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What About the Kids? Learnings from Early Years Research Initiatives in Northern BC in the Midst of COVID-19

As children begin to see and explore the world, learn how to communicate, and develop relationships, they are building foundations that will impact lifelong health and wellbeing outcomes. Over the last two years, a team of providers from a range of professional backgrounds across health, education, social services, and not-for-profit sectors has come together to build cross-sector working among early years providers, and explore needs, priorities, and research opportunities in northern BC to support children and families in early childhood. This network is known as SEED BC, for **S**haring to change **E**arly childhood **E**xperiences and promote healthy **D**evelopment in Northern BC (www.seedbc.ca).

This presentation will introduce the work of SEED and share findings from recent projects during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about considerable changes to the lives of families, yet the impact on younger children aged 0 to 5 is poorly examined. We will start with sharing learnings from our SEED summit in February 2021. The summit brought together over 100 participants to discuss early childhood, find common ground, celebrate local success and challenges in the midst of the pandemic, and build on understanding how we work collaboratively across the region to identify and address early years priorities. We will then review findings from our COVID in the Early Years project. The aim of this early years qualitative study was to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted day-to-day life and access to services for parents of young children living in Prince George, British Columbia. Three key themes were identified: (1) gaps in health services, (2) gaps in early childhood education and programs, and (3) changes to/lost social interactions. Finally, we will describe how both of these provide important and actionable recommendations for service provision in the North.