



City of Toronto

Journey Together Needs Assessment: Expanding Indigenous-led Early Years Programs in Toronto

Completed by TASSC and Toronto Children's Services

Journey Together Needs Assessment

Introduction

‘Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples is a provincial initiative to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action. The Ministry of Education, through its initiative under ‘Journey Together’ aims to increase the number of culturally relevant child care spaces and expand access to child and family programs for Indigenous children and families who live in urban communities.

Children's Services was informed of this mandate to work with Indigenous partners as the service system manager to plan locally for expanded Indigenous early years services in November, 2016. A community needs assessment led to project proposals that were submitted to the Ministry of Education in September 2016, seeking funding for expanded early programs for Indigenous families in Toronto.

Children’s Services worked in partnership with Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC) to complete the community needs assessment that informed project proposals. Indigenous families, children, Indigenous service providers and other relevant community stakeholders (including Toronto Public Library and Toronto Public Health) were consulted about the needs of Indigenous children and families. The needs assessment also included data from service providers and Well Living House (an Indigenous research unit at St. Michael’s Hospital), as well as recommendations from local and Canadian-specific Indigenous early learning and care research and reports.

TASSC and Children's Services developed project proposals based on findings of the needs assessment. Proposals included specialized support and cultural programs for children and families, new Indigenous Child and Family Centres, as well as enhancements to existing Indigenous child and family programs already offered by Indigenous organizations.

Summary

Key themes that emerged from consultations were the need for increased access to Indigenous cultural programming for families and children, including accessible ways to learn Indigenous languages, participate in land based programming, and opportunities for families and children to engage around Indigenous cultural knowledge. Other needs that surfaced through the assessment process include culturally safe parenting programs for fathers as well as intensive prenatal and postnatal supports for Indigenous families and infants.

Planning partners and service organizations

Children's Services partnered with the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC) to complete a needs assessment with local service providers and Indigenous families.

TASSC is made of up of the following organizations, as partner or affiliate agencies:

- 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations
- Aboriginal Legal Services
- Aboriginal Legal Clinic
- Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle
- ANDPVA/Arts Indigena
- Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training
- Na-Me-Res (Native Men's Residence)
- Native Canadian Centre of Toronto
- Native Child & Family Services
- Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto
- Nishnawbe Homes
- Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy
- Thunder Woman's Healing Lodge Society
- Toronto and York Region Métis Council
- Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre
- Toronto District School Board, Aboriginal Education Centre
- Wigwamen Incorporated

In addition, TASSC utilized the Aboriginal Advisory and Planning Committee as a working table to guide the needs assessment process. Members of the Aboriginal Advisory and Planning Committee include management and direct service staff of some of TASSC's member agencies, with representation from additional organizations that serve Indigenous children and families in Toronto:

- Anishnawbe Health Toronto
- Centre for Addiction & Mental Health
- FoodShare Toronto
- Native Child & Family Services
- Naadmaagit Ki Group (NKG)
- Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto
- Ministry of Children & Youth Services
- Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council
- Toronto Birth Centre
- Toronto Catholic District School Board
- Toronto Coalition for Better Child Care

- Toronto District School Board, Aboriginal Education Centre
- Toronto Public Health
- Toronto Public Library
- Seventh Generation Midwives of Toronto
- SickKids Hospital, Infant Mental Health Promotion

Further groups were engaged in the process of completing the needs assessment and resulting proposals, including:

- St. Michael's Hospital, Well Living House

Community engagement, consultation processes, and continued engagement approach

Engagement and consultation

Children's Services partnered with the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC) to complete a needs assessment with local service providers, key informants, and Indigenous families. TASSC is a local Indigenous non-profit and recognized Indigenous planning table for Toronto's Indigenous communities. In 2011 TASSC became well-known for commissioning Toronto's largest research on the local urban Indigenous community, Toronto Aboriginal Research Project (TARP) report, and has since become a community research, policy, and advocacy organization. TASSC is represented by the executive directors of 13 member organizations, and 4 associate member organizations. As such, TASSC is uniquely situated within the Toronto context to undertake a Toronto-wide needs assessment to inform the expansion of Indigenous early years programs and services.

TASSC utilized the Aboriginal Advisory and Planning Committee as a working table to guide the needs assessment process. Members of the Aboriginal Advisory and Planning Committee include management and direct service staff of some of TASSC's member agencies, with representation from additional organizations that serve Indigenous children and families in Toronto.

