



A READER FRIENDLY GUIDE TO

THE NATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN

FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD
DEVELOPMENT IN JAMAICA

2008-2013





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This Reader Friendly Guide to the National Strategic Plan (NSP) for Early Childhood Development is a publication of the Information, Education and Communications Department of the Early Childhood Commission.

The Commission wishes to thank all the stakeholders who have contributed to the development of the NSP and looks forward to your continued support for its successful implementation. Together we can give Jamaica's children the best start in life!

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ABOUT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMISSION

The Early Childhood Commission (ECC) is an agency of the Ministry of Education. It was established in 2003 by an Act of Parliament to improve the quality of life of our youngest children. The ECC does this by working with a range of stakeholders. This is to ensure that all children under the age of eight years have equal access to high quality early childhood programmes and services.

Our Main Stakeholders

- **children**
- **parents**
- **early childhood practitioners**
- **health sector workers**
- **government ministries and agencies**
- **non governmental organizations**
- **community based and faith based organizations**
- **local and international development partners**

WHAT IS EARLY CHILDHOOD?

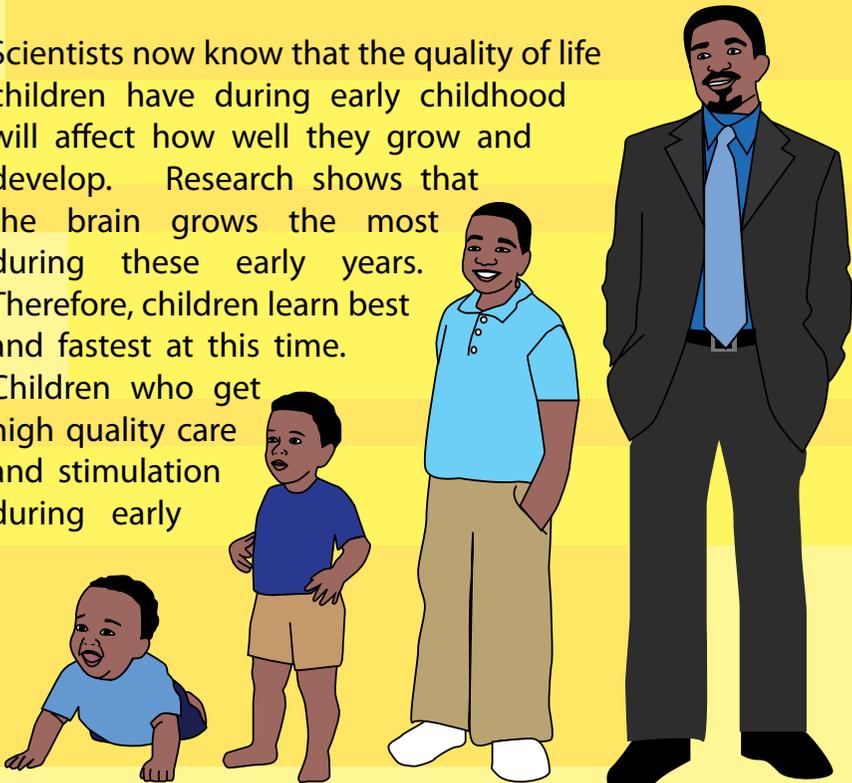
Early childhood is the period of growth and development that children go through from the time they are in the womb until they are about eight years old. This is because the unborn child is affected by everything the mother experiences while she is pregnant and this often continues to affect the child's growth and development even after birth. The experiences children have and the care and stimulation



they receive during early childhood lay the foundation for every aspect of their lives in the future including their health, nutrition, growth, learning, thinking and reasoning abilities, as well as their behaviour with other children and adults.

WHY SHOULD WE INVEST IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT?

Scientists now know that the quality of life children have during early childhood will affect how well they grow and develop. Research shows that the brain grows the most during these early years. Therefore, children learn best and fastest at this time. Children who get high quality care and stimulation during early



childhood are healthier, get along better with others, learn faster and do better in pre-school, primary and high school.

When children have a high quality early childhood environment they become educated, productive, well thinking individuals. As a result, the whole society benefits from better educated citizens, a more productive labour force and less crime and violence. Fewer persons will therefore need to depend on social services as more persons would have good jobs and earn better wages.



