

# Early Learning for Families (ELF) Program Evaluation Report

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2019-06-08

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## Background

### What is the ELF program?

The Early Learning for Families (ELF) program is a pop-up early learning program for children ages 0-5 and their families. The program was first implemented in 2015. Since then it has been running between October and June once every week for two hours in the afternoon at the Central City shopping center, engaging with children and families who visit the mall.

The ELF program is a partnership between SFU TD Community Engagement Centre, Surrey School District (SD36), and the Blackwood Partners Management Corporation (owner of Central City). The program is delivered SD36 staff members with support from SFU student volunteers who receive co-curricular credits from this community-based learning experience.

### ELF program objectives

The program focuses on child-centered and play-based learning, parent engagement, and community connections. It aims to:

1. introduce families and children to play-based learning, school and community resources, connections to other families, and support networks;
2. provide a community-based experiential learning opportunity for SFU students who are interested in early childhood education, teaching, and/or child and youth services; and
3. encourage families to visit and stay in the mall, thereby generating traffic and shopping activities.

### Evaluation Purpose and Questions

The purpose of the evaluation is to investigate program benefits and make suggestions on program improvement. Specially, we focus on the following questions<sup>1</sup>:

1. Who are the program participants? How did they hear about the program?
2. What are the perceived effects of the program on its participants (parents/guardians and their children)?
3. Does the program generate traffic and shopping for the mall?
4. Are there any unintended effects of the program (positive or negative)?
5. Are there aspects of the program that could/should be improved/changed in the future?

## Methods

Evaluation data were collected between October 2018 and February 2019. Multiple sources of data were gathered, including field observations, interviews of the program staff members (facilitators and student volunteers), and survey of parents or guardians. All data were collected on site when the program was in session.

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<sup>1</sup> A separate study evaluates SFU student volunteers' learning experience. It is excluded from the focus of this evaluation.

Data collected from all sources were compared and contrasted to provide rigor to the investigation and ensure trustworthiness of the study findings.

## Observations

Formal observations of the program occurred on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> 2018 during the two-hour program session. There were further observations of program sessions until the end of data collection in February 2019. Both evaluators took notes while observing the program from outside of the sessions, as well as while participating in the program, observing parent-child interactions, volunteer engagement with the program participants, and facilitator-lead activities like story and singing time, interacting personally with children, parents/guardians, volunteers and facilitators.

The evaluators also conversed with facilitators and volunteers to gain further understanding of program structure, activities and operations as well as the demographics and experience of program participants.

Insights gathered from these observations and conversations provided a basis for interview and survey instrument development.

## Interviews of program facilitators

The lead facilitator has been with the program since its inception. The second facilitator started with the program in October, 2018. We conducted a one-hour, one-on-one interview with each of the two facilitators on December 12, 2019. A second interview with the lead facilitator was conducted on December 19<sup>th</sup> for an additional hour to complete the remaining interview questions.

The main interview questions were the following. See Appendix A for the full interview protocol.

1. What were the initial goals of the program and how are these goals being met now?
2. What do parents/guardians get out of attending the ELF program?
3. How do those involved (Central City mall, SFU student volunteers) benefit from the program?
4. What are the unexpected outcomes of the program, if any?
5. What aspects or elements of the program need improvement or change?

## Interviews of student volunteers

As the two SFU student volunteers could not commit extra time outside of the program for evaluation, the interviews with them were brief, occurring at the end of the program on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019. However, conversations with both volunteers during the program visits provided additional insights into their perspectives on the program. This compensates the brevity of the interviews.

Both volunteers worked with the program for multiple semesters. One worked for multiple iterations of the program over the years. Their interactions with parents/guardians on the ground allowed them to develop key insights into program participants' experiences, the overall effect of the program, and what they personally imagined for the program's future.

The questions we asked the volunteers were:

1. What effects do you see the program having on parents/guardians and children?
2. What is the potential of the program in your eyes?

## Survey of parents/guardians

The focus of the parent survey was to understand what participants believed to be getting out of the program and what could be added to or altered for the program to encourage their attendance. Additionally, we gathered demographic data on those surveyed.

The survey instrument was tested in a trial set of interviews (3 total) to ensure that the language was appropriately understood and to minimize the interruption to parents participating in the program and interacting with their children. The language was therefore simplified and the questions shortened.

