



# EarlyON Action Plan ( 2 0 1 8 - 2 0 2 0 )



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## Toronto's EarlyON Mission Statement

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EarlyON Child and Family Centres:

support families and promote healthy child development by building strong connections and facilitating access to services that enhance well-being;

provide free, inclusive programs delivered by qualified professionals for families, caregivers and children (prenatal to six years of age), and;

reflect their communities and respond to local needs by working with other health and social service providers and program participants.

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## Director's Greeting

We all share an interest in building a better city. And it begins with the early years.

After assuming responsibility for EarlyON Child and Family Centres earlier this year, the City of Toronto and the EarlyON sector are taking important steps to transform how we deliver programs and services for families.

We know that accessibility, quality and equity must be embedded into everything we do. That is why we are taking a strategic approach to planning so we can ensure families have greater access to services across the city. For example, we are creating two new EarlyON centres that will provide programming in some Toronto's most underserved communities. Investments are also being made to establish programming specifically aimed at supporting Indigenous, Francophone and LGBTQ2S families. And we are taking important steps to enhance the capacity of all centres to deliver responsive, culturally-relevant services.

We also know that collaboration will be essential for transforming the EarlyON sector. Over 270 sites provide invaluable services that make a difference in the lives of thousands of children, families and caregivers each year. Now is the time to recognize the workforce that is integral to supporting families by recognizing achievements and investing in a strategic professional learning plan. Earlier this year, the City increased each EarlyON centre's annual operating funding by 3% and established a program enhancement grant to help centres purchase new materials and toys. As we progress through the EarlyON transformation, we will leverage our partnerships with the sector, community leaders and families to create new opportunities to strengthen the early years workforce.

Finally, we know that a modern EarlyON system must allow families to learn about, and gain access to, the full suite of Toronto's social programs. Building innovative partnerships across government and non-government services will help us create this more holistic approach to service delivery that Torontonians expect and deserve.

This Action Plan has been informed by the EarlyON sector and outlines how Toronto's vision for the early years and care system will be achieved through an ambitious series of Action Items. Through EarlyON, our intention is to create a community-led, city-managed resource that provides all families with the local supports that they need. This Action Plan will help us do that.

This is an exciting time for families, for the early years sector and for our city! We look forward to building Toronto's EarlyON child and family system with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Gray". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Karen Gray

Director, Service System Planning & Policy, Children's Services  
City of Toronto



# EarlyON Action Plan: Transforming Toronto's EarlyON Sector (2018-2020)

## Purpose of the Action Plan

Over the past year, TCS has engaged in an ambitious public engagement strategy to shed light on the type of EarlyON sector that is needed to meet the diverse needs of children and families in Toronto. Informed through a needs assessment, conversations with service providers and families, the formation of advisory and working tables and sector-wide strategic planning days, the City of Toronto has been able to take immediate steps to strengthen the early years system (see Appendix I for a more detailed description of the public engagement strategy).

This public engagement has also helped us develop a values-driven and evidence-informed approach – which includes a clear vision, mission, and goals – to guide the City's work in creating a high-quality, accessible and equitable EarlyON sector. This Action Plan serves as a road map to guide TCS, EarlyON service providers and the broader community services sector in transforming and enhancing EarlyON Child and Family Centres in Toronto.

What follows is a blueprint that will be universally applied to all service providers across the city. It outlines how Toronto's vision for the early years and care system will be achieved through an ambitious series of Action Items. These Action Items consist of processes and tools that will help us create greater consistency across the EarlyON sector. They also include approaches that will ensure EarlyON Centres reach and support traditionally marginalized communities, including Indigenous and Francophone families. Through EarlyON, our intention is to create a community-led,

city-managed resource that provides all families with the local supports that they need. This Action Plan will help us do that.

Importantly, this Action Plan sets forth an approach that provides clarity – for families, caregivers, service providers, government partners and the general public – on what the EarlyON system will look like, how we can collectively transform it, and the ways in which EarlyON will contribute to Toronto's vision for the early years and care system.

TCS developed the following logic model to help demonstrate how each component of the Action Plan – the vision, mission statement, goals and action items – all relate and contribute to one another. This visual representation is explained in greater detail in the pages that follow.

**1. Toronto's vision for the broader early years and care system**

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 partnerships; and

The system is nimble, responsive, integrated, and accountable.

(Source: TCS Service Plan 2015-19)

**4. Toronto's EarlyON Mission Statement**

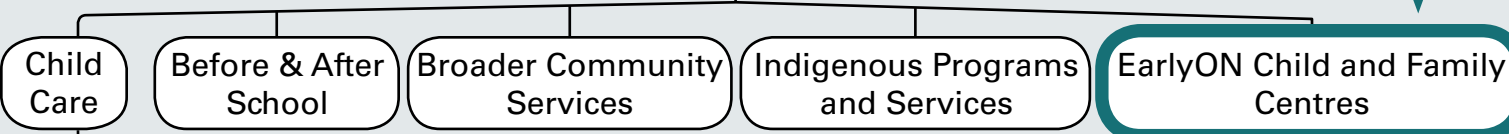
EarlyON Child and Family Centres:

support families and promote healthy child development by building strong connections and facilitating access to services that enhance well-being;

provide free, inclusive programs delivered by qualified professionals for families, caregivers and children (prenatal to six years of age), and;

reflect their communities and respond to local needs by working with other health and social service providers and program participants.

**2. Programs contributing to Toronto's early years and care vision**



**3. Child and Family Outcomes**

**Indigenous children and family outcomes**

- Self Knowledge
- Strong Families
- Vibrant Communities
- Cultural Equity
- Self-Determination

**Family outcomes**

- Family Health
- Resilience & Support
- Lifelong Learning
- Financial Security
- Community & Culture

**Child outcomes**

- Physical Health & Development
- Mental Health & Social Development
- Learning & Education
- Rights & Opportunities
- Nurture & Care

**5. Goals for the EarlyON sector**

**Increased Access:** All EarlyON Centres will provide access to an integrated, inclusive early childhood and family system that provides a "no wrong door" approach to accessing community services.

**Greater Equity:** All EarlyON Centres will apply an equity lens to their programs to ensure services are responsive to the diverse needs of Toronto's families.

**Higher Quality:** All EarlyON Centres will offer consistent, high-quality services that are guided by evidence informed standards and evaluation tools.

