

Region of Waterloo Children's Services Access and Inclusion Plan

Phase 1



Access and Inclusion Plan

Children's Services, Regional Municipality of Waterloo



Region of Waterloo
COMMUNITY SERVICES

©Region of Waterloo, 2024

Recommended citation:

Children's Services (2024). Access and Inclusion Plan
Regional Municipality of Waterloo, ON

For more information or to request an alternative format please contact:

Region of Waterloo, Children's Services
99 Regina Street South, 4th Floor
Waterloo, Ontario, N2J 4G6
Phone: 519-575-4400
Deaf and hard of hearing (TTY): 519-575-4608
CHSAdmin@regionofwaterloo.ca
www.regionofwaterloo.ca/childrensservices

January 2024



Waterloo Region is part of the Haldimand Tract, which encompasses six miles on either side of the Grand River from the mouth near Dundalk to where it empties into Lake Erie at Port Maitland also referred to as the Dish with One Spoon Wampum. This is the traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and Chonnonton.



Children's Services remains committed to working together with all First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities on our path to Truth and Reconciliation. As a collective, Children's Services staff acknowledge our personal and professional responsibility to seek knowledge and unlearn and relearn the histories and experiences of First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities and reflect on the actions we can take towards reconciliation. As we are learning, we are also committed to respecting and honouring the enduring presence and deep traditional Indigenous knowledge, wisdom and culture.



Welcome message from Children's Services

Children's Services is proud and excited to share the first phase of its Access and Inclusion Plan. This document is an important step towards building a stronger and more inclusive Early Years and Child Care (EYCC) system and community as a whole. We recognize the significant momentum building in our community towards a more affordable and accessible system. We've heard from families of all kinds asking for more child care that reflects a range of cultures, languages, family compositions and traditions. This plan is a response to feedback, conversations, collaboration and consultation that we've heard from parents, extended families, child care operators, caregivers and our Children's Services staff. We are continually and intentionally building our knowledge to include new and diverse ways of problem solving, and pushing the boundaries of our thinking and ways of being.

This plan has been created with the combined wisdom of our community, and will continue to evolve over the coming months and years. We are considering this Access and Inclusion Plan to be Phase 1, which summarizes the intentional steps towards equity, access and inclusion that are currently underway. We commit to releasing Phase 2, which will build on the actions below and include the results of further consultation with a wider and more diverse range of community members. Our Access and Inclusion Plan will continue to evolve into Phase 3 and beyond based on community insights and the results of evaluating our initiatives.

Region of Waterloo Children's Services Access and Inclusion Plan



Phase 1 overview:

Children's Services is proud of the work that has already begun as first steps towards creating a more accessible and inclusive child care system. The following summarizes both actions already underway, as well as actions planned for 2024.

Create more child care spaces

- New growth strategy
- Language and Mentorship Program
- Indigenous child care and home child care
- More overnight, evening and weekend child care

Create more welcoming and inclusive environments for children

- Professional development for the whole sector
- Equity and Inclusion Policies for child care
- Evaluate the special needs service model
- More supports for children with special needs in home child care

Remove barriers to accessing services

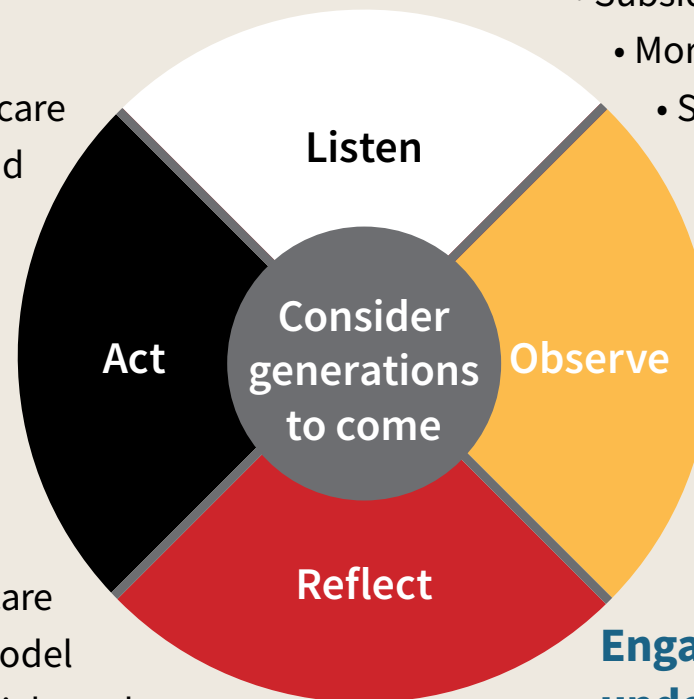
- Subsidy Access Pilot
- More inclusive policies in child care subsidy
- Simplify payment processes
 - Region of Waterloo Home Child Care
- New system navigators positions
- Translate the parent guide

