
Edmonton Kids Up Front Foundation: **Impacts & Value Added**

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A. Introduction

Kids Up Front is a charitable organization that provides access to arts, culture, sport and recreation events for children who otherwise do not have the opportunity. Currently, the organization operates mainly in four cities across Canada, including Edmonton.

The *Edmonton Kids Up Front Foundation (Edmonton Kids Up Front)* has been operating since 2003. The organization grants event tickets that would otherwise go unused to children and youth. These children and youth are identified through *Edmonton Kids Up Front's* collaboration with a broad network of partner agencies that provide child and family services in the education, health and social service sectors.

In September 2010, Felix Research & Consulting was contracted to use a research and facilitation approach to identify the impact of *Kids Up Front Edmonton* for Edmonton communities and families. After discussion with the stakeholders, it was also determined that the scope of this report would include identifying the factors that facilitated donors to financially support the work of *Kids up Front Edmonton*. This report presents the results and implications of this study.

B. Research Approach

Specifically, the goals of this research and facilitation process were to:

1. Identify the impact and “value added” that *Kids Up Front Edmonton* brings to its partner organizations, the Edmonton families served by these organizations and community service in Edmonton
2. Identify key aspects of *Kids Up Front Edmonton’s* delivery model and mission that appealed to current sponsors
3. Articulate collected information in a logic model, developed collaboratively with the administration and board of *Kids Up Front Edmonton*

The steps undertaken to achieve this purpose included:

1. Review of Background Information and Brief Environmental Scan

The consultants reviewed key historical documents to gain an understanding of the context of the *Kids Up Front* program, its intended outcomes, design and activities. They also conducted an environmental scan of similar programs nationally and internationally to identify if similar studies have been carried out. However, no similar studies or documents were found.

2. Interviews

The consultants interviewed 7 selected key informants from non-profit partners of *Kids Up Front Edmonton* to identify positive impacts of *Kids Up Front* on the children, youth and families they serve, as well as on their organization itself. These interviews were conducted over the phone and lasted approximately thirty minutes.

The consultants also interviewed 5 financial sponsors of *Kids Up Front Edmonton* to identify aspects of the organization’s approach and mandate that appealed to them as financial supporters. These interviews were also conducted over the phone and lasted approximately twenty minutes.

For both interviews, a qualitative approach was used for data collection, where semi-structured interview guides were used to achieve the goals as outlined above (Appendices I and II). The consultants took detailed notes during the interviews.

For data analysis, the responses were themed using content analysis and an inductive approach, where the units of analysis emerge out of the data rather than being imposed prior to data collection. The computer software - N-Vivo - was used to facilitate qualitative data analysis.

3. Report and Logic Model

This report also includes a draft logic model that outlines the short-term, medium-term and long-term impacts of *Kids Up Front* activities, as informed by the interview data. This preliminary logic model will be presented to *Kids Up Front Edmonton* staff and board members, along with the results of the interviews. Stakeholders will be given an opportunity to enhance the logic model. The final refined logic model will be presented in a final version of this report.

C. Findings

The findings of this evaluation are separated into three main areas.

Section C.1 Impact of *Kids Up Front Edmonton* presents findings about the impact of *Kids Up Front Edmonton* on children and youth, their families, the community as a whole and on the non-profit partners of *Kids Up Front Edmonton*.

Section C.2 Value of *Kids Up Front Edmonton* presents findings related to the value of *Kids Up Front Edmonton* that contributes to the impact as described in Section C.1.

Section C.3 Logic Model presents a draft logic model for *Kids Up Front Edmonton*.

Direct quotations from interviewees are provided as examples of comments that support the themes uncovered in analysis. Each respective paragraph represents the words spoken by different individual and these quotations are italicized and indented.

C.1. Impact of *Kids Up Front Edmonton*

C.1a. Impact on Children and Youth

Broadening of Experience

Many of the partner organizations of *Kids Up Front Edmonton* identified that its services enable children and youth to broaden their experiences and be exposed to something new, whether it be attending a sports event or a fine arts event. The service allows individuals to try new experiences they might not have had an opportunity in the past.

[Kids Up Front] opens up possibilities for kids. Because there are kids who would never have seen that. These kids can barely afford food.

It gives them a chance to get out, get different opportunities and have fun.

It's been tremendous. Kids should be able to be kids and get excited about these things. When you tell them they are going - the kids and families call me ... and they get so excited ... it's a fun thing they don't get to do very often.

