

# How a Toronto First Duty site works

## **Bruce/WoodGreen Early Learning Centre**

The Bruce/WoodGreen Early Learning Centre (*BWELC*) serves a mixed income community with a large new immigrant population. It is a Toronto First Duty (*TFD*) site demonstrating integrated, accessible child care/kindergarten/family service delivery. The Centre is located in Bruce Public Junior School, 51 Larchmount Avenue. Hours are 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday to Friday, year round. BWELC serves children and families from the pre-natal period to grade three. The school has classes up to grade six.

## **Site partners:**

Bruce Public Junior School and WoodGreen Community Services (a multi-service community agency) are the lead site partners. The school principal and centre manager (employed by WoodGreen) jointly supervise the program. The management committee includes parents, WoodGreen; Bruce School; the City of Toronto's children's services and public health divisions; Toronto District School Board (TDSB); the Atkinson Charitable Foundation (ACF); the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto.

Five elements identify a TFD program:

- **Integrated governance:** The partners pool their resources to plan and deliver the program. Bruce School supplies the physical space and staffing including the principal, kindergarten teachers, parenting staff, teaching assistants and administrative support staff. WoodGreen supports the centre manager, ECE staff and resource teacher in addition to providing administrative assistance and professional development. TDSB contributes professional development and release time for the principal and kindergarten teachers in addition to the support of its superintendents and early years' department. The Foundation for Student Success supports the nutrition program. Toronto Public Health delivers pre- and post-natal programming, additional parenting programs and early identification & referrals. Children with special needs and families requiring additional assistance access help through WoodGreen, TDSB and the City of Toronto. ECEs also support classroom activities during school hours and direct after-school programming for children in Grades 1-3. The continuity of consistent adults is viewed as important particularly for children as they make the transition to the primary grades.

The Atkinson Centre for Child and Social Development at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education provides research and development. The Atkinson Charitable Foundation and City of Toronto provide funding for minor capital, start-up, and transition and operating costs. The TDSB funds the half-day program for children 3.8 – 5 years. Communications and research is supported by ACF.

- **Seamless access:** Through a single enrolment process families are able to access the full range of activities the program offers. Participation is flexible – parents may attend at anytime with their children.
- **Integrated early learning environment:** The school's classrooms are licensed under the Day Nurseries Act allowing multi-use of space to support children's development and health and safety standards.
- **Staff teams:** A teaching team of early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, parenting staff and educational assistants deliver the program using a common curriculum, resources and space the program. Integrated staffing allows a child/adult (teacher or ECE) ratio approximating the requirements of the *Day Nurseries Act* and is well below the provincial 20-children/teacher cap proposed for kindergarten-aged children.
- **Parent participation:** Parent participation is paramount to children's success. Parents are welcome to take place in all the activities of the Centre all the time. This includes eating lunch or snacks with their children, joining in their children's classroom activities and participating in adult-only classes or in parent/child activities.

BWELC demonstrates the potential of integrated early years programming. It meets the multiple and changing needs of families with a variety of supports and resources.