Collect more useful data

- Collect race-based data for direct services
- Improve OneList

Engage more with under-served communities

- New engagement strategies



Learn more and provide input at regionofwaterloo.ca/childrens-access-inclusion-plan





From little seeds grow mighty trees

Table of contents

Our approach	8
Listen, Observe, Reflect, Act and Consider generations to come ..	9
The importance of the early years.	10
Early Years Child Care Service System Plan 2022-2026	11
Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan	12
Action steps.	13
Improving access to families experiencing low-income	14
1. Creation of a growth strategy to target growth in priority neighbourhoods	14
2. Subsidy Access Pilot – reserving spaces for children in receipt of child care subsidy	15
3. Continuous review of child care subsidy policies for greater equity of access	15
4. Direct collection of parent contributions for families in receipt of child care subsidy - Region of Waterloo Licensed Home Child Care	16
Improving access for Black, racialized and underserved families ..	17
5. Collection of race-based data for programs in Children’s Services at the Region of Waterloo	17
6. New system navigator positions to support Indigenous, Black, racialized and underserved families access local Early Years services	17
7. Update and translate the Parent Guide to Licensed Quality Child Care	18
8. Conduct further engagement with parents that have been traditionally underserved	18
9. Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion training and coaching to all early years professionals.....	19
10. Explore changes to OneList to improve access and collect better demographic data.....	19
11. Expand Equity and Inclusion Policies for child care operators and other contracted service organizations.....	20
12. Implementation and evaluation of the Language and Mentorship Program	20
Improving access for Indigenous families	21
13. Exploration of Indigenous led licensed child care	21
Improving access for families that need more flexible child care	22
14. Incentivising evening, overnight and weekend care	22
Improving access for children with special needs	23
15. Completed evaluation of Special Needs Resourcing service model	23
16. Provide additional supports for children with special needs in licensed home child care	23
In closing	24
References.....	25

Our approach

The road towards full access and inclusion can be rewarding and exciting as well as complex and challenging. Children's Services recognizes the immense benefits to children when there is a warm and shared sense of belonging. We know children benefit from being exposed to diverse ways of being and for having their culture and history embedded and well-represented in early childhood settings.

At the same time, we are learning and unravelling centuries of complex relationships between government institutions, organizations and the public. At times, all levels of government in our country have been part of systems of policies that were discriminatory, biased or exclusionary. We know that some communities, such as the First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities in Canada, are still experiencing the lasting impacts of the residential school system. Others in our community may be coming from countries where their government did not serve or include them, and may even have caused harm. In Children's Services, we now acknowledge the importance of historical and intergenerational trauma, where traumatic experiences in the past continue to affect the mental and physical wellbeing of subsequent generations. Children's Services in particular plays an important role in restoring trust and implementing new and holistic approaches to service delivery for children and their families. We are grateful for the healing that has already happened, and our approach remains one that seeks to continually evaluate power structures to work towards a more collaborative and transparent approach.

Children's Services is comprised of individual staff that are all on their own equity journey. The Region of Waterloo and Children's Services are committed to providing resources to support individual and group learning on topics related to reconciliation, equity, diversity and inclusion. Children's Services management has frequent reflections and learnings on Indigenous writings, media, or our own experiences and observations – we challenge our own thinking and ask ourselves difficult questions. In honouring Indigenous ways of being, we are integrating the Seven Generation Principle, based on the Haudenosaunee

