

In 2002, the Library held 7,000 programs for babies, toddlers and preschoolers with over 150,000 children and parents/caregivers participating. Both drop-in programs and those requiring registration are offered at many locations to provide access to the widest possible audience. Many programs have waiting lists.

Toronto Public Library also provides services and supports to promote other developmental opportunities such as readiness to learn and student achievement (please refer to these subsections for more information).

#### *Objectives/benchmarks*

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To encourage children to register for a library card, Toronto Public Library is targeting all junior and senior kindergarten students and has set a minimum benchmark of 50% contact for the 2003 - 2004 school year. This means coordinated visits will be made with a minimum of 50% of the kindergarten classes in each branch's neighbourhood. Classes of kindergarten children will either visit their local branch or a library staff will visit the school to introduce the children to the materials and services available to them.

## Positive parenting

- ▶ **Resource centres, parent education, access to specialized services, community supports**

### **26. Family support programs**

Funding for programs that foster child development and provide various parent supports to families with young children comes from all three levels of government as well as charitable sources such as United Way. Historically, the funding was based on ad hoc priorities with very little systemic needs assessment or consideration of equity.

In 2003, the Province established 22 Ontario Early Years Centres within the City of Toronto. While this represents a significant infusion of funds, the allocation of identical amount of funds to each provincial riding regardless of the number of children has resulted in increased inequity of funds and access.

#### *Importance*

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An extraordinary amount of a child's development is carried out in the first six years of life, and it is important that families have the appropriate resources available to them in their community to support this development. Family support programs involve and educate parents in areas such as child growth and development, child safety, positive parenting and child behaviour management, to name a few. Programs are generally community-based, accessible and responsive to changing family needs.

#### *Status/trends*

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Twenty-two Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC) have been established in the city, one for each provincial riding. Twenty-two lead agencies were selected through a community planning process consisting of service providers of children 0-6 and local stakeholders, including parents. The centres come with funding, service and accountability requirements from the Province.

The City, through service system realignment, acquired the funding and service system management of family resource programs in Toronto. At the beginning of the OEYC planning process, 34 agencies were cost-shared with the Province. By the end of the OEYC process, 11 of these organizations had been designated as lead agencies and have become OEYC in specific ridings. Of the 11, six will continue to have a contractual relationship with the City as they also provide unique family resource services in ridings/wards other than the riding for which they have the OEYC designation. Currently there are 34 family resource centres, representing 47 sites providing family support programs.

This includes agencies that are 100% funded by the City. These agencies also have a designation as unique satellites under the OEYC. The family resource programs funded by the City have funding, service and accountability requirements with the City and are governed by the previous MCSS child care Resource Centre Policy.

### *Key issues*

The new Ontario Early Years Centre Initiative has created a new system of family resource programs with an additional \$11 million in new provincial funding for 22 Early Years Centres, without addressing the financial pressures of the existing provincial/municipal cost-shared family resource sector. The family resource sector, deemed unique satellites under the Early Years Initiative, must also adhere to two similar but different provincial policies and planning structures as well as the City's requirements and service plan.

### *Services, supports and initiatives*

#### *Welcome Baby Package*

City divisions including Children's Services, Public Health, Parks and Recreation and Toronto Public Library have collaborated on the "Welcome Baby" package for new parents. This package, distributed to babies born in Toronto hospitals, provides information on how to gain access to city services for children and families. A number of additional resources are incorporated into the package, including the "Read to Your Bunny" booklet provided by the Library.

#### *Family resource programs*

Services provided by Toronto's family resource programs include drop-ins, playgroups, respite and resource libraries as well as caregiver education. Family resource programs are community-based, accessible and responsive to changing family needs. They focus on promoting healthy child development. They seek to enhance strengths and strive to increase opportunities for growth and are available to all families and caregivers of children 0-6 years of age.

*Toronto First Duty Project - see page 50*

#### *Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC)*

HBHC is a prevention and early intervention initiative designed to provide support and services to families with children from before birth up to six years of age. Toronto Public Health contacts all mothers who deliver a baby in the city to provide brief counselling and to offer a home visit. During this initial contact, public health nurses help families to determine what services and supports would be beneficial, and to make sure the family is linked to the most suitable resources in their community.

#### *Parenting groups*

In addition to the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program, Toronto Public Health works in partnership with community agencies to provide parenting groups. These groups help parents develop knowledge and skills in areas such as child safety, behaviour management, nutrition, and growth and development. As well, these groups enable parents to gain support from one another, and to learn about community resources. In 2002, Toronto Public Health facilitated more than 2,758 parenting sessions.