(Source: Intended Impact Statements)

**6. How EarlyON service providers contribute to the EarlyON goals**

**Engaging Parents & Caregivers**

Offering information, supportive programs and targeted outreach opportunities to support their role

**Supporting Early Learning & Development**

Drop-in and other programs that encourage children's exploration, play and inquiry

**Making Connections for Families**

Responding to concerns, facilitating connections and providing information



**7. How Toronto Children's Service contributes to the EarlyON goals**

- Advancing evidence-informed planning**
- Establishing program standards and enhancing inclusion**
- Building TCS' capacity to collect and evaluate data**
- Supporting EarlyON sector in professional learning and capacity-building**
- Strengthening communications with the sector and the public**





# Describing the Key Components of the EarlyON Action Plan

## 1. Toronto's Vision for the Broader Early Years and Care System

Children and families are an integral part of a healthy, vibrant, and equitable Toronto. In TCS' 2015-19 Service Plan, we set out an ambitious vision to ensure alignment across the entire early years and care system, including child care, EarlyON Child and Family Centres, before and after school programs, and special needs services. Our vision is to build an integrated early learning and care system 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 partnerships; and
- The system is nimble, responsive, integrated, and accountable.

## 2. Programs Contributing to Toronto's Early Years and Care Vision

The combined work of all child and family services will be needed to achieve the ambitious vision outlined for Toronto's early years and care system. Those services include:

- Child care centres;
- Before and after school programs;
- Broader community services;
- Indigenous programs and services, and;
- EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

Each of these services - through their individual and coordinated work - are contributing to building a more inclusive, healthy and vibrant city. By helping to realize the vision for the early years and care system, they are also moving the City towards realizing a series of long-term child and family outcomes that have been identified for Toronto's early years and care system.

## 3. Child and Family Outcomes

EarlyON Child and Family Centres provide access to a broad network of health and social services that can meet the unique needs of all families. As a free service, EarlyON centres help increase access to the broad range of programs offered by the City and other community partners. EarlyON centres provide referrals and partner with other organizations such as Toronto Public Health to enhance programming. The result is a more integrated and valuable experience for children and families.

Service integration is coordinated at a systems level by the Toronto Child & Family Network (TC&FN). TC&FN brings together education, health and social systems from across the city to positively impact the lives of children and families. Collectively, the TC&FN works together to improve quality, access and seamless service pathways, so that all children and families in Toronto experience well-being. The TC&FN engages in cross-system integration work that aims to improve shared child and family outcomes detailed in [Raising the Village](#).

In partnership with the Indigenous community, TC&FN has also identified a separate but complementary set of outcomes for Indigenous children and families, reflecting the specific needs, cultures and worldviews of Toronto's diverse Indigenous communities.

The following child and family outcomes describe the well being that we hope all children and families in Toronto experience. To help achieve these outcomes, TCS will continue to support the development of culturally-relevant policies and programs and seek advice from families, experts, service providers and system leaders, including TCFN's Indigenous Advisory Committee and the Francophone Advisory Committee.

## 4. Toronto's EarlyON Mission Statement

The following mission statement is intended to create a shared understanding of the EarlyON system that Toronto is seeking to establish and clarify how EarlyON contributes to the city's broader early years and care sector. Importantly, it provides guidance to TCS, service providers and program staff on how to focus their day-to-day activities.

Achieving this mission statement will require the collective effort and activities of service providers, broader community services, Indigenous organizations, French-speaking organizations, and Toronto Children's Services working together. It will also require the establishment of medium-term goals that can act as milestones to achieving this mission statement.



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### EarlyON Child and Family Centres:

support families and promote healthy child development by building strong connections and facilitating access to services that enhance well-being;

provide free, inclusive programs delivered by qualified professionals for families, caregivers and children (prenatal to six years of age), and;

reflect their communities and respond to local needs by working with other health and social service providers and program participants.

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## TC&FN's Child and Family Outcomes

### Child Outcomes

- **Physical Health & Development:** Children are both healthy, and reach their optimal physical health and development.
- **Mental Health & Social Development:** Children have the social, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being to reach their potential.
- **Learning & Education:** Children are engaged and curious learners, gain knowledge and skills, and have educational success
- **Rights & Opportunities:** Children's rights are fulfilled: they have opportunities for personal development and participate in decisions about their lives.
- **Nurture & Care:** Children have safe, nurturing and positive environments that encourage learning and development

### Family Outcomes

- **Family Health:** Families experience optimal individual physical and mental health, and contribute to the growth and development of each family member.
- **Resilience & Support:** Families are able to cope with challenges, and have consistent support through social networks and appropriate services.
- **Lifelong Learning:** Families have equitable access to learning and training, and are active in their children's education.
- **Financial Security:** Families have material well-being and an equitable standard of living.
- **Community & Culture:** Families belong to communities, and have the freedom to express, and opportunities to foster, their culture and identity.



## Indigenous Children and Family Outcomes

In addition to the ten child and family outcomes, we want outcomes for Indigenous children and families that reflect the specific needs, cultures and worldviews of Toronto's diverse Indigenous communities. The Indigenous outcomes below were developed in partnership with the Indigenous community.

- **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.

Source: Raising the Village

## 5. Goals for the EarlyON Sector

Medium-term goals (to be completed by 2020) are helpful in ensuring the sector's day-to-day activities are focused in a clear direction, and ultimately contribute to the broader mission statement and vision. Knowing where the sector is going helps to build the road to get there. This level of clarity also helps system leaders see their role in it.

At the Strategic Planning Day meeting in February 2018, participants identified the following ambitious goals that will guide the day-to-day activities of TCS and service providers:

- **Increased Access:** All EarlyON Centres will provide access to an integrated, inclusive early childhood and family system that provides a “no wrong door” approach to accessing community services.
- **Greater Equity:** All EarlyON Centres will apply an equity lens to their programs to ensure services are responsive to the diverse needs of Toronto's families.
- **Higher Quality:** All EarlyON Centres will offer consistent, high-quality services that are guided by evidence informed standards and evaluation tools.

These goals align with the [Government of Ontario's Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres principles](#), Toronto Child and Family Network's Equity Framework, and Family Supports Institute Ontario's (FSIO) [12 Guiding Principles](#), all of which will guide the City's activities.

## 6. How EarlyON Service Providers Contribute to the EarlyON Goals

Each day, hundreds of EarlyON directors, managers, supervisors, Early Childhood Educators and program staff are improving programs and services through the work they carry out every day. The mandatory core services, outlined by the Ministry of Education and practiced by Toronto's world-class early years workforce, are already helping to create a high quality, equitable and accessible EarlyON sector. This, in turn, is helping to realize the EarlyON goals, vision statement and vision for the broader early years and care sector.

### Engaging Parents & Caregivers

- Inviting conversations and information sharing about child development, parenting, nutrition, play and inquiry-based learning, and other topics that support their role;
- Offering responsive pre- and postnatal support programs to enhance parent and caregiver well-being, enrich adult-child interactions and to support them in their role(s);
- Providing targeted outreach opportunities designed for parents and caregivers who could benefit from Child and Family Centre programs and services

### Supporting Early Learning & Development

- Drop-in programs and other programs and services that build responsive adult-child relationships and encourage children's exploration, play and inquiry

## **Making Connections for Families**

- Responding to a parent/caregiver concern about their child's development through conversations and observations supported by validated tools and resources
- Sharing information and facilitating connections with specialized community service as appropriate.
- Ensuring Child and Family Centre staff have relationships with community partners and an in-depth knowledge of their community resources
- Providing Information about programs and services available for the whole family beyond the early years.

