

Needs Assessment to Inform Hamilton's OEYCFC Initial Plan

City of Hamilton

September 2017

Table of Contents

1. Introduction 3

2. Population Highlights..... 3

3. Highlights of Hamilton’s Early Years Assets 8

4. Neighbourhood-level Analysis of Key Indicators 12

5. Key Stakeholder Consultations 12

6. OEYCFC Planning Implications 22

1. Introduction

Hamilton's OEYCFC planning process and decisions (as presented in the accompanying OEYCFC Initial Plan) were informed by an assessment of local community needs and assets as they relate to early years child and family programs. This assessment included review and analysis of available child and family population data, general community demographic data, and early years program and service availability and utilization data. These sources of information were used to assist in the identification of the needs of Hamilton's children, parents and caregivers, the sector's strengths and key assets, and the system's service gaps and/or duplications.

Consultation with local children, parents and caregivers, early years service providers, and key community partners also informed the needs assessment by providing insight and understanding about how Hamilton's family support programs and services could be adjusted to respond to changing community needs.

This report provides a summary of the needs assessment findings grouped according to the following themes: population highlights; early years assets; neighbourhood-level analysis of key population indicators; and key stakeholder consultation.

2. Population Highlights

At the time of the initial OEYCFC planning and population needs assessment exercises the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) data was the most recent available source of population statistics.¹ The 2016 census data has recently become available and will inform the next phase of OEYCFC planning (i.e., site and operator selection, implementation planning, etc.).

Early Years population

Hamilton's total early years population (0 to 12 years) is 73,055 and of this 38,395 children are aged 0-6. The absolute and cumulative early years population by one year age group is provided in Table 1.

¹ Data from the 2011 NHS should be interpreted with caution. The NHS was a voluntary survey, which increases the likelihood of non-response bias. Non-response bias is a concern because populations who choose to respond to surveys tend to be different from those who do not. This means there could be skewed data for certain groups that tend not to participate in voluntary surveys (including Aboriginals, low income earners, immigrants, etc.).

Table 1. Absolute and Cumulative Population by 1 Year Age Group, Hamilton 2011

Age Group	Number of Children	Cumulative Number of Children
Under 1 year	5,320	5,320
1 year	5,515	10,835
2 years	5,470	16,305
3 years	5,610	21,915
4 years	5,485	27,400
5 years	5,430	32,830
6 years	5,565	38,395
7 years	5,715	44,110
8 years	5,560	49,670
9 years	5,710	55,380
10 years	5,635	61,015
11 years	5,980	66,995
12 years	6,060	73,055

(Source: Statistics Canada. Census 2011)

Geographic distribution of Early Years population

The number and density of the child population varies across Hamilton's neighbourhoods. The neighbourhoods with the largest number of children ages zero to 6 years are the Central Mountain, the Glanbrook/Stoney Creek/Winona area, West Mountain, and Hamilton Centre.

Neighbourhoods with the highest density of young children include Hamilton Centre, and Central Mountain. This map also identifies specific neighbourhoods of interest – those with high density of young children in smaller geographic areas (when compared to the areas with overall higher density) and either a lack of early years services in close proximity and/or experiencing demographic changes (i.e., rates of low income) since the last Census. This information was used to inform the neighbourhood-level analysis of key indicators of need as described below.

Population trends

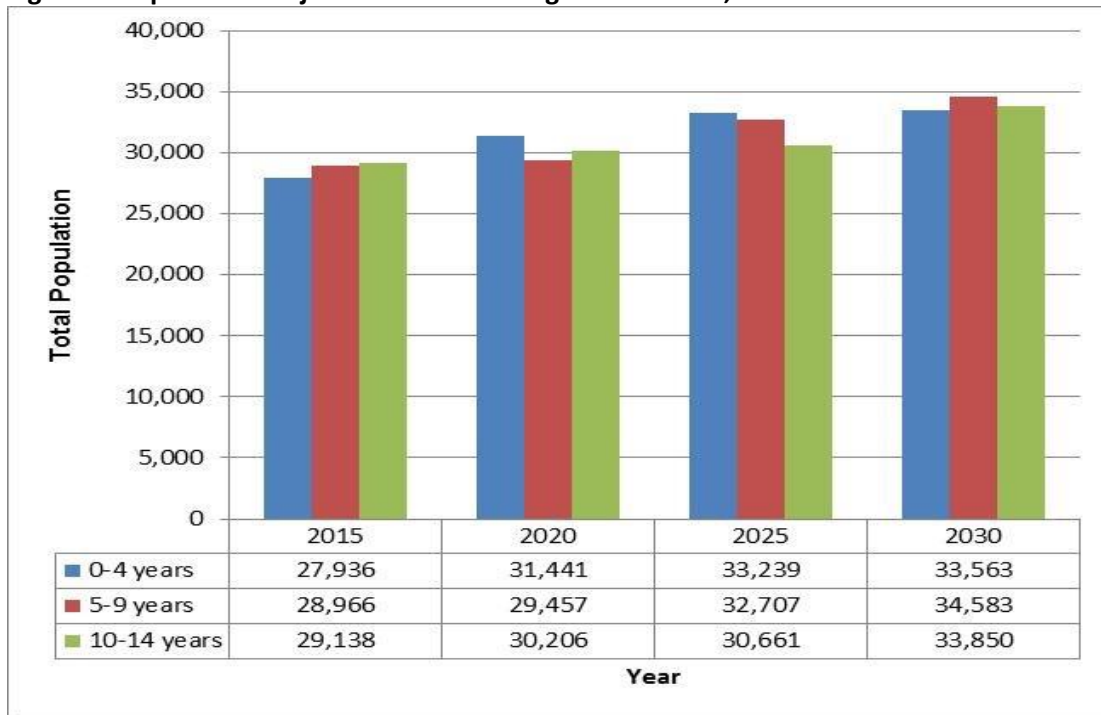
Hamilton has experienced a steep decline in the number of children in the city over the past two decades. For example, the population of children under five years of age decreased by almost 13% between 1996-2006, from almost 31,000 children to just under 27,000. In 2011, Census figures show minor growth, up to just over 27,000.²

Looking ahead, however, the total number of children (aged zero to 14 years) in Hamilton is projected to increase at a stable rate over the next 15 years, with an estimated population of 86,040 in 2015 growing to 91,104 by 2020 and 101,996 by 2030.³ See Figure 1 for the population breakdown by age group.