The variety is really nice - we tend to be sports oriented. But to be able to offer the kids community events that are more focused in arts, is quite beneficial.

Inclusion

Partner organizations highlighted that experiences provided by *Kids Up Front Edmonton* enable children and youth to feel included and part of a community, that for many reasons, whether through mental health, financial or behavior reasons, they had been excluded from.

The tickets allow these kids to do normal things that other kids take for granted. It brings them normalcy.

The kids feel: "I do fit here ... I'm part of society ... I'm part of community." They have something to talk about with peers when they come back from the weekend ... It's about normalizing things for kids ... It gives our staff the ability to take kids places that helps them build relationships, increase those assets the kids have, normalizes things, and builds protective factors.

... It allows somebody to feel included. So, when you're at an event, no one knows how you got there, you're just there with other people. And you're not pointed out to be different. You're just belonging - the other piece that comes in. That's important for some families and individuals who are in a bad spot.

Recognition

Interviewees also stated that *Kids Up Front Edmonton* enables the children and youth they serve to feel recognized and special. One organization specifically uses the tickets provided by *Kids Up Front Edmonton* as a form of reward.

There are kids that saw themselves differently because of [the tickets]. They saw their own potential differently. First of all, they were chosen. Someone believes in them. They were special and they had an opportunity based on a strength.

Tickets to the citadel where they can dress up and go to an event - this had a huge impact on how special they were feeling.

Improvements have been seen in their self-esteem.

Hope

Finally, these experiences provide children and youth with a sense of hope. Being able to experience new things, feeling special and seeing themselves as part of the greater community contribute to the child's belief that there can be a future with possibilities beyond their previous perceived limitations.

I remember getting tickets to the orchestra. And the teenager we sent had never gone or experienced that and had never listened to classical. The young man said how much it opened up his eyes to the different kinds of music and to see the similarities between rock and classical. He felt his life was enriched that much more. The experience showed there's more out there than your peers. [The youth] gets bogged down into too much of that negative behaviour. To experience something like that, when he was already at a turning point, helped that much more ... to see our world has a lot more color than black and white.

To get to go to the Citadel to see a performance, they want to get involved; they want to see how to get involved. This helps them realize what their goals and interests are and what they want to do.

It's around hope. It's around possibilities in terms of "I could be that" "I could be there" ... and letting them look at goal setting.

C.1b. Impact on Families

Some of the partner organizations of *Kids Up Front Edmonton* extend the tickets offered to the family members of the children and youth they serve. As a result, the family members experience benefit from this service.

Fun - Respite from Daily Challenges

The partner organizations that *Kids Up Front Edmonton* works with serve families that face daily challenges like poverty or pressures from coping with mental health issues, behavioral issues or disabilities. The experiences provided by *Kids Up Front Edmonton* give these families an opportunity to get a break from these daily challenges and have a fun and new experience instead.

It gets the families out of the house- laughing, talking and forgetting about what is going on in their life for a while.

Inclusion

Similar to what the children and youth experience, the family as a unit can now feel included in the community by participating in experiences that might have

been formally inaccessible, primarily for financial reasons. Such experiences can enable a family to feel included.

For the first time, you have a dad taking a kid to the hockey game. It normalizes things for people who are in very difficult situations.

We have given tickets to people in large families who live in poverty. It is a get away for them and an opportunity to go somewhere they have never been to.

Opportunity to Strengthen Relationships

Dealing with daily challenges can be strenuous on family relationships. Having an opportunity to interact in a new setting creates opportunities for family members to interact more positively. These positive experiences can serve as a foundation for future positive interactions that can add resiliency to relationships that may be fragile.

We were working with a mother and daughter that were having communication issues at the time. We saw through the email there were Eskimo tickets available and we thought that the game would be an opportunity to do something different and to be able to bond, laugh and talk.

We had a boy fixated on football. And we were able to offer tickets to him, his mom, and his dad. And we sent the staff member to make sure it was a successful positive opportunity. It was a teaching opportunity for the family - how to enjoy a happy moment with their child that a lot of people may not know how to do.

C.1c. Impact on Greater Community

Partner organizations were asked to speak to how *Kids Up Front Edmonton* helped them fulfill certain aspects of their organizational mandate. Two main themes came up with respect to impacts on the greater community which are strengthened through the services of *Kids up Front Edmonton*.

Positive Interaction

In general, *Kids Up Front Edmonton* supports community agencies that seek to promote positive interaction and experiences for the children, youth and families they serve.