One of the evaluators and the two student volunteers conducted the survey with parents through one-on-one interviews guided by the instrument while parents played with their children. The interviewers chose their interviewees more-or-less randomly.

Prior to data collection, one evaluator reviewed the instrument with the volunteers to ensure that they understand the questions properly. The evaluator also asked the volunteers to provide feedback and suggestions on how the instrument could be revised based on their understanding of the program and its participants. Their feedback was incorporated into the instrument revision.

The key questions we asked the parents/guardians are

1. What have been your and your child's (children's) experience attending the ELF program?
2. What do you and your child (children) get out of attending the ELF program?
3. What are your suggestions for the future of the program?

## RESULTS

### Observations

The program observations were chiefly conducted by one of the evaluators, whom we refer to as the main observer.

In our observations, the average number of families participating at the program per session was approximately fourteen. Most parents came with one child, some with two, and some with more. Individual sessions had between 35 to 50 visitors including parents and children. Families dropped in at any time during the program session. Once there, most of the families stayed until the program ended.

During each program visit we saw a considerable number of immigrant and EAL (English as an additional language) families. Many of them attended the program regularly and their faces became familiar. From the program sign-in sheets, we learned that there were also many parents attending the program for the first time each session.

It was very apparent that the visiting families were from diverse cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds. Talking with the parents and the program staff members, we learned that the majority of the families were immigrants or refugees. They came originally from many different parts of the worlds including Asia, the Middle East, Africa, North America, South America, and Europe. Multiple languages were spoken by the participants.

The majority of the parents were mothers. There were also fathers, grandparents, uncles and aunts. When asked, most mothers said that they attended the program as both an educational opportunity for their children and an opportunity for themselves to meet and connect with other mothers. During the main observer's visits, two mothers also told her on their own that they were meeting a friend and her child at the program. Additionally, two parents mentioned to her that the program was at a convenient location in their weekly routine, allowing children to have a change of scene while participating in a good educational opportunity.

The toys and activities at the program consisted of an arts and crafts table, a puzzle and educational toy station, a playdough station, and a building block area with some stuffed toys and a train track set. The crafts table and the playdough area seemed the most frequented by the children at the program, while the areas along the wall with the building blocks were more often home to many of the socializing parents.

The atmosphere at the program was always friendly and easy-going, with parents conversing with one another, facilitators, or volunteers; and with children playing either with their parents/guardians or other children at the program, or immersed in activities by themselves. Volunteers were usually seen mingling with the parents and supporting their engagement with their children, reconnecting with returning attendees and introducing themselves to new ones. The facilitators were usually seen conversing with participants at the entrance of the program, answering questions and welcoming in curious passersby.

Many parents appeared unsure of how to engage their children in play and seemed to appreciate the direction they received from facilitators and volunteers. Without always giving verbal cues, the staff modeled interactions with children to their parents. On multiple occasions, a facilitator was observed engaging with a child as the parent watched on the side. Only moments later after the facilitator had left, the parent used the same tactic with her child.

Program staff answered any questions the parents might have about engaging their child in play-based activities. The lead facilitator brought up these kinds of topics on more than one occasion during the singing and story time portion of the program. The facilitators often used this period to address common concerns and questions from the parents.

Parents were also learning from one another about engaging with their children. For example, in observing a response from adult A to their child, the evaluator witnessed adult B respond differently to their child the next time their child stole a train from another child at the program. This occurred on more than one occasion during one of the evaluators' visits to the program. This also happened between program staff and participants.

In term of program space and location, we noticed that there were times when the program area was packed, making it difficult for new participants to find space in the area. On top of this, strollers took up a lot of space next to the fenced program area, making it feel even more full. These observations suggest the need for more program space, which was also suggested by the parents and staff members in the later interviews.

The main observer noted, “At first glance, it may not be immediately obvious to the onlooker what the ELF program is and what it is trying to accomplish besides being a play area in the Central City mall. However, the more time I spent among the parents, children and staff inside the program stanchions, the more I saw its potential. In my time spent at the program, I observed parents meeting and making new connections with other parents in their city, I saw parents getting information about community resources for their families from the facilitators, children playing alongside one another and learning about respectful play and stating boundaries, volunteers gaining experience engaging with parents and their children, EAL parents and children learning English and making cultural connections. The more time I spent at the program the more I understood it as a multi-dimensional learning environment for both participants and staff. Everyone participating in the program appears to be learning something by attending.”