² Social Planning & Research Council of Hamilton. 2011. *Hamilton's Social Landscape*.

³ Ministry of Finance, Spring 2016. *Ontario Population Projections Update: 2015-2041*. Based on the 2011 Census.

Figure 1. Population Projections for 5 Year Age Cohort 0-14, 2015 to 2030



(Source: Ministry of Finance, Spring 2016.)

For more information on Hamilton's child population overall and at the neighbourhood level see the Social Planning and Research Council's *Hamilton's Social Landscape Bulletin (2011 Census edition): Children and Seniors*⁴ and the City of Hamilton's Ward Profiles.⁵

Family characteristics

There are 144,120 census families⁶ in Hamilton, an increase of 2.4% over 2006. This compares to an Ontario growth rate of 5.5% over the same period. In Hamilton in 2011, 47% (64,935) of census families are couple families (married or common law) with children, 35% (51,975) are couple families (married or common law) without children, and 19% (27,220) are lone parent families with children at home. This translates to approximately 92,155 families with children in Hamilton as of 2011 (Table 2).

⁴ Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. May 2012. *Hamilton's Social Landscape Bulletin (2011 Census edition): Children and Seniors*.

⁵ City of Hamilton. 2015. *Ward Profiles*. <https://www.hamilton.ca/city-initiatives/strategies-actions/ward-profiles>

⁶ A census family is a households made up of a couple with or without children or a single parent and at least one child.

Table 2. Hamilton Families with Numbers of Children, 2011⁷

Families with 1 child:	
Married couples	21,105
Common-law couples	3,365
Female parent	12,675
Male parent	3,520
Families with 2 children	
Married couples	25,395
Common-law couples	2,310
Female parent	6,440
Male parent	1,385
Families with 3 or more children:	
Married couples	11,615
Common-law couples	1,130
Female parent	2,810
Male parent	385

Source: Statistics Canada. Census 2011.

Additional family characteristics data at the Hamilton neighbourhood-level can be found in the City of Hamilton's *Ward Profiles*.⁸

Indigenous populations

In Canada, Indigenous communities are growing more quickly than the general population and are substantially younger. In Hamilton, the population of Indigenous peoples is even younger than the average for Indigenous communities across Ontario.⁹

The Indigenous population in Hamilton was approximately 15,840 or 3% of the total population in 2011.¹⁰ The median age of the Indigenous population is 26.62 years with the majority of adults in childbearing years.¹¹ Children under 14 years of age comprise 28% of the total Indigenous population in Hamilton. Of the 28% of children under 14 years of age, 9% are 0-4 years of age, 10% are 5-9 years of age and 9% are 10-14 years of age.¹²

The greatest numbers and density of Indigenous populations are currently in Hamilton Centre and East Hamilton close to Indigenous family and health services.^{13,14} Based on projections, the Indigenous child population (under 14 years of age) in Hamilton will be 5,041 by the year 2030 with almost half of these

⁷ As reported in Hamilton Profile. Created for Lynwood Charlton by the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University. December 2015.

⁸ City of Hamilton. 2015. *Ward Profiles*. <https://www.hamilton.ca/city-initiatives/strategies-actions/ward-profiles>

⁹ Social Planning & Research Council of Hamilton. (2015). Profile of Hamilton's Aboriginal Residents.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Morency, J-D., Caron-Malenfant, E., Coulombe, S. & Langlois, S. (2015). Projections of the Aboriginal Population and Households in Canada (91-552-X).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Statistics Canada. (2011). National Household Survey Focus on Geography Series Hamilton CMA Aboriginal Peoples.

(2,421) living in Hamilton Centre, East Hamilton and Red Hill areas.^{15, 16} Indigenous children ages 0-4 years are projected to reach 1,620 city-wide and 778 for the Hamilton Centre, East Hamilton and Red Hill areas by the year 2030.¹⁷

These population projections likely underestimate the true size and growth of the Indigenous population in Hamilton. There is a historical tendency among Indigenous populations to abstain from participating in Census data completion.¹⁸ However, these population figures do provide some contextual understanding of the Indigenous population and a place to begin to learn and understand more about the demographics of the Indigenous population in Hamilton. On-going consultation with local Indigenous groups is advised to validate the Census data as it relates to the realities of Indigenous peoples' lived experiences.

Francophone population

In 2011, 6,765 Hamilton residents report French as their mother tongue (first language learned at home and still understood); this represents 1.3% of the total Hamilton population. French speaking residents tend to live in greater numbers (i.e., 10% of the population or more) in Hamilton Centre, East Hamilton, East Mountain, and Flamborough areas.¹⁹

A report by the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant LHIN, estimated the Hamilton Francophone population to be 8,235 or 1.6% of the total population. The same report notes that Hamilton's Francophone population is younger and more likely to be born outside of Canada compared to Francophone populations in the surrounding region.²⁰

Immigration and ethnocultural diversity

In Hamilton, a quarter (24.5%) of residents are born outside of Canada.²¹ The majority of Hamilton's immigrants (72,760) have lived in Canada for more than 20 years (i.e., arrived before 1991). Approximately 12% (14,820) are recent immigrants, having arrived in the five years prior to the Census.

Hamilton has recently welcomed Syrian refugees, housing almost 1,000 people as of early 2016. Children and youth represent approximately 50 percent of this population.²²

City-wide data on the number of families with children ages 0-6 by language spoken at home is not available. However, the language spoken at home for the population overall and the total population by ethnic origin (i.e., French and/or First Nations) were taken into consideration – along with other socio-

¹⁵ Morency, J-D., Caron-Malenfant, E., Coulombe, S. & Langlois, S. (2015). Projections of the Aboriginal Population and Households in Canada (91-552-X).

