



INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	October 13, 2015
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Best Start - 10 Year Update (CES15045) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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Council Direction:

Not applicable

Information:

The Hamilton Best Start Network is celebrating ten years of work and accomplishments that have significantly changed the way young children and families receive supports and services in our community. These accomplishments have also significantly changed the way in which early years community partners work together to collaboratively plan for the early years system.

This report provides an overview of the Hamilton Best Start Network's Accomplishments from 2005-2015, highlights the community celebrations that are taking place to mark this special anniversary, and indicates next steps for the Network as work continues into the future in light of recent funding announcements.

History:

In March 2005, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) selected east Hamilton as the urban demonstration community for the Province of Ontario's Best Start initiative. As one of three demonstration communities, Hamilton was to fast track the 10-year vision of Best Start. This vision included:

- An expansion of quality, affordable child care;
- Investments in children's healthy early development; and,
- Increased accessibility of early years services and programs.

The City, as the Consolidated Municipal Services Manager (CMSM), convened the Hamilton Best Start Network which was, and continues to be comprised of more than 50 individuals from various organizations including:

- The City of Hamilton;
- Boards of Education;
- Post-secondary educational institutions;
- Early learning and child care providers; and,
- Health and social service agencies.

The Network was built on Hamilton's rich history of collaboration and joint planning to develop an integrated early years system for families and children.

The First Five Years (2005-2010):

The Hamilton Best Start Network was successful in fast-tracking the vision of Best Start and was seen as a leader across the province. During the first five years many accomplishments were achieved which made early years services more accessible to families. Highlights of these accomplishments include:

- Established a new Enhanced 18-Month Well Baby Check-up that continues to be used by primary care practitioners across the City and was expanded across Ontario.
- Developed Check It Out drop-in clinics for families that provided easy access to early years professionals such as speech and language pathologists, public health nurses, dental hygienists, etc. The drop-in clinics also include French language and Aboriginal sites to serve the unique needs of these families.
- Created and sustained an additional 1,143 licensed child care spaces through the initial Best Start investment.
- Developed informed community planning through ongoing monitoring and evaluation of Best Start which resulted in considerable information sharing, knowledge transfer and data to support decision making.
- Created a made in Hamilton Parent Charter of Rights.
- Established Service Provider Networks across Hamilton to improve the integration of services at the neighbourhood level.
- In partnership with the United Way of Burlington and Greater Hamilton and local private businesses, launched the From Here to the Bay initiative which directed

local United Way funds towards projects in the north end of the city that supported the early years.

The Next Five Years (2010-2015)

The Hamilton Best Start Network has remained active and has continued to strengthen the collaborative relationships with various community partners. The membership continues to meet on a monthly basis to plan collectively for the early years system. In addition, there are several sub-committees that meet on a regular basis. Below are some of the highlights of the accomplishments from the past five years:

- Created a partnership with private banking institutions, Service Canada, and several City of Hamilton departments and divisions (e.g. Public Health Services Department, CityHousing Hamilton, Children's & Home Management Services, Neighbourhood and Community Initiatives, Employment and Income Support, and Recreation Divisions) to host 18 Canada Learning Bond events where families had the opportunity to open a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) for their children. This resulted in approximately 400 children being registered for an RESP which equates to up to \$800,000 invested in the future education of children in our community.
- Updated the Hamilton Children's Charter that is being developed through the participation of children.
- Created the 2012-2015 Early Years Community Plan in partnership with the City which set out the strategic direction for the Network and has guided the work of the community over the past four years.
- Provided Check It Out drop-in clinics across the City which have increased access to preschool speech and language services for young children. 1,389 children have accessed these clinics since 2009.
- Continued to provide the annual Best Start magazine with resources and information to families across our community.
- Launched the new Best Start website for parents/caregivers and professionals.
- Adapted the Read to Your Baby initiative providing free books to families during the 18-Month Well-Baby Check-up visit to their family physician.

A detailed list of accomplishments is attached as Appendix A to Report CES15045.

Celebrating Our Accomplishments

To mark the tenth anniversary of Best Start in Hamilton, a planning committee has been established to plan two celebration events in our community; one targeted to families and one targeted to community partners.

The first event which was targeted towards children and families was held in partnership with the Telling Tales Literacy Festival. Approximately 3,000 families attended this free event on Sunday, September 20, 2015 at Westfield Heritage Village in Rockton.

The second event which will host approximately 300-400 early years service providers and community partners, will be a celebration dinner on Thursday, October 8, 2015 at Michelangelo's Banquet Centre.

Our Current Situation

Recently, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services provided notice to the City that the Best Start demonstration site funding will not continue beyond March 31, 2016. This funding, totalling \$1,355,400, has been in place since 2005 when the Best Start initiative first began. This allocation has been used to support the following:

- Integrated planning and service delivery;
- Enhanced Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC) services and supports;
- Enhanced access points to children and families;
- 18-Month Well Baby initiative;
- Post-Partum Mood Disorder Project;
- Early identification supports; and,
- Evaluation of investments and progress achieved.

Best Start Demonstration Site Funding Impacts

This funding has made a significant difference in our community and has helped to advance the Best Start vision. Some examples of the impact this funding has had in Hamilton include the following:

- Created six additional OEYC satellite sites and provided enhancements to two existing sites to increase the hours of access and provide additional supports to families. In the 2014/15 fiscal year, these enhancements have supported over 34,700 child visits and over 25,900 parent/caregiver visits to OEYCs.
- Developed Check It Out clinics that provide easy access to early years professionals. On average, three Check It Out clinics are provided each month. Between 2012 and 2014, a total of 637 children attended these clinics resulting in close to 500 referrals to services such as preschool speech and language,

parenting groups, child care, public health programs, physicians, recreation programs, etc.

- Provided enhancements to Aboriginal OEYC services that have supported 721 child visits and 564 parent/caregiver visits annually.
- Enhanced physiotherapy (PT) and occupational therapy (OT) supports resulting in 53 referrals in 2014 and a total of 268 visits in 2014/15. The additional OT and PT staff also provided six educational presentations to child care providers within the community in 2014.
- Enhanced research and evaluation activities resulting in an average of 110 data requests completed per year. This also resulted in an average of 450 people per year attending research and evaluation presentations, an increase of approximately 320 people per year prior to the roll-out of Best Start.

Next Steps

The Children's & Home Management Services staff are reviewing the loss of the funding and the impact on services for families, children and community partners. Staff are determining what strategies can be implemented that will mitigate those impacts to the extent that this is possible. Appendix B to Report CES15045 provides a high level plan to assess funding impacts and develop recommendations for moving forward.

Throughout the process outlined above, it is important that the City continue to consult and engage with our community partners including the Hamilton Best Start Network, local school boards, family support programs, and any directly impacted programs and services. This is consistent with the collaborative approach that this community has embraced, both during times of funding increases as well as times of funding cuts. We are confident that this collaborative approach will result in a plan that minimizes the impacts of this funding on children and families within our community.

The City in partnership with the Best Start Network, will begin work on the next Early Years Community Plan which will lay the foundation for our goals for the next five years.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix A to Report CES15045: Hamilton Best Start 10 Years of Accomplishments

Appendix B to Report CES15045: Best Start Funding Impacts