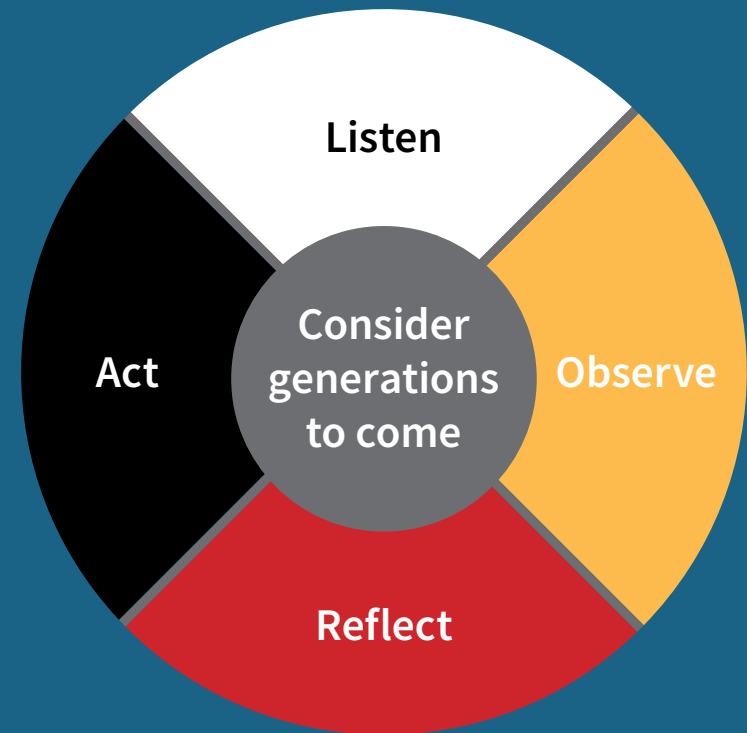


philosophy that the decisions we make now should consider the next seven generations to come. We know that new ways of working and new ways of being are needed to truly respond and provide service to our increasingly diverse community. We hope that actions included in the plan below, including new ways to engage with those that may have been missed in the past, will inspire trust and hope for the future of our youngest residents.

Throughout this document, you will notice that we have chosen the term Indigenous, Black, racialized and underserved to describe communities and individuals that have been, and continue to be, under-represented and sometimes even excluded in the Early Learning and Child Care system. This includes those that identify as First Nations, Inuit and Métis, African Caribbean and Black-identifying, racialized, and other marginalized communities who continue to face systemic barriers. We acknowledge that no label or group categorization will encompass the diverse, intersecting and rich histories of each individual or group in our region, and are committed to evolving our language as we learn and grow with our community.

Listen, Observe, Reflect, Act and Consider generations to come

Children's Services is becoming more intentional about shaping policy and making decisions using a holistic and circular approach. We are embracing the importance of childhood as a time where the lived experiences of children can be impacted for several generations, and following new research that is evolving in this area¹. We are committed to listening, observing, reflecting and acting – each time building on knowledge gained and new insights learned. We are trying new methods, taking new risks and are committed to evolving alongside our community. During this transformational time in the Early Years and Child Care sector, we want to build a new way of working based on humility, trust, and mutual respect that will set the foundation for generations to come.



Thank you to our friend James Shawana for his input into the final visual representation of our approach.

The importance of the early years

The early years (ages 0-6) are known as a critical time for children's development and the experiences of children during that time significantly impact long-term outcomes. Research shows that participation in quality Early Years and Child Care programs positively impacts children's development and family and child well-being². Benefits to children regularly participating in early childhood education programs include higher graduation rates, improved work habits and grades, strong social skills, gains in reading and math, and making better decisions³. Long term research done on children from families experiencing low income has shown that opportunities to engage in high quality early learning environments has an impact on outcomes in adulthood such as higher earnings, lower uses of social services and better health outcomes⁴. In Canada, investment in the Early Years and Child Care provides a return on investment of \$1.50-\$6 for every dollar spent^{5,6}, with that investment increasing significantly to double-digit returns for children experiencing more vulnerability factors⁷. Providing the opportunity for more children to attend a high-quality child care centre enables long-term benefits for both that child and society as a whole.

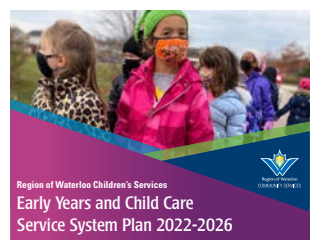
While awareness is growing around the importance of the early years on long term outcomes and brain development, unfortunately some children still experience conscious or unconscious forms of discrimination once they begin attending a child care program. This could come from adults in Early Years and Child Care settings or even other young children in care. The early years were previously regarded as a time of innocence and an assumption that children did not see race or other power structures. New research is showing that racial power structures and bias that exist in society as a whole are being mimicked by young children in their play and through their actions^{8,9}.



The Early Years and Child Care sector is learning about its shared responsibility in addressing unconscious bias and power structures that may exist. Some Early Years and Child Care programs have done critical analysis of their organizations to evaluate how they could be serving families more equitably and should be commended on their efforts. Wherever an Early Years and Child Care organization may be on their equity journey, we are being intentional about moving forward with all organizations. Early Years and Child Care programs are expertly positioned to influence young minds and be intentional about breaking generational patterns of oppression and presenting a more equitable and inclusive society during the critical years of brain formation.



Early Years Child Care Service System Plan 2022-2026



[Children's Services
System Plan 2022-2026](#)

In 2022, Children's Services released its [Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan](#) as a road map to creating a high quality, equitable and responsive Early Years and Child Care system that is accessible and affordable for every family in Waterloo Region.