¹⁶ Statistics Canada. (2016). Census Standard Geographies.

¹⁷ Ibid references 15 and 16.

¹⁸ Social Planning & Research Council of Hamilton. (2015). Profile of Hamilton's Aboriginal Residents.

¹⁹ Statistics Canada. Census 2011.

²⁰ Entite². DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF FRANCOPHONE COMMUNITIES IN THE REGIONS OF WATERLOO WELLINGTON HAMILTON NIAGARA HALDIMAND BRANT (WWHNB). March 2012. Rev Sept 2012.

²¹ Statistics Canada. 2013. National Household Survey Profile. 2011 National Household Survey.

²² Wesley Urban Ministries and City of Hamilton presentation to Best Start Network, February 19, 2016.

economic indicators - as part of the neighbourhood-level analysis of key indicators. See a description of this process below.

For a more detailed description of the demographics of Hamilton's population please see the Hamilton Early Years Community Plan 2016-2020.²³

3. Highlights of Hamilton's Early Years Assets

Hamilton's child and family support programs

Hamilton is fortunate to have a strong foundation of child and family support programs. Hamilton's system of family support programs currently consists of Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) established in 2003 and the school-based Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs) established in the 2009/10 school year.

Ontario Early Years Centres

OEYCs provide free universal opportunities for all children to participate in play and inquiry-based programs, and support all parents and caregivers in their roles. Parents and caregivers also have access to information about child development and specialized supports as needed.

Hamilton's OEYCs are currently operated by four non-profit, lead agencies (Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club, Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic Child Care Inc., Today's Family, and Wesley Urban Ministries) and two additional community partners (Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg and Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Niagara).

OEYCs include a combination of main sites, satellite sites, and some mobile and outreach services. Main sites provide drop-in programming for families a minimum of five days a week, including some evening and weekend hours. Most OEYCs operate on a year round basis (i.e., programs are offered during school breaks). Satellite sites provide programming on a part-time basis, in either temporary or permanent locations.

OEYC sites are located in schools and community-based sites across Hamilton, such as recreation centres, libraries, faith-based buildings, and housing sites. Additionally, there are specific sites focused on providing services to Indigenous families, Francophone families, and young parents. Mobile services and early years programming offered through partnerships provide two to three hours of drop-in programming once per week in a range of non-permanent locations, including recreation centres, community housing, schools, and parks.

OEYC budgets have remained flat since their initial allocation in 2002/2003. As a result, OEYCs are operating with substantially less purchasing power than when they first opened. This has meant that many of the current OEYC sites offer partial programs and services with part-time hours. The lack of new investments has also limited the ability to offer family support programs in areas of high population growth (such as, Binbrook and Winona).

²³ City of Hamilton. Hamilton Early Years Community Plan 2012-2020. September 2016.
<http://hamiltonbeststart.ca/eycp/>

Parenting and Family Literacy Centres

Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs) are free school-based programs for parents and their children (aged birth to six years of age) and operated by the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board and the Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board. Each site has one consistent staff member, and the program is the same at each site - building essential skills through music, play and family literacy, and helping to encourage families to be part of their children's learning.

PFLC programming is offered for approximately four hours each morning from Mondays to Fridays with no weekend hours. PFLCs, being located within schools, operate on school instructional days only with no programming during Winter Break, March Break, PA days or summer break.

Originally, PFLCs were conceived as a way of equalizing school opportunities for children in “high-needs” neighbourhoods.²⁴ Local school boards were able to define “high-needs” in the local community context using available neighbourhood demographic data (i.e., family income, family characteristics) and school data (i.e., EDI results). As a result, PFLCs tend to be located in elementary schools serving high density, urban neighbourhoods. In Hamilton, this resulted in PFLCs often having an OEYC site in relative close proximity serving the same or adjacent neighbourhoods, leading to the perception of service duplication in some areas of the city.

A recent study by Underwood and Trent-Kratz²⁵ found that OEYCs and PFLCs have unique contributions and strengths. They propose that the role of PFLCs in the system of services may be related to connecting families with schools (i.e., introducing families to schools and connecting them with school-based resources and supports), while community based family support programs (such as, OEYCs) have greater linkages to other community-based services which could be attributed to the large number of partnering organizations working within the OEYC model and the fact that these organizations serve families as well as children.²⁶

The OEYCFC planning consultations identified the following strengths of the PFLC program:

- Consistent programming and staff from site to site;
- Convenience of being located in schools;
- High levels of parent satisfaction attributed to the small, welcoming environment; and
- Strong connections with school staff and school-based resources (as described above).

OEYCs were identified as having the following strengths:

- Year round operating calendar and extended hours of operation (such as, weekend and evening hours offered at some sites);
- Comprehensive nature of programs and services offered at many sites (full service sites);
- A more geographically dispersed distribution of Centres across the city; and

²⁴ Ontario Ministry of Education. (2010). *Parenting and Family Literacy Centres: Resource binder*. Toronto, CA: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

²⁵ Underwood, K and Trent-Kratz, M. (2015). *Contributions of School-Based Parenting and Family Literacy Centres in an Early Childhood Service System*. School Community Journal, 2015, Vol. 25, No. 1

²⁶ Underwood, K and Killoran, I. (2012). *Parent and Family Perception of Engagement: Lessons from Early Years Programs and Supports*. Canadian Journal of Education 35, 4: 376 – 414.

- Strong linkages to a wide range of community-based services (such as, child care, public health, preschool speech and language, etc.).

Given the unique strengths of PFLCs and OEYC, Underwood and Trent-Kratz²⁷ conclude that there should be a choice for parents that is a mix of school-based and community-based family support programs given their discrete functions in terms of supporting family connections to other services.

