

Greater Sudbury Early Years System Plan for 2019 - 2023

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Report Summary

This report provides information regarding the Early Years System Plan for 2019 - 2023 and identifies the work underway and next steps in implementing the Plan.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP)

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan in the areas of Growth and Economic Development and Quality of Life and Place as it aligns with the Population Health Priorities of Families, Compassionate City and Play Opportunities, by providing strategies to improve access to and quality of Early Learning services for all families. This report has no relationship to the Community Energy and Emissions Plan.

Financial Implications

Implementation of any activities included in the Early Years System Plan must take place within the parameters of the existing and future allocations for Children Services from the Ministry of Education, as defined within the scope of the approved budget direction by Council.

Background

The provincial Child Care and Early Years Act 2014, requires that all Service System Managers develop a Service System Plan at least once every five years. It must include measurable outcomes and plans for the delivery of mandated child care and EarlyON services within the community and be developed in consultation with stakeholders.

The Early Years System is made up of a diverse group of stakeholders that sit together on the Early Years Planning Network's (EYPN) (formerly the Planning Network for Sudbury Families - PNSF) Community Planning Table mandated by the Ministry of Education and managed by the City through the Children Services Section. The EYPN and its partner agencies are key contributors to the development of this Plan and continue to be actively involved in implementing the plan's activities.

The Early Years System Plan 2019-2023 (the “Plan”) was completed in early 2019, but its presentation to the Community Services Committee was delayed due to a change in provincial government, which resulted in significant changes to funding and reporting requirements (Appendix A). In addition, internal restructuring and the 2020 pandemic created further delays to present the Plan to the Committee. While the implementation of many of the Plan’s strategies has continued to move forward during this period, these factors have necessitated some revisions to the implementation of the Plan’s strategies and timelines. A summary of the main changes is provided in this report.

The Early Years System Plan 2019-2023

The Early Years System Plan is a dynamic system of programs and supports for children from 0 to 12 years of age and their families. It includes 75 licensed Child Care Programs and 15 EarlyON Child and Family Centre centres with 40 outreach sites mostly operated by not-for-profit organizations and supported through grants from Children Services. Children Services also funds inclusion support for children with special needs, child care subsidy, consultative quality improvement programs, and professional development and capacity building for professionals in the sector, through the Early Years System.

This Plan is an important tool that guides the planning and management of the broad Early Years System for all partners involved in providing services and supporting families and young children.

Community and Partner Engagement

The Children Services Section undertook a series of consultations and conversations to engage stakeholders in the system planning process. Staff worked with stakeholders who represented the diversity of families and partners in the service system and designed engagement opportunities for each unique group. Over 30 organizations and 1,000 individuals participated in consultation and engagement activities including parents, caregivers, child care and early years partner agencies at the board, director and front line staff levels, EYPN partner agencies, including school boards and specialized service providers. In addition, other City divisions and departments provided valuable insights and contributions.

Environmental Scan

The Children Services Section collected data about the community and services currently provided. The Plan outlines demographic and community trends using census data, development, and housing changes. It also describes the current services that make up the Early Years System (i.e., what and where are they, how many people use them, changes, trends, and considerations for planning).

Service System Plan Outcomes and Implementation Plan

The Plan is organized around building a system of services for children and families that is:

- Accessible
- Responsive
- Affordable, and
- High Quality.

All partners share these four (4) system goals.

To meet these goals, the Plan identifies 18 outcomes and includes 40 strategies that the Children Services Section will work together with partners and stakeholders to achieve by 2023. These outcomes and strategies are described in detail in the Plan.

Key issues addressed within the strategies and activities involve:

- responsive planning to ensure that services continue to meet geographical, cultural, language and demographic needs in Greater Sudbury within a changing funding landscape
- building capacity to meet the human resource needs of the sector, in particular focusing on the recruitment and retention of Registered Early Childhood Educators
- adjusting funding and allocation mechanisms to better support community goals related to improving system stability and program quality
- improving families' experiences accessing and using Early Years services.

Changes to the Early Years System Plan Implementation

Impact of reduction in provincial funding:

- Licensed child care expansion was put on hold
- Revisions to Operating Grant formulas were deferred

Impact of Covid-19 pandemic:

- Focus of service delivery shifted to Emergency Child Care and safe reopening of licensed child care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres
- Plans to expand the reach of EarlyON Child and Family Centres shifted to include development and delivery of virtual services, which have been successful and will likely continue beyond the pandemic

Implementation and Next Steps

A work plan has been developed to implement the included strategies and measure progress on meeting outcomes. Children Services staff is meeting with partners and completing the work required to move the Plan forward. As new opportunities or changes to the funding and service delivery landscape are introduced (including the newly announced National Child Care Plan), strategies will need to adapt. However, the overall goals of creating a more accessible, responsive, affordable, and high-quality system remain.

Service system planning at the municipal level gives local communities the opportunity to build a system to respond to their community's priorities and to leverage local strengths and opportunities. Children Services will bring periodic updates to Committee and Council about progress implementing the Early Years Service System Plan strategies and meeting community goals.

Resources Cited

Appendix A – 2019 – 2023 Early Years Service System Plan

Child Care and Early Years Act 2014