TASSC utilized several methods of consultation to ensure transparency, efficiency, and an educational process in this needs assessment. Using an iterative approach TASSC began the consultation with Indigenous service providers (both TASSC and non-TASSC members, including outreach to grassroots organizations), to ensure commitment in supporting new and improved services. It was also important for TASSC to understand challenges and limitations to organizations taking on new initiatives; this information was then shared with Indigenous families and capacity building supports were documented.

TASSC also utilized a network of networks approach by utilizing Children's Services Aboriginal Advisory and Planning Committee, and two community animators to consult with Two-Spirit families, and Indigenous language specialists. This approach allowed TASSC to get the greatest amount of input in a short period of time. As gaps in services surfaced, TASSC performed key informant interviews with specialists in the field of prenatal/postnatal services, language services, and land-based education. Within the process TASSC consistently reported back to participating organizations and individuals.

The cycle of direct community consultation is documented below:

- March 2017 Facilitated discussion with Indigenous community on family programs (25)
- April 2017 Facilitated consultation with Indigenous health/support service leaders (10)
- April 2017 Facilitated consultation with Aboriginal Advisory and Planning Committee (15)
- May 2017 Presented overview to Toronto District School Board Parent Council (20)
- May 2017 Facilitated consultation with City of Toronto Public Library staff (25)
- June 2017 Key Informant Interview, Elder (1)
- June 2017 Key Informant Interview, Toronto Public Health (1)
- June 2017 Report back to Indigenous health/support service leaders (12)
- June 2017 Community consultation, Eastview Public School Pow wow (50)
- June 2017 Community consultation, First Nations School Pow wow (40)
- July 2017 Key Informant Interview, Prenatal/Postnatal Health (1)
- July 2017 Key Informant Interview, Two-Spirit Community Navigator/Animator (1)
- July 2017 Key Informant Interview, Indigenous Housing (1)
- Aug 2017 Key Informant Interview, Land-based Children's Programmer (1)
- Aug 2017 Focus Group, Prenatal/Postnatal Full Spectrum Support (2)
- Aug 2017 Key Informant Interview, Language Specialist (1)
- Aug 2017 Community consultation, Toronto Council Fire Youth Pow wow (70)
- Aug 2017 Final consultation to Indigenous health/support service leaders (6)
- Sept 2017 Final consultation to Aboriginal Advisory and Planning Committee (15)
- Sept 2017 Key Informant Interview, After School Programming (1)
- Sept 2017 Community consultation, East York sites (50)

In total, the needs assessment consulted directly with 348 individuals. This number increases to 360 individuals when including the number of families consulted through TASSC's community navigators/animations. The consultations can be broken down as follows:

- 21 Indigenous organizations (88% participating in multiple consultations)
- 255 Indigenous families and key informants (3% participating in multiple consultations)
- 9 non-Indigenous organizations (60% participating in multiple consultations)
- 24 non-Indigenous individuals (40% participating in multiple consultations)

TASSC would include a summary of information collected from previous research, discussion circles, and surveys to ensure all consultations provided an opportunity to build the community and stakeholder knowledge pertaining to child and family programming and services.

The data utilized includes:

- Toronto Aboriginal Research Project (2011)
- TASSC Community Report Card Survey (2015)
- TASSC Visioning A Liveable City Discussion Circles (2017)
- TASSC Honouring Our Community Report Back and Action Plan (2017)
- SN Management Indigenous Families Survey Response (2017)
- Well Living House* - Our Health Counts Toronto Preliminary data

*Well Living House has an Indigenous research mandate within St. Michael's Hospital

Continued engagement

Children's Services will continue to support the Aboriginal Advisory and Planning Committee as a working table of the Toronto Child & Family Network, as committed to in the Children's Services' 2015-2019 Service Plan. We expect the strength and reach of this table to grow as new relationships established through the Journey Together needs assessment process are nurtured through continued partnership.

Children's Services will also develop an Indigenous early years system plan alongside the 2020-2024 service plan. This system plan will be informed by the completed needs assessment and ongoing engagement with Indigenous service providers, children and families. This system plan will continue to identify gaps and barriers for Indigenous children and families, guiding Children's Services' actions towards addressing systemic issues for Indigenous families.

Children's Services will also continue to apply the recommendations outlined in the Raising the Village Indigenous Outcomes Report (developed by the Aboriginal Advisory and Planning Committee in 2015), partnering to establish benchmarks for indicators of child and family well-being for Indigenous communities.

