



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Introducing a Middle Childhood Strategy for the City of Toronto

Date:	October 4, 2012
To:	Community Development and Recreation Committee
From:	General Manager, Children's Services and General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

This report introduces the Middle Childhood Strategy, which is intended to guide the development of an effective, coordinated and high quality system of out-of-school-time programs for children aged six to 12. According to the 2011 Statistics Canada Census, there are approximately 179,205 children in this age group across the city of Toronto. The Strategy was developed by a work group of multiple stakeholders, in consultation with Toronto's Child and Family Network. It is also based on findings of a research project that focused on understanding the out-of-school time needs of Toronto families with children in middle childhood. This report recommends that the Middle Childhood Strategy be adopted and used to guide policy development, integrated system planning, as well as the design and delivery of out-of-school time programming for children aged six to 12.

As an integral component of the Middle Childhood Strategy, the report also provides an update on the After-School Recreation Care program (ARC). The ARC program was developed in 2006 as a model of practice that can offer lessons and tools to advance quality opportunities for out-of-school programming. Currently, the ARC program provides 865 children ages six to 12 years in 12 Priority Neighbourhoods with an unlicensed recreation based program that is high quality, age appropriate and proven to enhance resiliency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Managers of Children's Services and Parks, Forestry and Recreation recommend that:

- 1) City Council adopt the Middle Childhood Strategy, attached as Appendix A to this report; and
- 2) the City of Toronto work with the Province of Ontario to secure sustainable funding to stabilize the current After School Recreation Care (ARC) program.

Financial Impact

Recommendations contained in this report have no financial impact beyond what has already been approved in the current year's operating budget. As program reserves are sufficient to allow the continuation of the ARC program into 2013, this programming will be included in the 2013 Operating Budget Submission.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agree with the financial impact information.

Equity Impact

The objective of the Middle Childhood Strategy is to guide the development of a system of out-of-school-time programs for children aged six to 12 years. Currently, many Toronto families have a difficult time accessing quality middle childhood programs, primarily because they are not distributed equitably across the city. A guiding principle of the Strategy is that all families should have access to high-quality, affordable, age appropriate out-of-school-time programs. Accordingly, the Strategy includes action items that address various barriers to access, such as affordability, inclusive programming content, integrated models of service delivery and planning tools that address service gaps and inequities.

DECISION HISTORY

City Council's interest in the provision of quality programming for children in middle childhood dates back to 2005. A major initiative that advanced the approach to middle childhood years was the development of a model of after-school recreation care program (ARC). ARC was initiated in 2006 through a partnership between Toronto Children's Services and Parks Forestry and Recreation.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2005/agendas/council/cc051124/cofa.pdf>

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/agendas/council/cc060725/cofa.pdf>

City Council at the August 5 and 6, 2009 meetings approved a broader Middle Childhood Strategy Framework, which provided the principles and direction to develop a Middle Childhood Strategy. Based on this framework, the General Manager of Children's

Services and the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation were directed to ensure that future Divisional service plans align with the framework.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2009.CD25.4>

City Council during the May 11 and 12, 2010 meetings unanimously approved the Toronto Child Care Service Plan. The plan supports the development and implementation of an integrated early learning system for children 0 to 12 years of age and their families. It also identifies the need to create a Middle Childhood Strategy to guide the development of a system of high quality out-of-school-time programs for children aged six to 12 that aligns with the Provincial early learning program (Full-Day Kindergarten).

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2010.CD32.3>

City Council at its June 8 and 9, 2010 meetings accepted a report that provided an update on the development of the Middle Childhood Strategy and the status of the After-School Recreation Care Programs. Council directed the General Managers of Children's Services and Parks, Forestry, and Recreation to report back on the Middle Childhood Strategy and Implementation Plan, as well as the continuation of the current ARC programs.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2010.CD33.3>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Middle Childhood Programs

The City of Toronto has long been concerned with out-of-school programs for children aged six to 12, a stage of child development often referred to as the "middle childhood years". These programs provide care during periods when children are not supervised by teachers, yet parents are still in need of care. This includes before- and after- school periods, summer holidays, March Break, and professional activity days.