Kids Up Front supports all kinds of other non profit agencies to be able to meet their goals. If you look at their work, mentors have

opportunities to do things because Kids Up Front is there. They have healthy things to do and go out in the community.

Kids Up Front hits our mission directly: “to provide the opportunities for children, youth and families to experience new things”. It’s a national mission. Kids Up Front plays into that so perfectly.

Two agencies spoke specifically to *Kids Up Front’s* ability to provide a space in the community at large for youth-at-risk to interact positively with other community members.

Our work is therapeutic - we wouldn’t have next step - kids able to practice social skills and feel practical and comfortable in the community at large, without Kids up Front. They wouldn’t have that exposure.

Our mission is to help prepare kids and their families to reintegrate back into the community by learning skills. It maximizes opportunities for the staff to supervise kids in the community and make sure that those activities are successful and they are learning skills in the community. It will increase the opportunity for learning for kids.

Inclusion

Many of the community agencies that work with *Kids Up Front Edmonton* seek to support children, youth and families to be a part of community.

Our goal is to be community involved, and be inclusive. Kids Up Front supports that.

Our mission is “no one’s turned away”. Kids Up Front allows us to extend this to event and celebrations for people.

Kids up Front is one of our cornerstones ... There would be a whole piece that would not be happening - the hope, the possibilities, the normalizing - would not happen. For our kids, it’s about belonging - you belong in the community, and are part of it.

C.1d. Impact on Organizations

Partner organizations also identified impacts on their organizations that result from working with *Kids up Front Edmonton*.

Decreases Pressure on Organization

Before the partner organizations worked with *Kids Up Front Edmonton*, interviewees expressed there was very little opportunity to provide these types of experiences to the youth and children they serve. Firstly, they did not have the budget to fund these kinds of activities. Secondly, if such opportunities did arise, they were sporadic and difficult to respond to. Additionally, one rural organization expressed that such opportunities simply did not exist due to their location.

There are was no way [to have this experience before]. Maybe a one-off opportunity. We have no budget. We have a hard time accessing a community recreation center, which is three blocks away, because of money. We've got parents and kids struggling in low income areas that have no leisure or healthy opportunities to do together.

We encouraged the kids to join the activities at another [free activity] center. But, a lot of the kids were scared and would not get involved in these activities because of the other kids that would be there, who appeared to be involved in crime or drugs.

[Before Kids up Front], [free tickets] happened sporadically - usually through corporate donations, but it was more who you knew, rather than integrating it into the needs of our programming.

The availability of *Kids up Front Edmonton* opportunities decreases the stress of both staff and the organization in trying to find these positive opportunities for the children and youth they work with.

It is a big part of our recreational programming. [Comparing it to before we worked with Kids Up Front], it is night and day.

We have done our own research in finding free opportunities. It certainly has taken a lot of pressure off the staff looking for those opportunities.

Enhances Service - Provides Teaching Opportunity

The opportunities provided by *Kids Up Front* enhance the services provided by non-profit organizations in two ways. Firstly, it provides teaching opportunities

for frontline workers with the children and youth. Many of these organizations seek to create the capacity in children and youth to interact positively in social situations and build their social skills. The ability to attend community events gives the workers an opportunity for the children and youth to practice these skills.

It gives the staff opportunity for teachable moments, and to show the kids, socially this is how you should be.

A lot of our teaching takes place [at our facility]. Our kids don't do well in the community. These activities offer a smaller group situation where the staff can create learning opportunities in the community that we can't do here. Things that might seem simple for functioning people - like how to order popcorn at a concession stand or how to count out money for can of pop - is under-rated in how difficult it might be for the kids we work with. Or the kids can practice how you get the courage to order something at a concession stand. This is wonderful, teaching them how to interact. Or teaching the art of gratitude - how you say thank you to people who donate.

Enhances Service - Builds Relationship

The opportunities with *Kids Up Front Edmonton* also give frontline workers an opportunity to work with the children and youth in different contexts, which can contribute to building a better relationship. The frontline worker might get an opportunity to see some assets of the children and youth that are only apparent in a community setting. The worker also can share a positive experience, which helps the child or youth build trust in the frontline worker.

It certainly allows them - especially with youth - to forge a different style of relationship ... It extends the staff's connection with youth and they can see them in different environment.

It gives staff the opportunity to see kids in a different way - in a fun way, away from the group. So you see the kids in a smaller group and you see them in a different way.

It also helps staff build rapport with the kids when they go on the outings.

