

# ABORIGINAL ADVISORY GROUP FOR BEST START TORONTO

## Guiding Principles

Members will be part of a Circle, an innovative consensus building, decision- making process that will bring to bear knowledge and expertise from varied perspectives on the integration of programs and services to meet the needs of pre-school Aboriginal children and their families in the City of Toronto. Aboriginal cultural, linguistic and political rights and needs will serve as a foundation for services that promote the following principles:

- a holistic approach to child development that involves developing an integrated system for Aboriginal child care and early learning programs that move the child and family from pre-school, child care and early learning into the kindergarten program in a seamless fashion
- the empowerment of the Aboriginal family through the recognition of Aboriginal traditional cultures and spiritual knowledge recognizing the presence of Elders as wisdom keepers, story tellers, and language teachers
- the understanding of Constitutional rights, treaty rights and Aboriginal rights, and historical factors that impact programming for Aboriginal children and their families
- the acknowledgement of the residential school experience and its generational effects; grief and trauma and its continued effects on the child and the family; the necessity of healing practices as part of family life
- the promotion of traditional Aboriginal values to build a strong sense of community in the City of Toronto where resources are shared, communication of program services is comprehensive and culture is maintained in an urban environment
- the identification of gaps in services to young children and their families in order to have a Team of the AAGBST take charge of planning to deal with the shortfalls
- establish collaborative meetings among the members of the AAGBST to plan shared training initiatives, integrated programming and sharing of resources including co-sponsored proposals to access funding requiring partnerships
- the need for accessibility of services to families such as a mobile response team, transportation, mental health team, home service teams that are critical to service equity and remain seriously under funded

## **Indicators of Success and Growth From 2007 – 2016**

The Ontario Aboriginal Childcare Society has been established to oversee all training, research and development issues in early childhood education for Indigenous children.

Reductions have occurred in waiting lists for Aboriginal families to participate in or receive Indigenous early learning and childcare programs and services. Indigenous parents are using the services offered to them.

Indigenous programs are maintained in an Anglophone environment. “Eagles Nests” are located in or near schools. Language acquisition, cultural values and spiritual traditions are the foundation of early learning programs for Indigenous children.

Learning resources are available and being designed to reflect Indigenous languages and cultures for early learning purposes.

There is a continuum of early identification and intervention services with high levels of accessibility and usage by Aboriginal parents and caregivers.

Research is in place locating Aboriginal families and documenting their needs and measuring outcomes for children. Instruments that identify patterns, needs and directions for planning programs for young children are culturally sensitive such as the EDI and other current data to provide profiles and comprehensive data for planning.

There is a system to identify policy omissions for Aboriginal peoples, resource shortfalls and systems gaps.

Colleges and Universities offer early childhood education programs incorporating Indigenous languages and cultures and also make a commitment to increase their enrolment to make sure there is continuity in human resources. Aboriginal agencies/service organizations make internships available to students in early childhood education programs.

A bi-annual Indigenous ECE conference is held with invitations to international guests to share successes in programming and discuss current research in Indigenous early learning initiatives.

Professional development programs are available to update and maintain human resource competencies and knowledge among Indigenous staff in early learning environments.

Annual early learning program evaluations are done and shared among the agencies, service organizations, families and Aboriginal community members.

Aboriginal parents/caregivers/extended family utilize the services of Best Start and feel a sense of ownership in the Program and its services, that they have a voice in its operation and that their children feel like this is a happy environment.

## **Action Plan**

To establish services, deal with gaps in services, to form partnerships with other service organizations, to ensure integration of services and to omit overlap of services, to engage in developing a vision for the future to ensure that the early years and learning plans are optimal to meet the needs of Aboriginal children and their families in the City of Toronto and to ensure that the programs have cultural, linguistic and historical integrity.

- To advocate for the establishment of the Aboriginal Working Group to carry our voices to the Minister of Children and Youth Services
- To ensure that in towns and small cities in the Province there are Aboriginal Advisory Groups in place with a Coordinator to organize early childhood educators locally
- To advocate for an Ontario wide conference to examine the question of establishing an Ontario Aboriginal Childcare Society. Aboriginal leaders, Aboriginal researchers, leading Aboriginal childcare professionals will engage in a two year development process of conferences and regional feedback mechanisms to determine how the Society might form
- To increase the numbers of ECEAs through professional training programs.
- To identify and prioritize Aboriginal families in the childcare system to better meet their needs
- To engage in current research for demographic studies and needs assessments which will better inform program planning for Aboriginal children's educational needs in the City. A culturally sensitive EDI must be developed. Research protocol for the ownership and usage of data must be designed. Research must be completed on the efficacy of using Indigenous languages to create cognitive excellence, to promote conflict resolution, to increase identity development, to promote emotional growth, to foster the expression of cultural values and to follow the dictates of the Elders to build human beings of the highest character
- To establish "program integrity" that is founded on cultural norms utilizing the teachings of the Elders on a daily basis to promote language fluency, cultural values and role modeling. Visiting Elders may be invited into the classroom for the promotion of inter-cultural knowledge
- To negotiate funds for staffing of the position of the Consultant and the Trainee to serve the administrative needs of the AAGBST and to push forward the agenda for Indigenous childcare needs
- The Aboriginal Advisory Group should establish annual evaluations to be presented to the Aboriginal community in the City of the services in early learning and child care to ensure that not only are the goals being met for the objectives of Best Start, but that there are plans with for development for the coming year that truly deal with the shortfalls in services including fundraising.

## **COLLECTIVE VALUES GUIDING OUR OPERATIONS**

### **RESPECT**

Assume good intentions, listen carefully to the words and feelings of others;  
Demonstrate kindness and dignity in situations where there are differing opinions  
and alternate positions;  
Avoid taking things personally; search for answers, do not assign blame for problems.

### **COURAGE**

Take risks - learn from what doesn't work;  
Take ownership for outcomes;  
Stand for the highest order of values and practice.

### **HONESTY**

Communicate with openness, clarity and avoid pettiness;  
Use words carefully;  
See oneself as transparent, without a hidden agenda or seeking control of others.

### **LOVE**

Use intuition not just one's mental abilities;  
Let decisions be made from the heart;  
Come forward to express opinions from a position of love, not fear.

### **HUMILITY**

Understand that the whole is greater than the parts;  
Reflect inner peace knowing that the Creator guides us and holds all power;  
Keep an open mind and heart.

### **WISDOM**

Use discernment, not judgment;  
Trust the process even if you don't always agree with the decisions;  
See wisdom in all ways, faiths and traditions and to commit to being a seeker;  
Understand and appreciate that we are the voices for the children and their needs.

### **TRUTH**

Keep agreements and to walk knowing we are guided by the Spirits, the  
Ancestors and the Great Mystery in all that we do and say.