



# **Cultural Considerations while Using a Wrap Around Approach: Learning from the Maskwacis Early Years Program Successes to Increase Immunization Uptake**

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## Disclosure

I have no actual or potential conflict of interest in relation to this program/presentation.

## AGENDA

- Program History & Partners
- Program Activities/Approach
- Immunization Successes
- Discussion/Questions



## PROGRAM PARTNERS



**Martin Family Initiative (MFI)** registered Canadian charity committed to improving education, health and overall well-being outcomes for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people.



**Maskwacis Health Services (MHS)** health centre serving 17,000 members of the 4 Nations of Maskwacis, Alberta

Samson Cree Nation  
Ermineskin Cree Nation  
Louis Bull Tribe  
Montana First Nation



**Maskwacis Education Schools Commission (MESc)** educational authority in Maskwacis



## WHAT IS THE EARLY YEARS?

The Early Years is a **home visiting and early childhood program** designed with the First Nations in Maskwacis.

The Early Years **positively impacts children, families and employs community members.**

The Early Years is the only one of its kind in Maskwacis, and **fills a necessary gap in the community** rather than replacing or competing with existing services.



## WHERE WE STARTED

- Launched in 2018 in Ermineskin Cree Nation as a pilot project with 3 Visitors and a Program Manager
- Researching the implementation of a prenatal to early childhood intervention program in a First Nations community to meet community gaps
- Families, community and Elders are heavily involved in the planning and evolution of the program
- Pilot in Ermineskin Cree Nation was funded by Brain Canada Foundation and the expansion to all Nations was funded by Indigenous Services Canada



## WHERE WE ARE TODAY / PROGRAM GROWTH

	Program launch (2018)	Today (2024)
Staff	4	32
Families active in the program	28	201

Over 400 families participated to date



## 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



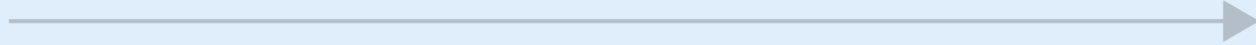


## **OUR APPROACH**

*Aligning traditional knowledge with scientific research*

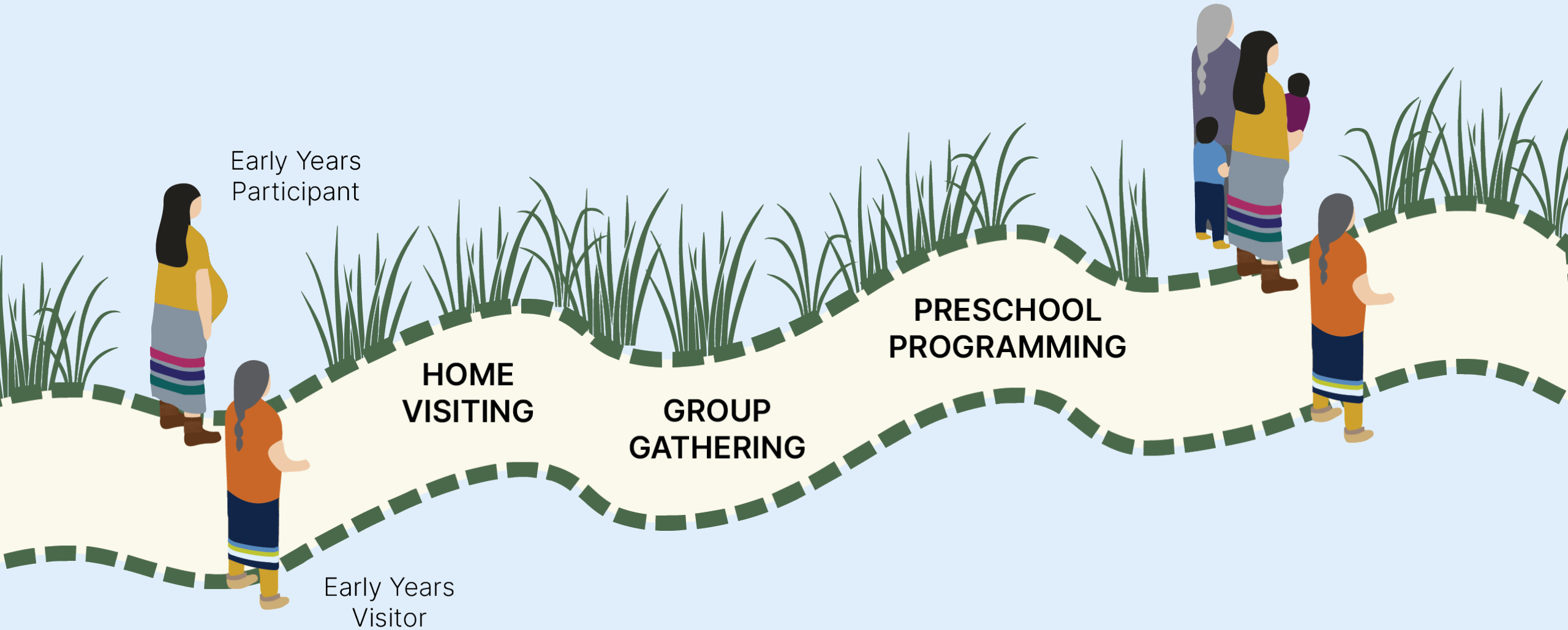
Every child in Canada deserves the opportunity to reach their highest potential. Working hand in hand with Indigenous communities, the Early Years strengthens parents' engagement in their child's healthy development before birth and into their school years.