In Hamilton, an OEYC site and PFLC site are co-located at the Beasley Community Centre. This community centre is co-located with Dr. J. Edgar Davey Elementary School and operated by Wesley Urban Ministries in partnership with the City of Hamilton Recreation Department and the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. The co-location of the OEYC and PFLC served as a model for the overall OEYCFC planning process.

In Hamilton, there are currently 45 OEYC sites and 14 PFLC sites (Table 3).

Table 3. Number OEYC and PFLC Sites in Hamilton, Spring 2017

	Type of Site	Number of Site(s)
OEYC	General Sites	38
	Aboriginal	2
	French Language	2
	Young Parent	3
PFLC	HWDSB	8
	HWDCSB	6
TOTAL		59

(Source: City of Hamilton, 2017.)

A survey of current OEYC and PFLC program offerings, hours of operation, staffing, funding levels and sources, and community partnerships was conducted as part of the OEYCFC planning process and findings were used to inform the development of the local service delivery model as described in the Initial Plan.

Utilization of child and family support programs

Approximately 19% of families in Hamilton are currently accessing OEYC sites.²⁸ One of the challenges with increasing access for families has been the limited funding increases since the OEYCs were first created in 2002. This has resulted in a limited ability for the system to expand hours or locations to meet the changing needs of families (e.g. demand for weekend and evening hours, demand in areas of the city that have experienced rapid population growth, etc.).

Overall, Hamilton's family support programs (OEYCs and PFLCs) reported more than 121,000 child visits and over 89,000 parent/caregiver or parent/guardian visits in 2014/15 (see Table 4).

²⁷ Underwood, K and Trent-Kratz, M. (2015). Contributions of School-Based Parenting and Family Literacy Centres in an Early Childhood Service System. School Community Journal, 2015, Vol. 25, No. 1

²⁸ City of Hamilton. Early Years Research Team. Spring 2017.

Table 4. Total Number of Child (0-6 years) Visits and Parent/Caregiver/Guardian* Visit for OEYC's and PFLCs, Hamilton 2014/15.²⁹

	Total Number Child (0-6 years) Visits	Total Number Parent/Caregiver or Parent/Guardian Visits*
OEYC	87,692	71,064
PFLC	33,790	18,222
TOTAL	121,482	89,286

(Source: Ministry of Education, 2016.)

*OEYC's collect data on parent/caregiver visits and PFLCs collect data on parent/guardian visits.

OEYC participation rates and PFLC utilization (based on total number of child visits) vary by neighbourhood. The geographic variation in participation and utilization was taken into consideration for the neighbourhood-level assessment of need (see below).

A 2015 survey³⁰ of families who visit Hamilton OEYC's found that:

- 82% of respondents have children ages 3 years or younger, 10% have children ages 4 to 5 years, and 8% have children who are 6 years of age.
- 83% have lived in Canada for 10 or more years, 5% have lived in Canada for 5 to 10 years, 4% have lived in Canada for 3 to 5 years, and 8% have lived in Canada for less than 3 years.
- 89% of respondents use English at home while 11% of respondents report speaking another language at home (Chinese and Arabic were the two most common 'other' languages reported).
- 53% of respondents reported a total household income of \$60,000 or more, 13% reported \$40,000 to \$60,000, 19% reported \$20,000 to \$40,000 and 15% reported less than \$20,000.
- 78% of respondents reported having a college diploma, university degree or postgraduate degree, 20% reported a secondary school education and 1% reported a primary school education.

Early Years community assets

A list of Early Years Community Assets for the City of Hamilton was generated to help inform the planning of neighbourhood locations for the future OEYCFCs. Community assets identified for this exercise included OEYC's, PFLCs, licensed child care, schools, before and after school programs, immigration gathering centres, Indigenous gathering centres, recreation centres, libraries and hospitals. Central Mountain and West Mountain – the areas with the largest child population (0-14 years) - had the highest number of identified early years community assets (58 and 52 respectively). While Wentworth (west Flamborough and Ancaster) – the area with the smallest child population (0-14 years) - had the lowest number of identified early years community assets (17 assets).

²⁹ The OEYC data is reported on a 12 month fiscal year and the PFLC data is reported on a 10-month school year (i.e., September to June).

³⁰ City of Hamilton. e-Valuation Family Resource Programs Survey; Hamilton OEYC – City Wide Results. February 2016.

4. Neighbourhood-level Analysis of Key Indicators

As part of the community needs assessment process the OEYCFC Planning Group³¹ engaged in an analysis of key indicators at a neighbourhood-level. This analysis served as one input into the process of identifying geographic priority areas for future OEYCFC locations.

The key indicators chosen for this analysis related to Best Start outcomes for children, families, communities and future.³² They included: education rates, low income rates, family type, diversity, developmental health (i.e., EDI vulnerabilities), early years program engagement (i.e., OEYC participation and PFLC visits), child care, child care fee subsidy, and population growth and size.

The analysis of key indicator data helped to identify neighbourhoods in Hamilton that appear to have a need for growth and expansion of child and family programs. They are:

- Urban areas located in Central Mountain and West Mountain and Hamilton Centre; and,
- Upper Stoney Creek, Glanbrook/ Stoney Creek/Winona and Flamborough areas, which are anticipated to have the greatest population growth over the next 15 years. However, these areas ranked in the middle based on other key indicators of need and desired outcomes.

5. Key Stakeholder Consultations

Consultation Methods

Consultations with parents, caregivers, family support program (FSP) providers, and other key stakeholders were conducted to seek input, ideas, and advice about the existing child and family support programs in Hamilton. The focus was on identifying what is currently working well as well as the needs, challenges/barriers, service gaps, and overlaps. The OEYCFC key stakeholder consultations are summarized in Table 5. Highlights from these consultations are provided below.

³¹ Members of the OEYCFC Planning Group included representatives from the City of Hamilton (Community & Emergency Services Department and Public Health Services), MEDU, local school boards, professional resource centre, and OEYC agencies currently delivering early years programs, including Indigenous and Francophone operators.