## **7. How TCS Contributes to the EarlyON Goals**

As the Service System Manager, TCS has an important role in play in collaborating with the sector to achieve these goals. TCS intends to work closely with the early years sector to carry out Action Items to help enhance and transform Toronto's EarlyON sector. TCS will continue to engage with families, service providers, other governments and external experts to inform our approach.

### **A. Advancing evidence-informed planning**

TCS is committed to strategically planning Toronto's EarlyON system in an evidence-informed manner to enhance access, equity and quality programming across the city. The following tools will help in this work, while ensuring greater consistency, transparency and accountability in how decisions are made.

**Action Items:**

- **Strategic Planning Day (Completed)**
  - ◇ Description: TCS hosted this full day event that brought together service providers from across Toronto to discuss strategic priorities for the new EarlyON system.
  - ◇ Outcome: TCS received advice on key planning issues, including: communications and outreach; evaluation and data; French language and Indigenous programming; professional development; program standards; special needs and social inclusion. EarlyON service providers also developed draft Intended Impact Statements.
- **Program Enhancement Grant (Completed)**
  - ◇ Description: The 2018 EarlyON Program Enhancement Grant was a one-time grant that service providers could access to update program-related materials and furnishings.
  - ◇ Outcome: Programs were able to update their materials to better reflect the populations they serve and/or ensure programs are inclusive and welcoming to families who experience barriers.
- **3% Funding Increase (Completed)**
  - ◇ Description: All EarlyON service providers received a 3% increase in operating funding to support more consistent hours, better compensated staff and better resourced programs
- **Establishing a TCS EarlyON Team (Completed)**
  - ◇ Description: Hiring TCS staff to plan, manage and support Toronto's EarlyON system.
  - ◇ Outcome: A dedicated team focused on enhancing access, equity and quality in Toronto's early years system.



- **Expanding EarlyON programming**
  - ◇ Description: In 2019, TCS is establishing two new permanent EarlyON centres – one in northwest Toronto and one in northeast Toronto – to enhance services in under-served neighbourhoods. TCS is also launching a LGBTQ2S Mobile Program that will operate in EarlyON Centres across Toronto.
  - ◇ Outcomes:
    1. Additional EarlyON programming in some of Toronto’s most under-served neighbourhoods;
    2. Provide LGBTQ2S programming in EarlyON Centres above-and-beyond what is currently offered, and;
    3. Enhance the capacity of existing EarlyON service providers to serve and meet the unique needs of LGBTQ2S families. The mobile program will be informed by a researcher and advisory group.
- **New Indigenous Programming as part of The Journey Together**
  - ◇ Description: TCS is working with Indigenous service providers to establish new Indigenous EarlyON Centres and programs across Toronto. The new investments will establish a mobile Indigenous language program, mobile land-based program, mobile Indigenous fathering program and two new Indigenous EarlyON Centres.
  - ◇ Outcome: Greater access across the city to Indigenous EarlyON Centres and programs that offer relevant and culturally-appropriate services.
- **Expansion of French-language Programming**
  - ◇ Description: TCS is expanding access to ON y va services in two French-language schools in Toronto – Académie Alexandre-Dumas and École élémentaire Gabrielle-Roy.
  - ◇ Outcome: Greater access to French-language programs for families in Toronto.

- **Planning Dashboard**
  - ◇ Description: An evidence-informed tool that incorporates a wide range of data indicators to help TCS identify neighbourhoods with the greatest need for EarlyON centres. The tool will be one of a series of steps TCS will take in deciding where to locate new/consolidated centres.
  - ◇ Outcome: Greater equity throughout the City as TCS is able to identify and direct resources to higher needs neighbourhoods.
- **EarlyON Planning Guidelines**
  - ◇ Description: A set of guidelines that will outline the processes and tools the City will use to make decisions around the design and location of EarlyON centres. The guidelines will serve as a resource for the community to better understand decision-making processes.
  - ◇ Outcome: A transparent, community and evidence-informed process for making system planning decisions related to the EarlyON sector.
- **Site Assessment Tool**
  - ◇ Description: An evidence-based tool to help TCS determine priority locations for renovations and potential relocations (e.g., new development opportunities), and to conduct initial health and safety reviews.
  - ◇ Outcome: TCS will be able to objectively assess existing EarlyON centres and prioritize where enhanced safety and quality investments are most needed.
- **Engagement Model**
  - ◇ Description: TCS will develop a long-term model to improve engagement on key issues. The model will include:
    - an annual EarlyON Sector Collaboration event to provide updates and seek advice from the EarlyON sector and the broader community service sector;

- an EarlyON Leadership Network that will focus on strategic planning;
  - EarlyON Staff Networks that will assist with professional learning and capacity-building, and;
  - Encouraging participation in existing Local Planning Tables, where EarlyON service providers can connect and coordinate with other organizations in the neighbourhood.
- ◇ Outcome: his multi-faceted engagement model will help TCS create new forums and leverage existing ones to improve information-sharing, planning, professional development and capacity-building, coordination and collaboration.
- **Cost of Service Analysis**
    - ◇ Description: TCS will conduct a thorough analysis of the diverse costs of delivering EarlyON services across Toronto.
    - ◇ Outcome: A thorough and up-to-date understanding of the costs of providing EarlyON services across Toronto. The analysis will inform the City's new funding framework.
  - **Funding Framework**
    - ◇ Description: TCS will initiate an evidence-informed approach to develop a new funding framework to inform the distribution of resources across Toronto's EarlyON centres.
    - ◇ Outcome: A new funding framework to support evidence-informed resource distribution.

## B. Establishing program standards and enhancing inclusion

TCS is working with our partners to develop the following program standards, tools and processes to enhance program quality across Toronto's EarlyON sector.

### Action Items

- **Operational Policies (Completed)**
  - ◇ Description: Comprehensive, phased updates to the operational policies and financial requirements for EarlyON service providers.
  - ◇ Outcomes: A clear description of the operational and financial requirements that all EarlyON centres are expected to implement.
- **Concept Mapping & Research**
  - ◇ Description: TCS will work with external researchers to conduct research and collect foundational data using participatory research methods to develop new EarlyON program standards and quality indicators.
  - ◇ Outcome: Enhanced shared understanding of the program expectations for all EarlyON centres within the City of Toronto, which have been informed by research, service providers, families and children.
- **Program Standards**
  - ◇ Description: TCS will develop EarlyON program standards that define requirements related to quality core services, integrated service delivery, physical space, inclusion, service intensity, access, etc.
  - ◇ Outcome: A set of clear program standards and practice indicators that EarlyON staff can use to inform the delivery of their programs. Once implemented, this will lead to a higher quality, coherent EarlyON system.

