



# **CITY OF TORONTO CHILDREN'S SERVICES 2020-2024 SERVICE PLAN**

## **Co-Creating Priorities with Child Care and Early Years Partners and Organizations**

### **Have Your Say...**

As organizations delivering or supporting child care and early years services in Toronto, the work you do is critical to the well-being of Toronto's children and families. We value your knowledge and expertise and we want to hear from you.

This document sets out proposed priorities for you to consider and provide feedback on. These priorities are based on what we have heard from service providers, families, and other key partners, but no decisions have been made about directions for the next five years. We want to hear from you on how to create a stronger system that will help children and families thrive in our city.

We are committed to listening to what you say, reflecting it back to you, having discussions about the responses, and taking action where we can. Thank you for taking the time to share your feedback with us.

**Response due date: October 9, 2019**

Contents

**Background: Co-Creating Shared 2020-2024 Service Plan Priorities** 3

What Is The Service Plan? 4

How Is It Being Developed? 4

Service Plan Engagement Process with Service Providers and Organizations 5

How To Share Your Input 5

Who Do We Want to Hear From? 5

How Is This Document Organized? 6

**Discussion: Shaping 2020-2024 Service Plan Priorities** 8

Part I: Open Comment 8

Part II: Proposed Priorities 8

    Listen and Learn 9

    Build Relationships 10

    Be Responsive 11

    Taking Action 13

**Conclusion** 14

## **Background: Co-Creating Shared 2020-2024 Service Plan Priorities**

The City of Toronto is developing the Children's Services 2020-2024 Service Plan and we want to hear from the people and organizations that make up Toronto's child care and early years system.

This document is for service providers and other partners. Whether you provide or support licensed child care (centre- or home-based), Every Child Belongs programs, EarlyON child and family centres, or before and after school programs, adapting to change has become an ongoing part of your work. We know that change will continue to occur in our sector. We are aware of ongoing uncertainty regarding Provincial direction, including the development of a new child care plan for Ontario. We believe in times like these engagement becomes even more important, so we can move forward with a better understanding of each other's priorities and needs. This engagement allows us to hear from organizations and seek their input about what matters most to them, which will also be shared with the Province through the Service Plan.

Our focus remains on improving child and family outcomes so that all families experience well-being – no matter their income, race, language, cultural background, religion, family composition, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, ability, immigration status, unique needs or any combination of these factors. Not all families experience the same outcomes, and that is often because they face barriers and inequities in our system. For this reason, service planning and delivery must acknowledge and address barriers and inequities while recognizing the strengths of children and families. We need to continue to find ways of working together to achieve these goals and other shared priorities.

We want to hear what you think about broad priorities for the next Service Plan. We will use this important information – the perspectives and opinions of the professionals in our system – to help set the direction for the next five years.

## What Is The Service Plan?

A Service Plan is a five-year, forward looking document that describes how the child care and early years system is doing and what can be improved. Service Plans help Children's Services to set goals, make transparent decisions, and be accountable. They also help to tell the story of what we collectively do, who we do it for, and why it matters. This means that the Plan needs to reflect community input and our shared priorities.

Children's Services has completed City Council-approved Plans since 1992. The [current Plan](#) covers the period from 2015 to 2019.

## How Is It Being Developed?

For the 2020-2024 Service Plan, we are using multiple methods to listen to your feedback and create an engagement process that is flexible and convenient.

This document proposes some high-level priorities for organizations in our sector to respond to. These are proposals for consideration – no decisions have been made about directions for the next five years. We hope that this approach will allow you to take time, when it makes sense for you, to talk to your colleagues and focus your input on the topics you see as most important or relevant to your work.

After we receive and analyze the results, we will share what we heard at public meetings, networks, forums, and advisory tables. This will be an opportunity to have more specific conversations about priorities with your colleagues from across the city, in settings you already attend.

## Service Plan Engagement Process With Service Providers And Organizations



### How To Share Your Input

To participate, please read through this document and share your thoughts by completing the online form at <https://cotsurvey.chkmkt.com/sp-survey-en>. The form allows you to save your progress, in case you want to start and come back later. Responses can be submitted until October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

The amount of time your response takes is up to you – it depends on how many of the priorities you choose to respond to, how much detail you want to provide and how you want to incorporate the opinions and perspectives of others you work with.

### Who Do We Want To Hear From?

This document is for:

- ▶ Service providers, including those offering licensed child care (centre- or home-based), before and after school programs, EarlyON programs, and Every Child Belongs services;
- ▶ School boards;
- ▶ Groups, associations and coalitions representing parts of the sector;

- ▶ System leaders participating in the Toronto Child and Family Network;
- ▶ Academics and researchers; and
- ▶ Other organizations serving children and families in Toronto.

It is our hope that responses will represent the perspectives of agencies or organizations rather than individuals. However, academics and researchers not affiliated with the types of organizations identified above may choose to respond individually.

A separate child and family engagement strategy is being carried out through the summer and fall. As a result, children and families are not the intended audience of this document. However, we encourage responses that reflect on the experiences of the families that you work with.

## How Is This Document Organized?

The rest of the document has two parts: Part I is for open comments about the direction of Toronto's child care and early years system over the next five years. Part II sets out priorities for consideration with some prompting questions. These are based on our understanding of the experiences of children, families, and organizations in the child care and early years system. We need your input in order to better understand whether these reflect your priorities and how you think we should address them.