³² Hamilton Best Start Network has been the community collaborative that has supported families by offering a broad range of services for children from birth to 12 years of age aimed at ensuring children receive the best possible opportunities. For more information on Hamilton Best Start outcomes see <http://hamiltonbeststart.ca/>

Table 5. OEYCFC Key Stakeholder Consultations

Stakeholder Group	Consultation Methods	Consultation Numbers
Parents	Survey	784 parent respondents including 43 Francophone parent respondents and 27 Indigenous parent respondents.
Caregivers (licensed and unlicensed home-based child care professionals)	Survey	37 fully/partially completed responses
Children	Children's voices activities	A total of 187 artifacts were submitted from 30 FSPs in Hamilton
Child & family support program providers	Planning Group participation (i.e., representative from each lead agency) Key informant interviews (as required)	6 OEYC operators and 2 PFLC operators (school boards) participated in 11 facilitated Planning Group meetings 4 additional individual interviews
Key community partners	Planning Group participation (i.e., representation from school boards, public health services and ASCY) Key informant interviews (as required)	3 key community partners participated in the 11 facilitated Planning Group meetings 7 additional individual interviews with key community partners who were not part of the planning group process

A separate consultation process was conducted as part of the *Journey Together* proposal development to inform the development of the Indigenous OEYCFC. Highlights from these consultations are provided below.

In addition to the above consultations, the findings from the EYCP community consultations conducted in 2015 to 2016 were incorporated into the OEYCFC planning discussions. EYCP consultation highlights are provided below.

Parent Survey

The parent survey was designed to ask parents about their:

- Previous experiences with family support programs (FSP) and the frequency of their experiences;
- Source of referral to the centres and their willingness to recommend the centres;
- Interest and their child(ren)'s interest in coming to a centre as well as other services they are looking to access or use; and
- Challenges with accessing centres if they were infrequent users or never visited a centre and what would encourage them to visit a centre.

Survey distribution was strategically planned to ensure equitable opportunities for parents voices to inform the OEYCFC planning. Surveys were administered at Full Day Kindergarten (FDK) observation days in the Hamilton public, Catholic and French public school boards and through various community distribution points including Public Health, Family Support Programs, Young Parent Programs, organizations servicing new comer and refugee families with children, Francophone Programs, Indigenous Programs, City of Hamilton Twitter, Hamilton Libraries, etc. A total of 784 parents responded to electronic, paper copy and real-time translated surveys. Almost all the surveys were completed in English (92%) that included 3.5% Indigenous, 5.5% were French, and 2.5% were other languages (i.e. Arabic, Chinese, Punjabi, Spanish, Urdu and Vietnamese).

Indigenous and Francophone surveys were included in the overall analysis and also separated out to provide specific data to inform equitable planning for these community partners.

The goal of the parents' surveys was to engage families who had not traditionally had a voice in previous FSP engagement activities (e.g. surveying, focus groups, etc.) and almost one-quarter (22%) of those who responded to the surveys shared that they had 'never' visited a family support program.

Survey response highlights are provided below.

Parents' interests in coming to a FSP in Hamilton

- Top three reasons why parents are interested in coming to FSP are: their child's socialization with other children; interacting with their children; and meeting/talking with other parents.
- More than a third (35%) of parent respondents identified that using the resources they do not have at home as a reason for visiting FSPs and almost a quarter (23%) visited to get a break.
- Parents did not have as much interest in visiting FSPs to be connected to information (18%), get referrals to other services (11%) or because FSPs were close to other services they use (12%).
- Generally, parents are more interested in visiting FSPs to meet with other parents (45%) and staff (35%) than to attend workshops (17%), to have questions answered, or to pick up information (18%).
- Greater proportions of Francophone parents valued referrals for other services when compared to all survey respondents overall.
- Referral and proximity to other services is important among the group of parent participants who attend Indigenous sites.
- Francophone and Indigenous surveys reported greater interest in meeting with other parents, staff, getting questions answered, picking up information and attending workshops.

Children's interests in coming to a FSP in Hamilton

- Parents responded that the top three reasons why children visit FSPs was to engage in exploration activities, to play with other children and playing with toys.
- A greater proportion within the parent participants who attend Indigenous sites indicated that feeling included and welcomed, enjoying learning, and access to food and social expression are of greater interest to their children.
- Francophone children had more interest in visiting with staff and access to food when compared to the respondents from the FDK and community survey groups.

Challenges with visiting FSPs

- The top three reasons identified as challenges among parents who were infrequent visitors or have never visited a centre were hours don't work, not knowing about the FSPs and 'other' reasons.
- Francophone and Indigenous surveys reported less challenges than the community and FDK survey respondents.
- The Francophone top three challenges were the same as the larger group.
- The top challenges for parent respondents who attend Indigenous FSPs were not knowing about the programs, 'other', and proximity to other services. The 'other' responses included: employment, child in school and distance to FSPs from home.

Referral sources

- Word of mouth continues to be the main source for referral to FSPs.
- More parents with children in the younger age categories below 4.5 years reported social media and web sites as a source of referral when compared to the FDK and community survey groups.
- Greater proportions of the Francophone respondents identified 'school or teacher', 'website' and 'doctor or other health care providers' as a referral source when compared to the lesser proportions who identified these referral sources from the FDK and community surveys. Far fewer Francophone respondents identified 'libraries', 'Public Health Nurses', 'Social Media' and 'the Media (e.g. newspapers)' as a referral source when compared to the larger proportions from the FDK and community surveys.
- Indigenous parents, in addition to word of mouth, more often identified other referral sources, such as 'school or teacher', 'family home visitor', 'web site', 'Public Health Nurse' and 'other' services (e.g. Hamilton Regional Indian Centre, Shelters).

Caregiver Survey

A slightly modified version of the parent survey was used to gather input and feedback from caregivers. The term "caregiver" includes licensed and unlicensed home-based child care professionals. Surveys were administered through Affiliated Services for Children and Youth (ASCY) and Today's Family via email, Facebook, Twitter and on-site flyer recruitment.

