

February 9, 2008

ABORIGINAL ADVISORY GROUP FOR BEST START TORONTO

TERMS OF REFERENCE

OBJECTIVES

The Aboriginal Advisory Group For Best Start Toronto (AAGBST) will support the implementation of the Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children by incorporating the unique needs and cultural imperatives of the Aboriginal community.

The AAGBST will take responsibility for constructing an Indigenous integrated service model based on the needs of Aboriginal children and families in the City of Toronto in the area of early learning and childcare that truly reflects cultural, linguistic, political and historical integrity.

The Members of the Advisory Group will plan integration strategies for programs and services for this group of young learners 0-12 years. There are unique features of the functions of this group that are specifically designed to reflect the cultural traditions and the communications styles common in Indigenous communities and referenced in the community neighbourhood hub delivery system as part of the Best Start Vision.

The AAGBST will advise the Best Start Network and the Implementation Steering Committee on the needs of Aboriginal children in the City of Toronto.

The Provincial government envisions an Ontario where all children and youth have the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential. In order to make this vision a reality, in November of 2004, the Government introduced its Best Start Plan.

Best Start is a comprehensive, evidence based learning and childcare strategy designed to strengthen healthy development, early learning and childcare services to help give Ontario's school children the best possible start in life and help them achieve success at school.

THE SPIRIT OF THE CIRCLE: FUNCTIONS OF THE AAGBST

The Aboriginal Advisory Group for Best Start Toronto is reflective of leaderless leadership, recognizing the value of the expertise of each member and the equality of all voices in the planning processes. Co-operative integration of programming is one of the major goals in this Group. Lateral empowerment is a key factor in relationships among the Members of this Group. There is no hierarchy of authority. Decision-making is one of collective planning and consensus.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The Aboriginal Advisory Group For Best Start Toronto will be accountable to the Best Start Network and the Implementation Steering Committee (ISC) and will:

- Provide recommendations to the ISC specifically related to the implementation of Toronto's Best Start Vision as it relates to the needs of Aboriginal children and families in the City of Toronto
- Establish strong partnerships with the Aboriginal community
- Identify the gaps in services and bring the need for additional resources to the ISC
- Identify barriers and bring forward to the ISC
- The Convener will sit on the Best Start Network
- The Co-Convener will sit on the Implementation Steering Committee
- The AAGBST will report to other organizations on written request received by the Convener
- The ISC will be asked to mediate should any differences of opinions in operations occur

To fulfill the mandate, the AAGBST will:

- Request that Ms. Christine John of Awashishuk be the representative of the AAGBST at the Implementation Steering Committee (ISC)
- Request that Ms. Laurie Hermiston of Mothercraft will represent the AAGBST at the Best Start Network
- Link with Aboriginal service organizations in the City to utilize their expertise in the network of Aboriginal organizations responsible for child care and early learning
- Be cognizant of the legislation and the collective agreements of all sectors
- Develop linkages to other Best Start working groups and the City of Toronto
- Meet monthly at different locations of the offices of our members
- Develop annual Work Plans which are inclusive of the plans of the Research Team and the Community Capacity Building Team

PRINCIPLES

The Best Start Network has a Terms of Reference that will guide the Aboriginal Advisory Group. In addition, the Indigenous values and culturally based communication processes will empower the initiative so that:

- Programs and services in Aboriginal child care and early learning reflect the cultural traditions and Indigenous languages of the children and families they are serving in the City of Toronto
- Collaborative efforts will be made to involve libraries, local school boards parents/caregivers, Elders, extended family members, Traditional cultural teachers, service providers, the municipality, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and the Ministry of Education; a continuum of services for families

- Community based planning and consultation will reflect the integrity of community needs and the voices of the families; an open and transparent communication process
- The diversity of needs within families demands a broad based community network of services required across neighbourhoods in the City of Toronto; accessibility of services for children with special needs as well as integrated multi-disciplinary services
- Responsive service and equity of access for children are necessary and will evolve through integrated service planning at the neighbourhood level
- Early years service providers have strengths, capacities and expertise that will manifest through establishing linkages, collaborative action plans, and sharing of resources at the local level
- Addressing service gaps and health care omissions will be much easier with collaborative action and linkages among organizations
- Guidance will be taken from the legislative mandates of the service sectors and the Toronto Child Care Service Plan 2005-2009

KEY ACTIVITIES

The Aboriginal Advisory Group will provide its best guidance to the ISC on the needs of Aboriginal children and their families regarding the Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision For Children.