The Access and Inclusion Plan is an extension of our System Plan, and in the following pages you will find details on how specific objectives contained within the System Plan will be met.

The System Plan provides more specific details on the ways in which poverty and income insecurity are continuing to affect some families in our region:

- Racialized individuals are disproportionately affected by poverty and are more than twice as likely to live in poverty compared to non-racialized residents¹⁰.
- Food insecurity is growing in Waterloo Region, with children age 0-12 representing 23 per cent of all food bank users. There has been a 31-35% increase in parents using the food bank between 2022 and 2023¹¹.
- Families in Waterloo Region continue to experience homelessness, with at least 595 families with dependents being at immediate risk of homelessness and seeking support for housing stability or emergency shelter support between April 2022 and March 2023¹².

We acknowledge the effects of poverty and other vulnerable life circumstances in accessing licensed child care. As part of our engagement efforts in Waterloo Region we have learned that families in receipt of child care subsidy and other underserved families often face additional barriers to accessing care, including:

- Limited understanding of the child care system and how to navigate it
- A reduced ability to apply to waitlists far in advance
- A reduced ability to navigate physical barriers for those with special needs
- Living with the effects of mental health or trauma which can influence trust building with child care providers
- More likely to have additional vulnerability factors, including precarious housing, working irregular hours or multiple jobs, and having fewer support networks to assist with child care
- More reliance on public transportation, limiting child care options
- A lack of representation of our diverse families in child care settings, which can impact a sense of belonging

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is another way that communities across Ontario measure vulnerabilities in child development (e.g. physical, social, emotional health, etc). In Waterloo Region, almost one-third of children are vulnerable in at least one of those areas, signaling an opportunity to better support our youngest citizens^{13 14}.

Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan

On March 28, 2022, the Province of Ontario signed the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) agreement with the federal government that will see child care fees lowered until they reach an average of \$10 per day by 2025. CWELCC represents a transformational change in the child care system and is positioned as a plan to support more families in Ontario to access high quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive early learning and child care. The implementation of fee reductions in our region has greatly increased demand for child care spaces and accessing child care spots has become difficult for many families. Currently, there is a shortage of licensed child care in Waterloo Region, with approximately 29% of children ages 0 to 4 years having access to a licensed centre or home-based space. As of August 2023, approximately 8,300 children ages 0 to 4 years are on the waitlist for a licensed child care space in Waterloo Region. We acknowledge that even with the significant reduction in fees since 2022, the cost of child care continues to be a barrier for many families in our Region.

To ensure that a diverse range of families are included in the licensed child care system during this significant time of growth, the Ministry of Education has released Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework 2023: Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System. This framework aligns and supports the initiatives outlined throughout this document as well as in our System Plan, and requires Children's Services to continue its efforts towards ensuring equitable access to licensed child care spaces.





Action steps

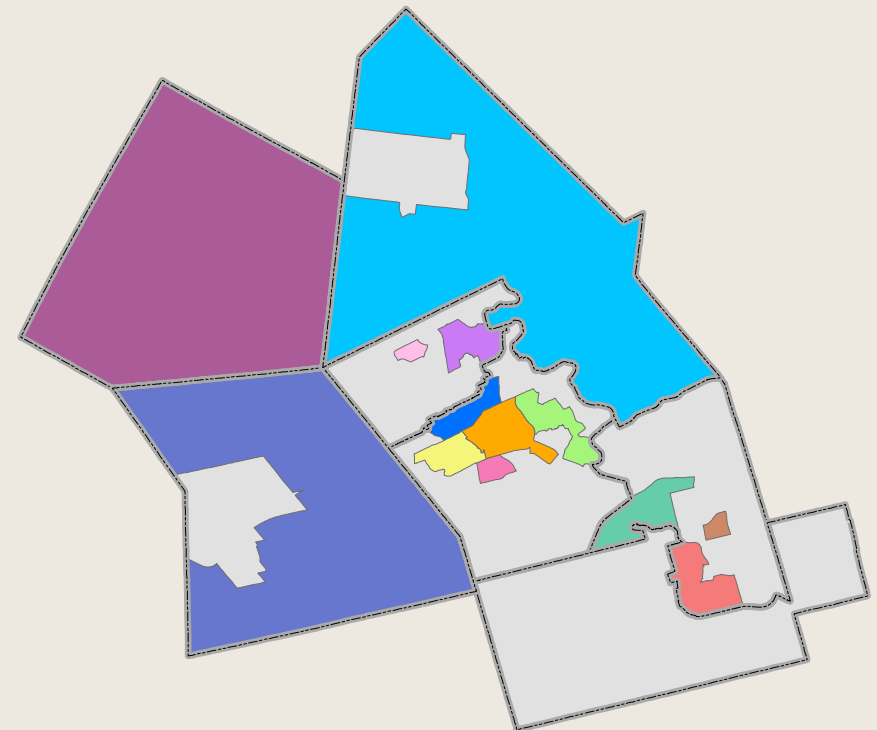
Children's Services is proud of the work that has already begun as first steps towards creating a more accessible and inclusive child care system. The following summarizes both actions already underway, as well as actions planned for 2024. These actions are in response to community feedback and reflect priorities outlined in the [Children's Services Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan](#) as well as priorities outlined by Region of Waterloo's Corporate Strategic Plan 2023-2027, Growing with Care, priority three: [Equitable Services and Opportunities](#).

