

## NEW WESTMINSTER EDUCATION SAVINGS IMPLEMENTATION GROUP



Community efforts to help low income families save for their children's post-secondary education

Research shows that saving for a child's education is connected to improved child development, increased high school completion rates, greater educational and career expectations and future financial capability.

An action to enhance access to the [Canada Learning Bond](#) (CLB) and the [BC Training and Education Savings Grant](#) (BCTESG) is included within the New Westminster [Community Poverty Reduction Strategy](#). The CLB is money that the Government of Canada deposits into a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) to help low income families save for a child's education after high school. The total amount the Government deposits can be up to \$2,000. \$1,200 is available to eligible children through the B.C. Training and Education Savings Grant (BCTESG) from the B.C. Government.

A sub-committee from the Community Poverty Reduction Initiative of those interested in moving the initiative forward formed in 2017 and support in-kind was confirmed.

### Who is involved?

Members are: SmartSaver, United Way of the Lower Mainland, Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), City of New Westminister, New West Schools and Family Services of Greater Vancouver.

### What is the role of each partner?

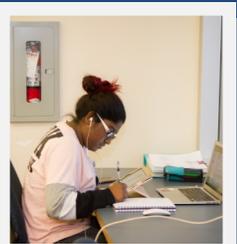
**United Way of the Lower Mainland** – provides marketing materials, URL link and other support.

**MCFD** – assists with outreach, coordinates meetings, provides project coordination. Liaises provincially and nationally with other communities working on the SmartSaver initiative.

**City of New Westminister** – provides meeting space, conducts best practice research and prints out marketing materials for distribution.

**New West Schools** – promotes RESP uptake in schools. This has included hosting RESP workshops.

**Family Services of Greater Vancouver** – leads RESP uptake outreach, provides families with one to one support and trains other organizations on how to sign families up for RESPs.



*"I can save for my children's future and the fact that the government helps is adding an extra layer of encouragement. Rocio presence is very important as she gives very good suggestions and recommendation and she is very open minded. Putting funds away will encourage my daughters to study."*  
(Adult, RESP one-on-one support service, New Westminister)

In 2016 Family Services of Greater Vancouver received funding from Prosper Canada to increase the uptake of the Canada Learning Bond and the BC Training and Education Savings Grant. In May 2017 the Manager of Financial Empowerment for Family Services of Greater Vancouver confirmed contribution of services in kind for New Westminster including the delivery of workshops and presentations on the Canada Learning Bond.

[SmartSaver](#) pays \$25 for each complete CLB application submitted through their dedicated link and also provides promotional materials and ongoing support. It was agreed that in New Westminster that funds generated from this would be directed back to the community agencies working to increase uptake.

## What research was done?

In 2017 the City of New Westminister's Planning Analyst and MCFD's Community Development Worker undertook research on work done in other communities across Canada to assist families to sign up for government RESPs. This was to determine what strategies were effective in increasing uptake. Telephone interviews and email communications took place with Halton Region (Ontario), Calgary (Alberta), Hamilton (Ontario) and Nanaimo (BC).

One effective strategy used in other Canadian communities was training for organizations on signing up low-income populations for RESP grants. The Community Development Worker and the Family Services of Greater Vancouver's Client Service Coordinator developed training for frontline workers on the RESP SmartSaver initiative. This took place in October 2017. It is hoped that some New Westminister community organizations will sign up families via the SmartSaver link.

## What has the family support work involved?

Outreach is providing services to any population who might not otherwise have access to those services. The Client Service Coordinator worker is available to assist families with sign up through outreach work.

- 55 clients received one-on-one RESP coaching meetings and follow-up (110 hours). This resulted in 35 children opening free and affordable RESP accounts with different financial institutions (e.g. RBC, Vancity, TD, CIBC). 44 children applied for the Canada Learning Bond, 19 children applied for the BCTESG and 55 children applied for the CESG + A-CESG.
- 10 workshops (two hours) were delivered and attended by 106 participants and hosted by five different community partners (Purpose Society, ISS-New Westminister, PAC at Schools, Olivet Church and Burnaby Family Life).
- A training session for community partners was held. 11 frontline service providers from eight community service organizations attended.
- 22 visits were made to programs, services and community events. This work resulted in over 300 contacts with parents, families, caregiver and grandparents.
- Outreach work has taken place at a variety of community locations including the Immigrant Services Society, Olivet Food Bank, Salvation Army, Income Assistance office, Centennial Community Centre and community family events.

55

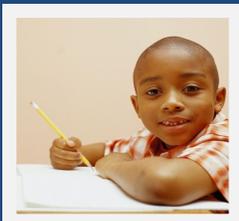
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Participants attended 10 two hour workshops.

22

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*"RESPs were on my mind but I did not know how to get them. After the workshop and one-on-one support I know exactly how to open an RESP."*  
(Adult, RESP support and education program, New Westminister)

## How other non-profits and other organizations have been involved?

The work has been successful in building partnerships and community effort with other organizations. Organizations have hosted RESP workshops, provided space for outreach and distributed promotional materials. Many have made referrals to the support service program. The Immigrant Service Society has assisted clients, made referrals to the support service and provided much need translation for clients with language barriers.

## What marketing methods were used?

The CLB and BCTESG have been promoted in multiple ways.

- Federal and Provincial government mail outs have taken place and recently included information about the BCTESG.
- Posters using details from the basic RESP uptake posters from the United Way of the Lower Mainland were created. These have been printed and distributed throughout New Westminster.
- Emails about RESP programs have also been sent out to parents through New West Schools.

## What has worked well?

- Having an action plan for increasing RESP uptake.
- Having a dedicated Client Support Worker person providing one to one support to families.
- Developing and delivering workshops which were well attended.
- Support from partners who have provided resources and helped to distribute materials.
- New immigrants have been very receptive to opening RESPs.
- Political support from Mayor and Council for the City of New Westminster to work on this item.
- A multi-partnership approach has provided impetus.
- Accompanying families to the bank to open RESP accounts has resulted in a positive experience for most families. Good relationships with individual financial advisors have developed. Financial advisors have learned more about the financial situation of low income families. They have gained expert knowledge about the application process for the RESPs.

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## What could be improved?

- Many people are not able to apply for RESPs because they have not completed their tax returns. Having additional clinics and supports for helping people to complete their taxes would be helpful. Many low-income people could boost their incomes by up to 50 per cent if they were able to claim and receive all government benefits they are entitled to.
- Barriers that hinder families in opening RESPs include identification, language skills and financial literacy. Families are often in crisis and dealing with issues such as housing, food and mental health so setting up an RESP may not be a priority.
- Financial advisors working with clients on RESP accounts should receive training on government incentives and best practices for supporting low income families.
- Auto-enrollment through the tax system could increase take up.
- More materials are needed in different languages.
- Multi-barrier families often need one-to- one support and a holistic approach as they face many challenges.



## General advice

- Know your community when trying to increase RESP uptake. This includes demographics, organizations, take-up rate and community characteristics.
- Involve key partners such as non-profit organizations, local provincial government offices, municipal government, financial institutions and schools. These organizations can help increase uptake.

## In conclusion

It is evident that plans put in place to increase the uptake of government RESPs by low income families have been successful in New Westminster. During 2018 we will continue with outreach and one to one work. Marketing the RESPs will continue via the City of New Westminster and New West schools. We will continue to explore ways to build on this work by exploring income boosting strategies available to low income families.



*"I feel more in control with my finances and well-being with support. I need someone to help me understand and coach me during the processes that require paperwork to be filled out and steps complete."*  
(Adult, RESP one-on-one support service, New Westminster)