- Utilize **focus group sessions** with the Aboriginal community to develop a plan and to share the plan among affiliated sectors
- Provide recommendations to the ISC and the Best Start Network that reflects the need for **programs and services for children that are linguistically, culturally and historically appropriate**
- Develop a **media strategy** to market the services using newsletters, radio stations, poster campaign, community feasts and play days that are linked to the Best Start communications strategy
- Utilize the consultation process to form ideas on **preferred locations** for programs for Aboriginal children based on current research data
- Identify **gaps in services** and develop strategies to overcome these obstacles: identify barriers to participation
- Design annual **Work Plans** to complement the Best Start Network Action Plan for services, gaps in services, partnerships, integration schemes and a vision for 2009
- Prepare an **update on current services** in family support programs and early learning programs to prepare for systems integration
- Discuss a system that can **integrate Aboriginal services** for children and their families
- Engage in collaborative meetings with Managers of agencies to plan shared **training** initiatives to ensure the professional management of human resources
- Examine the **accessibility of services** to families: transportation, mental health team, home service team, mobile response team
- Engage in discussions with Colleges, Universities and other private institutions to offer **early childhood education programs in Indigenous languages and cultures** and ask that they increase their enrolment to make sure there is continuity in human resources
- Request that agencies/service organizations make **internships** available to Aboriginal students in early childhood education programs

- Offer a **bi-annual ECE conference** to share the evolution of the programs, the barriers to growth and the plans for the future: invite international guests who have long standing programs with remarkable research results such as the Maori Language Nests for children 0-6 years
- Examine a process to review **learning resources** that are available or being developed that support the early learning of Indigenous languages and the enhancement of cultural traditions; collaborate on a process to develop to culturally sensitive EDI; engage in research that brings current data to the planning table
- Advise on **professional development programs** that are available to update and maintain human resource competencies and knowledge
- Engage in an **annual program evaluation** that will be discussed with the Service organizations, the Best Start Network, the ISC, parents/caregivers and Aboriginal community members

MEMBERSHIP

There are 13 seats of Esteemed Values. The seats are numbered for Service Providers and their respective agencies who are directly involved in meeting the early education needs of Aboriginal children and their families in the City of Toronto.. In addition, there are those persons occupying seats based on the traditional kinship system of Aboriginal people such as Grandfather, Grandmother, Aunt, Uncle, Mother/Caregiver, Father/Caregiver who can speak to the daily needs of the Aboriginal child and the family. We will strive to have a balance of male and female persons seated in the Circle.

Current Membership:

- Council Fire-Tammy Bird and her alternate Jennifer Upshaw
- Native Child and Family Services-Kim Kirkley and Cathy Punnett
- Anduhyaun-Christine John
- Noojimawin Health Authority-Loretta Loon
- Anishnawbe Health Toronto-available for specific meetings only
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services-Sheila Nayak
- City of Toronto-Eva Smerdon
- Mothercraft Institute for Early Development-Laurie Hermiston
- Gizhaadaawgamik-Penny Smith
- Toronto District School Board-Catherine Pawis and Fidelia Torres
- Family Representative-Saya Johnson
- Family Representative-Crystal Phillips
- Toronto Coalition for Better Childcare-Jane Mercer

FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

- Meetings will be held every month for the AAGBST.
- The Executive Committee is comprised of the Convener, Co Convener, Consultant and the MCYS representative. Monthly meetings will be held by teleconference to establish the agenda for the AAGBST meetings.
- The Research Team and the Community Capacity Building Team will meet at their own times scheduled by consensus.
- Meeting locations and times will be determined by the AAGBST members at their monthly meetings.

CONVENER

The Group will select a Convener who will Chair the meetings. A Co-Convener will also be chosen at this time and act as the Chair of the meetings should the Convener not be able to attend the meetings for medical or personal reasons.

They shall act in this capacity for two years.

After the two year period, the AAGBST shall hold a meeting to select a new Convener and Co Convener or re-appoint the incumbents and the appointments shall be by consensus.

Communication Imperatives

The Convener will open the meeting with the introduction of an Elder to lead an opening ceremony of a prayer and smudging ceremony to honor the intent of the gathering and call the Spirit to be present during the deliberations. The Convener may ask others present in the Circle to do this or invite Special Guests to perform the ceremony. The Convener is responsible for holding the integrity of the Rules of the Circle. Also the Convener is the person responsible for calling Executive meetings to formulate the monthly agenda of the AAGBST.

The position of the Convener performs the following functions:

- introduces items for discussion
- asks for a volunteer writer for recording Minutes of the meeting and decisions taken
- keeps the discussion on track and does not move to the next item on the agenda until decisions have been made on the current item under discussion
- seeks consensus on the issues; initiates decision-making processes
- uses the Talking Stick when necessary: when the Talking Stick is in use, no one interrupts the Speaker and must wait until he/she is done speaking; only then will the Talking Stick move on to the next person
- allows withholding of opinions by Members: allows opting out of decision-making
- summarizes discussion at the end of the meeting and reads decisions out loud for consensus of all Members
- sets next meeting date after agreement by the Members: ensures responsibility and action are clearly expressed to those accepting duties for the next meeting date

Decision Making and Conflict Resolution

Consensus decision-making is the goal. Each service organization and parent council will choose someone to represent them who has the ability to make commitments on its behalf. Members will endeavor to resolve conflict through the Convener and the regular procedures. Should this not be possible, a Special Mediator will be invited for dispute resolution from the ISC.

Recording and Distributing the Minutes

Each month a volunteer from the membership of the AAGBST will take the Minutes of the meeting and be responsible for seeking approval for distribution through the Executive before release to the membership. The recorder will be selected by alphabetical order of name on the membership list.

Revisions to the Terms of Reference

Revisions may be undertaken under the direction of the AAGBST at any time. An annual review will occur in December of each calendar year.