The main observer further noted that the program became a place for many families to learn about educational resources and opportunities available in the Surrey area. In her conversations with families, she learned that many families attend the program because they were unsure of where to turn in their community to find resources and support for their child’s education and for their own education as parents. The program offers opportunities to become educated about community resources by speaking with program staff and with other families and staying for story and singing time where occasionally information on resources is provided by the facilitators. Volunteers were also learning about resources in their community. When they were asked questions by parents that they couldn’t answer, they brought these questions to the facilitators. The ELF program has become a place to access information on resources for families in the Surrey area, which in turn has benefited families by giving them the information they need to make the next steps in their child’s education.

In becoming exposed to resources, families are empowered to expand their social networks and make connections with other organizations in their community. This point is also connected to the previous one in that resource education like this occurs in a multi-dimensional learning environment, with resources (brochures, pamphlets) and individuals with knowledge about those resources who can connect families with what they need.

## Facilitator Interviews

### *1. What were the initial goals of the program and how are these goals being met now?*

Throughout the interviews it was expressed that the initial goal of the program was to reach families who were not utilizing early learning resources in their communities, whether that be pre-school or other early learning services like Strong Start, and to provide that particular demographic with a no-cost, no-pressure alternative.

The lead facilitator said that initial goals of the program were also to build greater awareness among parents and guardians of other early learning opportunities in their communities as well as awareness of other community supports and resources. In demonstrating how these goals were being met the facilitator said, “We’ve had the library come in and talk about the ease of getting library cards and utilizing resources there, the children’s foundation coming in and talking about free parenting programs, DIVERSEcity coming in and talking about newcomer and refugee programs, childcare options... Surrey Nature Centre used to come in once a month [...]”

The lead facilitator mentioned that helping families develop a parenting network was one of the program goals. In response to our question about whether this was an original goal or an unexpected benefit of the program, the facilitator clarified, “I would say it was something that was definitely an additional benefit, but I think it’s something we’ve always seen within these drop-in programs. It’s a natural progress that happens in the program that families make these connections, and friendships are built and continue outside of programs, but I think the primary goal for this was to reach families who had no support, who weren’t utilizing community resources, and to reach those children who were quite vulnerable in coming to school without any prior [guided and structured] early learning experience.”

## *2. What do parents/guardians get out of attending the ELF program?*

The facilitators agreed that by attending the program parents and guardians are learning about their community resources, the appropriate developmental milestones and goals for children at various stages of pre-kindergarten, how to bond with their children and promote learning through play-based activities, and, in the case of EAL families, developing cultural connections and English-speaking skills.

The majority of questions that parents asked the facilitators were in response to the songs, toys and activities used throughout the program. There were also questions about community resources. Questions about parenting and child development are common, such as, “What’s normal for my child to be doing at this age?”, “How do I potty train my child?”, and “How do I get my child to eat their vegetables?”

When it comes to children’s learning, the facilitators noted that they learned to play and socialize with other children and adults. They learned such things as how to

- use craft supplies, e.g., scissors, stamps and crayons;
- communicate boundaries during play;
- share with others and engage in group work;
- develop confidence and security stepping away from family; and
- other essential skills for kindergarten such as following direction, organization, listening and paying attention.

For children, the facilitators commented that the program is an “exposure to opportunities that they might not have at home. The whole idea of sitting down at circle time, or putting things away when they’re finished, building the relationships with families outside of the family, those are all gearing up towards what we would say would be kindergarten readiness”.

On the whole, the facilitators expressed that parents were very grateful for what they and their children have learned at the program. They were generally surprised that the program exists. Many of them stumbled across it when they happened to be visiting the mall. Others found out through word of mouth or the mall's website. The facilitators shared that quite a few families come from locations other than Surrey in the greater Vancouver area (Richmond and New Westminster were given as examples). Some of these families used to be local participants and then moved away, but kept returning to the program for what it had to offer to their children and themselves.

The lead facilitator at the program said that for many families community centres weren't as accessible for these kinds of early learning programs, which was why the decision to begin the pop-up program at the shopping centre was first made.

Organizers of the program asked (in a facilitator's words), "How do we make these connections? Because if we stay in the schools and we stay in the community centres but families aren't coming to us - that was that core group of community organizations where they wanted to do that initial pop up idea - we need to go to the people. Where do people go? The mall."