My staff members are often young adults and because of being able to go to events, the kids will look at them, develop trust and it can be a "big brother" relationship. Sometimes the teens don't want to talk to the parent, but they look forward to the event and they open up to the support worker. It's great - it gives another opportunity to share what they are going through.

Staff Appreciation and Support

Finally, partners described how staff in non-profit organizations are often underpaid, working in highly stressful situations with children, youth and families who are in need. When staff have an opportunity to accompany children, youth or families to events provided by *Kids Up Front*, it is a way to appreciate staff for all of their contributions in a sector where valuable work cannot be financially recognized.

To able to offer some staff a showing of appreciation is wonderful.

We are non-profit; we don't pay our workers a great amount. It's an incentive for them too ... it helps with retention.

By having staff participate in a positive experience with the children and youth has a similar impact as on the kids themselves. The staff see the kids enjoying themselves, which provides hope and adds to their own resiliency as a support worker.

For the staff to see the joy and experience the event through their kids is really great and reinforces why we do what we're doing. We get just as much as what the kids get.

C.2. Value of *Kids up Front Edmonton*

The previous section identified the impact of *Kids up Front Edmonton*. That is, it identifies the value of the experience. This section of the report identifies the value of specifically, the organization of *Kids up Front Edmonton*, in providing this service. This information was compiled from interviews with both partners and financial sponsors.

Targets Disadvantaged Kids

Stakeholders identified value in how *Kids Up Front* targets children, youth and families who are disadvantaged. This component of their mission is valued by both partners and financial supporters.

*There's nothing else out there like it. When you look at other organizations, I can't believe that anybody that works with youth who are marginalized or at risk, would not use KUF. They need permanent funding ... they do this service for all youth in Edmonton. The work they do has a social return down the line ... and we have to recognize the investment that *Kids Up Front* is making for the rest of us.*

Many of the partner non-profit agencies were very aware of how “including” disadvantaged kids in activities leads to other positive outcomes, such as positive self-esteem, social skill development and resiliency. However, while financial sponsors (and potential sponsors) may value inclusion, they may not be aware of its long-term impact.

For example, one sponsor described how another potential sponsor did not understand the impact of the experience of children and youth attending events. Their colleague thought a “better” experience would be provided if the children and youth participated in sports events, rather than just watching them.

Similarly, another financial sponsor valued what *Kids Up Front* provided for children and youth, but wondered if its value could be extended to include activities such as mentoring.

I don't know if this would ever be part of their mandate, but I would like to see them add something more to their charity than just the tickets. Personally, my willingness to donate will only go to a certain financial level. It is hard to change a kid's life with just tickets. They need positive role models. They need something more for the day-to-day living. If they could add that, that would make a great leap for the charity. Unless Kids Up Front adds something else to the charity, I will [continue] to [additionally] support other charities that help kids out in other ways.

From the data collected in this report, it is clear that *Kids Up Front* ensures other non-profits reach their mandate - whether it be mentoring, developing social skills, or helping families feel included - which, in turn, can “change a life”. *Kids Up Front* on its own doesn't change lives. But *Kids Up Front* certainly enables other organizations to achieve these kinds of important outcomes.

Hopefully, this report should help *Kids Up Front Edmonton* better articulate the positive outcomes for children and youth that directly result from these experiences that support inclusion.

Provides a Direct Positive Experience

Stakeholders valued how *Kids Up Front* directly provides a positive experience for children and youth. The benefit to children and youth is clear and easy to identify.

You know where the money goes versus a charity like the United Way. There is a need in the community- there are people not using tickets and people wanting to attend events.

[I was attracted to] the directness of the charity. Tickets go directly to the kids. It has a direct impact. You are not contributing to a foundation or the general coffers like Kids for Cancer.

Anything that builds resiliency and gives kids a positive experience is very inspiring.

Makes Effective Use of Resources

All stakeholders identified how effective *Kids Up Front* was in using their resources to provide positive experiences for children and youth. As well, they described how clear it was what the money in this organization supported.

The organization provides a lot of value. It's not a high structure model, but high value ... it's not overloaded with expenses.

I am impressed with them as an organization and how they operate on a shoe string budget. Maybe because they are so effective at distributing the tickets, it could be hurting them because funders don't know why they need more money.

I can't believe there's just two [staff]. Kids Up Front offers it like there are one hundred of them. I would have assumed it was a large organization.

However, stakeholders highlighted that they are effective at not only their resources - but the resources of community (i.e. unused tickets) towards a positive outcome.

It's creative to distribute tickets and get them out the door.