Improving access to families experiencing low-income

1. Creation of a growth strategy to target growth in priority neighbourhoods

System Plan strategic priority 3.a: Implement a child care growth strategy

In Spring 2023, Children's Services finalized its [Priorities for Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Growth](#), which identifies [thirteen priority areas](#) across Waterloo Region for growth of CWELCC licensed child care spaces for children aged 0-4. That growth strategy was [updated in August 2023](#) to reflect further investments from the provincial government in our region. These areas were selected because they have low access to licensed child care spaces and a high proportion of families experiencing low income. These indicators were chosen as families experiencing low income often face significant barriers to accessing affordable child care outside of their neighbourhoods, making it vitally important to ensure new CWELCC spaces are located in areas where families in low income have access to them. As described in the Growth Strategy, new CWELCC spaces must be located in priority neighbourhoods and support families who need affordable child care the most, including families that are experiencing low income or other children that are underserved in our licensed child care system. The thirteen priority neighbourhoods can be found on this map:




Legend

-  Alpine Laurentian Hills
-  Breslau-Rural Woolwich North East/St Jacobs
-  Chicopee/Idlewood/Stanley Park-Heritage Park/Rosemount
-  Dearborn Lexington Lincoln
-  Downtown Kitchener
-  Forest Heights East/Highland SW/Forest Hill-Lakeside
-  Lakeshore
-  Northview
-  Preston/Blair
-  Rural Wilmot
-  Wellesley Township
-  Westmount-Cherry Hill/N Victoria Hills/Fairfield-Mt Hope-Huron Park
-  Westview-Victoria Highlands/SW Galt/Glenview-Southview




2. Subsidy Access Pilot – reserving spaces for children in receipt of child care subsidy

 **System Plan strategic priority 7.a: Make accessing child care more transparent and equitable through OneList and other process changes**

Children's Services has launched an Access Pilot to support families in receipt of child care subsidy to maintain access to high quality licensed child care spaces. Access to a high quality early learning environment can have a profound impact on the long term outcomes of children from families experiencing low income. Operators participating in the Access Pilot will work towards reserving 20-30% of their licensed child care spaces to subsidized children as a first step towards more equitable representation in the child care system. The pilot provides an opportunity to learn from child care operators if any administrative challenges or positive outcomes arise with this model, as well as responses from parents and staff. Some of the anticipated outcomes include a greater diversity of children at the pilot sites, enhanced sense of community and belonging, and more spaces going to families experiencing vulnerable circumstances. The pilot began in summer 2023 and will inform a broader strategy that will be rolled out to the child care system.


3. Continuous review of child care subsidy policies for greater equity of access

 **System Plan strategic priority 2.g: Increase access to child care fee subsidy for Indigenous, Black, and racialized families through providing new supports and funding**

During 2022 and 2023, the Region of Waterloo Child Care Subsidy program completed a comprehensive review of their local policies to identify and eliminate systemic barriers to accessing child care fee subsidy. Revisions have resulted in families being able to apply earlier for child care fee subsidy, less barriers for new Canadians to receive child care fee subsidy, more stability for child care placements, and direct connections for clients accessing Ontario Works to the Child Care Subsidy program. This review has supported parents to pursue additional employment, schooling or other supports, and has led to more children having increased access to licensed child care.

Child Care Subsidy is committed to continuing to review and evaluate current policies that may disadvantage Indigenous, Black, racialized and underserved families. Moving forward, the focus of our policy review will shift to looking at the following policies: Custody Policy, Co-residency Policy, Break In Service Policy and Student Policy.

