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## **New research shows critical need for school-aged programs and services**

New research conducted by YMCA of Greater Vancouver and United Way of the Lower Mainland reveals a critical need for school-aged childcare and other program options, in many neighbourhoods throughout the Lower Mainland.

Presently in BC, it is estimated that there are licensed child care spaces for seven per cent of school-aged children. In 2008, 5,837 children were reported to be on waitlists for school-aged childcare in the 12 regional school districts. The research shows that the ability to provide safe and developmentally stimulating programs for children in their middle years is viewed as a major challenge throughout the region. Researchers interviewed business leaders, school board officials, police, mayors, community foundations and municipal officials.

“Interview responses revealed a widespread acknowledgement that existing gaps in service to middle years children is a universal community problem on par with homelessness, addiction and gangs,” said Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, Associate Professor, University of British Columbia. Meanwhile, significant gaps in services available throughout the Lower Mainland make children age 6 to 12 vulnerable to many influences that pose serious risks to their health and wellbeing.

The YMCA/UWLM School-Aged Child Care Neighbourhood Analysis by Dr. Denise Buote looked at out-of-school program needs based on data including reported program waitlist numbers, the percentage of children who currently have access to space, the percentage of schools with existing programs in or beside a school, community socio-economic status and the percentage of kindergarten children who are considered vulnerable based on the Early Development Instrument, a measurement tool developed by the Human Early Learning Partnership at UBC.

School Districts and their neighbourhoods identified in critical need for additional school-aged programs: Vancouver-Renfrew/Collingwood, Vancouver- Kensington/Cedar Cottage, Surrey-North, Burnaby-Metrotown, Burnaby-Stride Park.

For example in the Surrey School District, data collected last year showed that there was school-aged childcare available for just three per cent of children and 535 children were reported to be on waitlists.

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School Districts and their neighbourhoods identified as having a second-level priority need for additional school-aged childcare programs: Vancouver-Hastings/Sunrise, Vancouver-Victoria/Fraserview, North Vancouver-Lower Lonsdale.

For example, in the North Vancouver School District, there was school-aged childcare available for nine per cent of children and 390 children were reported to be on waitlists.

Responding to the challenge, the YMCA and United Way designed and studied a pilot project and two potential community response models for feasibility testing.

The latest research builds on a 2007 study, funded by United Way of the Lower Mainland and led by a University of British Columbia expert on children age 6 to 12, which provided a first look at the after-school lives of children throughout the region.

Children age 6 to 12 have an average of 67 discretionary hours a week - more time than they spend in school. *Middle Childhood Inside and Out: The Psychological and Social World of Children 9 to 12*, authored by Schonert-Reichl, found that:

- Children benefit significantly from participating in structured activities after school
- Relationships with peers and adults in school and in the community are central in fostering children's social and emotional competence
- Children are experiencing a rising sense of social isolation.

"We believe this research raises awareness of what this forgotten generation needs in order to be strong," said Bill Stewart, CEO of the YMCA of Greater Vancouver. "We hope it mobilizes the community to work together to create lasting solutions."

"Quick action must be taken to develop programming that meets the needs of these children to enable them to become well adjusted, contributing members of our community," said Michael McKnight, President and CEO United Way of the Lower Mainland.

United Way and the YMCA of Greater Vancouver are committed to reducing the level of vulnerability in children age 6 to 12 in the region. In 2009, United Way supported a record 20 after-school grant projects throughout Burnaby, Surrey, and the TriCities area for a total of approximately \$1 million. The YMCA provides 61 child care programs in the Lower Mainland and is the largest provider of child care in Western Canada.

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