The surveys yielded n = 37 fully/partially completed responses. It is important to note that the following findings are based on a small sample and the nature of the survey distribution warrants cautious interpretation.

The survey results from the caregivers did not differ greatly from the FDK and community survey group. 'Word of mouth' was the way most caregivers learned about the family support programs. Caregivers responded that for themselves and their children they valued social interactions, access to resources (i.e. toys, activities) or staff, access to food, friendly/inclusive environments and the opportunity to learn and express themselves when they visited FSPs. Hours of access to FSPs, transportation and not knowing about the FSPs were the most reported challenge with accessing FSPs. Caregivers were more likely to identify themselves as frequent users with children in the 4.5 years and younger age categories.

Notable differences in the caregiver results were related to different proportions who valued access to resources (toys, activities, etc.) and an emphasis on programming when compared to the FDK and community group combined, transportation as a challenge when compared to the FDK and community group, the younger age categories when compared to the FDK group and the number of children accompanying the caregivers who were not their own children as this was vastly different from the FDK and community group.

Children's Voices Project

How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years, 2014 (HDLH)³³ was the catalyst for seeking ways of including children's voices in the planning process that would *honour and respect children as competent, capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential...[that will] more likely [inform the OEYCFC planning] to deliver programs and services that value and build on children's strengths and abilities* (HDLH, 2014, p.6). The children's activities were developed through the FSP Coordinators'/Managers' work cluster. OEYC and PFLC professionals collaborated to implement activities in the centres that would give voice to children to inform the OEYCFC planning process. The activities provided insight into what interests children favoured in the centres, why they like visiting the centres and what things they would like to change or add to the centres. A total of 187 artifacts were submitted from 30 FSPs in Hamilton.

Highlights from the artifacts:

- A sense of belonging and community was inextricably linked for parents and children.
- Parents' emphasis, especially among the Indigenous and Francophone, was for their children to feel welcomed and included.
- Parents and children appreciate activities (e.g. Baby Massage, Little Chef's, Breastfeeding, Parent and Baby Networks, etc.) that support and strengthen the inextricable link of parent and child.
- Children greatly valued how the centres supported their well-being and expressed a desire for more gym time, outdoor play, physical and recreational activities.
- Children's engagement was often observed in the artifacts to be during "active, creative and meaningful" interactions with parents, educators, other children, play spaces/equipment and activities.
- A children's right to "be me" and 'have a voice' is quite prevalent in the quotes and artifacts submitted to give children voice. Activities that provided opportunities for children to express themselves were often suggestions for change and emphasized more singing, drumming, dancing, making music, art, crafts and fun.

Journey Together Consultation with Indigenous Families, Community Leaders/Elders and Service Providers

Parallel to the overall OEYCFC planning process, Hamilton received *Journey Together* Capacity Funding as part of the Ontario Government's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

³³ Ontario Ministry of Education. (2014). *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* (HDLH), 2014.

Calls to Action. These resources enabled the City of Hamilton, in collaboration with Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg, to conduct a culturally sensitive and holistic community engagement process in order to identify local needs, opportunities and priorities for culturally relevant, Indigenous-led early years' programs and services.

A stakeholder engagement plan was developed based on input provided by the Journey Together Project Team comprised of City of Hamilton staff, Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg's Executive Director, and the Project Consultants. In collaboration with Niwasa consultations were conducted with 47 Indigenous service providers, families, and Elders/community leaders to identify local needs, opportunities and priorities for culturally relevant, Indigenous-led early years programs and services. Engaged stakeholders discussed current barriers to accessing services, identified what Indigenous-led means to the community, articulated what difference it has made in the lives of Indigenous children and families to access Indigenous-led early years programs and services currently offered through Niwasa, and clarified what outcomes they expect regarding the successful implementation of this integrated service model.

Additional consultations with key informants (5) were undertaken to explore potential partnerships and opportunities to align with and leverage broader early years' service system plans in Hamilton.

Consultation highlights

Indigenous families, providers and community leaders/Elders engaged in the consultations for the Journey Together Proposal emphasized the following gaps, needs and preferences which will serve to enhance access to existing Indigenous-led early years programs and services provided by Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg (Aboriginal Head Start Pre-School Program, Child Care Program, and Child and Family Programs):

- Integrated services under one roof with the goal of building trust and making connections to available early years programs / supports and beyond. Relationships are a key component to building trust between Indigenous families and the education system (and institutions in general).
- Expanded early years services including additional subsidized child care spaces, a full-day Head Start Pre-School program, a school-aged after school program, and on-site full-day Kindergarten.
- Increased availability of language and cultural learning opportunities for children and parents so that families can learn together in their own languages from qualified Indigenous teachers in order to strengthen a sense of belonging.
- Creation of a welcoming, family-centred space where children and families can gather and learn together, cultural beliefs and traditions can be practiced and honoured, and Indigenous languages can be learned and spoken. This Indigenous family-centred space should be built to honour a relational way of being by supporting intergenerational learning and community connectedness, and incorporate green space and land-based elements in its design.
- Strengthened outreach mechanisms to build awareness, trust and connections with existing early years services and supports and beyond.
- Improved transportation supports to ensure Indigenous children and families living outside of the area (i.e., East Mountain and Central Mountain neighbourhoods have a total of

approximately 700 children ages 0 to 14 years) or those for whom travel to and from a centre is difficult (i.e., full-time work hours, mobility restrictions) can access the available programs and supports.

A more detailed account of the gaps, needs and preferences voiced during the consultations is provided below.

- INTEGRATED SERVICES (under one roof) : BUILDING TRUST AND MAKING CONNECTIONS

If a wide range of Indigenous-led EY services were located in the same place, families would get to know the various programs that are available, have fewer barriers to access these programs (reduce travel time and costs, minimize the number of transitions for children), and be able to build relationships and trust over time. In the words of one parent, *'If you build it, we will come.'* (NOTE: It was suggested that the expanded services detailed below should also be included in the same location.)