In recent years, middle childhood and the factors that promote positive development for this age group have received increased attention, focusing primarily on the relationship between healthy development in middle childhood and out-of-school-time hours. Researchers agree that programming during this time is important to meet the critical developmental needs of children aged six to 12.¹ Acknowledging the research, a number of service agencies and community activists in the Middle Childhood Matters Coalition Toronto are advocating for more high-quality out-of-school programs to support children in this age group.

¹ J. A. Durlak, & R. P. Weissber., The Impact of After-School Programs That Promote Personal and Social Skills. (Chicago: Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2007)

B. M. Miller, Critical Hours: After-school Programs and Educational Success: Critical Hours Executive Summary. (Quincy, MA: Nellie Mae Education Foundation, 2003)

D. Solk, Building a Program for Middle Childhood: A Literature and Program Review. (Vancouver: BC Council for Families, 2006)

The landscape of programming for six to 12 year-olds in Toronto is highly complex, involving multiple service providers, funders and stakeholders. As a result, families with children in their middle childhood years often contend with a patchwork of services that may not always be accessible, affordable or developmentally appropriate.

As the system manager for the child care sector, Toronto Children's Services is responsible for planning services, managing fee subsidies, and monitoring program quality for children in licensed after-school child care programs. Other City divisions also offer programming in the out-of-school-time periods as do a wide variety of community organizations. In particular, the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division provides a wide range of unlicensed instructional, drop-in, and summer camp programs for children in the middle childhood years. This includes the ARC program, a model of practice from which lessons and tools to advance the Middle Childhood Strategy can be taken.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation will bring forward a Recreation Service Plan in the fall 2012 that will guide the City in planning, facilitating and delivering recreation services. Services for children are a focus of city recreation programming and alignment through the Middle Years Strategy will support improved quality, access, partnership and integrated planning for children ages six to 12 years.

ARC Program Status

In 2005 City Council approved the development of a recreation based model of after-school care for children aged six to 12 years of age.

The ARC program continues to operate in 29 locations, serving children with recreation based after school care. The city-wide program ensures equitable access for 865 children daily and provides employment and youth leadership opportunities for approximately 160 staff (120 are youth). The program operates five days a week, for 10 months of the year, in 12 of the City's Priority Neighbourhoods.

ARC is operated by Parks, Forestry, and Recreation, and is based on a strong partnership between City Divisions, the two school boards and community agencies. The Toronto District School Board and Toronto Catholic District Board support ARC through the provision of free space in 21 school locations; Children's Services supports program quality through site visit assessments; Toronto Public Health monitors and helps with menu planning. Some ARC locations also receive contributions for the snack program from local community agencies, including Second Harvest and Doorsteps Neighbourhood Services.

ARC serves as a model of recreation based after- school programming with a strong commitment to quality. The program is regulated through annual Toronto Children's Services visits and is also assessed twice annually by PFR staff with the HIGH FIVE

Quest² evaluation tool. ARC staff receives over 70 hours of training. This training includes a partnership with Seneca College to provide enhanced training, apprenticeship, and education opportunities for the more than 160 staff employed in the program. In 2009, Dr. Wayne Hammond and Resiliency Initiatives Canada assessed the impact of the ARC program on participants. Research results show that the ARC program contributed to a greater degree of resilience in program participants. The quality of the ARC program was recognized internationally at the Liveable Cities Conference in Charleston, South Carolina in 2010. In 2008, the ARC program also received the Public sector Quality Fair – Gold Level Award.

The total planned funding for the ARC program in the 2012-2013 school year is \$2.5 million, funded through a combination of four sources - provincial funding from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (\$641,000), parent user fee revenue (\$263,000), City funded (\$1,136,000) and the Social Service Stabilization Reserve Fund (\$460,000).