### *3. How do those involved (Central City mall, SFU student volunteers) benefit from the program?*

Both facilitators agreed that SFU student volunteers were an essential part of the functioning of the ELF program and that they believed SFU volunteers enjoy participating in the program. The lead facilitator said, "I think the enthusiasm of the volunteers, the fact that they are giving of their time to participate in this is extraordinary. They've always been really positive, they come joyfully here and so that kind of adds into the atmosphere of the program, too."

In terms of the program's contribution to the Central City shopping centre, both facilitators were able to provide examples of participants shopping in the mall either before or after attending the program. The lead facilitator said, "I think there's a small portion of extra shopping that happens through that, but I think that it's a draw that families come back consistently," emphasizing the importance of the program in maintaining a community atmosphere in the mall which is attractive to families and encourages those from areas outside of Surrey to make a visit.

### *4. What are the unexpected outcomes of the program, if any?*

The racial, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity of the participating families is beyond what the facilitators imagined. One facilitator enthusiastically said, "We represent the entire globe, so we've got families that [...] recognize themselves as aboriginal/indigenous, we've got a lot of Punjabi speaking families, Vietnamese, Polish, various people from African countries, Pakistani, Afghan, Iraqi – everyone."

Additional unexpected benefits of the program also include helping families build a parenting network of their own and therefore reducing social isolation in families with less access to community resources (often refugee families). The facilitators agreed that it is a significant benefit of the program. One of them expressed, "The refugee moms, they come and they're isolated, and this is a program where they come in and meet each other."

In terms of unexpected learning, the program provides a safe space for families to ask sometimes difficult questions about their child's development, parenting tactics, and their child's early education. For EAL families, it is a meet up space to develop and improve their English-speaking skills.

The level of loyalty of many of the families, especially those travel to the program site from other Lower Mainland cities further away from Surrey, surprised the facilitators. Taking part in the program became routine for many daytime guardians.

### *5. What aspects of the program need improvement?*

In discussing improvements to the program, the lead facilitator expressed a hope for more out-of-program time with student volunteers to discuss basic principles of early learning, review mediation strategies, and unify on goals and expectations for the program. The lead facilitator said, "I think one of the challenges of it have been making sure that everybody is on the same page, understanding the goals and objectives of the program clearly; articulating that. Because I don't have the same involvement I did when I first started the program. I'm more hands off. I don't have the admin time I used to have at the program, so trying to connect with them during program is really hard." In general, the facilitators agreed that more out-of-program time would be beneficial. One added, "I think also to have specific admin time or debriefing time where maybe once a month or maybe once every other month that we have an extra thirty minutes where we can sit around and talk [...] because I don't have that opportunity during set up to touch base and rub shoulders."

The facilitators noted that the program has become highly dependent on SFU student volunteers, it was expressed that the program would benefit greatly from finding a way to ensure volunteer support and commitment by SFU or possibly to return to the previous model of having at least one additional staff member along with SFU student volunteers.

In receiving many suggestions by participants about bringing in new toys and equipment to the program, facilitators expressed that it would be helpful to set up a host of rotating toys and activities so that there is a greater variety for the returning families. It was also mentioned that the program would benefit from having an ELF program-designated dolly in the mall in order to avoid confusion with mall staff, which has occasionally resulted in not having a dolly for the program equipment.

The lead facilitator also mentioned that having the program end at two o'clock rather than two-thirty would be helpful to those parents with older children who are leaving the program early to pick up their kids from school.

## **Volunteer Interviews**

### *1. What effects do you see the program having on parents/guardians and children?*

Volunteers agreed on two crucial points about the success of the program: first, that the program offers opportunities for learning that many families would not otherwise easily have; second, that

the program is helpful in establishing connections among families new to Canada or struggling to create a support network in their city. Singing and story time were said to be particularly well-received among participants. It was also mentioned that for many families the ELF program functions as their version of Strong Start.

## 2. *What is the potential of the program in your eyes?*

In terms of the future of the program, both volunteers agreed that they could see the program expanding to other locations and be offered more frequently than once a week at the Central City shopping centre, though they admitted that it might be difficult to secure volunteer commitment if the program were to run on multiple days.

Both volunteers agreed that they saw a need for more space in the designated program area, as well as more funding for program resources. One of the volunteers who has been volunteering for a number of years also suggested creating a sign to redirect stroller parking to the area alongside the wall, to avoid blocking sight of the program for potential guests.