TASSC is an active member of the Children's Services Aboriginal Advisory and Planning Committee and will ensure council related research and priorities are known to the committee; in return Children's Services will provide presentations at the request of TASSC to ensure on-going consultations and updates on early years programming and services for Indigenous families. Children's Services will also provide periodic impact updates to the City of Toronto's Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee, made up of Indigenous support service organizations, universities, and representation from the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nations.

Early years programs and services: user demographics, available programs, and current gaps and needs affecting Indigenous children and families

Indigenous communities in Toronto

Toronto is home to the largest and most diverse urban Indigenous population in Ontario. Indigenous communities in Toronto are vibrant and growing. Strongest representation making up Toronto's Indigenous communities include the Anishnawbe, Cree, Haudenosaune, Micmac, Metis, and Inuit people. There are also several generations of urban Indigenous families, born and raised in Toronto, who have their own unique identities and needs. As a large urban area, Toronto is also a draw to a large population of Indigenous youth and Two-Spirit families and individuals looking for peer support, safety, and opportunities.

The Statistics Canada (2011) National Household Survey (NHS) estimates that there are 19,265 Indigenous people in Toronto. However, new data confirms that Indigenous people are drastically under-represented in Statistics Canada census data. The 'Our Health Counts' (OHC) study conducted by Well Living House estimates that Toronto's Indigenous adult population is 45,000 – 60,000, and Toronto's Indigenous child population is 10,000 – 14,000 (Rotondi et al., 2017). The number of Indigenous children ages 0-5 ranges from 4108 (conservative) to 5751 (non-conservative) (Well Living House, 2017). Approximately 30% of Indigenous adults are parents who have children under 18 years old (Well Living House, 2017). OHC found that 93% of children identify as First Nations, the most common First Nations were Ojibway, Cree, and Mi'kmaq (Well Living House, 2017).

Poverty is a devastating lived reality for Indigenous families in Toronto. According to OHC, approximately 84% of Indigenous families with children were living below the poverty line (understood in this study to be the before tax Low Income Cut Off, or LICO, measure) (Polanyi, Wilson, Mustachi, Ekra, & Kerr, 2017). To contrast with the wider population of Toronto, approximately 27% of families live in poverty. The burden of poverty in Indigenous communities is crushing, exacerbating intergenerational legacies of trauma and keeping Indigenous children and families cycling through crisis and instability.

Indigenous families often report having children living with special needs compared to the overall population of families in Toronto, and of those, 18% of parents experienced barriers to accessing supports for concerns about their children's development (Maddox, Wolfe, & Smylie, 2017). OHC found that 1 in 4 caregivers have been concerned about their child's development, but only 3% have been referred to a

behavioural or developmental specialist (Maddox et al., 2017). There are no Indigenous specific supports in Toronto for Indigenous children living with special needs.

Indigenous families identify as LGBTQ and/or Two-Spirit and have specific needs and face particular challenges. However, there are no specific supports for Two-Spirit families offered by mainstream LGBTQ organizations or Indigenous organizations, including children's support services.

Child Protection Agency (CPA) involvement was found to be more likely for families living below the poverty line, who have a high school level education or less, and who are experiencing homelessness. CPA involvement in the lives of Indigenous families stretches back generations, and the intergenerational impact of child apprehension is also well documented (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The violence of colonization which resulted in residential schools, the 60's scoop, policies and practices that aimed to suppress and eliminate Indigenous families, were a form of cultural genocide (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

The implementation of these policies has involved the involuntary removal of generations of Indigenous children from their families through residential schools and Child Protection Agencies. Structural factors, such as inadequate housing, poverty, and limited access to adequate health care continue to leave Indigenous families at risk of CPA involvement. Children who have grown up in care themselves are more likely to experience these structural disadvantages. A focus on structural risks, such as poverty rather than individual parenting can provide space for supportive parenting to thrive and keep families safely together.

Source: (Maddox et al., 2017)

When Indigenous parents reflect on their parenting practices, OHC found that Indigenous parents are competent and confident in their skills. For example, nearly all parents agreed that 'in most situations, they know what to do to ensure their child behaves' and that they are 'able to do things to improve their child's behaviour (Maddox et al., 2017).