The program is dependent on provincial funding from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (MTCS), which is negotiated annually. In 2009, when the funding was initially received, it allowed for an expansion of ARC locations and supported the reduction of parent fees. The reduction in parent fees was key to expanding access to low income families. MTCS requires that "program fees are not a barrier to participation" as a grant requirement. ARC meets this requirement through the application of Park, Forestry, and Recreation's Welcome Policy subsidy program.

Welcome Policy is available for eligible families, to ensure access to the program. Currently, 20 per cent of clients (170) are supported through the Welcome Policy. In addition, 31 per cent of clients (270) are in Priority Centres. The remaining 49 per cent (425) are fee paying.

In 2012, the user fees for ARC were aligned with the recent conversion to dollar based amounts for Welcome Policy. The user fee for the program is currently \$2.34 per day per child at 23 locations. The remaining 6 locations are in Priority Centres where programming is free and no user fee revenue is received by the ARC program.

The Social Services Stabilization Reserve Fund (\$3.7 million) was allocated to the 2006 Children's Services Operating budget for ARC. Of this, \$1.3 million remains in the reserve fund.

Funding for the ARC program is in place for the 2012-2013 school year (June 2013). It is important to highlight that the current ARC program is dependent on securing funding from all four funding sources - the Province, parent user fees, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, and the Social Services Stabilization Reserve Fund. If any one of these sources is eliminated, the viability of the ARC program is at risk. The provincial funding from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport is project based and not annualized base

² HIGH FIVE is nationally recognized as a quality standard for children's sport and recreational programs in Canada. For more information, visit www.highfive.org/

funding, making it difficult for the City to plan for the program in the long term. The City's efforts, therefore, will be focused on securing annualized stable funding from the Province and identifying a source to replace the Social Services Reserve Fund once it is depleted. Note that with ongoing funding from the Province at the current level, the Social Service Stabilization Reserve Fund will be depleted in 2015. Any reduction in funding from the Province before that time will require an increased contribution from the Social Service Stabilization Reserve Fund as an offset.

Introduction of Full-Day Kindergarten

The development of the Middle Childhood Strategy is particularly timely in light of significant changes occurring in education at the provincial level. In June 2009, a report written by Dr. Charles Pascal, the Premier's Early Learning Advisor, provided a comprehensive action plan for developing a seamless and integrated system to support children from birth to 12 years and their families. The report recommended that school boards be mandated to offer out-of-school-time programs for children ages four through 12.

Of the numerous recommendations in the Early Learning Advisor's report, the Provincial Government identified Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK) for four and five year olds as a policy priority. Implementation is now entering its third phase. School Boards are mandated to offer FDK before-and after-school programs to families for a fee, where there is sufficient demand. These programs are provided on instructional days and non-school days, and can be directly operated by the school board or contracted through a licensed child care provider.

Each year of implementation, the uptake for extended day program increases as four and five year olds currently in licensed child care move to an FDK before- and after- school program. This generates an increased demand for out-of-school time programs as children transition out of FDK into grade 1 and middle childhood.

In the recent discussion paper: *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario: Sharing Conversations, Strengthening Partnerships, Working Together*, the province restated its support for out-of-school-time programs for children in middle childhood.

The discussion paper specifically asks whether a new licensing category is needed for older children. The City of Toronto submitted a formal response to the province's discussion paper on Modernizing Child Care in Ontario. Informed by Toronto parents and child care operators, Toronto's position is that a new regulatory environment is needed for older children (aged six to 12). Specifically, a broader range of age-appropriate programs is seen as a requirement for this age group. A system that meets the needs of six to 12 year olds will depend on a regulatory environment that allows appropriate models of care to be set up. As such, requirements for school age children should be established in legislation separate from the Day Nurseries Act.