This can become Jamaica's reality. However, if Jamaica is to reap these benefits we must invest in early childhood development now. This is why the Early Childhood Commission has developed a national strategic plan for early childhood development in Jamaica.

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN (NSP)?

The National Strategic Plan, or NSP is a 5 -year plan, which takes into consideration all areas of early childhood development. Think of the NSP as a roadmap. This roadmap lays out all the roads we must take to reach our goals. It was developed through research, including listening to the ideas and concerns of parents, people who work with children and members of communities.



WHAT WILL THE NSP DO?

The NSP is designed to meet the needs of Jamaica's parents and children. When the NSP has been fully implemented it will result in us having:

Children who are:

- clear thinking
- sociable
- healthy
- and ready for life!

Parents who are:

- well informed
- involved in their children's lives
- knowledgeable about their children's needs
- play an active role in their children's development
- and supported in meeting children's developmental needs

The NSP is not a magic wand that will fix everything overnight. Instead, think of it as a process or a journey. As you read you will notice that we have taken what is called the **"life cycle approach"**. This means that we are putting plans in place to meet the needs of our children from they are in the womb until they are out of the early childhood stage. In the end, this will have a positive effect on the whole society.

Over the next five years the Early Childhood Commission will coordinate the process by working with our partners

in government ministries and agencies as well as other organizations.

Government

Ministries and Agencies

- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Health and the Environment
- Ministry of Labour and Social Security
- Ministry of Finance and the Public Service
- Planning Institute of Jamaica
- NCTVET
- HEART Trust NTA.

Other Partners

- Organizations that provide programmes and services for children
- Health care workers
- Operators of early childhood Institutions
- Early Childhood Practitioners
- Parents
- Community members
- Tertiary Institutions
- Jamaica Early Childhood Association

Working with our partners we will implement the following processes to improve early childhood development:

PROCESS 1 Effective Parenting Education and Support

- Provide parents and caregivers with the support and training they need to effectively raise young children

PROCESS 2 Effective Preventive Health Care

- Ensure that health care system that takes good care of children and works with parents to avoid preventable illnesses is in place

PROCESS 3 Early and effective screening, diagnosis and intervention for “at risk” children and households

- Put good screening systems in place so that children who are at risk for health, behavioural, developmental or learning problems or who live in situations that could harm their development can be identified early. This is to ensure that families and children receive the help that they need.

PROCESS 4 Safe, Learner Centred, Well-maintained ECI Facilities

- Ensure that early childhood institutions are safe, well-maintained and nurturing and able to meet the developmental needs of children.

PROCESS 5 Effective curriculum delivery by trained ECD Practitioners

- Ensure that all early childhood practitioners are trained to help children develop and reach their full potential.

In order to achieve these goals, the right working environment must be in place to ensure the success of the NSP. This means that:

Working Environment Process 1

- all the persons and organizations who work with children or provide programmes and services for them must work together to achieve the targets set

Working Environment Process 2

- decisions on how to improve the quality of early childhood development in Jamaica must be made based on timely, clear, current, and accurate information.

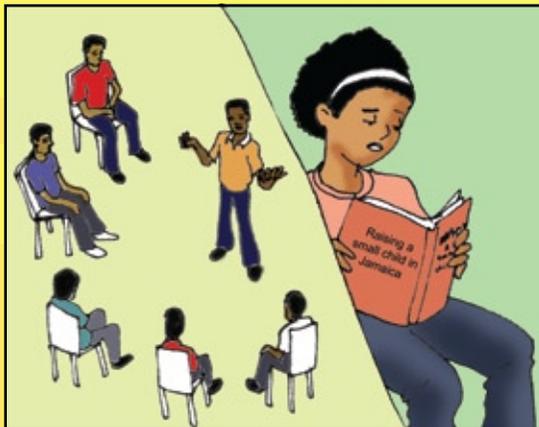
ACTIVITIES TO BE CARRIED OUT UNDER THE NSP

To reach the goals of the NSP, there are a set of planned activities that must be carried out to make the **process** work. Let us look more closely at them.