Available child care and family programs and services

Licensed Centre-Based Child Care:

- Indigenous child care is available through Native Child and Family Services Toronto (NCFST) at the Native Child and Family Life Centre in east Scarborough offering 56 spaces for infants; toddlers; preschool; kindergarten before and after school program
- NCFST also runs 4 Aboriginal Head Start programs at – three – Kiiwednong Aboriginal Head Start – 2784 Keele St (Keele / Wilson Ave.) and Shaawnong

Aboriginal Head Start – 935 Dundas St E (Dundas / Broadview) – Waabanong
Aboriginal Head Start – 156 Galloway Road (Kingston / Galloway)

Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres (OEYCFC) Programs:

- The Aboriginal Early Years Centre (AEYC) is operated by Native Child and Family Services of Toronto and is located in the downtown core
- Six OEYCFC service providers identified that Indigenous families utilize their services and programs, including: East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club; Northwood Neighbourhood Centre; Toronto Catholic District School (TCDSB); Toronto District Schoolboard (TDSB); and the STOP Community Food Centre

Programs Offered By Indigenous Agencies:

Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto:

- Aboriginal Healthy Babies, Healthy Children is offered by Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto
- Cap-C and CPNP is offered through Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto's Piimatisiwin program
- Winter Solstice Celebration for children and families

Native Child and Family Services:

- Scarborough Life Centre provides 56 spaces for children 0 to 6 and children's programming including sports, dance, arts and drama, homework club, and summer camp
- Aboriginal Early Years Centre including drop-in, community kitchen, children's clothing bank, parent relief, yoga, and monthly cultural events
- Aboriginal Head Start Programs (children and families 2.5 to 6 years)
- Summer camps at Lake Grundy
- Cap-C and CPNP programs
- Aboriginal Healthy Babies Healthy Children (Ninoshe)
- Children's Mental Health Program (Mooka'am)
- Annual Children and Family Pow wow

Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre

- The Little Embers and Akwe:go program includes afterschool programming for children 7 to 12 years including First Fire Dance, All Nations Junior Drum Group, after school programming
- Monthly Youth and Family Socials
- Annual Pow wow

Anishnawbe Health Toronto

- Ni-wii Noodin Abinochii FASD Parent and Caregiver Support Group

- Oshkii Children and Family Programming
- Maternal Infant Program

Gaps and needs affecting Indigenous children and families

Key themes that emerged from consultations with the diverse stakeholders include the need for:

- Increased access to Indigenous cultural programming for families and children including accessible ways to learn Indigenous languages.
- Opportunities for families and children to engage around Indigenous cultural knowledge on the land within the city.
- Culturally safe parenting programs for fathers.
- Intensive prenatal and postnatal supports for Indigenous families and infants.
- The need for greater access to Indigenous Child and Family Centres and Indigenous child care programs located across Toronto
- The need for mobile child and family programs in order to increase the reach of new Indigenous Child and Family Centres in serving families who live outside of their immediate neighbourhood.

Overall identified gaps in early years programs and services for Indigenous children and families include:

- **Indigenous families need and want more supports, programs and services.** Overwhelmingly, families, children and service providers expressed through the needs assessment that more supports, programs and services are needed and wanted.
- **A lack of service distribution for Indigenous-specific early years programs and services.** Services for Indigenous families are concentrated in the downtown core and at one location in east-Scarborough. There are no coordinated mobile child and family services that serve families in places where families gather. For example, through the needs assessment process, it was understood that concentrations of Indigenous families are living in specific neighbourhoods where few or no Indigenous services are offered. Mobile child and family programs and services, new sites for Indigenous Early Year Centres (where child care programs and child and family centres are co-located) and the addition of transportation provision to child care programs will address this service gap.
- **Mainstream services are accessed by Indigenous children and families but may not meet their needs.** Though Indigenous families confirm attendance at mainstream child and family programs across the city, families consistently report that these services are not culturally inclusive and that sometimes families don't

feel welcome. In local research commissioned by Children's Services and by the Aboriginal Advisory and Planning Committee as well as findings from the needs assessment demonstrate that Indigenous families want access to Indigenous specific programs and services that honour the unique diversities of Indigenous communities in Toronto (for example, programs that are inclusive of many Indigenous cultural practices, are accessible to children who have special needs as well as Two-Spirit families), while at the same time having access to mainstream programs and services that are also welcoming and culturally informed. An intentional plan for capacity building within the child and family sector in Toronto will aim to address this service gap.