- **Inclusion Model**

- ◇ Description: TCS will examine potential models for enhancing the inclusion of children and families with extra support needs in EarlyON centres.
- ◇ Outcome: Enhanced inclusion of children and families with extra support needs, supported by inclusion quality indicators that will be embedded in the EarlyON program standards.

- **Inclusion of LGBTQ2S in the Early Years Research Project**

- ◇ Description: A participatory research project related to the inclusion of LGBTQ2S children and families in EarlyON centres. The researcher will coordinate with, and inform the work of, EarlyON providers and the LGBTQ2S mobile program.
- ◇ Outcome: Report with research findings and recommendations for enhancing program quality, access and inclusion across the EarlyON and broader early years sectors.

- **Quality Framework & Tool**

- ◇ Description: A framework to support the use of the program standards within EarlyON centres.
- ◇ Outcome: A reflective tool and accountability mechanism for enhancing the quality of programs and services across the EarlyON sector.



## C. Building TCS' Capacity to Collect and Evaluate Data

TCS is developing new processes for the collection and analysis of data pertaining to EarlyON programs, services and operations. The following Action Items will provide the City with accurate and up-to-date information to better support evidence-informed decision-making.

### Action Items

- **New Data Collection Process/System:**
  - ◇ Description: TCS will establish new processes, tools and new software for collecting data from EarlyON program participants and service providers.
  - ◇ Outcome: The collection of reliable and relevant data to better understand and plan Toronto's EarlyON system.
- **Toronto Children's Services EarlyON Outcome Framework:**
  - ◇ Description: The Outcome Framework will identify and describe key outcomes for TCS' EarlyON centres in alignment with existing TCS priorities and shared outcomes.
  - ◇ Outcome: A clear set of expectations around which TCS and the EarlyON sector can focus their work.

## **D. Supporting EarlyON Sector in Professional Learning & Capacity-Building**

TCS is working with our partners to support EarlyON service providers to enhance their capacity to delivery quality programs to children and families. The following Action Items will establish the foundation upon which EarlyON service providers may continuously engage in professional learning and capacity-building.

### **Action Items:**

- **Professional Learning Strategy**
  - ◇ Description: A comprehensive plan for system leaders and program staff that includes identification of required skills, skills gaps, a collective learning orientation, and professional learning approaches and opportunities.
  - ◇ Outcome: A comprehensive EarlyON professional learning strategy that will enhance access to professional learning opportunities, support RECE training pathways, and build a shared culture of reflective practice.
- **Develop & Launch EarlyON Staff Networks**
  - ◇ Description: TCS Consultants will facilitate local EarlyON Staff Networks in four distinct areas across the City to support professional learning and capacity building between and across EarlyON service providers.
  - ◇ Outcome: The EarlyON Staff Networks will enhance relationship-building, capacity building and coordination among Toronto's EarlyON service providers.

- **Professional Learning Opportunity to Enhance Capacity**
  - ◇ Description: Anti-bias professional learning sessions will be delivered to EarlyON leaders in November 2018, followed by sessions for program staff in 2019.
  - ◇ Outcome: These sessions will enhance the capacity of EarlyON service providers to ensure that all children and families feel welcome, safe and supported.

## **E. Strengthening communications with the sector and the public**

TCS is developing a communication plan as well as materials to improve information-sharing between the City and EarlyON service providers and enhance awareness of EarlyON programs among the general public.

### **Action Items:**

- Strategic Communications Plan and Materials
  - ◇ Description: TCS' EarlyON Communications Plan will include methods for sharing information with families (e.g. web, social media, print materials), the general public (e.g. newspapers, bus shelters) and EarlyON partners.
  - ◇ Outcome: Enhanced awareness of EarlyON centres, including targeted outreach to families not currently accessing programs. Improved communication between TCS and EarlyON service providers to ensure that everyone receives updates in a timely manner.



## Appendix I: Informing the Action Plan – Community Engagement Strategy

In 2013, the Ministry of Education released the [Ontario Early Years Policy Framework](#) to outline the province’s plan to integrate four existing programs (Ontario Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Family Resource Programs and Better Beginnings, Better Futures) into one coherent system to be administered by municipal service system managers. Rebranded as EarlyON Child and Family Centres, these new programs provide publicly-funded services that offer free programs for children (aged 0-6), families and caregivers. Programs are provided on a drop-in basis, but also include instructional workshops and classes for families as well. The intent of EarlyON services is to help strengthen adult-child relationships, support parent education, foster healthy child development, and connect families to additional community services.

Toronto Children’s Services (TCS) recognizes that integrating four distinct early years programs into one system that has a common mandate, identity, standards and governance structure requires careful planning and engagement. Rather than starting anew, the EarlyON Action Plan incorporates and builds upon the important contributions of [Children’s Services Service Plan 2015-2019](#), [TCS’ 2017 Initial Plan](#), the work of the Toronto Child and Family Network (including the forthcoming Equity Framework), the [Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism](#), the province’s [Public Plan for Ontario Child and Family Centres](#), [Ontario’s vision for the EarlyON system](#), as well as numerous community resources and academic reports.

We also launched a series of initiatives over the past year to identify how we might best manage this transition. These initiatives included:

The Road Ahead Conversations: Nine community conversations were convened to engage the family support sector in discussions on how EarlyON will be implemented in Toronto.

- **A Needs Assessment:** TCS contracted with an external consultant group, SN Management, to conduct research about the existing early years system. A key component of this work was a series of surveys and focus groups that helped the City better understand the needs of children and families across Toronto.
- **Child and Family Centre Advisory Committee:** TCS convened an Advisory Committee comprised of early years practitioners and experts to provide guidance on the development of the community needs assessment and the Initial Plan.
- **Strategic Planning Days:** In February and September 2018, TCS hosted service providers at full-day Strategic Planning Day events that brought together EarlyON service providers and TCS staff to discuss how we can collectively build a more equitable, accessible and high-quality EarlyON sector in Toronto.
- **Advisory Committee:** In May 2018, TCS established an EarlyON Advisory Committee to provide strategic direction on how best to transform Toronto's EarlyON sector. It is comprised of experts and practitioners, including representatives from EarlyON agencies, school boards, and other social services, including Toronto Public Library, immigration services, and community development. The intent of the Advisory Committee is to:
  - ◇ provide advice on key issues, questions and challenges surrounding the development of Toronto EarlyON Child and Family Centres;
  - ◇ assist TCS in improving connections and partnerships in order to increase coordinated service planning;