- EXPANDED SERVICES: INDIGENOUS-LED & SERVICES THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

The following additional early years services were identified: Full-day (versus half-day) Head Start Program to be offered earlier (starting at 2 years), Full Day Kindergarten on-site, school-aged before and after school program, more subsidized child care, and more cultural teaching including storytelling with Elders, and more parent programs/workshops. Indigenous stakeholders also identified the need to work in partnership to bring other services into the space including: Ontario Works; Food Bank; Library (for the whole family, with books by Indigenous authors), recreational programs for older siblings, for children with special needs; etc.

- INDIGENOUS PROVIDERS & CULTURAL EDUCATION: BUILDING A SENSE OF BELONGING

In defining what Indigenous-led means, Indigenous stakeholders emphasized the importance of learning from qualified Indigenous providers who understand their worldview, culture and language. This extends to full day kindergarten teachers. They expressed interest in being able to access more culturally relevant learning opportunities for children, parents, and caregivers to support intergenerational learning. Such opportunities reflect the incorporation of traditional Indigenous educational practices that value relational learning, and community involvement.

In the words of parents consulted:

'As parents, it is important that we get to learn along with our children about our language and culture.'

'We need the presence of Elders in ceremonies. It grounds the family and child.'

'We should incorporate an Indigenous approach – teach, learn and grow'

'We build a sense of belonging when we learn about our culture and traditions – a pride of who we are and where we came from.'

'We should offer Indigenous-led early years services to children in care (i.e. Children's Aid).'

- LANGUAGE: AN IMPORTANT PART OF OUR CULTURE

The ability for children and families to learn their languages was identified as a priority. When families spoke about their culture they emphasized the importance of being able to learn and

speaking their own language. Indigenous languages are embedded within our teachings, relationships and responsibilities to the natural world and to each other as human beings.

'It is important to imprint children with their own language early on.' (Indigenous Elder)

- FAMILY CENTRED CULTURAL SPACE: A WELCOMING PLACE FOR INDIGENOUS FAMILIES TO GATHER

Families talked about the importance of having a welcoming space where they can gather and learn together, cultural beliefs, traditions, and current cultural practices can be practiced and honoured, and Indigenous languages can be learned and spoken. Indigenous stakeholders also talked about the need for access to green space, outdoors. It is important that the space be ecologically focused and incorporate land-based elements in its design (e.g. garden spaces, green spaces, ceremonial spaces, etc.). It was suggested that such a space attends to holistic wellness by providing a connection to mother earth (land) that nurtures the spiritual aspect of mind, body, emotion and spirit. Therefore the space should be one that promotes holistic wellness, embeds Indigenous worldviews in its design, and acknowledges the importance of land-based connection for cultural continuity within the community. Access to green space outdoors provides people with a connection to the land they may not otherwise have. This space is a crucial learning place, and gives a platform to learn about cycles of life, Indigenous ceremonies, languages and songs.

In the words of parents:

'We need a place for families to be together.'

'We have nowhere to go currently to gather and do our ceremonies.'

'This is especially important for Indigenous families living in the City. Many have lost their names, language and culture. We need a connection to gardens so that we can have a blessing of the seeds ceremony. Our children get great joy from watching things grow, and picking and eating them.' (Indigenous Elder)

- OUTREACH: BUILDING AWARENESS, TRUST AND CONNECTIONS

The consultations revealed that many families don't know about the services that are available. It was also suggested that some mixed families where one parent is not Indigenous may not know that they are welcome. Indigenous stakeholders indicated that it will be important to reach out to Indigenous children and families across the City, and to establish liaison/navigator roles whose job is to connect with community members. Word of mouth is particularly important in the Indigenous community given the presence of racism, and the need to establish trusting and building positive relationships.

In the words of parents:

'We need to let the community – across the City – know about the services.'

'An open house would be helpful so that families can meet the staff and talk to other parents.'

'Building trust is important because there is currently a lot of racism against Indigenous people.'

- **TRANSPORTATION: ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO ACCESS**

Transportation was identified by families as one of the most critical barriers to access currently. While co-locating early years services will help to address this, families that are working full-time, have other children of different ages, and/or live far enough away that they can't walk (particularly those that live on the Mountain and don't have a car or money for transit) still face multiple access barriers. Transportation may also be a barrier for people to access services, ceremonies and gatherings on reserve.

In the words of parents:

'It is important to provide transportation to reduce barriers to access, and reduce transportation costs for families.'

'We need to provide transportation to and from the mountain.'

Indigenous stakeholders also talked about the importance of ensuring that the physical space is accessible and welcoming for Indigenous children and families. Here are some of the design considerations that were identified:

- Incorporate visual representations of Indigenous cultures and peoples (e.g., traditional carvings, Indigenous art, use of natural materials, etc.).
- Create easy access/flow through between indoor and outdoor spaces
- Ensure lots of windows, light and plants.
- Include space for cultural/ceremonial and gathering spaces (indoors and outdoors), including a sweat lodge, healing space, and community gathering space.
- Provide access to a community kitchen and community garden for families.

Community partner feedback

Findings from the OEYCFC community partner consultations are incorporated into the service delivery model, system coordination and site/operator considerations outlined in the accompanying Initial Plan.

Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan Consultation Findings

The Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan (2016-2020)³⁴ consultation findings related to Hamilton's family support programs served as an important foundation for the OEYCFC planning process.

EYCP consultations that were conducted with 'special populations' including: Indigenous, Francophones, diverse communities, established immigrants and newcomers, young parents, LGBTQ parents, and parents of LGBTQ children and youth, revealed that the system needs to be more sensitive to their needs.

The EYCP findings confirmed the following themes:

- The early years population is not homogeneous;
- There are populations whose needs and perspectives are not well understood or reflected in existing programs/services;

³⁴ City of Hamilton. Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan 2016-2020. <http://hamiltonbeststart.ca/eypc/>

- Finding information about specialized programs/services that are available for diverse populations is difficult; and
- The system needs to be accountable for equitably meeting the needs of ALL children.