- **Programs and services need to be tailored to the needs of children and families across the age and gender spectrum.** Programs where fathers and young men who are planning to be fathers were identified as a gap through the needs assessment process. Because many Indigenous families identify as Two-Spirit, there is a need for welcoming and inclusive programming even within programs that are tailored. For example, programs for 'fathers' and 'mothers' need to be designed and delivered to be inclusive of genderqueer, trans, and Two-Spirit identified community members. Developmentally appropriate programs for children from birth to six years old that facilitate engagement with Indigenous languages and cultures are a gap that was also identified. Culturally safe parenting programs for fathers, and mobile programs for land-based and Indigenous language programs would address these needs.
- **Programs and services need to welcome the whole family.** Indigenous communities hold a worldview that is often expansive in understanding who is part of the circle of family life. Mainstream service and program delineations that exclude the middle years from child and family centre programming are not in line with this worldview. Further, who is a caregiver in the life of an Indigenous child may be a grandparent, cousin, aunt, uncle or potentially a foster parent. Programs and services need to welcome the caregivers in a child's life and not limit the scope of programming to normative, western understandings of family composition.
- **Families and children want to connect to their culture through language and being on the land.** Families want more access to programs that teach Indigenous languages to babies, children, and caregivers. Children are also enthusiastic to learn or improve their knowledge of Indigenous languages. Families and children want more opportunities to get out on the land to grow food, to perform ceremonies, and to learn about Indigenous culture and history through land-based programs. Cultural continuity has been interrupted by colonization and cultural genocide, resulting in the loss of Indigenous languages and traditions. Strengthening identity through connections to language and

culture can improve outcomes for families, and fosters healthy communities and relationships between family members (Raising The Village, 2016).

- **Families need intensive prenatal, perinatal and postnatal services to support better outcomes.** According to OHC Toronto, Indigenous mothers are at increased risk of experiencing maternal stress, lack of social support, poverty and medical conditions compared to the general population. Pregnant mothers were more likely to experience diabetes during pregnancy: 13% of Indigenous mothers had diabetes versus 6% in the overall population of pregnant mothers in Ontario (Wolfe, Maddox, & Smylie, 2017).

Indigenous newborns were 2.6 times as likely as the overall population in Ontario and nationally to be born prematurely, and 57% of Indigenous infants born prematurely were admitted to a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) (Wolfe et al., 2017). OHC found that the proportion of Indigenous babies admitted to a NICU is 20% of all Indigenous babies born locally, which is in contrast to the overall statistics for Ontario (13%) and nationally (11%) (Wolfe et al., 2017). Indigenous infants are also much more likely to stay longer in the NICU than the Ontario average (Wolfe et al., 2017). Service providers have noted that long stays in the NICU can be extremely stressful for Indigenous families, especially if they are socially isolated or if they have flown in from a community in Northern Ontario to give birth in Toronto.

These extensive findings indicate the need for intensive prenatal, perinatal and postnatal supports that are infused with cultural programming and activities. There is evidence that culturally safe supports have positive impacts: OHC found that participation by parents in traditional Indigenous ceremony (including smudge, sweat lodge, fast healing Quilliq or Kudlik lamp lighting ceremony) were associated with lower odds of preterm birth (Wolfe et al., 2017).

- **Families want expanded choices and options.** Families want diversity among early years service providers and are not content with the landscape as it exists now. Indigenous families also want more choices in terms of hours and times of day for programs, citing evenings and weekends as important time slots. Families are also open to attending Indigenous specific programming delivered by Indigenous organizations in a variety of locations including schools, community centres, libraries, and out on the land in local parks and forests.
- **A lack of culturally specific programs for Inuit and Metis children and families.** New and existing organizations including the Toronto Inuit Association and the Metis Nation of Ontario are developing or delivering some culturally specific programming or community development events for children and families. Because programming for both communities is limited, families report being willing to travel far distances to access culturally specific programming for

themselves and their children. A pan-Indigenous approach to Indigenous early years programming is to be avoided, and further consultation with both Metis and Indigenous children and families is needed to best meet their needs as early years programs expand.

- **A lack of welcoming and inclusive programs for Two-Spirit children and families.** As explored above, Two-Spirit families are not served well by mainstream LGBTQ organizations, or by Indigenous organizations. Within mainstream LGBTQ organizations, Two-Spirit families may experience racism and discrimination. Within Indigenous organizations, Two-Spirit families may face homophobia or transphobia. Mainstream child and family programs are often not adept at serving either LGBTQ2S families or Indigenous families, creating real and significant service gaps for Two-Spirit children and families. Further consultation and supported, resourced community development is needed to create programs that best meet the needs of Two-Spirit children and families.
- **No culturally specific connections for children living with special needs.** Caregivers who participated in OHC have been concerned about their child’s development (Maddox et al., 2017). Of those concerned, the most commonly cited reasons include:
 - Mental/Intellectual
 - Speech/Language
 - Social
 - Emotional
 - Physical
 - Spiritual

