



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Toronto Children's Services 2015-2019 Service Plan

Date:	April 2, 2015
To:	Community Development and Recreation Committee
From:	General Manager, Children's Services
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

This report seeks approval of Children's Services' 2015-2019 Service Plan. This plan gives direction to Toronto Children's Services in the planning and managing of services for children and families for the next five years. It was developed during a period of significant change, as the sector transitions to a broader, more coordinated early years system. The plan responds to these changes and advances the division's vision of a cohesive system of services for children and families that are accessible, affordable, inclusive, seamless, and resilient. Its development involved extensive engagement with children, families, service providers, community partners, and other stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Children's Services recommends that:

1. City Council approve Children's Services' 2015-2019 Service Plan, included as Attachment 1 to this report;
2. City Council instruct the General Manager, Children's Services, to forward the approved Service Plan to the Ministry of Education and Toronto school boards for their information and reference.

Financial Impact

This report has no financial impact. The 2015-2019 Service Plan will guide Children's Services in the allocation of resources and the planning and delivery of services over the next five years.

The cost of service delivery in 2015 is included in the 2015 Approved Operating Budget for Children's Services. Any additional financial implications associated with the implementation of the Service Plan will be considered as part of the future years' budget processes.

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

Equity Impact Statement

This Service Plan was designed to support the needs of all children and families in Toronto, enhance equitable access to services, and make the Children's Services system as a whole more inclusive and responsive. To ensure that the needs of different communities are captured, consultations were held with diverse stakeholder groups, including: newcomer families; LGTBQ-led families and families of trans or gender independent children; Aboriginal families and service providers; and French-language service providers. These consultations resulted in the development of a new strategic direction, "Inclusive Support for All Families," and specific actions to improve inclusivity for all communities.

This Service Plan also explores factors that may contribute to a family's vulnerability, including: poverty; structural inequalities; discrimination; limited social support; and geographic location. It highlights the strong connection between child and family services and social, developmental, and economic outcomes, including poverty reduction. Children's Services distributes resources and services according to principles contained within the plan, including geographic equity targets, so that all families have equitable access to resources regardless of where they live. Specific actions in the plan are intended to bring us closer to meeting these targets, taking into account the needs of individual neighbourhoods.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of May 11 and 12, 2010, City Council unanimously approved the 2010-2014 Child Care Service Plan. See:

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

The *Child Care Modernization Act, 2014*, passed in December 2014, updates the legislative framework governing child care by repealing the *Day Nurseries Act* and replacing it with the *Child Care and Early Years Act*, and by amending the *Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007* and the *Education Act*. Among other things, the new legislation strengthens Toronto Children's Services role as the service system manager and requires service system managers across Ontario to develop service plans.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Children's Services has engaged in service planning since 1992. All plans have benefitted the division and the sector by establishing principles and priorities for managing change, guiding investments, and strengthening the system in a way that advances the well-being of Toronto's children and families. While there is continuity across successive service plans, individual plans also set out unique priorities that reflect the current state of the sector.

It is important that the service plan aligns with provincial policy direction. Over the last five years, there have been significant provincial policy changes. The new *Child Care and Early Years Act*, which was passed in December 2014, updates the legislative framework governing child care and requires service system managers to develop and implement service plans in consultation with school boards and other stakeholders. Recent developments such as the release of the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework have also changed the environment under which the early learning sector operates. In this Service Plan, Children's Services acknowledges the ongoing and significant policy changes that are expected over the next five years, and includes actions intended to ensure that the system is stable and responsive to these proposed changes.

In its role of service system manager for child care and early years programs, Children's Services works with community partners and school boards to plan and manage a system of services that are coordinated, accessible, and responsive to Toronto's children and families. The division implements provincial legislation and policy in a way that responds effectively to local needs and manages changes that affect all partners in the sector.

This Service Plan is guided by eight principles which are consistent with those of the previous service plan, and which direct the division in decisions about how to invest its limited resources. With the guidance of these principles, we aim to build a system that is:

- a. Centred on children and families, so that they can make informed choices about services
- b. Planned and delivered in an integrated way, so that as children develop, they experience seamless transitions across a continuum of services
- c. High quality, through constantly advancing organizational and pedagogical best practices
- d. Inclusive of children with special needs, as well as vulnerable and marginalized communities
- e. Equitably delivered across the city and available to children of all ages, based on the practices of age and geographic equity
- f. Fair, so that fee subsidies for child care are provided on a first-come, first-served basis
- g. Accountable, through public planning and measured outcomes
- h. Focused on expansion through public and non-profit service delivery

COMMENTS

2010-2014 Accomplishments and Changes

The 2015-2019 Service Plan builds on the accomplishments of the last five years. Over the course of the 2010-2014 Toronto Child Care Service Plan, Children's Services has achieved its strategic directions and actions, while responding to unprecedented change. Some accomplishments include: the consolidation of numerous community planning networks and the establishment of the Toronto Child and Family Network; the development and approval of the Middle Childhood Strategy; and the validation of the Assessment for Quality Improvement, making it the only Canadian validated measure of quality in early learning settings. At the same time, Children's Services worked with all four school boards, families, and service providers to support the transition to full-day kindergarten, resulting in the creation of 280 new kindergarten before- and after-school programs. A summary of the 2010-2014 Service Plan accomplishments is attached as Attachment 2.

