming to families. A feasibility study must be carried out.

#### ● *Toy Library*

Toy libraries offer multiple benefits to families. Children are able to try educational toys that help develop new and existing skills. Parents can regain parental confidence and experience increased social engagement through volunteering at the toy library. Children learn the concept of sharing and taking turns. Very few toy-sharing libraries are available in our region, and even fewer are accessible to English-speaking families.

Toy Libraries will be established where parents can interact with their child in a socially engaging space that encourages parents and children to socialize; creating informal networks with other toy library members.

#### ● *Book Bags for New Mothers*

As a large part of early learning takes place within the home, encouraging early literacy helps parents better understand the important role of the home environment while developing children’s language and literacy skills. Reaching out to a new parent can be challenging, however effective collaboration will make it possible.

Book bags can help new parents acquire free learning resources that promote language and literacy development, while building on the importance of home environments and meaningful literacy experiences for pre-school aged children.



- **Parent-children nursery rhymes**

Parent-child nursery rhyme sessions have been successfully implemented in several Gaspesian communities. It is clear that this program must be strengthened and expanded to other communities where English-speakers are isolated with little access to activities in English. It is crucial to reach the most vulnerable families who might experience a weaker communicative ability, and whose children may be challenged with language, developmental and social delays. The delivery of group experiences for parents and their babies/toddlers, introducing adults and children to the pleasure and power of using rhymes, songs and stories, will be expanded.

- **Book Crunchers (Croque-livres)**

Access to libraries, book stores and services that offer English books is extremely limited in many communities. On the Magdalen Islands in particular, books and games are unavailable in English, unless ordered online, therefore depriving the younger generation of familiarizing themselves with reading for pleasure outside of school-based literature.

*Croque-livres*, inspired by the “take a book, leave a book” approach, is a network of book-sharing stations throughout Quebec targeting youth ages 0 to 12. These are currently offered in English by CASA in some communities and will be expanded to other communities, offering children, and their families’ free access to books.

## **B** ASSIST SERVICE PROVIDERS WITH ADAPTATION OF EXISTING PROGRAMS

Service providers will be provided with a sound knowledge base as to how their services are required within the English-speaking community. Based on this knowledge, they can work towards delivering adapted services to parents and children.

## OBJECTIVE 4 ▶

The participation and engagement of socioeconomically disadvantaged parents is fostered.

### A REACH SPECIFIC PARENTS

Different approaches and outreach methods are needed to reach vulnerable parents. For example, these parents may feel more comfortable with community organizations in comparison to institutions within the education and health and social services sectors. Lack of transportation to activities is an important factor.

### B OFFER PARENTAL WORKSHOPS

Community-based education and support programs that have been developed specifically for parents who are young, single, socially, culturally or geographically isolated, and who have limited formal education and low income, will be offered.

Parental workshops will be designed and offered by trained facilitators to small groups of parents in regular sessions.

*“Research is clear on the subject of early intervention for children 0-5 years old, particularly when certain socio-economic conditions are present.*

*Given that 14 of 16 ESSB schools are designated as “milieu défavorisé”, a significant percentage of our families would benefit from outside-the-home assistance-and-support programs that help to better prepare their children for entry into our schools.*

*This type of timely initiative can only increase the odds for our students’ long term success in literacy and numeracy.”*

- Howard Miller, Director General, Eastern Shores School Board

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