Source: (Maddox et al., 2017)

Most prevalent child development and learning challenges that have been identified by teaching/health care professionals include:

- Learning disability
- Speech / language difficulties
- Attention deficit disorder
- Cognitive or mental disability

Source: (Maddox et al., 2017)

Common challenges identified by teaching/health professionals include:

- Autism spectrum
- Blindness/Vision problems
- FAD
- Hearing Impairment
- Physical Disability

Source: (Maddox et al., 2017)

Many families with children who are living with special needs face significant barriers to accessing supports for their child's development (Maddox et al., 2017). Some barriers identified include:

- Support was not culturally safe
- Lack of trust in provider
- Waiting list was too long
- Could not afford transportation to the support or service
- The provider was not available

Source: (Maddox et al., 2017)

For more information, the OHC Toronto Community Report was made publicly available at the Native Canadian Centre on February 28, 2018 and on the [Seventh Generation Midwives Toronto](#) and [Well Living House](#) websites.

Indigenous families need more support in navigating services and making referrals. Special Needs agencies need to examine their readiness and ability to serve Indigenous families with culturally informed supports. Further, in a parallel needs assessment, it was found that parents overall in Toronto find many barriers to accessing child and family programs because the built environment or program activities are not accessible. Some parents also reported that staff are not always informed and able to support parents or children in the space, or make appropriate referrals. These findings apply to Indigenous families. With the expansion of Indigenous early years programs and services in Toronto, there is an opportunity to connect with the Special Needs Strategy leads in conducting further consultation with Indigenous children and families living with special needs in order to create new built environments and programs that are accessible to all Indigenous children.

- **Families need transportation supports in order to access child care and child and families programs and services.** In consultations with Indigenous families and service providers through this needs assessment process and in local research conducted in the past, we have heard that transportation is a key barrier to address. Families need transportation supports to attend both child care and child and family programs because of the many structural barriers faced by Indigenous families, including poverty. Further, in Toronto, public transportation is not always efficient outside the downtown core, creating long travel times that can be a deterrent to attending programs for some families. In addition to transportation support, Indigenous early years programs need to be disbursed equitably throughout the city to lessen the length of travel time for Indigenous children and families.

Child care and child and family programs: desired outcomes for Indigenous children and families, short and long term goals

Short term goals

In the short term, local goals are to increase the number of Indigenous early years programs and services both in terms of the volume of programming available and locations. This increased access will result in better well-being outcomes for Indigenous children and families.

Long term outcomes

In the long term, outcomes, in addition to the shared outcomes of Raising the Village, for Indigenous families will be measured using indicators under development through Well Living House and community working tables. The five outcomes identified in 'Raising the Village: Measuring the Well-being of Indigenous Children and Families in Toronto', include:

- **Self-knowledge:** Indigenous children and families have knowledge of, take pride in, and have opportunities to express their identity.
- **Strong Families:** Indigenous families, including all generations, are able to cope with challenges, meet their goals, and foster their culture and identity.
- **Vibrant Communities:** Indigenous communities are diverse, vibrant, growing, and connected, and provide a source of strength for children and families.
- **Cultural Equity:** Indigenous children and families experience their cultural identity and way of being with dignity and respect.
- **Self-Determination:** Indigenous communities are able to make decisions that improve the well-being of their children, families, and communities as a whole.

For more information, the OHC Toronto Community Report and 'Raising the Village' factsheets have been made publicly available at the Native Canadian Centre since February 28, 2018.

Child care and child and family programs in the local community: additional relevant information

Middle Childhood

Through the needs assessment, gaps and barriers for older children (ages 7 to 12) emerged. There is a significant lack of programming and supports for this age group. Because Indigenous worldviews often include the entire family across the lifespan, consulting on the delineated 'early years' 0-6 years of age mandate was sometimes met with critique. Further, because Indigenous families are often larger and intergenerational, the inability of children in the middle childhood years to be served by child and family centres seemed counterproductive to building strong families and communities, as a lack of programming in a centre for older children may prevent families with multiple children from attending if older children will not be engaged.

Further, when consulted, children had great ideas about what kinds of activities they would like to see in after-school programs including: drama, sports, baking/cooking, dance, swimming, gardening, singing/drumming, and rock climbing.