## Parent Surveys

### 1. *Who are the visiting families?*

Table 1: Family demographics (n = 30)

Attendance	First timers: 10 (33.3%) Recurring: 20 (66.6%)
Location	Live in Surrey: 28 (93.3%) Other: 2 (6.66%)
Number of children on site	One: 21 (70%) More than one: 9 (30%)
Immigration status	Immigrated: 25 (83.3%) Born to Canada: 5 (16.6%)

Table 1 shows that the program is serving its target population. The majority of the visiting families (25, 83%) are immigrants and most of the visitors are from Surrey (28, 93%).

It is worth noting that the 25 visiting parents/guardians who are immigrants named 13 countries and regions as their country of origin. They are India, China (including one from Hong Kong), Philippines, Pakistan, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, El Salvador, Jamaica, Kenya, Ethiopia, Mexico, and Turkey. They cover five continents: Asia, Africa, North America, South America and Europe.

### 2. *How did they hear about the program?*

Most of the respondents found out about the program while passing by (20, 67%). About 23% (7) found out by word-of-mouth, and three found from other resources, e.g. the website.

### 3. What do they and their child get out of attending the ELF program?

Families said that by attending the program they have become informed about other resources in their communities, like Strong Start, library programs, daycare opportunities and other child programs in the Surrey area. They also said that by attending the program their children have developed important life skills like sharing, listening, focusing, speaking English, and playing with and communicating with others. Additionally, families said that their children were learning important pre-kindergarten skills like colour identification, group participation, and hand coordination.

### 4. What effects does the program have on their life?

In all, parents and guardians agreed that there is much to be gained by attending the ELF program. Families said that they attend the program for the opportunity to engage with their children as well as with other families, for the exposure to activities and toys not found at home and for the helpful interactions with program staff. They also said that it is a great opportunity for their children to work on social skills. For those attending the program for the first time, it is often a pleasant surprise. For those returning to the program, it was said that it is an opportunity to meet with friends from previous program experiences.

### 5. How often do they shop at the mall before or after attending the program?

Table 2: Program visitor shopping behavior at the mall

How often do you shop at the mall before/after attending the program?	
I only come for the program	2 (6.6%)
Sometimes, but it is not planned	19 (63.3%)
We come to the program and do our shopping at the same time	6 (20.0%)
We only come for the program when we are at the mall already	3 (10.0%)

Most of the family (25, 83%) combined visiting the program with shopping and most shopping was unplanned (19, 63%). This indicates that the program does bring additional business to the mall.

### 6. What are their suggestions for the future of the program?

Common suggestions from participants for improvement to the program included longer story and singing time, a greater variety of activities and toys for those attending on a regular basis, more advertisement for the program, more space in the play area, instituting a no-shoes policy and having the program run more often throughout the week (at least 2-3 times). These suggestions indicate the popularity of the program and the need for more.

## Summary of Key Findings

Data gathered from observations, interviews of the facilitators and volunteers, and the parent survey have revealed common themes in perceived program benefits and effects as well as suggestions for improvement or changes. Below is a summary of our key findings.

## Program participants

The majority of the visiting families (25, 83%) are immigrants from diverse culture backgrounds. Most of the visitors are from Surrey (28, 93%), indicating the program is serving its target population. The program has been visited by an average of fourteen families and between 35 and 50 visitors, including parents/guardians and their children, per session. Many of the families were repeat visitors and some were regulars.

Two-thirds of the visitors found out about the program while passing by, the rest through word-of-mouth and other sources (e.g. the mall website).

## Perceived benefits and effects

The program has brought multiple benefits to families, SFU student volunteers, and the shopping mall. Specifically, it has

- served as a resource hub for disseminating and generating awareness of school and community support services to immigrant and refugee families;
- fostered a multi-dimensional learning environment that affords a range of learning opportunities for parents/guardians, children and student volunteers;
- created a multi- and inter-cultural safe gathering place for families, especially immigrant and refugee families, to meet and connect with one another; and
- generated additional traffic, activities and sales in the shopping centre, and promoted it as a civically engaged and responsible business.

### *The program serves as a resource hub.*

The program has served as a resource hub for disseminating and generating awareness of school and community support services to newcomer, immigrant, and refugee families, many of whom are socially isolated.

