

INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	May 12, 2014
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	2012-2015 Early Years Community Plan Implementation Strategy (CES14017) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

Council Direction:

Not applicable.

Information:

In January 2013, staff provided Council with an overview of the Early Years Community Plan 2012 – 2015¹ (City of Hamilton Early Years Community Plan (CS13002) (City Wide)).

This plan, developed in partnership with the Hamilton Best Start Network, is the product of community consultation that began in 2012 to determine the current state of early years services in Hamilton. The plan includes an environmental scan of the city's early years system; a review of relevant literature/reports; the results of stakeholder consultation and community engagement; and, an analysis of findings and recommendations.

These findings and recommendations reinforce the importance of the Hamilton Best Start Network's vision:

- Best Start is about children;
- Best Start is about families;
- Best start is about community and connections; and,
- Best start is about our future.

¹ A copy of the plan in its entirety can be found at:

hamilton.ca/NR/rdonlyres/06A49C1C-7CCA-4B89-877C-9B262B3D7838/0/EarlyYearsCommunityPlan20122015.pdf

Since this plan was introduced in January 2013, work has been underway to address the twelve (12) challenges identified in the plan through the guidance of a steering committee comprised of key community stakeholders.

Challenges Presented in the Early Years Community Plan 2012 – 2015

Twelve (12) challenges were identified in the Early Years Community Plan. These can be categorized into four key themes:

- inclusion;
- child care stabilization and transformation;
- system integration; and,
- access to information.

The challenges were derived from feedback received from community partners, parents and children. It is clear that if these challenges are addressed, the Hamilton Best Start Network would move closer towards reaching its vision.

Strategies to Overcome These Challenges

Since access to a high quality early years system is critical to our children's health, well-being and future, strategies to address the challenges identified in the Early Years Community Plan are being, or will be, implemented through the shared leadership of the City and the Hamilton Best Start Network. The *2012 – 2015 Hamilton Early Years Community Plan Implementation Strategy*, attached as Appendix A to Report CES14017, highlights how our community will address these challenges. Figure 1 in Appendix A to Report CES14017 provides a pictorial overview of the strategies that are being, or will be implemented to address the identified challenges as well as anticipated timelines.

In addition, the attached implementation strategy also identifies current opportunities and anticipated results associated with the strategies being implemented. The following summarizes the work that has been undertaken to date to address the challenges under each of the four key themes:

Inclusion

Ensuring that children with special needs have access to high quality early years supports is a priority for both the City and the Hamilton Best Start Network. To support the challenges associated with the inclusion theme, the City has begun reviewing and assessing the current approach to delivering early years' special needs resourcing in Hamilton. The review will include an assessment of system gaps, strengths and challenges as well as results of consultations with parents and service providers to better understand their needs.

Once this initial review is complete, a further examination will be undertaken to determine how early childhood educators can be better supported in providing high

quality child care to those children who do not have identified special needs; however, require additional supports.

In addition to children with special needs, it is equally important that Aboriginal, Francophone and culturally diverse children and families have access to and are welcomed into the early years system. In an effort to ensure these specific populations are supported, early years' professionals are being provided with focused professional development opportunities.

Child Care Stabilization and Transformation

In order to address the challenges related to child care stabilization and transformation, staff have built stronger partnerships and improved communication with service providers through an updated approach to stakeholder engagement and consultation. In addition to system wide consultation sessions, individual meetings have taken place with each licensed child care operator in Hamilton to provide an overview of the current early years landscape and to better understand how operators could be supported throughout this period of change.

This approach has been supported through the introduction of enhanced communication tools including a quarterly newsletter and an annual calendar outlining funding and reporting dates targeted to all child care programs.

To further support child care operators and families, an online centralized child care registry (Hamilton OneHSN) has also been implemented to simplify the application and registration process for parents wishing to access the licensed child care system. This web-based registry will not only better support operators and families; it will also be used to inform system planning as transformation evolves. The development and implementation of this registry was overseen by an advisory committee comprised of a variety of licensed child care operators.

Stakeholder engagement continued with feedback being solicited from the community regarding the City's child care fee subsidy waitlist strategy. Recognizing the need to update its child care fee subsidy waitlist strategy, the Children's and Home Management Services Division obtained input from service providers, parents and caregivers in an effort to better understand how the needs of parents requiring help with the costs of their child care could be better met. A recommendation report about this issue will be presented to Council in June 2014.

In addition, a comprehensive consultation process is under way to inform the development of a new funding model that will better support high quality licensed child care in Hamilton. It is anticipated that the proposed new funding model will be presented to Council for consideration early in 2015.

System Integration

System integration is critical to families and children who want to seamlessly navigate a community with a multitude, and sometimes overwhelming number, of services and resources. Perhaps more importantly, if community partners within the early years sector collaboratively work together to find mechanisms to integrate their services and resources more effectively, this will result in our families and children accessing much needed supports quicker and easier.

The Hamilton Best Start Network has begun the following activities to enhance integration amongst the early years community partners:

- identifying outcomes and indicators that will tell us if children and families are better off as a result of the Best Start Network's efforts;
- developing an inventory of early years services that complements the work that has been undertaken by other community networks; and,
- creating a "warm transfer" protocol that can be adopted by service providers to ensure that parents have the right type and amount of agency support to help them access the resources they require.

Access to Information

The final set of challenges centre around the need for parents and caregivers to have quick, easy access to information. In an effort to further support parents and caregivers, the Hamilton Best Start Network has re-profiled its website to make it more user friendly for parents, caregivers and professionals.²

The Hamilton Best Start Network has also identified the need to ensure families are aware of, and can access financial resources that may be available to them. A thirteen (13) day project that focused on helping parents access financial supports was piloted in the Beasley neighbourhood in November 2013 and January 2014. The results of this pilot project are currently being reviewed and analysed to determine how the program can be expanded. Also, in partnership with several financial institutions, an initiative will be launched in the Gibson/Landsdale neighbourhood in April 2014 that will help families access the Canada Learning Bond program. This program offers an initial \$500 bond to children whose families are receiving the National Child Benefit Supplement as well as an additional \$100 each year until the child reaches the age of 15 up to a maximum of \$2,000.

Conclusion

The Early Years Implementation Strategy, as outlined in this report, will allow our community to address the challenges identified in the Early Years Community Plan so

² The re-profiled Hamilton Best Start Website can be viewed at hamiltonbeststart.ca.

that we can continue to ensure child development supports in our community are equitable, accessible, inclusive, responsive and flexible over the coming years.

Furthermore, the implementation strategies identified in this report support the City of Hamilton's vision ... "To be the best place in Canada to raise a child, promote innovation, engage citizens and provide diverse economic opportunities".

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix A to Report CES14017: 2012-2015 Hamilton Early Years Community Plan Implementation Strategy