4. Direct collection of parent contributions for families in receipt of child care subsidy - Region of Waterloo Licensed Home Child Care

 **System Plan strategic priority 2.f: Revise policies and provide funding to support parents with precarious employment to access licensed child care more equitably**

In July 2023, the Region of Waterloo's Home Child Care program made the transition to collect all parent contributions directly from parents. Until this point, parents in receipt of child care subsidy were paying their portion of child care costs directly to caregivers, adding an extra administrative burden to caregivers. This was identified as a barrier to the full participation of all families in our Licensed Home Child Care program. By moving all financial transactions to the Region's Home Child Care program, parents in receipt of child care subsidy and caregivers can focus more of their time on building relationships and discussing topics related to the growth and development of the child.



Improving access for Black, racialized and underserved families

5. Collection of race-based data for programs in Children's Services at the Region of Waterloo

System Plan strategic priority 2.c: Create and implement a data strategy that supports data disaggregation

In early 2023, the Region of Waterloo's Licensed Home Child Care program and Child Care Subsidy program began collecting race-based data for the families they serve. These statistics help program staff to observe trends, evaluate who is accessing these programs, and identify which communities may not be accessing these programs or may not be finding child care. The ability to disaggregate program data by race will allow the system to be more responsive to serving all racial communities more equitably.




6. New system navigator positions to support Indigenous, Black, racialized and underserved families access local Early Years services

System Plan strategic priority 7.c: Increase awareness of the local early years and child care system through new strategies

Early Learning and Child Care system navigators (ELCC navigators) are working through the YMCA EarlyON programs to help remove barriers to accessing early years' services for Indigenous, Black, racialized and underserved families in Waterloo Region. The ELCC navigators have been hired to reflect the diverse community they serve, and provide support to families including: explaining the Early Years and Child Care system, helping families to create OneList accounts, accompanying families to meetings with potential child care providers, providing information on child care subsidies, helping them to apply for Child Care Subsidy and connecting them to other resources within the community. They are using a range of community engagement approaches to reach families in need, including direct outreach to targeted neighborhoods, referrals from newcomer support organizations and through a consistent presence at EarlyON centres. Multi-language flyers have been distributed to help families to be able to connect with ELCC navigators directly. More information about the ELCC navigators can be found at [EarlyON Child and Family Centre – ELCC Navigators](#).




7. Update and translate the Parent Guide to Licensed Quality Child Care

 **System Plan strategic priority 7.c: Increase awareness of the local Early Years and Child Care system through new strategies**

[The Parent Guide to Licensed Quality Child Care in Waterloo Region](#) is an important tool to help families learn about and understand how to access child care services. In early 2024, the guide will be translated into eight key languages to help expand access for households who do not use English as their primary language. The translations will be used as a support for the ELCC system navigators as they work directly with families to remove barriers to accessing child care in Waterloo Region. The translations will be available on the Region's website and will be shared with organizations supporting newcomers and families who do not read or speak English.

8. Conduct further engagement with parents that have been traditionally underserved

 **System Plan strategic priority 5.a: Develop a framework that outlines an approach to stakeholder engagement**

Children's Services is evolving its engagement strategy to better connect and understand the experiences of underserved families in the EYCC system. This strategy includes a framework, methods of communication, decision making and evaluation process. Children's Services staff is also seeing engagement as an opportunity to provide updates and link the community to Early Years and Child Care services that may benefit them. New engagement strategies include one-on-one conversations directly with parents in the community and meeting with grassroots ethno-cultural organizations for their feedback on the child care system. The feedback that we hear, as well as additional recommendations learned in the engagement process, will be included in Phase 2 of our Access and Inclusion Plan.

9. Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion training and coaching to all early years professionals

System Plan strategic priority 2.d: Support new equity and inclusion training and supports for EYCC operators

As an Early Years and Child Care system, we must strive to continually incorporate the histories and ways of being of our diverse and rich community. At the same time, we must all learn how to recognize unequal power structures and unconscious prejudice that may be replicating in child care settings. Children's Services, in partnership with the Early Childhood Professional Resource Centre at Conestoga College, is rolling out an online training series on anti-racism and anti-bias for all early years professionals in Waterloo Region. Children's Services has partnered with Selam Debs in offering the six module "Antiracism Course". The online training series is grounded in the concept of "unlearning", the practice of dismantling and letting go of our previously held beliefs and practices to make space for new concepts and ways of thinking. The training will be offered alongside coaching and mentoring sessions as well as opportunities for personal and group reflection. Training on reconciliation, equity, diversity and inclusion will be ongoing.