Feedback specific to family support programs is highlighted below. For further details see the full plan.

Progress made over the past three years:

- Improved communication, planning and working relationships between the OEYCs and PLFCs;
- Created new and innovative services/initiatives (Beasley Child & Family Centre; Children's Charter; continuation of the Check It Out Drop In);
- Built strong relationships between EY providers;
- Worked together with other early years providers regarding inter-professional training and services; and
- Increasing importance of early years research and evaluation team.

Challenges and obstacles faced over the past three years:

- Different reporting mechanisms/data availability for the two family support programs;
- The need to stabilize the early years system and view it as a system versus collection of programs;
- Front-line integration of early years services varies greatly across the system;
- Inadequate funding; and
- Access to services varies across sub-populations.

Current gaps in the family support and/or early years system:

- Outreach to families in the child welfare and mental health system;
- Unclear access points/pathways for families;
- Lack of clarity regarding the future direction of Community Hubs and how family support programs fit within these hubs;
- Need to work closely with providers that have expertise regarding the needs of diverse/special populations;
- Support for programs serving children with high or complex needs and/or disruptive behaviors who do not fit specific service definitions; and
- No overall system of services.

Big Issues/Opportunities:

- Pursue Community Hubs and cross-sectoral partnerships;
- Adopt a family-centred focus and determinants of health lens; and
- Ensure the quality of EY programs/services.
- Opportunity to plan and align across the entire early years system (child care, BASPs, and OEYCFCs)

Overall, the main themes from the EYCP consultation were reinforced by the findings from the OEYCFC parent, caregiver and children consultations.

6. OEYCFC Planning Implications

Key findings from this local needs assessment will help to shape Hamilton's initial plans for the transition to OEYCFCs. Salient population trends and needs, notable system assets and gaps and their system planning implications are outlined below.

Limited funding increases over the past 15 years have meant the local family support system is challenged to meet the changing needs and locations of Hamilton's family populations. The transition to OEYCFCs represents an opportunity to ensure the system of family support programs is more reflective of and responsive to Hamilton's changing demographics including:

- A stable rate of projected child population growth in the city of Hamilton over the next 15 years
- High rates of child population growth in Upper Stoney Creek, Glanbrook/Stoney Creek/Winona and Flamborough areas over the next 15 years
- Neighbourhood pockets with a high density of young children yet limited availability of family support services in close proximity (such as, parts of Hamilton Centre, Hamilton Mountain (around the Linc) and parts of lower and upper Stoney Creek)
- High growth rates amongst Indigenous populations in the city overall and especially in Central and East Lower Hamilton

Hamilton is fortunate to have a strong foundation of child and family support programs, Parent and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs) and Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs), operated by a group of local non-profit organizations with a history and on-going willingness to plan and work together for the benefit of Hamilton's children and families. Strengths of the PFLC program include: a consistent approach to programming and staffing from site to site, the convenience of being located in schools and the strength of connections with school staff and school-based resources. Strengths of the current OEYC program include: year round operating calendar and offering evening and weekend hours, the comprehensive nature of programs and services offered at many sites, and strong linkages to a wide range of community-based services (such as, public health, preschool speech and language, child care, etc.). Hamilton's OEYCFC system is poised to build upon these strengths and aim for a mix of school-based and community-based family support programs.

While this strong foundation exists, the transition to OEYCFCs presents the city with an opportunity to address the following identified system challenges and gaps:

- Minimal funding increases have resulted in a limited ability for the system to expand hours or locations to meet the changing needs of Hamilton families (e.g. demand for weekend and evening hours, demand in areas of the city that have experienced rapid population growth, etc.).
- Some PFLCs and OEYCs are situated in relative close proximity to one another serving the same or adjacent neighbourhoods leading to the perception of service duplication.
- Unclear access points/pathways for families and the need for continued integration of early years services at the front-line.
- The need for enhanced outreach to families who are not currently engaged but would benefit from the services and supports offered by local family support programs. More specifically, outreach to families already connected to the child welfare and mental health systems and the

need to work more closely with providers that have expertise regarding the needs of diverse/special populations.

- More support for inclusive programs serving children who require inclusive supports to participate..
- A lack of consistent and efficient data collection and reporting mechanisms.
- The need to continue to stabilize the early years system and view it as a system versus collection of programs.
- The need to identify how the OEYCFCs will align with the broader community hubs strategy.

Parents, caregivers and children's voices provide data to reinforce the desire for the movement towards emphasizing full service sites with expanded hours for families to access centres across the city that are coordinated and close to other services, but offer more space to avoid crowding and a space for physical activities (both in/outdoors). Feedback also suggested that larger full service sites should be better equipped or located in spaces that are inclusive and appeal to the whole family, offering a wide-range of services for parents and their younger and older children.

Equitable access and inclusion can be better realized when sites are selected that are AODA compliant, situated in easy to access locations and that are consistently branded with what parents already experience as "comfortable, welcoming and friendly" environments. Referral sources suggest that virtual services may not be utilized as much as other sources for accessing services (i.e. word of mouth).

Achieving cultural relevance will require planning and consultation with the various neighbourhood locations to determine the relevant cultural practices and needs of the communities that surround the full service sites. Indigenous and Francophone services are already collaborating at the system and site-specific levels to ensure that representation of their communities is present across the system, while still offering concentrated cultural services at sites designated and well-positioned for these communities.

Parents, caregivers, children, and staff who have developed strong relationships and attachments to particular locations and organizations will need support to form attachments and relationships at new or relocated full service sites.

Finally, these needs assessment findings represent a snapshot in time. It is essential for the future system to have the capacity for on-going data collection and monitoring to inform system- and operational-level planning. This type of ongoing Early Years data and information analysis will support the system/programs in being responsive to children's, families' and caregivers' needs as well as changes in the demographics of Hamilton's neighbourhoods. In addition, ongoing data collection provides an opportunity to learn about the impact of these programs at the system- and program- level for continuous improvement.