The Middle Childhood Strategy supports the development of new models of service delivery that could inform the development of a new regulatory framework for this age group. It will require strong participation from the school boards and access to school space. As such, school boards must be full partners in the strategy's implementation. This will allow the City to meet the developmental needs of children aged six to 12 and to support a more integrated, seamless and accessible service system for all children.

COMMENTS

Middle Childhood Strategy

In 2009, the City made a commitment to develop a Middle Childhood Strategy that promotes a seamless system of high-quality, age appropriate, out-of-school-time programs for children ages six to 12. As a first step, Council adopted the Middle Childhood Strategy Framework in August 2009. The Framework focuses on out-of-school time programs – primarily managed, funded or delivered by Children's Services and Parks, Forestry and Recreation – that address the care needs of families. It also proposes a set of principles to guide the development of a strategy.

Guiding Principles

- 1) Acknowledging the developmental significance of middle childhood years
 - Helping children develop new skills and become more resilient and independent as they make the transition to adolescence is a key objective of out-of-school-time programs.
- 2) Creating high quality programming
 - Programs should strive to provide high-quality service to meet the needs of children and families.
- 3) Ensuring funding sustainability
 - Adequate, ongoing funding is required to ensure consistency in staffing and program delivery to meet local needs.
- 4) Collaborating and coordinating local service planning and delivery
 - Working together within communities to ensure an appropriate range and mix of programs are available.
 - Joint planning to coordinate service delivery in local neighborhoods.
- 5) Supporting inclusion, access and equity
 - All families should have access to high-quality, culturally appropriate and affordable out-of-school-time programs.
 - Flexible funding options, including subsidies to ensure income doesn't become a barrier to access.
- 6) Setting standards and ongoing evaluation
 - Appropriate quality standards and measures based on program outcomes should be established.
 - The quality of programs must be regularly monitored and evaluated.

With the adoption of the Framework, a Middle Childhood Workgroup of multiple system stakeholders was formed to oversee further research on the current needs of families for quality out-of-school-time programming. The group includes representation from the CITYKIDS Network, District Child Care Advisory Committees, George Brown College, Toronto Middle Childhood Matters Coalition, Toronto District School Board, Toronto Catholic District School Board, Toronto Community Housing, and Toronto Coalition for Better Childcare as well as different City divisions: Children's Services, Toronto Public Health, Toronto Public Library and Parks, Forestry and Recreation.

Research undertaken consisted of a needs assessment of families with children aged six to 12 and an environmental scan to identify service gaps in after-school programs. The results and recommendations were captured in a comprehensive report titled, [*An Opportunity for Every Child: Realizing the Potential of After-School Programming for Children Ages 6-12 in Toronto.*](#)

Specific research methodologies included:

- eight focus groups across Toronto with a total of 83 parents with children between six to 12 years of age
- 1,313 completed online and paper surveys by parents with children six to 12 years old residing in Toronto
- one-on-one interviews with 24 researchers and policy experts across North America
- 33 telephone interviews with after-school program staff and management
- statistical analysis of available data and a literature review.

Consultation was also conducted with the Toronto Child & Family Network, a partnership between a cross-section of agencies and organizations working to build an effective and integrated system of high quality services for children and their families. Members from the network's committees reviewed and provided input to the Strategy, ensuring that the perspectives of the wider community were incorporated into its content and direction.

The Middle Childhood Strategy has the following five key goals. Action steps for each goal are outlined in Appendix A.

Goal 1: Develop a comprehensive and integrated system of services for children aged six to 12

To respond to the fragmented system of out-of-school time programming, governments, service providers and community partners need to collaborate to align policies, planning approaches and processes to create a comprehensive system of services for children and families.

Goal 2: Improve Local Service Coordination and Planning

Develop tools to support local planning and explore new models of service delivery to create an efficient and seamless approach to providing out-of-school time programs.