Workforce Development Strategy

Discussions and planning are underway to develop a workforce development strategy to increase the number of Indigenous Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) in Toronto. The whole sector is facing a deficit in the number of RECEs needed to run quality early learning and child care programs. With new requirements for RECEs to be employed in Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres, these pressures will only increase. Indigenous young people need to be engaged while in high school, college and university to increase awareness of the field and its meaningful work. We will also work with TASSC, local Indigenous employment agency Miziwe Biik, Toronto Employment and Social Services, local RECE programs and the College of Registered ECEs to develop a strategy that assists interested community members to enter the field.

A further note on workforce development is that other barriers emerged through the needs assessment regarding to entry into professional roles. Many job applicants indicated that they were screened out of social service positions that require a driver's licence and access to a vehicle. Given the level of poverty in Indigenous communities and the urban environment of Toronto, this often excludes Indigenous community members with the needed skills to do the job, who lack the car and license. We hope to work with Miziwe Biik to discern if licensing is possible through their funding for interested community members, and if creative solutions like car shares (Car-to-Go, AutoShare, etc.) could be utilized when necessary.

Gaps in Consultation with Toronto's Indigenous Community

Many provincial ministries across Ontario rely on their provincial partners (OFIFC, MNO, ONWA) to provide consultation and research on the urban Indigenous reality. The provincial partners rely heavily on the consultation and statistics of their member or affiliate agencies. The large majority of Indigenous organizations across Toronto are stand-alone agencies are not affiliated with the provincial partners. As a result, Toronto's Indigenous reality is left out with no consultation. When consultations do occur, it is limited to the 20% of Indigenous support service agencies in Toronto that are affiliates with provincial partners. This of course limits the reliability of the data, minimizes the potential to address challenges or understand opportunities, concentrates and distributes program funding to a select few, and undermines self-determination efforts.

Program impacts important to Indigenous children and families and potential measurement strategies

Program impacts important to Indigenous children and families are outlined in the table below:

PROGRAM	IMPACT	MEASURES
Indigenous Early Years Centres and Childcare	Families feel safe attending programming – physical, emotional, spiritual	Questions ranking physical, spiritual, and emotional safety on intake, 3 month follow up, and 6 month follow up Parents annual discussion circle solicits opinions on safety of program
Indigenous Early Years Centres and Childcare	Family stress is reduced by having increased support and options for children’s programming and childcare	Number of referrals from community members Level of participation of families in programming and events over time Number of families sharing stories around programming and its connection to family wellbeing
Indigenous Early Years Centres and Childcare	Increased confidence in parenting skills	Level of confidence in parenting skills goes up from intake, 3 month follow up, and 6 month follow up.
Indigenous Early Years Centres and Childcare	Decreased sense of isolation	Decreased sense of isolation on intake, 3 month follow up, and 6 month follow up.
Indigenous Early Years Centres and Childcare	Increased resiliency of children	Increases in children’s developmental assessment over short term. Parents provide positive feedback.

PROGRAM	IMPACT	MEASURES
Indigenous Early Years Centres and Childcare	Increased knowledge and practice of culture and traditions	Children and families have working knowledge and confidence in practicing language, ceremonies, singing, drumming. Parents can link exposure to cultural knowledge and practice with family healing and wellness.

Needs and outcomes addressed by proposed programs, alignment with regional service system plans and government direction and priorities

Key themes that emerged from consultations with the diverse stakeholders include the need for increased access to Indigenous cultural programming for families and children including accessible ways to learn Indigenous languages and opportunities for families and children to engage around Indigenous cultural knowledge on the land within the city. Other needs that surfaced through the assessment process include culturally safe parenting programs for fathers as well as intensive prenatal and postnatal supports for Indigenous families and infants.

Based on the findings of the needs assessment, proposals have been developed that include specialized support and cultural programs for children and families, as well as enhancements to existing Indigenous child care and child and family programs already offered by Native Child and Family Services Toronto.

Proposals also include the development of 'Indigenous Early Years Centres' in specific neighbourhoods across Toronto where new Indigenous child care centres and child and family centres will be co-located. Co-locating child care with a child and family centre provides opportunities for programs to share equipment and space (for example, children attending the child care program could have access to a gross motor room in the child and family centre). Co-location of child and family programs with child care is also recommended in Indigenous research studies; child and family centres can act as a 'hook' for families in connecting caregivers with services, including child care. These centres are envisioned as gathering places where children and families can receive holistic support, make connections and participate in Indigenous cultural programming. To ensure further wrap-around supports, child care staff complements will be enhanced through the addition of a family support/outreach worker to facilitate connections between families and other support services as well as link Indigenous families in the community to the child care program. The staff complement will also be enhanced by a Traditional Knowledge Keeper and apprentice who will support early childhood educators in providing culturally relevant programming and a culturally safe space for Indigenous children and families.

