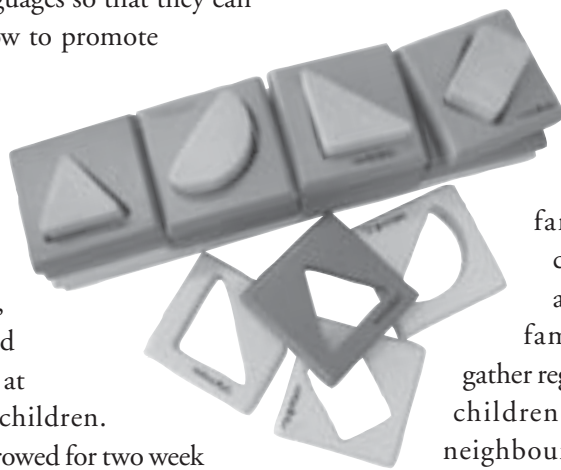


Westcoast on Wheels: Bringing resources to families in their communities

For years, Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre has dreamed of having the ability to bring children's materials and parent and caregiver resources directly to families in their own neighbourhoods. "What if we had a van?" we would wonder. Now with financial commitment from our Board of Directors, Gaming Funds and corporate support from groups such as Business Objects (formerly Crystal Decisions) and Murray Pontiac GMC Abbotsford...the dream is reality!

Westcoast Mobile Lending provides opportunities for parents, grandparents, and other caregivers in Vancouver to actively participate in the healthy development of young children under 6 years of age. Mobile Lending connects with families and caregivers of young children at close-to-home locations where they gather to play and socialize. Through Westcoast Mobile Lending, parents and other caregivers can borrow books and videos in several languages so that they can learn more about how to promote young children's healthy development. They can also borrow developmentally appropriate toys, games, books and learning kits to use at home with young children. Resources can be borrowed for two week periods, providing families opportunities to actively engage in fun activities with their young children to encourage healthy physical, social, emotional and language development.



Why Mobile Lending?

Family and caregiver access to resources that support early childhood development and quality care is both an urban and a rural issue. Vancouver is no exception. Families face many challenges in ensuring their young children have access to enriching early childhood experiences.

Some face economic barriers - enrolling children in programs or purchasing quality toys is beyond the reach of many families. Some face cultural and linguistic barriers - if English is not a family's home language, finding child development information or programs can be difficult. Others are limited geographically - although Westcoast is located in the heart of Vancouver, it is unimaginable that a parent with young children, or a family child care provider with several preschoolers in tow, packing a stroller and diaper bag, could travel across town, perhaps transferring buses several times, to borrow books and toys.

The thought is overwhelming!

Westcoast Mobile Lending strives to be inclusive of all families with young children. Lending sites are located at sites where families and caregivers gather regularly with their young children - family places, neighbourhood houses, adult-child drop in programs, parent support circles. For a mere \$5 per year, families and caregivers can borrow items from the Westcoast Mobile Lending. Subsidies are available for those for whom the fee is a barrier. Families and caregivers have the option to upgrade to a full

Westcoast subscription for an additional \$15 so that they can expand their borrowing to include the 12,000 resources onsite at the Westcoast Library.

Adult resources and the tip sheets that accompany play and learning materials are translated into several languages.

Mobile Lending staff talk with parents and caregivers about typical child development, any concerns they might have about their child and about the particular child's interests, and assist them to select items that are meet their own needs or are stimulating and developmentally appropriate for the child.

Mobile Lending meets parents and caregivers in their own neighbourhood. With 2 part time staff and 2 vans loaded with books, toys, videos, and other resources, Westcoast Mobile Lending vans visit 12 sites twice each month. There is now a waiting list of more sites that want the Westcoast vans to visit their programs.

Success Built On Community Partnerships

Since its inception Westcoast has believed in partnering with other agencies to design and deliver services to families and caregivers. This means that together we find ways to meet neighbourhood needs. These often long standing community partnerships have supported the development of other programs that benefit families and caregivers in local communities. The community agencies that are partnering with Westcoast in Mobile Lending at this time include:

South Vancouver Family Place, Ray-Cam Community Centre, Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, Marpole-Oakridge

Mobile Lending connects with families where they gather to play and socialize.

Family Place, South Vancouver Neighbourhood House, Mount Pleasant Family Centre, Pacific Immigrant Resources Society Preschool at Pierre Trudeau Elementary School, Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House, East Side Family Place, Coal Harbour Community Centre, Gordon Neighbourhood House and the Roundhouse Community Centre

Our corporate and charitable partners include Business Objects (formerly Crystal Decisions), Murray Pontiac GMC Abbotsford, BC Gaming and United Way of

the Lower Mainland Success By 6. Together, we are supporting healthy development for Vancouver's young children.

The Resources

In recent years, research has clearly demonstrated the importance of the preschool years in children's readiness for formal learning at school as well as to their life-long health and well-being. Westcoast Mobile lending brings books, videos and toys that would otherwise be unavailable to many families and caregivers. When helping in the selection of toys, Mobile Lending staff suggest ways that parents and caregivers can use common household items to extend the child's learning and interest. Resources chosen for the Mobile Lending vans reflect the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of families in the



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...Mobile Lending continued

neighbourhoods they visit as much as possible.

The Future

For now Westcoast Mobile Lending can only visit sites in Vancouver. We are looking

for ways to extend the service to families in the Greater Vancouver Regional District in the near future. It is our goal over time to put our Westcoast vans "on the road" visiting other parts of BC. Look for the big white van with the orange Westcoast sticker in your community some time soon! ♦

A Conversation with the Mobile Lending Staff



When did the Mobile Lending Library program start?

It started as a pilot project in July 2004 and continued on as a program in September 2004.

What is the age range of children served?

0–6 years, with an emphasis on toddler resources presently as this is the age most represented at lending sites. We want to develop more early literacy kits and acquire more resources for infants as we go.

What has the parent's response been?

Very positive. They tell us they find the selection of toys and resources is excellent and can't be easily found in stores or elsewhere. The program is also very cost-effective – for a \$5 membership fee families have a wide range of toys/resources to choose from. Children can try out a variety of resources that they may not have had access to because of the cost.

We offer the parents consultation on their toy selection. Because the staff is trained in early childhood education, they are able to explain the benefits of the resources to the parents and make suggestions for selections. We are presently developing Activity/Tip sheets to be included with the resource kits

to enable parents to build on the learning opportunity the toy offers.

Some of the challenges of the program have been that the parents would like to borrow more than one item at a time, especially when they have two children with a wide age range. We need more resources to meet this need.

What has been the Lending Site's response?

Again very positive. They have been supportive in helping the Mobile Lending program set up and problem solve, etc. Some of the sites have been providing translation, either through their staff, parents or volunteers when Mobile Lending staff are at sites which are predominantly Chinese (for example).

The staff at the lending sites are learning more about Westcoast's other services and about child care and child development, in general.

Again some of the challenges include not enough funding and resources to service all of the potential lending sites that have expressed interest. We have a waiting list for sites that want us to visit their programs. ♦