It has provided a space and place for community agencies to meet with families directly. Rather than waiting at the office for families to come, service providers can proactively reach out to target populations by coming to the program.

### *The program fosters a multi-dimensional learning environment.*

The program fostered a multi-dimensional learning environment that affords a range of learning opportunities for parents/guardians, children and student volunteers.

Everyone at the program learned. Parents learned about their child's development, parenting tactics, and their child's early education. Children learned to play and interact with other children and adults outside their families. They also developed early learning and socializing skills such as sharing, turn-taking, paying attention, and taking social responsibilities such as cleaning up, giving and receiving, and playing nice, all under the guidance of knowledgeable and experienced early learning educators, a benefit most of the visiting families don't get at home.

For EAL families, it is a meet-up space to develop and improve their English-speaking skills. Student volunteers learned about how to work with parents and children and about community

resources that they were not aware of. It is particularly beneficial for those volunteers who aspire to be school teachers.

### *The program is a friendly social gathering place.*

The program has become a friendly social gathering place for many families, especially immigrants from diverse culture backgrounds. It brings significant benefits for socially isolated families. For them the program is inviting place to meet other families with similar needs, gain confidence through positive and unthreatening social interactions, build cultural and cross-cultural connections, and develop and maintain personal support networks.

### *The program promotes business for the shopping centre.*

The program and the shopping centre have a mutually beneficial relationship in that each contributes to the success and accessibility of the other. The program benefits from the mall's location and accessibility for families. The mall benefits from the additional traffic, activities and sales that the program generates.

Beyond the commercial benefits the program has brought, it has also helped build positive public relations and promote a civically-engaged and socially-responsible corporate image for the shopping centre. This in turn further contributes to the shopping centre's business success.

### **Why the program is successful**

The ELF program clearly serves a much-felt need in the community. In addition, we suspect that its overall success can be linked to the welcoming and knowledgeable facilitators, helpful student volunteers, the astute choice of location and context, the easygoing atmosphere created by staff and environment, as well as elements of the program's design including choice of toys, organized play stations, activities and overall set-up.

It is worth highlighting the dedication of the program facilitators and helpfulness of the SFU student volunteers. Through our observations, informal conversations, and formal interviews of the two groups, it was evident how much they care about the families and how passionately they want the program to succeed. The facilitators' skilled interactions with parents and children (one facilitator speaks four languages: English, Russian, Farsi, and Dadi) and their capable operation of the program as well as the volunteers' invaluable assistance have no doubt played a critical role in the program's success.

### **Suggested program improvements and changes**

Facilitators, volunteers and parents all made suggestions for the program's improvement and changes. Some of these are small tweaks, while others imply greater resource requirements.

Suggestions were slightly different across subgroups (parents, facilitators and student volunteers), but were unified about the need for additional program resources and the expansion of program space. All subgroups suggested that there is a greater need for a program like this.

Below is a summary of all suggestions, listed roughly in order of increasing difficulty of implementation:

- Increased signage: greater advertisement of program throughout the shopping centre as well as signage to redirect strollers along the wall instead of in front of the program (facilitators and volunteers)
- A no-shoes policy for the play areas (parents)
- Additional resources: program materials such as toys, mats, and stanchions and rotation through different toys and activities (all), a dedicated program dolly (facilitators)
- A longer singing and story time (parents)
- Adjustment of timeframe: 12:00 - 2:00 PM rather than 12:30 - 2:30 PM (facilitators)
- Program space: designated-area to be extended due to participant numbers, requiring extra mats and stanchions (all)
- More advertisement for the program (parents)
- Out-of-program administration time for facilitators (facilitators)
- Out-of-program debrief time for facilitators and volunteers to meet to discuss program operation and address any emergent needs (facilitators)
- Volunteer support: to ensure commitment by SFU or possibly to return to the previous model of having at least one additional facilitator along with SFU student volunteers (facilitators)
- Expansion of program: program to run on multiple days or at multiple locations (All)

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the program is popular and accessible. It has successfully met its intended goals of introducing families and their children to play-based learning and to school and community resources, facilitating making connections to other families and support networks, providing SFU students with valuable experiential learning, and generating additional traffic, activity and sales at the shopping centre. Evidence also show that the program is a multi-dimensional learning environment for parents, children and SFU student volunteers. It is a culturally diverse and friendly social gathering place for families.

Overall, the program is a multi-faceted success. It has proven to be a fruitful partnership between the Surrey School District SD 36, Blackwood Partners, and SFU.