Goal 3: Advance Quality of Programs

Develop and promote the use of evaluation criteria to advance quality in out-of-school programming.

Goal 4: Raise Public Awareness

Partner with key stakeholders to develop and implement a public awareness campaign around out-of-school programming in Toronto.

Goal 5: Support Research and Knowledge Exchange

Create opportunities for continued research and information sharing around children in middle childhood as well as out-of-school programs.

Implementation Plan

The changing landscape of services for children and families in Ontario prompted Toronto Children's Services to lead a strategic review of how the various service systems interact with each other to create a more holistic response to issues facing children and families. The review resulted in the development of the Toronto Child and Family Network, an integrated planning model that supports a comprehensive system of services for new and expectant parents, children (birth to 12 years), and families in Toronto. The model is made up of a Steering Committee that convenes a broad range of leaders from various governments, agencies and organizations, creating an opportunity to align provincial and municipal policies and community planning and programs. It also includes the following four planning tables that represent the service components of the child and family system and two population specific tables that intersect with the steering committee:

- Health
- Early Learning and Care
- Early Identification and Intervention,
- Family Support,
- Aboriginal Advisory,
- French Language Advisory

The Middle Childhood Strategy will be advanced primarily through the work plan of the Early Learning and Care Committee, with guidance and support from the Steering Committee. The Middle Childhood Strategy Workgroup will remain as an Ad Hoc group

of the Network to advance the goals and actions of the Middle Childhood Strategy and ensure that it aligns with all components of the system.

Preliminary Initiatives

The following summarizes the activities currently underway in Toronto that contribute to the implementation of the Middle Childhood Strategy.

Transit Shelter Advertising: Using free outdoor advertising space, Children's Services and Strategic Communications partnered with the Middle Childhood Matters Coalition Toronto to generate awareness around out-of-school time programs. The strategy ran from August 13 to September 9, 2012, a time when many families are confirming their out-of-school-care requirements. The posters were located at 131 locations throughout the city.

Middle Childhood Program Locator: Children's Services is working with the City's Geocompetency Centre to launch a program locator in October 2012 that will serve parents as well as local service providers as they plan for out-of-school-time programs not only for children in middle childhood, but also for four-and five-year olds. The directory will be fashioned after our current child care locator, with a focus on out-of-school time programs that are not necessarily licensed. It will also use "a program inclusion framework" captured in the report: *An Opportunity for Every Child: Design of a Database for Middle Childhood Programs within the City of Toronto* to determine what programs and information are appropriate for the locator. The report was based on research that explored how a directory might be successfully deployed and maintained in the long term. To begin, the locator will include FDK before-and after-school programs, licensed child care programs for six-to 12-year-olds, and Parks, Forestry and Recreation programs, such as ARC. Community programs will be added in early 2013.

Quality Assessment: Moving toward a quality system of out-of-school time programs, the current priority for the Middle Childhood Workgroup is to explore the use of a common quality assessment tool that will be promoted for use across the service system for all out-of-school-time program providers.

Middle Childhood Think Tank: In partnership with the Middle Childhood Matters Coalition Toronto, Children's Services is planning a Think Tank for May, 2013 that will bring together community, political and corporate leaders. The day will focus on key actions required to advance the Middle Childhood Strategy.

CONCLUSION

When it comes to the needs of children ages six to 12, the data gathered from the research, *An Opportunity for Every Child*, demonstrates that parents want after-school programming and feel that it has many benefits for their children. However, parents are struggling with the accessibility of after-school programs in Toronto. The Middle Childhood Strategy is intended to address the issues raised not only by parents but also

by after-school personnel and policy experts. Addressing the goals of the Strategy will increase the potential for a positive impact of after-school programming. The City, local school boards, community agencies, academic institutions and provincial governments all have a vested interest in this important age group. The collective effort of all stakeholders will be instrumental in the Strategy's success.

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ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A – Middle Childhood Strategy