**PRENATAL**



**PRESCHOOL  
ENTRY**

Early Years Visitor alongside parents/caregivers







# HOME VISITING



# GROUP GATHERINGS



**CULTURE CAMP / 174 ATTENDEES / 33 PRESENTERS**





# PRESCHOOL PROGRAMMING





# PROGRAM EVALUATION

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



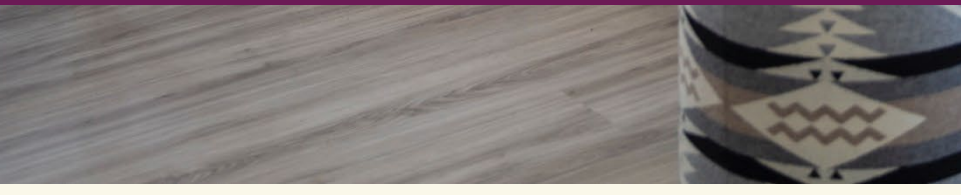


## **ENGAGING FATHERS AND MALE ELDERS**

The Early Years program invites all parents and caregivers to be involved. Every year the program sees more fathers participating and dads engaged in the development of their child while learning their traditional role in parenthood from male Elders.



# EARLY YEARS RESOURCES



# TOOLBOX CARDS

MASKWACIS  
EARLY YEARS

**0-12 MONTHS**

## Love Builds Brains



**Take one baby shower**

**Showing a child consistent and thoughtful love before birth and the early months is the most important way to build her brain.**

Touching your baby and talking to her develops his or her brain. It's a good way to help stimulate her senses and build developmental pathways in her brain.

**www.maskwacis.ca**

**0-12 MONTHS**

## Baby Lullabies



**Use lullabies**

**Sing to baby and rock the baby.**

Lullabies are a gentle way to soothe a baby, making her feel loved and connecting her with language.

**www.maskwacis.ca**

**0-12 MONTHS**

## Breastfeeding Connection



**Use lullabies**

**Breastfeed your baby.**

Breastfeeding is an opportunity for skin-to-skin contact, which is one way to help build a strong bond with her baby.

**www.maskwacis.ca**

**0-12 MONTHS**

## Starting to Crawl



**Use lullabies**

**During tummy time, place an exciting toy slightly in front of the baby and encourage her to move toward it.**

A baby will have to reach for the toy you put in front of her and will start to move toward it.

**www.maskwacis.ca**

**0-12 MONTHS**

## This Is Your Family



**Use lullabies**

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

Understanding identity starts here. Children will learn to understand and embrace.

**www.maskwacis.ca**

**0-12 MONTHS**

## Beauty and Aesthetic



**Use lullabies**

**A child should engage with art and aesthetic as both the audience and the creator.**

Creating and admiring beauty can provide children with inspiration and information. Piling their environment with art and beauty can support their creativity and cognitive development.