#### *Comfort, Play and Teach - Health Communication Campaign*

In 2002, The Early Years Project Toronto, Invest in Kids Foundation, and the Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) program launched an innovative social marketing campaign to raise public awareness of the importance of the early years.

The campaign's universal theme of "Comfort, Play and Teach: What a child learns before age six lasts forever" was delivered using a variety of venues to a broad audience in Toronto. Ads, brochures, posters and supporting letters were sent to businesses, religious institutions, community, health and social service agencies as well as to health care providers, child care centres, schools and libraries. The campaign was successful in promoting awareness of the importance of the early years.

Using Early Child Development funds, Toronto Public Health will build on the Comfort, Play and Teach Campaign, by developing new materials for the Chinese and Tamil-speaking communities. These languages were selected because they represent large numbers of families living in Toronto.

#### *TDSB Parenting and Family Literacy Centres*

The Toronto District School Board's Parenting and Family Literacy centres were initiated in 1981 in the former Toronto Board of Education in five inner-city schools. Over the next 20 years, the number of centres grew to 34, spreading throughout the inner-city downtown schools. In 2001/2002, seven new centres were opened in other TDSB schools outside the former City of Toronto. In 2002-03, 10 more sites were added in different quadrants of the city, and four more new centres were scheduled to be opened in January 2004. By then, TDSB would have a total of 55 in-school Parenting and Family Literacy Centres spreading throughout the high needs areas of the city. Funding for these centres was based on a partnership between the school board and Toronto Foundation for Student Success. The intent is to improve academic outcomes for inner-city children.

This initiative was based on research that identified parental involvement as one of the key ingredients to academic success. Parents and caregivers with infants 0-6 years attend these free programs. The centres introduce parents to the school system and deliver a range of play-based problem-solving activities in a culturally sensitive environment. In these centres, parents learn about child development, and how to support the development of literacy and numeracy learning. The goal is to enable each child to achieve optimal development and enter school equipped for success.

#### *Ontario Early Years Centres*

Ontario Early Years Centres provide a place for parents and caregivers of children 0-6 years to seek information from early years professionals about their child's development and about services to support that development. Additional services offered include programs on pregnancy and parenting, early learning and literacy as well as information about resources available in their community. Programs and services are offered free to all parents and caregivers of young children.

#### *Objectives/benchmarks*

Funding for the various family support programs in the city comes from all three levels of government as well as charitable sources. A process involving coordination and planning among all the funders is required to ensure equitable access for all children.

#### **Mentoring**

Today, some of the social issues facing families which directly affect children may include poverty, homelessness and family violence, and may also include stress related to family break-up, underemployment and difficulty balancing work and family responsibilities. For several years, prevention programs have aimed to build "assets" in the individual, in families and in communities to help counteract some of these challenges.

The "One on One" Mentoring Program at Toronto Public Health is one such example, and is an innovative method of providing additional support to the family and to the school community by providing another adult role model in the lives of children. It is unique in that it uses employees from a corporate setting (City of Toronto), from service clubs (Rotary) and private citizens as volunteer mentors. For the 2003/2004 school year, 40 schools are participating and about 140 children will be mentored.

## Early child development projects

In 2001, the Government of Canada transferred federal funding to Ontario in support of a joint government commitment to improve and expand early child development programs and services. The initiatives supporting young children and their families are focused on four key action areas:

- promoting healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy
- improving parenting and family supports
- strengthening early childhood development, learning and care
- strengthening community supports.

As part of the Ontario Early Years Plan, Boards of Health received funding to develop and implement early child development (ECD) initiatives.

The following Toronto Public Health initiatives are part of this plan:

- family abuse prevention (child abuse and woman abuse)
- childhood injury prevention
- healthy pregnancy and child development
- support for at-risk pregnant and parenting youth
- perinatal and child health survey.

The Toronto ECD project plans are based on existing data, reports, action plans for children, literature, and stakeholder consultations.



The Early Child Development initiatives make important contributions to the recommendations identified in the 2003 *CYAC Action Plan for Children* by providing enhancements to existing programs and investments in parks and recreation, shelter services, child care programs, public health, community health and social services and schools.

These include:

- training opportunities for child care professionals
- developing resources and health communication materials to support early years programming
- advocacy and policy development initiatives that promote healthy child development
- generating surveillance data and literature reviews to inform local programming
- developing partnerships and networks for planning and implementing programs and activities.