The concept of what they do is deserving of support. There are lots of wasted tickets in the corporate world.

It is a logical model. It is connecting people who have tickets and not using them to people who could use them. The model makes sense.

We have a model in our household that if we have the availability [of resources], we should help others out. Kids Up Front does that.

Overall, the non-profit partner organization expressed great appreciation for the efficiency of the organization and ability to manage the requests and coordination required for the experiences provided by *Kids Up Front Edmonton*.

Future challenges identified by stakeholders for the organization included:

- More publicity

The majority of non-profit partners and financial sponsors had heard about *Kids Up Front Edmonton* through personal contact and word-of-mouth. Many of the financial sponsors had ideas to help *Kids Up Front Edmonton* get more publicity that are not shared in this report, but will be shared directly with the staff of *Kids up Front Edmonton*.

- Funding Operational Costs

Because the benefit of the experiences of the children and youth occur in the context of other existing programs, the funding of *Kids Up Front* can be viewed as operational costs, rather than programming costs, which are traditionally not funded by many foundations. Again, it is hoped that the data provided by this report can highlight the impact of the operational costs of *Kids Up Front Edmonton*.

C.3. Logic Model

A logic model is presented on the next page that captures the impact of *Kids Up Front Edmonton*. The development of the logic model is based on previous documents of the organization, along with the data collected for this research study.

Based on discussions with staff and board members of *Kids Up Front Edmonton*, the logic model will be revised accordingly.

Logic Model for *Kids Up Front Edmonton*

<i>Long-term outcomes</i>		
<p>Children & youth develop socially positive relationships.</p> <p>Edmonton is an inclusive community for children, youth & their families who have financial and social barriers.</p>		
<i>Medium-term outcomes</i>		
<p>Children & youth with financial and social barriers increase their self-esteem and hope.</p>	<p>Relationships among families of children & youth with financial & social barriers improve.</p> <p>Relationships of service providers with children & youth with financial & social barriers improve.</p>	<p>Non-profit social agencies have opportunities to work towards their mission of inclusiveness and positive interactions among children & youth.</p>
<i>Short-term outcomes</i>		
<p>Children & youth with financial and social barriers have positive life experiences.</p> <p>Children & youth feel included in the community.</p>	<p>Parents, family members, and service providers are involved in the lives of children & youth in a positive way.</p>	<p>Non-profit social agencies have access to life opportunities for children & youth.</p>

D. Concluding Remarks

This research project has identified that *Kids Up Front Edmonton* contributes to positive impacts in children and youth, their families, their partner non-profit agencies and in the community of Edmonton as a whole. As well, the project has identified that three key traits of *Kids Up Front Edmonton* as an organization mark its unique role in the non-profit sector. The organization supports children and youth with financial and social barriers, provide a direct positive experience to these children and youth and make effective use of their resources. Hopefully, this information identifies a starting point for *Kids Up Front Edmonton* to tackle some of their challenges in acquiring sustained operational funding and supporting their excellent work in providing children and youth, and their families, with the building blocks for socially positive relationships and contributing to Edmonton being an inclusive community.

Appendix I: Interview Guide for Partners

Tell me about your role in the organization?

How did you hear about Kids Up Front?

What made you decide to call them?

Before you worked with Kids Up Front, describe how and if you were able to fulfill that need within your organization?

I'd like to talk about the "value added" and impact of Kids Up Front. I'm interested in learning about its value not only for the kids, but for their families and their communities and for your organization itself.

Let's start with the kids. Could you describe the impacts, if any, you have seen on kids because they have been able to access events through Kids Up Front? Do you have a story that speaks to this?

Can you describe if this impact extends to families?

What is the value of this service for the staff in your organization?

Keeping in mind your own organization's vision and mission, what is the value of Kids Up Front to your organization's goals and the vision it seeks to achieve?

Would you encourage other organizations of your size to use Kids Up Front? Why or why not? [*probe for how it is different from other non-profits*]

Appendix II: Interview Guide for Financial Supporters

Tell me about your role in your organization?

How did you hear about Kids Up Front?

What made you decide to financially support them in their work?

Kids Up Front is interested in collaborating with partners to foster positive experiences for youth. As you know, their tickets they distribute are tickets that can't be used but are already paid for and the service they provide to community services is free. Is there anything in particular about the Kids Up Front program and approach that you find compelling or inspiring as a financial supporter?

Is there any other information you would like to share that Kids Up Front might find helpful in its effort to get their work better known to financial supporters like yourself?