This training builds on resources provided in 2022 to better support Indigenous ways of being in the Early Learning sector. Children's Services partnered with Conestoga College to create a video, called [Indigenous EDI in ECE](#), which focuses on awareness building of Indigeneity in the Early Years' sector. In addition, packages of 10 children's books written by Indigenous authors were given to every licensed child care centre, EarlyON program, and home child care providers in Waterloo Region.

10. Explore changes to OneList to improve access and collect better demographic data

System Plan strategic priority 7.a: Make accessing child care more transparent and equitable through OneList and other process changes

[OneList](#) is the single point of access and online service where all applications for licensed child care in Waterloo Region are submitted. Children's Services and child care operators currently use OneList as a coordinated approach to waitlist management. Feedback from parents and child care operators have highlighted the need for ways to improve overall access and transparency to wait lists. Children's Services is starting a critical review of OneList and exploring service improvements and waitlist strategies to increase equity to the child care system, including a more robust collection of user demographics to allow for further data disaggregation.



11. Expand Equity and Inclusion Policies for child care operators and other contracted service organizations

System Plan strategic priority 6.a: Provide new quality improvement supports to child care operators and EarlyON programs

Children's Services, in its role as Service System Manager, has always required child care operators to have an Inclusion Policy. Traditionally, this policy outlined how children with special needs would be included in child care programming. Other contracted service organizations were not required to have an Inclusion Policy for the specific services they provide. Moving forward, Children's Services will support operators and contracted service organizations in expanding their Inclusion Policies to include creating a sense of belonging for all underserved children. Updated Inclusion Policies will seek to include specific actions in areas such as programming, learning environment and materials, staffing, parent engagement and professional development.



12. Implementation and evaluation of the Language and Mentorship Program - Region of Waterloo Licensed Home Child Care

System Plan strategic priority 2.a: Engage with Black, Indigenous, racialized and underserved families to identify and address systemic barriers

The Language and Mentorship Program (LAMP) allows caregivers who are representative of our diverse linguistic community to contract with the Region's Licensed Home Child Care program to provide quality child care in their home. The program is designed for caregivers that have lower levels of English - they receive support from interpreters and mentors and focus on providing care to children from their language community. Caregivers in the LAMP program are supported to continue with their English language learning, and receive interpretation until no longer required.

The program was inspired from conversations and feedback with community members that were looking for more opportunities to access or provide culturally relevant child care in the licensed system. The program has met that need by creating more culturally diverse licensed child care spaces and allows families to have their child attend care in a setting that reflects their language and culture. An evaluation is currently underway to learn from the successes and identify opportunities for continued growth.

Improving access for Indigenous families

13. Exploration of Indigenous led licensed child care

System Plan strategic priority 2.b: Work with Indigenous partners to further implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations

Children's Services is undertaking consultations with the Indigenous community partners on creating culturally safe and relevant licensed child care spaces. The work is being guided by previous community consultations as well as the call to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to “develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families”¹⁵.


Drawing on findings from the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework, we know that “high quality, culturally-specific and well-supported early learning and child care programs that are specifically designed for and with Indigenous families and communities will make a genuine difference in the early experiences of Indigenous children”¹⁶.

Children's Services will seek broader input from the Indigenous community on the creation of Indigenous-led licensed child care, as well as the possibility of expanding its licensed Home Child Care program to include Indigenous focused care. A specific action plan for both will be further detailed in Phase 2 of our Access and Inclusion Plan.



Improving access for families that need more flexible child care

14. Incentivising evening, overnight and weekend care

 **System Plan strategic priority 2.f: Revise policies and provide funding to support parents with precarious employment to access licensed child care more equitably**

Children's Services' directly operated Home Child Care program has begun a six-month pilot to provide additional funding for caregivers that provide care during non-traditional hours, including early mornings, evenings, overnights and weekends. This initiative is to better support parents that work non-traditional hours. During recent engagement with parents in our region, they expressed that they often find it difficult to find licensed child care to meet their needs when they work during non-traditional hours. This pilot will assess if additional funding to caregivers makes a difference in the number of children accessing care during these non-traditional hours, and inform a plan for the broader child care system.



Improving access for children with special needs

15. Complete an evaluation of Special Needs Resourcing service model

System Plan strategic priority 4.c: Measure outcomes of special needs and capacity building supports and make changed based on results

After hearing feedback from parents and child care operators, the Special Needs Resourcing Collaborative came together to introduce a more effective and efficient way of providing special needs supports to children age 0-12. A tiered service model was introduced in 2019, with Tier 1 focusing on supporting whole classrooms, Tier 2 focusing on smaller groups, and Tier 3 focusing on supporting individual children. Findings from the evaluation found that educators consistently reported that after making a referral to the Special Needs Resourcing team they felt supported. More than 80% of educators reported that the tiered system addresses their concerns, with those receiving more intensive small group or individual supports rating the service slightly higher on average than those receiving supports as a whole classroom. The evaluation did identify several areas for improvement including: increased clarity of roles in the system; the referral form completion process; and coordination of services between tiers. Next steps and recommended changes will be included in Phase 2 of this plan.