Process 1: Effective Parenting Education and Support

ACTIVITIES: The activities to be carried out to meet this goal are:

- Ensure that antenatal, child health clinics and ECIs provide parenting, education and support for parents
- Develop a directory of high quality parenting support programmes for young children including those offered by health centres, resource centres, early childhood institutions, and non governmental organizations.
- Inform parents and caregivers about the importance of parenting and early childhood development and how they can get the support they need to help their children grow and develop well.



Process 2: Effective Preventive Health Care

ACTIVITIES: The activities to be carried out to meet this goal are:

- Develop a certification system to ensure that child health clinics provide the highest quality services
- Develop and put in place a system to provide a wide range of child development and parenting services at health centres
- Develop and put in place a plan to ensure that the staff at well child clinics is trained and able to provide the new services that are needed.
- Ensure that well child clinics have all the tools and equipment needed to provide the new services.
- Develop a child health and development record or “Passport” that can be used by parents, health professionals, and ECIs to support children’s development and track each child’s health and development
- Develop and put in place an early childhood nutrition policy to ensure that our young children are well nourished.
- Provide parents and caregivers with information on how to help children grow up healthy and avoid common illnesses that can be prevented. This will be done through community workshops, media promotions and other activities.

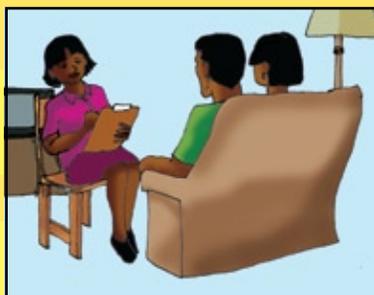


- Improve the government information system so that accurate records on children's health, development and behaviour can be kept

Process 3: Early and effective screening, diagnosis and intervention for "at risk" children and households

ACTIVITIES: The activities to be carried out to meet this goal are:

- Develop and put in place a national policy on screening and early identification for children and households that are "at risk"
- Work with agencies such as the Social Development Commission (SDC), the PATH Programme, social workers, and health care workers to put a system in place to identify families in high risk situations and provide support for them.



"At Risk" children are children who have health, behavioural or developmental problems or who live in situations that could prevent them from developing as they should.

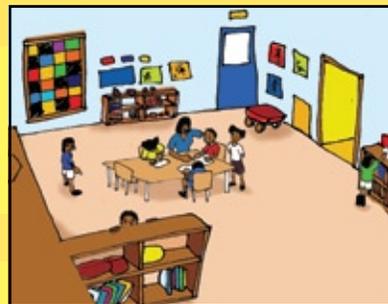
Families or households "at risk" are those that are in situations that could prevent young children from developing as they should

- Ensure that trained specialists are available at health facilities and in communities to provide services for children who have developmental and behavioural problems that need special attention.
- Ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, or HIV/AIDS have equal access to high quality programmes and services and are treated as well as other children.
- Inform parents, caregivers and the general public about child development issues so that they can identify children who are at risk early and improve their quality of life.

Process 4: Safe, Learner Centred, Well-maintained ECI Facilities

Activities: The activities to be carried out to meet this goal are:

- Inspect ECIs regularly to ensure they maintain high standards
- Ensure that Development Officers work with ECIs to help them meet the required standard.



Process 5: Effective curriculum delivery by trained ECD Practitioners

Activities: The activities to be carried out to meet this goal are:

- Provide all ECIs with an approved early childhood curriculum
- Ensure that Development Officers work with early childhood practitioners to help them understand the curriculum and teach the children better.
- Put systems in place to ensure fairness in how ECIs get financial support
- Put systems in place to ensure that all EC practitioners are trained, licensed and continuously upgrade their skills.
- Ensure that each ECI has at least one diploma or degree trained teacher.
- Encourage more persons to choose early childhood development as a profession.



WHAT WE NEED TO MAKE SURE THE ACTIVITIES ARE CARRIED OUT

It is important that all agencies that provide programmes and services work together. In this way we will be able to put the right framework in place so that we are able to carry out all the activities set out above. This framework is called the Working Environment. The working environment has two processes. They are explained below.