**www.maskwacis.ca**



## **CONNECTING FAMILIES TO LANGUAGE AND CULTURE**

- Role of the Family, Cultural Coordinator and Cultural Helpers
- Connecting families to cultural programming in community
- Dedicated safe space for cultural events
- Elder guidance and teachings connected to all decision making in the program
- Re-establishing our cultural values to guide our work and programs
- Cultural ceremonies and practices we embed into the Early Years



## Early Years Growth Across Canada

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

# IMMUNIZATIONS IN THE EARLY YEARS

## Program Benefits

- Having nurses on staff has benefits with specific applicable knowledge and assist with increasing accessibility
- Immunization Toolbox cards help Visitors start conversations with parents/caregivers about the importance of vaccines



# Immunizations in the Maskwacis Early Years

Percentage of 2-year-olds with complete primary immunization series

## 2 year olds in 2021

53% in the Early Years

14% in the community

## 2 year olds in 2022

45% in the Early Years

8% in the community

# Immunizations in the Maskwacis Early Years

Percentage of 1 & 2-year-olds with complete primary immunization series

## 1 year olds in January 2024

45% in the Early Years

30.8% in the community

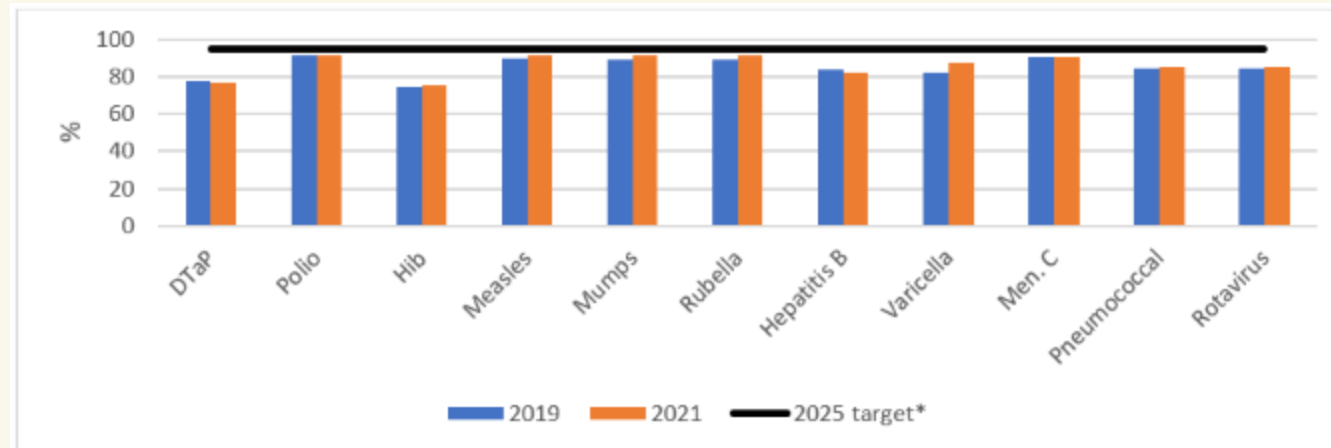
## 2 year olds in January 2024

58.9% in the Early Years

34% in the community



# Immunization coverage by antigen for children aged 2 years, Canada, 2019 & 2021



DTaP: Diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccine.

Hib: Haemophilus influenzae type B.

Men. C: Meningococcal type C.

\*The national target for vaccination coverage for 2-year-old children is 95% by 2025.

Source: Childhood National Immunization Coverage Survey, 2021 (5185).



## ACCESSING SERVICES INCLUDING IMMUNIZATION

Visitors help families navigate services, providing not only a ride but wrap-around support.

Almost 450 rides to services like:

- PRENATAL APPOINTMENTS
- IMMUNIZATION
- HOUSING
- INCOME SUPPORT
- BIRTH REGISTRATION and
- BAND REGISTRATION



## KEY FINDINGS

- 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



# PROGRAM IMPACT

The Early Years has received recognition for the positive rates of immunizations for program participants. Results have been shared at conferences in Ottawa, Winnipeg, and Tulsa, and directly with Indigenous Services Canada (MOHs).

The Maskwacis Early Years has served as an example to other First Nations and Inuit communities to develop their own culturally adapted Early Years programs.



## ELDERS GUIDANCE

“The sense of culture that they embrace in the program is something that I really like. Because it’s important to me and it’s important for my kid. And I love how they include it in everything.”

— Participant testimonial





"[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

## DISCUSSION

Indigenous communities have always had their own best practices. Service providers/institutions must recognize that we know what is best for our children and families and that Western practices are not the only way, nor the “right” way. **Guidance from community and Elders and a sense of ownership are essential.**





## REFERENCES

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