- ◇ provide advice on key issues, questions and challenges surrounding the development of Toronto EarlyON Child and Family Centres;
  - ◇ assist TCS in improving connections and partnerships in order to increase coordinated service planning;
  - ◇ share insights on how TCS can design and implement a more equitable and accessible high-quality EarlyON system that coordinates with other social services;
  - ◇ strategize at a systems level and provide recommendations for building an equitable, accessible and high quality system, and;
  - ◇ champion the EarlyON sector in the community to motivate and inspire confidence.
- Working Tables: To support TCS and the work of the Advisory Committee, TCS also established five Working Tables to provide guidance on key areas within the EarlyON sector:
    - ◇ Planning
    - ◇ Inclusion
    - ◇ Standards
    - ◇ Professional Learning & Capacity-Building
    - ◇ Data & Evaluation

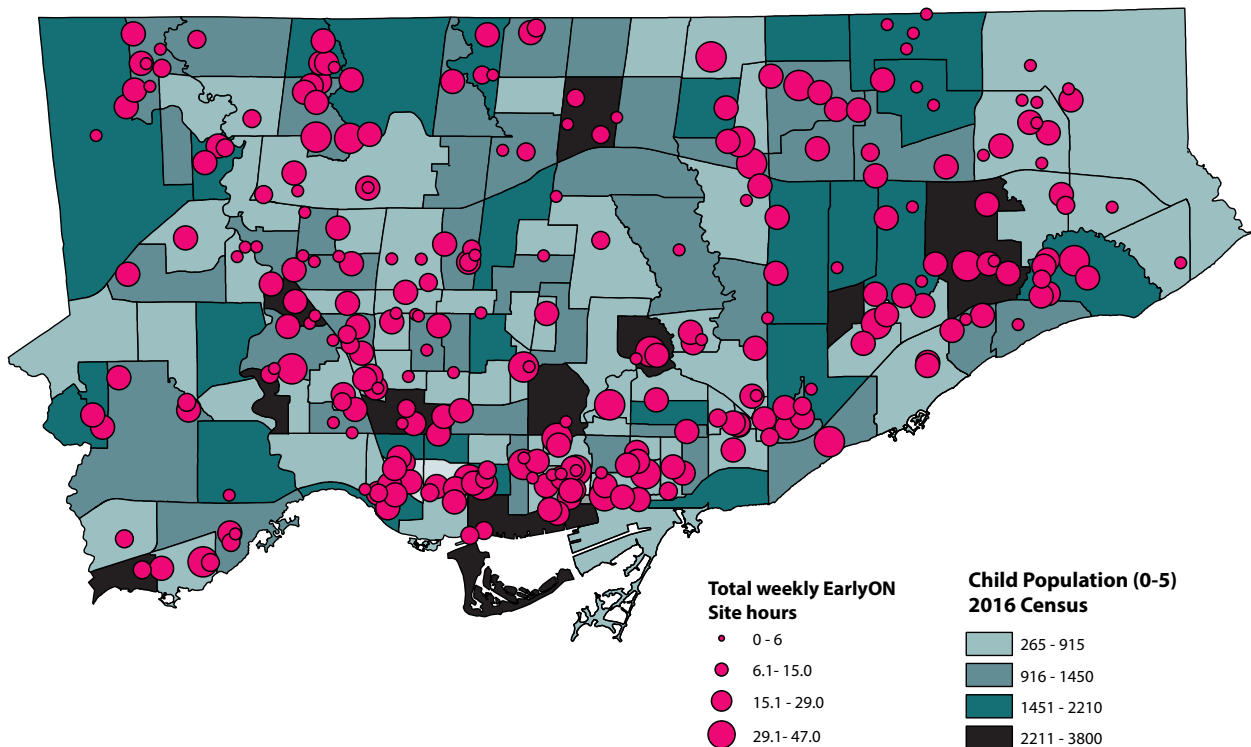
Together, these engagement initiatives have been essential in informing and shaping TCS' Action Plan for Toronto's EarlyON sector, outlined in the next section.

# Appendix II: A Brief Snapshot of Children & Families in Toronto

Understanding the condition and needs of children and families is essential to developing a more accessible, equitable and high-quality EarlyON system. According to the 2016 Census, there are over 985,615 children aged 0-14 living in the City of Toronto.

However, the child population varies considerably across Toronto. Figure 1 shows where children live across Toronto's 140 neighbourhoods. Figure 1 also shows the existing child and family services across Toronto by site hours.

**Figure 1: Child Population (0-5 years), 2016 Census and EarlyON site locations**



Source: Statistics Canada; City of Toronto – Children's Services

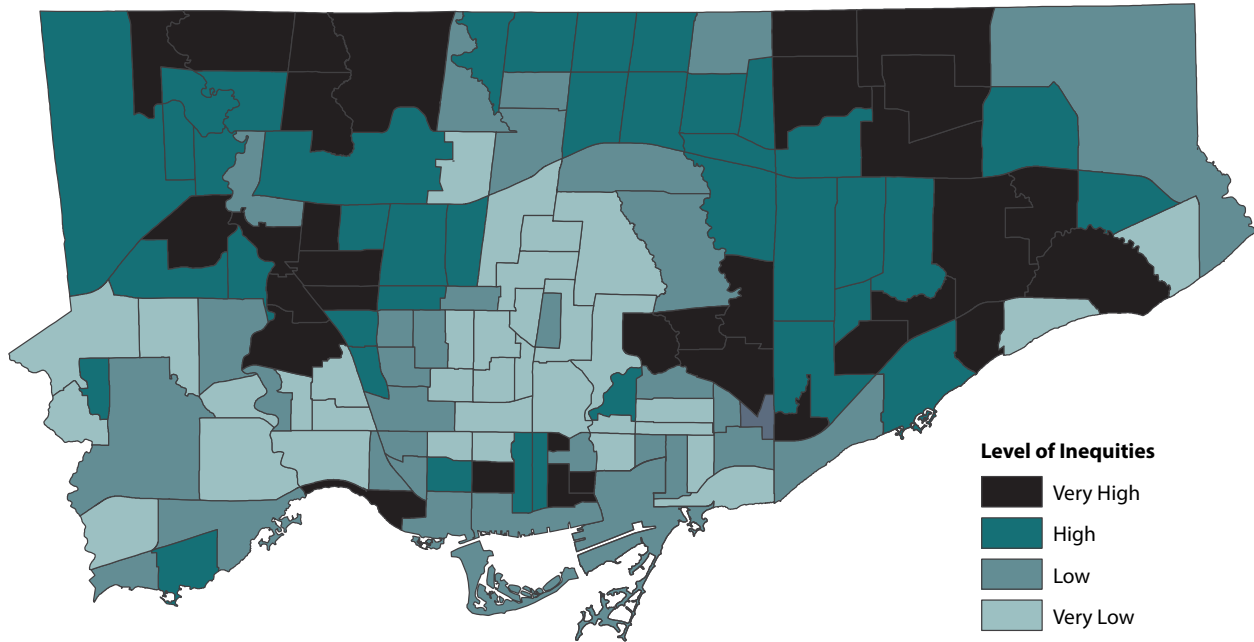


This map helps to demonstrate a key challenge facing TCS in establishing a more equitable EarlyON system: the number of programs and the service hours in neighbourhoods with a high child population are often insufficient to meet demand. Therefore, working with the sector to enhance and expand services, particularly in underserved areas and neighbourhoods with a higher number of children, will be a key priority for TCS over the next three years.

