



INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	February 23, 2015
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Special Needs Resourcing Review (CES15003) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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Council Direction:

Not applicable.

Information:

The Ministry of Education funds the City of Hamilton, Children's and Home Management Services (CHMS) Division, to provide special needs resourcing (SNR) funding to community agencies. The purpose of this funding allocation is to support the inclusion of children with special needs in licensed child care settings.

At minimum, the ministry requires the City of Hamilton to spend 4% of its total child care allocation on special needs resourcing. However, based on the demand for service, the City of Hamilton has exceeded minimum requirements and is currently spending \$4,083,242, or approximately 9% of the total allocation, on special needs resourcing supports (based on 2014 operating budget). As additional Ministry funding became available over the years, the special needs resourcing funding allocation has grown in response to identified community priorities.

The City of Hamilton and the Hamilton Best Start Network's **Early Years Community Plan 2012 – 2015** outlines the current state of early years services and identifies challenges and recommendations aimed at guiding the ongoing work of service integration. Three of the twelve challenges identified in the plan are specific to special needs resourcing. Furthermore, additional special needs pressures regarding waitlists for service have been reported to the CHMS Division.

In an effort to address the challenges identified in the Early Years Community Plan and to identify strategies that would mitigate special needs resourcing pressures, through a

request for proposal process, RFB Associates was hired to review and assess the current approach to delivering Early Years special needs resourcing in Hamilton. Specifically, RFB Associates were asked to:

- provide a description of the current integrated approach to delivering special needs resourcing for child care in Hamilton;
- conduct an environmental scan of the gaps, strengths and challenges of the existing special needs resourcing supports;
- consider the capacity of the current system to meet the needs of eligible children aged 0 to 12 years; and,
- identify ways to strengthen/improve delivery of these special needs resources.

This Council report provides an overview of the consultant's findings and recommendations and identify the next steps that will be undertaken by staff.

Description of Current Approach to Special Needs Resourcing

In Hamilton, all special needs resourcing supports are accessed through the Integration Resources HUB. Funds for special needs resourcing are provided to the Integrated Resources HUB via Community Living Hamilton, the lead agency. These funds are then allocated to a range of programs and supports through the following five community partner agencies that form the Integration Resources HUB:

- Community Living Hamilton;
- St. Matthew's House;
- Hamilton & District Council of Co-operative Preschools;
- McMaster Children's Hospital, Chedoke Site; and,
- City of Hamilton's Red Hill Family Centre.

The Integration Resources HUB is a collaborative service delivery model that provides a single point of access for special needs resourcing services. The services which are available include:

- co-ordinated intake and placement;
- specialized equipment and toys;
- staffing (i.e., Support Facilitators, Resource Teachers);
- training; and,
- social skills program and behavioural consultation.

Environmental Scan of Existing Special Needs Resourcing Supports

The consultants conducted an environmental scan of existing special needs resourcing supports and analysed the current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Based on their review, it was identified that one of the strengths of the existing SNR model was the commitment and talent of the front-line SNR staff and managers, as

evidenced by their commitment to supporting the inclusion of all children in licensed child care programs. It was however identified that the current model has several inefficiencies and that there are opportunities to improve the model going forward. The need to better define the eligibility criteria, primary client group, and roles and responsibilities of various agencies was also identified.

The consultants also conducted a scan of other municipalities which helped to inform the recommendations by examining the experiences and promising practices in other jurisdictions.

Report Recommendations:

Based on the review and analysis conducted, the consultants' report provided 21 recommendations under four primary areas; service model, service criteria, service agreements, and enhanced training and development. In addition, the consultants provided ten additional recommendations related to data and information management. Below is a high-level summary of the recommendations that have been made:

1. *Service Model*

The consultants recommended that roles and accountabilities be clarified and modified, and the SNR program be positioned as a support to licensed child care providers to increase access for children and families.

2. *Service Criteria*

It was recommended that the definition of "special needs" be expanded to include children with and without formal diagnoses, and tools be developed to determine the appropriate use of resources.

3. *Service Agreements*

It was recommended that a new service agreement be negotiated with service providers which clearly articulates expectations, authorities, and dispute resolution processes.

4. *Enhanced Training and Development*

The consultants recommended that increased training and skill development workshops be provided to SNR and child care staff and managers.

5. *Data and Information Management*

The consultants recommended that the City develop a measurement framework and establish a steering committee to guide and identify outcome indicators and evaluation processes.

Next Steps:

A staff project team has been established to review the recommendations from the consultants' report. The project team will be identifying which recommendations the Division will be moving forward with and developing an implementation strategy for those

recommendations. It is recognized that there may be some “quick wins” that could be implemented in relatively short timeframes, however many of the other recommendations have funding and staffing implications for community agencies that require further analysis and reflection before it can be determined when, or even if, the recommendations will be implemented. An implementation plan is expected to be developed by the 4th quarter of 2015, after which a subsequent report will be brought forward to Council.

Additionally, a communications strategy has been developed, which includes sharing the consultants’ report with the Integration Resources HUB, CHMS staff, and all other key stakeholders that informed the report. Further communication will be developed as the implementation plan is established and finalized.

Conclusion:

Based on the identified challenges in the ***Early Years Community Plan 2012 – 2015***, and the analysis and recommendations contained in the report provided by RFB Associates, it is recognized that there is an opportunity to improve the current special needs resourcing model in order to continue to promote the inclusion of children in licensed child care. The staff project team responsible for reviewing the report are looking forward to reflecting upon these recommendations in order to develop an implementation plan.