16. Provide additional supports for children with special needs in licensed home child care

System Plan strategic priority 2.e: Provide grants for child care programs to improve equity and inclusion

In 2023, two additional resource consultants began supporting children with special needs in all licensed home child care agencies as part of a one year pilot. Given the unique arrangements within licensed home child care, including variable hours, ages of care and locations, this pilot represents an opportunity to better address the unique needs of children in those settings. In addition, all licensed home child care agencies have been given funding to support a one-year pilot to implement a unique model of enhanced staffing. A unique enhanced staffing model will pilot how additional staff can support children across multiple locations. Both pilots will have ongoing evaluation and long term feasibility will be evaluated in 2024.





In closing

The actions described in this Access and Inclusion Plan are the beginning of a new journey alongside our community. This plan will be the first of many in years to come, and as we evolve as a community our plan will evolve as well. We commit to releasing Phase 2 and continuing to add and improve throughout the years. We know the path ahead will be full of learning, surprises, and joy. As learned from our children we will keep things simple; as learned from our community we will build lasting trust; and as learned from nature we will think holistically. We thank all those before us that helped carve the way for our current knowledge.

References

- ¹ Matheson, K., Seymour, A., Landry, J., Ventura, K., Arsenault, E., Anisman, H. (2022). Canada's Colonial Genocide of Indigenous Peoples: A Review of the Psychosocial and Neurobiological Processes Linking Trauma and Intergenerational Outcomes. Retrieved from: <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/19/11/6455>
- ² Philpott, D., Young, G., Maich, K., Penny S., & Butler E. (2019). The Preemptive nature of quality early childhood education on special education needs in children. Retrieved from: <https://research.library.mun.ca/13571/1/The%20Preemptive%20Nature%20of%20ECE%2C%20Feb%2012.pdf>
- ³ Government of Canada. (2023) Toward \$10-a-Day: Early Learning and Child Care. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/campaigns/child-care.html>
- ⁴ Schweinhart, L., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W.S., Belfield, C., & Nores, M. (2005). The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40. Retrieved from: [specialsummary_rev2011_02_2.pdf \(nieer.org\)](#)
- ⁵ Government of Canada. (2022). Families in Canada to benefit from innovative early learning and child care practices. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2022/10/families-in-canada-to-benefit-from-innovative-early-learning-and-child-care-practices0.html>
- ⁶ Macdonald, A., Renner, C., Alexander, C., Beckman, C., Stewart, M. (2017). Conference Board of Canada: Ready for Life. Retrieved from: <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/product/ready-for-life-a-socio-economic-analysis-of-early-childhood-education-and-care/>
- ⁷ TD Economics. (2012) Special Report. Early Childhood Education has widespread and long lasting benefits. Retrieved from: [di1112_EarlyChildhoodEducation.indd \(td.com\)](#)
- ⁸ Berman, R., Abawi, Z., Haile, F., Escayg, K., Butler, A., Royer, N., Daniel, B. (2022). Give Race Its Place. Retrieved from: [An Anti-racism Knowledge-sharing Initiative for Early Childhood Educators in Ontario](#)
- ⁹ University of Pittsburgh. (2023). Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education: Professional Development. Retrieved from: [Professional Development – The P.R.I.D.E. Program \(pitt.edu\)](#)
- ¹⁰ Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016211
- ¹¹ The Food Bank Waterloo Region. (2022). Retrieved from: [Hunger Count 2022](#)
- ¹² Lutherwood Families in Transition Program (FIT) and YWCA Family Shelter Team (2023)
- ¹³ Children's Services System's Plan. (2022) Retrieved from: [Region of Waterloo Children's Services - Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan 2022-2026](#)
- ¹⁴ Children and Youth Planning Table of Waterloo Region. (2018). Retrieved from: [Early Development Instrument \(EDI\) - Children and Youth Planning Table](#)
- ¹⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). Section 12. Retrieved from: [Calls to Action English2.pdf \(exactdn.com\)](#)
- ¹⁶ Government of Canada. (2018). Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/indigenous-early-learning/2018-framework.html>



Region of Waterloo
COMMUNITY SERVICES
Children's Services

If you would like to learn more or provide suggestions and feedback to Children's Services, please reach out to chsadmin@regionofwaterloo.ca.