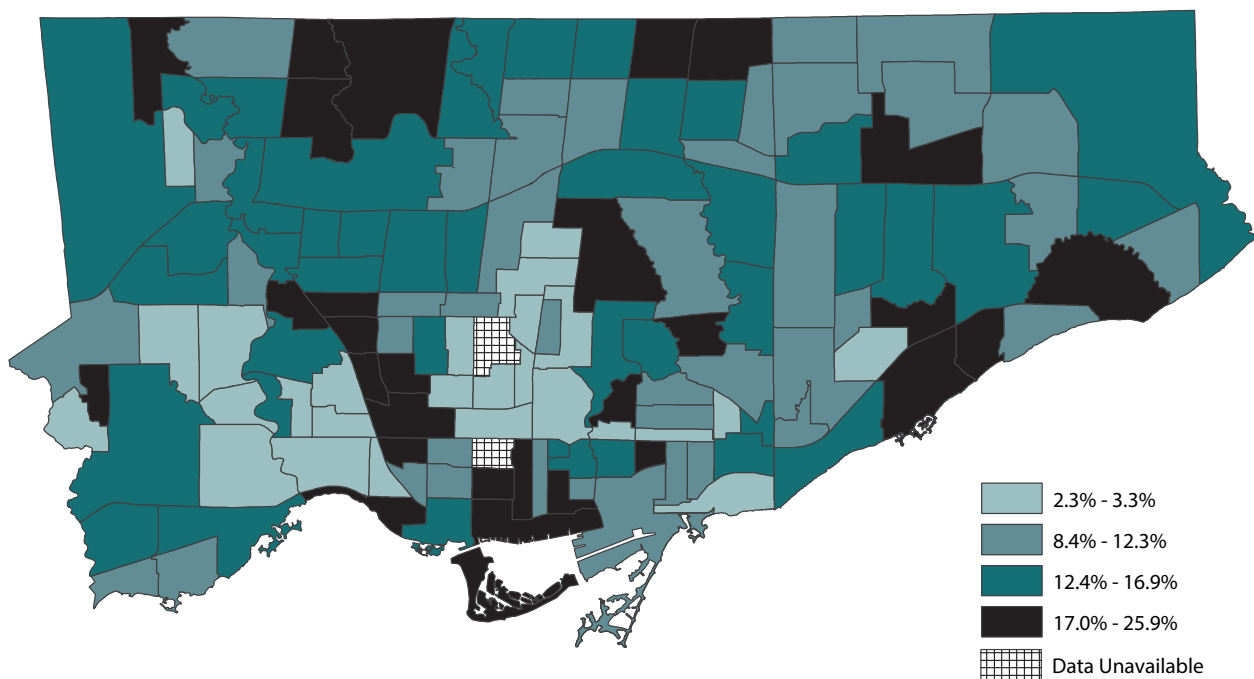
## **Inequity among children and families**

Studies have shown that providing early years supports in under-privileged communities can generate healthier and happier children and families over the long-term. As part of ensuring a more equitable EarlyON system, TCS is committed to ensuring greater access to children and families in high-need neighbourhoods. Figures 2 and 3 show the neighbourhoods where child and family inequities are most acute.

**Figure 2: Toronto Child and Family Inequities Score by Neighbourhood, Toronto, 2016**



**Figure 3: Early Development Instrument (EDI) Vulnerability on 2 or more Domains (children 5 years of age), 2014/15**



## French-speaking families

According to the 2016 Census, 65,535 Torontonians speak French as their mother tongue, and almost 470,000 speak either French or French and English in their homes.<sup>1</sup> Serving this sizable minority group represents a key priority for the City of Toronto.

There are 21 neighbourhoods in Toronto where French is one of the top three languages identified as the primary home language (Table 1). For the most part, these neighbourhoods are concentrated in the central part of the City, however, program level data reported by service providers indicated that Scarborough is seeing a growing number of French language families. These neighbourhoods are listed on the next page.

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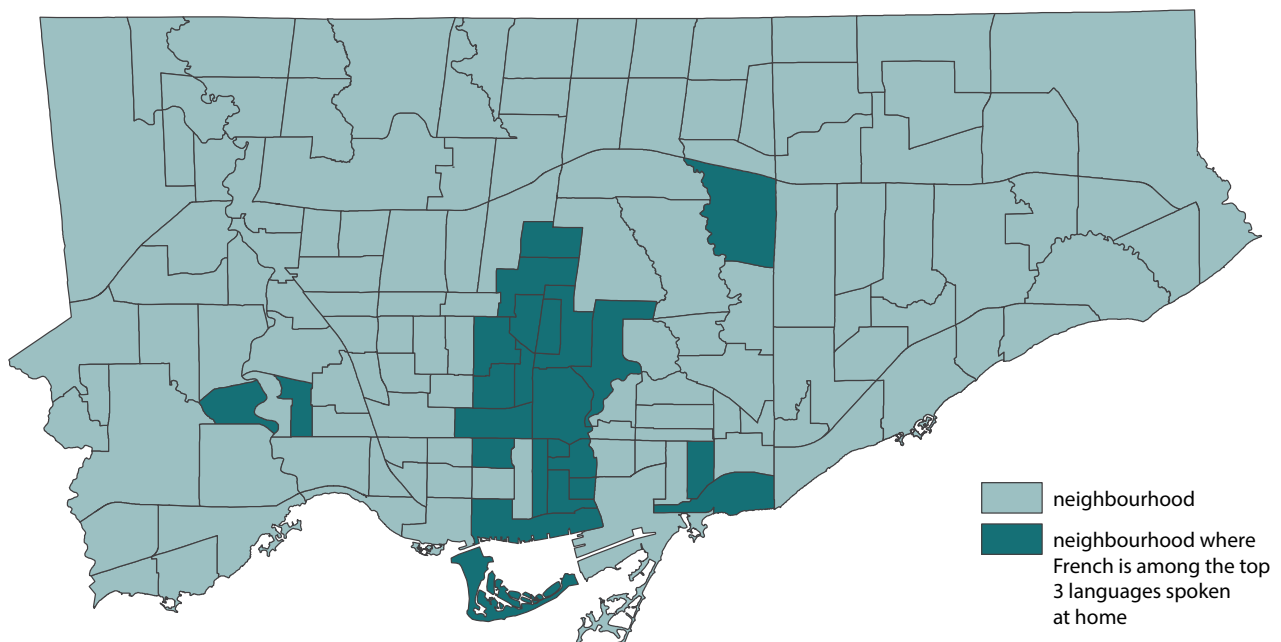
1 Statistics Canada. 2017. Toronto [Census metropolitan area], Ontario and Ontario [Province] (table). Census Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017.