Working Environment Process 1:

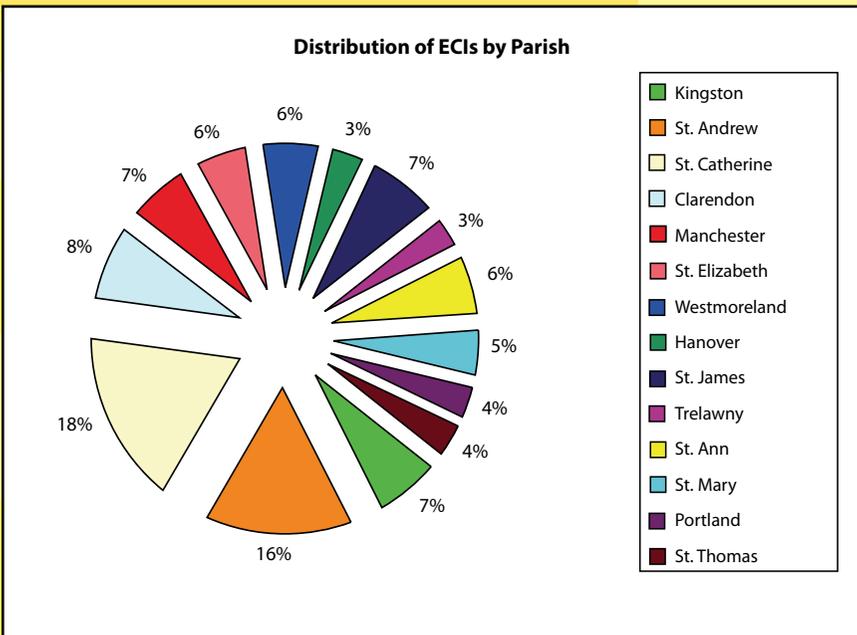
To make sure that all the different agencies for early childhood development work in harmony to achieve their goals. To do this we must:

- Put laws in place to govern the early childhood sector.
- Have Government ministries and agencies work together to plan and budget for the early childhood sector.
- Put systems in place to make sure that the resources of the sector are managed well.
- Put systems in place to ensure that there are good management structures for ECIs.
- Encourage persons to serve on ECI boards.
- Work with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other community organizations to provide improved services to young children and their families.
- Rally the entire county to provide more support and resources for the sector.

Working Environment Process 2:

Timely, clear, current, appropriate, evidence-based information to support ECD

- Put in place a computerized system to collect, store and manage important information about young children and their families.
- Keep track of the status of Jamaica's young children's development through surveys and assessments. This is important as it will help us to know if the NSP is working.



WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE PLAN AFTER 5 YEARS

This is what the Plan will achieve after five years.

1. Early childhood parenting education and support services will be of a high quality
2. Health centres will offer high quality services that aim to keep children well. They will also screen children and households to find those that are having problems and get help for them.
3. There will be a trained person called a “child development therapist” to help children with special needs.
4. Early childhood institutions will meet required standards
5. ECIs will have trained EC practitioners
6. The state of the young Jamaican child’s development will be checked and reported on to the public

HOW WILL WE KNOW IF THE PLAN IS WORKING?

Remember the road map? As we travel along on our journey, we will check every few months to see if we are going in the right direction. These checks are what we call monitoring and evaluation. It allows us to keep an eye on the plan to see if we are meeting our goals. Through monitoring and evaluation we will also be able to see how the Plan has helped our children, their families, teachers and communities. We will also be able to see the impact on our country’s development.

WHAT IS THE COST OF ALL THIS?

The Government of Jamaica now spends approximately Sixty-nine Billion United States Dollars (US\$69B) per year on early childhood development. This includes money spent in the health sector, social services and the education sector. The new services provided by the NSP will mean spending an additional Fourteen Million Dollars (US\$14M) per year over the next five years.

HOW WILL IT BE PAID FOR?

The Government of Jamaica will pay a large portion of this from the national budget. However, a World Bank loan of Fifteen Million US Dollars (US\$15M) will pay for about one fifth (1/5) of the additional cost of the NSP. The Commission will be working with local and international donors to fund other aspects of the Plan.

WHO IS GOING TO MAKE THIS PLAN WORK?

The Early Childhood Commission cannot make the plan work by itself but is responsible for bringing together all the different groups that contribute to early childhood development and work with them to make the plan successful.



As you can see, we all have to play a part in making the plan work. Remember that it benefits all of us when our children are given the opportunity to reach their full potential.

So, let us all work together to give our children the best start in life!





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