Stakeholder Engagement

This Service Plan has been designed around themes that were regularly heard during a robust stakeholder engagement process. Altogether, over 3,000 people provided input at over 30 engagement sessions. Groups consulted include: families (including specific initiatives for newcomer and LGTBQ families); children; advocacy and research communities; the Toronto Child & Family Network; child care service providers; Children's Services staff; Toronto school boards; and Aboriginal and French-language communities. Much of the feedback provided insight into the needs of one particular community or population. This confirmed the importance of building diversity and inclusivity into the system by considering the unique experiences of each community. At the same time, strong common themes and priorities emerged, including: the need for accessible and affordable child care; partnerships across services; ongoing communication and engagement with families and service providers; well-paid and supported staff; and building a cohesive, seamless, and coordinated system.

Key themes from the stakeholder engagement process helped to develop a clear vision for the service system and informed the content and design of the plan. A report on the results of the stakeholder engagement on the Service Plan is available on Children's Services' website at toronto.ca/children/serviceplan.

Vision and Strategic Directions

Children and families are an integral part of a healthy, vibrant, and equitable Toronto. This Service Plan continues the journey towards a cohesive system of services that are accessible, affordable, inclusive, seamless, and resilient. By implementing the Service Plan, the division strives to build a city in which:

- All children have access to a continuum of services and programs that support their individual needs;
- Families know where to find meaningful and affordable supports and services, and have a say in how these services are planned, regardless of their social, economic or cultural background;
- Communities are invested in promoting the well-being of their children and families and are connected to the networks and expertise they need to do so;
- Service providers are equipped with the tools they need to provide high-quality services, including innovative learning opportunities and meaningful partnership;
- The system is nimble, responsive, integrated, and accountable.

The strategic directions and actions contained in this Service Plan advance the achievement of this vision over the next five years.

The plan is organized into four sections. Sections A, B, and C provide background information and analysis that set the stage for the strategic directions and actions, which are outlined in Section D.

Section A: A Toronto for All Children & Families delves into Children's Services' role and vision for building a city that works for all of Toronto's children and families.

Section B: The Changing Landscape is an environmental scan of the many influences that impact the child and family system in Toronto.

Section C: The Service Sector provides a snapshot of existing programs and services, with a focus on those programs and services that Children's Services plans, funds, and manages.

Section D: Strategic Directions & Actions for the Next Five Years sets the agenda for the next five years. It includes five new strategic directions, with measurable and achievable actions. The strategic directions are:

1. Access to High-Quality Child Care
2. Inclusive Support for All Families
3. Engagement, Partnership, and Communication
4. Systems Change
5. Leadership

Implementation Priorities

A key challenge that continues to impact the system's ability to serve Toronto's families is the lack of available child care spaces for our youngest children. The current supply of 64,700 licensed child care spaces only accommodates 19% of the child population from newborn to age 12. This Service Plan highlights the urgent need for capital development, with corresponding fee subsidies, in order to increase the number of licensed child care spaces available to families in Toronto. Other key challenges include: the need for high-

quality, age-appropriate programs for middle childhood; access and inclusivity for Aboriginal, French, newcomer, and LGBTQ communities; and strengthening joint planning structures with school boards. In accordance with these themes, the division has identified implementation priorities for 2015-2016, which are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Strategic Direction	Priorities for 2015-2016
<p>1. Access to high-quality child care</p> <p>Families have access to affordable, available, and high-quality early learning and child care services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the methodology used to determine the distribution of child care fee subsidies and ensure that the principles of age and geographic equity are effectively applied • Encourage and expedite the development of new child care spaces for infants and toddlers based on the division's Capital Strategy included in the 2015-2019 Service Plan • Increase the number of middle childhood programs • Develop quality standards for middle childhood programs
<p>2. Inclusive support for all families</p> <p>Supports and services meet the unique needs of all Toronto families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategically align need for child care with poverty reduction initiatives • Increase and simplify access to child care for Aboriginal families (including the implementation of an Aboriginal self-identification policy) • Establish partnership opportunities with newcomer and LGBTQ organizations • Complete a business enhancement review of the Every Child Belongs model of special needs services • Increase access and quality for French-language families by establishing a joint planning process with French School Boards
<p>3. Engagement, partnership, and communication</p> <p>Strong partnerships, ongoing engagement, and communication result in planning processes that respond to the diverse needs of children, families, and service providers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new models of engaging families • Modernize online supports for service providers

Strategic Direction	Priorities for 2015-2016
<p>4. Systems change</p> <p>The child and family system is modernized in a way that works best for Toronto.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present new child care funding model to Council for approval • Implement Provincial Wage Enhancement Grant
<p>5. Leadership</p> <p>All orders of government, municipal and community partners contribute to the well-being of children and families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement joint planning structure with school boards • Report on child and family well-being indicators • Advance human services integration together with other City divisions

CONCLUSION

The 2015-2019 Service Plan will direct Children's Services' in the planning, management, and allocation of resources towards services for children and families over the next five years. It positions the division to respond to the transformation of the early learning system, and informs community partners of the division's vision and direction. This Service Plan will guide the division's activities and investments to build a vibrant, healthy, and equitable Toronto, where children and families are supported by cohesive system of services that is responsive to their needs.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Toronto Children's Services 2015-2019 Service Plan
 Attachment 2: 2010-2014 Service Plan Accomplishments