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed November 7, 2018).

## Table 1: Neighbourhoods Where French is Among the Top 3 Languages Spoken at Home

- Annex
- Rosedale-Moore Park
- Mount Pleasant East
- Yonge-Eglinton
- University
- Leaside Bennington
- The Beaches
- Woodbine Corridor
- Cabbagetown-South
- St. Jamestown
- Moss Park
- Lawrence Park South
- Church Yonge Corridor
- Forest Hill South
- Kingsway South
- Casa Loma
- Regent Park
- Parkwoods-Donalda
- Waterfront Communities-  
The Island
- Lawrence Park North
- Runnymede Bloor West Village
- Yonge-St. Clair

**Figure 4: Neighbourhoods where French is among the Top 3 Languages Spoken at Home (2011 Census)**



According to Raising the Village's Report, *Measuring the Well-being of Children and Families in Toronto: Part 2: Indigenous Outcomes*:

- 92% of Indigenous parents self-identify as First Nations / 9% identify as Métis or Inuit
- 21% of Indigenous parents in Toronto identified as Two-Spirit
- 5% of Indigenous children over the age of 2 can understand or speak an Indigenous language
- 42% of Indigenous adults speak an Indigenous language
- 96% of caregivers have talked to their child about important people or events in First Nations/Inuit and/or Métis history
- 76% of children attended an early childhood development or preschool program
- 93% of parents discuss their family values with children every day or a few times a week
- 86% of parents have talked to their child about discrimination against Indigenous people
- 79% of parents felt at least once in the last month that they belong to their community
- 65% of adults participate in traditional cultural ceremony (i.e. smudge, sweat lodge, fast)

## Indigenous Families

Although it is often standard to use Statistics Canada data in demographic analyses, researchers working with Toronto's Indigenous communities have expressed concern about the ability of the Census to fully enumerate the population of Indigenous peoples living in the city. Statistics Canada also notes that "population estimates for concepts such as Aboriginal identity and Registered or Treaty Indian status are influenced by numerous factors. Users should be aware that point estimates and changes over time are influenced by a combination of natural growth, changes to coverage and to measurement, and other factors affecting how people self-identify. It is not possible to quantify the impact these changes have in isolation from each other."<sup>2</sup>

Studies using different research methods to identify the city's Indigenous population have yielded results that suggest the Census figures may under-represent the Indigenous population. For example, the Well Living Health's survey, Our Health Counts Toronto (OHC), study cited a 2016 Indigenous population in Toronto of 34,000 to 69,000 people.<sup>3</sup> OHC indicates that the discrepancy is due to at least two key factors: many Indigenous people frequently move or are homeless; unlike the National Household Survey, the OHC study does not require a fixed address.<sup>4</sup>

### A snapshot of Indigenous families in Toronto

According to OHC, there are approximately 3 to 4 times as many Indigenous children living in Toronto as reported in the Canadian Census. Of these children, approximately 92% live households below or at the Low-Income-Cut-Off (LICO) line;

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2 Statistics Canada, 2017b

3 Well Living House, 2018, Our Health Counts Toronto, Toronto.  
<http://www.welllivinghouse.com/what-we-do/projects/our-health-counts-toronto/>

4 Ibid.

93% identify as First Nations (7% identified as Métis, Inuit, or other), and; 70% identified as being Status<sup>5</sup>.

The OHC also provides insight into some of the key developmental issues facing Indigenous children. It indicates that 1 in 4 Indigenous caregivers in Toronto have been concerned about their child's development, with the most common concerns being about their mental/intellectual abilities (58%), speech/language (43%), as well as social (36%), emotional (36%), physical (32%) and spiritual (21%) wellbeing.<sup>6</sup>

Those seeking support sometimes find services inaccessible. The OHC found that approximately 18% of Indigenous families and caregivers experienced barriers to accessing child development programming. The identified barriers include:

- Services were not culturally safe
- There was a lack of trust in the provider
- The waiting list was too long
- The cost and lack of transportation options made access the services too difficult; and
- The provider was not available.<sup>7</sup>

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5 Well Living House, 2018, Our Health Counts Toronto, Toronto. <http://www.welllivinghouse.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Demographics-OHC-Toronto.pdf>

6 Well Living House, 2018, Our Health Counts Toronto, Toronto. <http://www.welllivinghouse.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Child-Development-OHC-Toronto.pdf>

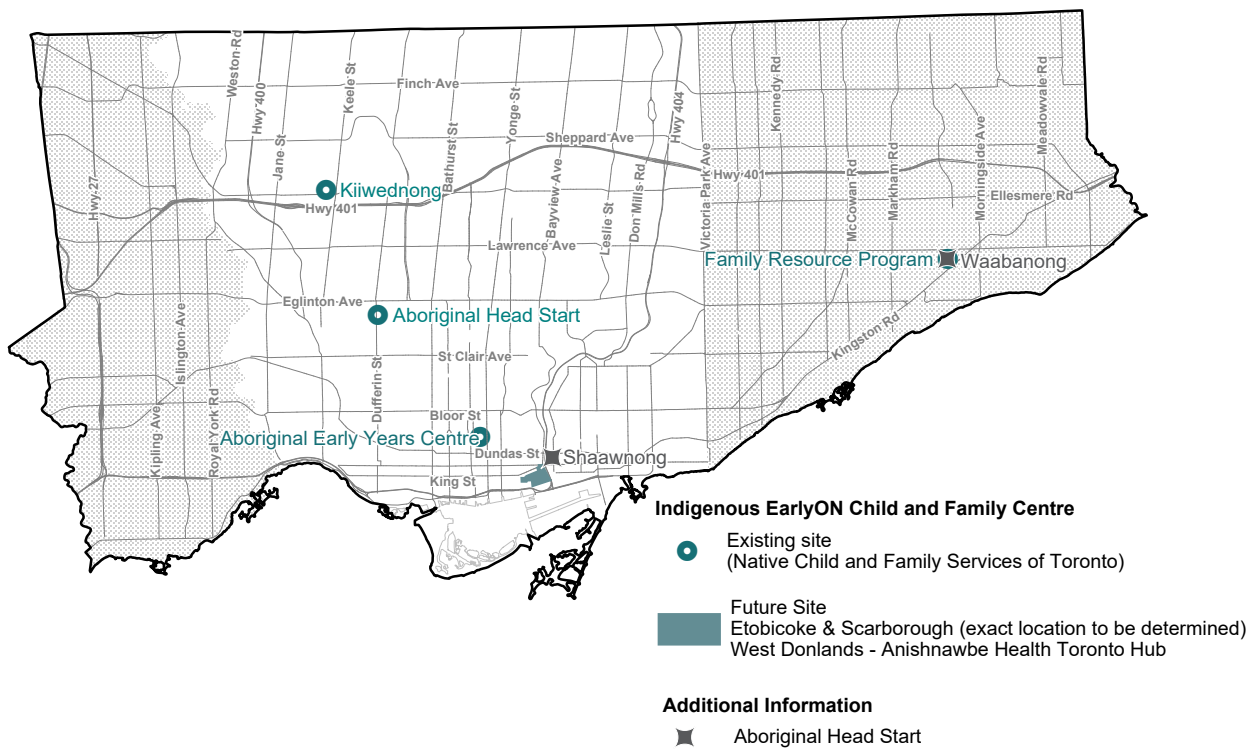
7 Ibid.