Overall, this proposed expansion will create approximately 150 culturally relevant child care spaces for Indigenous children. Indigenous early years centres are proposed for the West Don Lands and East York neighbourhoods. An Indigenous early years centre focused on serving Two-Spirit children and families is proposed for the downtown core. A standalone child and family centre in Eglinton East-Kennedy Park is proposed to better serve Indigenous families in Scarborough. A standalone child and family centre is also proposed for the Mount Dennis neighbourhood, in addition to a new Indigenous child care program intended to occupy space in Neekanan, an Indigenous second stage housing program for women and children, in the same neighbourhood.

Program proposals include funding for mobile child and family programs to be provided across the city, and for a special needs resource staff position to increase capacity within the early years system to support Indigenous children who have special needs. If funded, these proposals will weave a blanket of services across Toronto for Indigenous children and families, led by Indigenous agencies.

This expansion could also lead to better outcomes for Indigenous families by providing good, well-paying jobs in a rewarding and growing sector. As explored above, poverty is a reality for 81% of Indigenous families in Toronto. Indigenous families need child care and child and family programs to help foster their innate resiliencies as well as good jobs that address the structural barriers associated with living in poverty. These proposals combined in their full budget form propose the addition of approximately 140 new jobs, with wages that are proposed at the maximum under the Toronto Child Care and Toronto Child and Family Program guidelines. While individual agencies will administer programs in line with their staffing models and pay scales, we hope by starting with proposals that have robust funding for staff roles, this will facilitate an increase in well-paying, professional jobs available to Indigenous communities in Toronto.

Toronto Children's Services identified in its 2015-2019 Service Plan the need to explore how to increase access to culturally specific child care that is responsive to the communities realities. Journey Together provides the opportunity to achieve this and to potentially have resources that will assist in addressing some of the systemic barriers that families face in accessing child care (new funding approach). With the transfer of responsibility of child and family programs to the City of Toronto, as Service System Manager, Children's Services has at the same time as Journey Together engaged in a process to develop the Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres (OEYCFC) Initial Plan. The consultation process used for the OEYCFC Initial Plan had an Indigenous focus that dovetailed and supported the proposals of Journey Together.

Increasing access to services in Toronto: how our proposed programs fit

The programs proposed under the Journey Together initiative will increase access to services within Toronto by:

- Addressing needs across Toronto through physical locations with transportation (child care) and mobile services (CFC) attached.
- Increasing culturally specific child care spaces for Indigenous families, and supports within new and existing programs.
- Increase the number of specialized support programs for: fathers; families and infants during the prenatal/perinatal/postnatal periods; land-based programming; and Indigenous language learning opportunities for children and families.
- Better support children who have special needs by increasing supports and building capacity in staff at Indigenous child and family centres, Indigenous child care centres and Indigenous agencies that serve children. Also increase access in the built environment by building new centres in ways that are inclusive, engaging and exciting for all children.
- Raise awareness of the needs of Indigenous children and families throughout the mainstream child and family sector in order to ensure families can access Indigenous specific supports, but can also use the programs and services that are close to home and still receive safe and informed care.

Indigenous Funding Model

Given the high proportion of Indigenous families who live below the poverty line, Indigenous child care must be affordable, and must mitigate the barriers of the child care fee subsidy system if at all possible. In addition, because Indigenous child care programs are intended to offer high quality early learning and care environments in order to mitigate vulnerabilities and at the same time connect Indigenous children and families to language, culture and community, our needs assessment found that it's also important to ensure middle-class Indigenous families are able to access these programs through an affordable fee.

Children's Services will continue to implement its current strategies for mitigating the barriers of accessing a child care fee subsidy for the Indigenous community. This has been a successful measure at the current child care location through Native Child and Family Services. However, a number of additional barriers need to be address. As outlined in Toronto's Licensed Child Care Growth Strategy cost is one of the most important factors impacting a caregiver's decision to use licensed child care. Through modelling it is understood that if parent fees were reduced significantly many more families would access licensed care. The ideal solution is a fully base funded program that can be managed and governed by the Indigenous community. Without this, proposals have included modeling that reaches the Growth Strategy goal of a 40%

reduction in the average Toronto fees and increasing the operating grant significantly. This is one option that may be explored.

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