## End notes

As evaluators, we refrain from making specific recommendations for program changes or expansion at this point because the program overall is a success and the study is focused entirely on the perception and experience of the program participants and staff. In order to make sound recommendations, we need to converse with all stakeholders of the program to gain a comprehensive understanding of each group's interests, resource capacity, and the context in which they operate in relation to the program.

Even though all of the suggestions made by parents, facilitators and volunteers make sense, we realize that the implementations of many these suggestions have resource and funding implications. One also has to consider how changes might potentially negatively (as well as positively) impact the program operation as a whole, family participation, and stakeholder engagement.

We hope this study has revealed insights into aspects of the program that could provide a basis for all stakeholders to engage in conversations about the future of the program.

## Appendix A: Data Collection Instruments

### Facilitator Interview

1. Tell us about the program: How did it get started, and when?
2. What were the initial goals of the program?
3. How has it evolved since you first started?
4. How would you describe your role as ELF program facilitator?
5. How did you begin facilitating at ELF?
6. How would you describe your experience as a facilitator? Can you share a story of your experience, something memorable, surprising, delightful, or even troubling?
7. What is your general impression of how parents and children feel about the program?
8. What are children and parents learning from this program, and can you describe an experience where you have seen this firsthand?
9. What are the most common questions that you get asked by parents or others inquiring into the program?
10. Have you seen any outcomes or impacts of the program in the lives of participants that you did not expect?
11. Do you have any specific stories to share about the participants of the program from your observation and experience?
12. How has having student volunteers affected your experience of the program?
13. In your view, has the program benefited from having student volunteers?
14. What is your experience of having the program run in a shopping mall?
15. Do you think the program is beneficial for the mall's business? If so, how? If not, why?
16. Are there any aspects of the program which you would like to have improved?

## Volunteer Interview

1. What effects do you see the program having on parents/guardians and children?
2. What is the potential of the program in your eyes?

## Parent Survey

1. Is this your first time attending the ELF program? If not, how many times/how long have you been attending?
2. How many children are with you today? What is your relationship to them?
3. Do you live in Surrey? If not, where are you coming from?
4. Is Canada your country of origin? If not, where have you immigrated from, and for how long have you been living in Canada?
5. How did you hear about the ELF program?
  - a) While passing by
  - b) Word-of-mouth
  - c) Shopping centre website
  - d) Other:
6. Do you and your child enjoy attending the program? What do you like about it? What do they like about it?
7. What would you say you and your child have learned by attending the program (i.e., opportunities, resources, skills, etc.)?
8. How do you like the program running in the shopping centre?
9. How frequently do you shop before/after attending the program?
  - a) I only come for the program.
  - b) Sometimes, but it is not planned.
  - c) We go to the program and do our shopping at the same time.
  - d) We only go to the program when we are at the mall already.
10. If you had one wish for the future of the program, what would that be?

## Appendix B: Timeline for Evaluation

Evaluation purpose, questions and methods were confirmed in a meeting between program evaluators Cindy Xin, Director of Research, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University and Bronwen McCann, MA graduate research assistant and Rachel Nelson, Associate Director of the Office of Community Engagement at SFU on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

The following methods were agreed on and sent out in an email to be confirmed by the main stakeholders in the evaluation.

- One-on-one interviews with the SD36 program facilitators
- One-on-one interviews with SFU student volunteers who have volunteered in the program for more than one semester
- Surveys with parents/guardians (conducted by SFU student volunteers)
- Observations of the program in action

The program was visited between October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018 and March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Facilitator interviews were conducted on December 12<sup>th</sup> and December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Facilitator interview questions were finalized in November 2018. An email informing facilitators of the interview was sent out on November 28<sup>th</sup>, along with a consent form for them to review. The parent survey was tested in a trail set of interviews (3 total) on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and the remainder of the surveys were carried out on February 13<sup>th</sup>, February 20<sup>th</sup>, February 27<sup>th</sup>, and March 6<sup>th</sup> by the program's SFU student volunteers, who were trained February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The training consisted of a review of the instrument and the opportunity for volunteers to ask for clarification on any of the survey questions. Interviews with student volunteers were conducted on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Observations of the program occurred on October 17<sup>th</sup>, October 24<sup>th</sup>, and October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018 and continued informally throughout the rest of the program visits.