TCS has partnered with Well Living House, an action research centre for Indigenous infants, children, and their families' health and well-being. Their focus is on gathering, sharing, and protecting knowledge on the well-being of Indigenous families in Toronto. This partnership will bring new knowledge to the area of Indigenous well-being outcomes through the Raising the Village strategic initiative and will continue to guide the work of TCS going forward. In addition, TCS will continue to strengthen relationships with Indigenous community partners and Indigenous communities in Toronto to support policy and decision making.

**Figure 5: Indigenous Early Years Services in Toronto**





## Appendix III: Some key challenges facing the current EarlyON system

In 2017, TCS hired SN Management to conduct a needs assessment of the current status of Toronto's early years system. As part of their research, SN Management conducted surveys and focus groups to get family and caregiver perspectives on existing child and family programs. A summary of the results are highlighted below:

### **EarlyON Programs are Critical Resources for Families and Communities**

Child and family programs are an important resource for families; they are welcoming, they foster parent engagement, build community and provide a sense of belonging. Families access programs because they want their children to interact with other children and develop skills, and because they themselves want to interact, socialize and share stories with other families.

Most respondents indicated that they attend programs two to three times a week, with some families reporting they attend 4 or more times a week. Among families that do utilize services, Indigenous and newcomer families reported attending programs most often during the week.

### **Expanded Access to Programming**

Families want to see more programming available through increased hours, including afternoons, summer hours, weekends and evenings, and in more community-based locations. A number of families reported barriers to participation due to inconvenient locations and times, or over-subscribed programs. Additional

barriers are expanded on below. Some families reported they are seeking programs that offer activities for children of different ages - that is, infants and children over six years of age - although it is important to note that CFCs are mandated to service children from birth to 6 years of age only.

Families want a balance of drop-in and more structured programming such as workshops and information sessions to address specific learning needs.

## Opportunities for Program Improvement

Families currently experience variability in program offerings and quality across CFCs. As such, families want to see improved service and program quality wherein program environments foster inclusion with more opportunities for children to explore, learn and play. Below are the top five reported opportunities for program improvement:

1. More programming hours on more days/different hours
2. Bigger/better space (for example, cleaner, updated, with room for strollers)
3. Increased opportunities for staff training and capacity-building
4. More games/activities
5. More/better locations

## **Schools are the Preferred Location for Early Years Programs**

Schools followed by libraries and community centres were reported as the preferred location for CFCs. Families also identified libraries and community centres as preferred locations: “hubs” enable connections to other supports and services, and are typically readily accessible in local neighbourhoods.

## **Inconsistent Program Awareness and Promotion**

Word of mouth is by far the most common way families find out about programs, with online information being the second most common. Notwithstanding, online information about specific program hours, activities or locations is inconsistent, difficult to find, and may not be up-to-date.

Families who experience isolation or marginalization may not access online searches or cannot rely upon word of mouth in the same way as other populations. These populations appear to rely on professionals for program-related information.

## **More Responsive Programming**

French language, Indigenous, and LGBTQ2S respondents indicated that being able to interact with other families and/or with their communities is especially important. Newcomers, families with children with special needs and French-language families are particularly invested in the capacity of child and family programs to provide a gateway to other supports and services.

## Some Families Experience Barriers to Access

Most respondents reported highly welcoming program experiences, however, the following barriers were identified by a number of respondents:

- Programs are sometimes full and must turn people away
- Program spaces can be small and cramped
- Families are not able to easily find information online about program locations, times or activities
- Programs are not always available at convenient times (for example, children are napping during program times) or on evenings and weekends
- Program locations are too hard to get to - both in terms of transportation to get there and the actual location having physical barriers such as stairs that make it difficult to handle strollers
- Language /community specific or culturally appropriate programs are not always available
- French language families and caregivers have difficulty accessing programming in French
- Indigenous families have very limited choice in terms of access to programs that are culturally safe and rooted in Indigenous tradition and teachings

Respondents also reported some may experience societal oppression, and barriers to programs including feeling alienated, judged, not feeling understood and experiencing racism or other discrimination. This may indicate the need to explore more and ongoing anti-oppression and cultural competency capacity building with staff/service providers.

## French Language Families' Needs and Perspectives

Linguistically or culturally appropriate programs are not always available. There is little French-language programming and Indigenous families have very limited program choice where they feel culturally safe and where culturally specific programs are available. Due to the lack of culturally responsive programming, some respondents reported feeling alienated, judged, not well understood and had experiences of racism or other forms of discrimination when attending CFC programs. As such many families, most frequently Indigenous, those with children with special needs, LGBTQ2S and French language families, are travelling between programs to access the types of services and programs they want or need.

Information was collected from a total of 239 French-speaking families, most of whom were family members or guardians who participated in the online survey. The French language field survey was completed by 19 participants and two participants attended a focus group discussion. Many of the findings were similar to the non-French language participants. The findings that were distinct to the French community are presented below.

- The most important reason families reported for attending programs was the opportunity to be part of a Francophone community.
- Families cited attending more than one location to access French programming.
- Families expressed they encounter significant difficulties finding and accessing programs in French.
- French language families requested more locations/more French programs as a way to improve service with the top three preferred locations being schools, libraries, and community centres.

## Indigenous Families' Needs and Perspectives

The information pertaining to the Indigenous community was collected from 157 Indigenous families, including 56 respondents to the online surveys, 23 respondents to the field survey and 78 focus group participants. While many of the perspectives mirror the overall results for families, this section highlights those that were distinct.

- Indigenous families expressed that there is a significant lack of culturally safe and accessible programming in mainstream CFCs
- Indigenous families reported schools, community centres, libraries and Indigenous specific spaces as preferred locations for child and family programming.
- A greater proportion of Indigenous families identified as two-spirit or part of LGBTQ2S communities in contrast with the overall population of families who were surveyed. This is also true for the number of Indigenous families who reported having a child who has special needs. This highlights the need for services to be accessible, inclusive and utilize an intersectional approach to delivering programming and supports for families.