The proposed priorities are organized according to a set of practices that are embedded in an Equity Framework developed by the Toronto Child and Family Network. They are part of a commitment to being inclusive, accessible, and responsive in our engagement and relationships. These practices are: **Listen & Learn, Build Relationships, Be Responsive, and Take Action.**

Each priority has been placed under the section which we feel is the most relevant. However, we know that these practices are related and ongoing. For example, we cannot **Take Action** without understanding **Relationships**, and we cannot **Listen to and Learn** from stakeholders without **Being Responsive** to what we hear.



Each priority is followed by prompting questions you may want to consider when sharing feedback. The priorities touch on many areas of our shared and interconnected system, but please feel free to respond to only the items that are most important to you and the communities you serve.

## **Discussion: Shaping 2020-2024 Service Plan Priorities**

All service providers and partners have a role in shaping strategic priorities for the child care and early years sector in Toronto. As part of this process, we want to hear your ideas which will help lay the foundation of the next Service Plan.

### **Part I: Open Comment**

In Part I, we welcome your big-picture ideas and concerns. We want to know how you are feeling about the next five years, and where you think TCS should be making changes in areas where we have some control or influence (i.e. areas where TCS makes decisions or delivers programs).

Our first question, which you can answer on the online form, is:

- ▶ What is the most important priority for you over the next five years? This could be a challenge or barrier that needs attention, or a big opportunity for improvement. What kind of goals or actions could get us closer to addressing this priority?

### **Part II: Proposed Priorities**

The suggested priorities on the following pages are based on our understanding of the experiences of children, families, and organizations in the child care and early years system.

You can decide how many of the priorities you want to respond to and how much detail you want to provide. We have also included prompting questions you may want to consider in your answer. But our goal is to hear about what is important to you.



## Listen and Learn

Planning and decision making needs to include the expertise, wisdom, and experiences of our partners. This section lists potential priorities where we need to engage with organizations through active listening and reflective learning.

- 1. Collaborate with community partners, especially in communities that have been underserved in the past, to realize the City's commitments to inclusion:**
  - ▷ In what ways can TCS meaningfully engage with Indigenous communities, recognizing they are rights holders, to support [reconciliation](#) efforts?
  - ▷ How can TCS strengthen its capacity to confront systemic barriers, including [Anti-Black Racism](#) and other barriers, through collaboration or partnerships?
- 2. Recognize and respond to the challenges facing the early years workforce by promoting recruitment and retention strategies.**
  - ▷ What are possible solutions to staff recruitment and retention problems in the sector? What leadership can TCS take in this area?
  - ▷ What could be done to respond to the split shift issue in before/after school programs?
  - ▷ What other workforce issues does your organization face and how could TCS help mitigate these issues?
- 3. Continuous quality improvement for all services and improved communication about the importance of high quality programs for child and family outcomes.**
  - ▷ What resources would help to support quality improvement and pedagogical leadership in your programs or the programs you work with?
  - ▷ What kind of information could help build a better understanding of program quality among families?



Listen & Learn: engagement, data, research

**4. Make planning decisions about where services are needed based on an understanding of the socio-economic challenges that children and families experience.**

- ▷ What planning practices could TCS explore to make decisions about where services are most needed?
- ▷ Are there any innovative or effective local planning and engagement strategies you think we should know about?
- ▷ How can we support stronger community engagement and local partnerships across all the services supporting Toronto's diverse families?

## **Build Relationships**

Working together to develop and maintain trusting and mutually beneficial relationships is key to any action plan. This section is focused on priorities that depend on developing or improving relationships within and between parts of the system.

**5. Take action on commitments to Truth and Reconciliation by working with Indigenous communities to create culturally relevant and inclusive programs.**

- ▷ What can TCS learn from actions you have taken to improve inclusion with Indigenous families?
- ▷ If your organization is Indigenous-led, what barriers do you experience in trying to deliver culturally responsive programming that TCS should work to address?

**6. Strengthen relationships between TCS and community partners, (including funding, administration, etc.)**

- ▷ How would you describe your organization's relationship with TCS and how could that relationship be improved or be made easier?



**Build Relationships: reciprocity, trust, resiliency**

- ▶ How could administrative requirements be streamlined to reduce the biggest hurdles that require your time and resources?

**7. Improve integration of the [EarlyON](#) system with other City and community services.**

- ▶ If you operate EarlyON programs, what are your goals for integration with other services and supports? What would help you achieve these goals?
- ▶ If you do not operate EarlyON programs, what would help your organization to connect with EarlyON programs to support families in your community?

**8. Support child care and early years partners when responding to various changes in policy or priorities.**

- ▶ What does it look like for TCS to support you through times of change?
- ▶ What kinds of communication or information-sharing practices work best for you?

## **Be Responsive**

It is important to intentionally plan for children and families that experience exclusion and ensure that the information we gather is analyzed and responded to appropriately. This section focuses on understanding and responding to the identified needs of all children and families.

**9. Reduce barriers to accessing child care and early years programs, including barriers based on income, race, language, cultural background, religion, family composition, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, ability, immigration status, unique needs and other combinations of social identity. This includes:**

- ▶ Confronting systemic barriers, including Anti-

Be Responsive: outcomes, evaluation, reflection

**Black Racism and other barriers, by supporting programs and services that are inclusive for children and families from diverse communities**

- ▶ **Responding to the distinct needs of newcomer children and families by supporting culturally and linguistically inclusive and accessible spaces**
- ▶ **Supporting programs to welcome and celebrate the many realities of 2SLGBTQ children and adults, including Indigenous, Black, and racialized families, and reflect a broad understanding of diverse family structures.**
  - ▷ What barriers prevent families from accessing or feeling welcome in programs?
  - ▷ What barriers do families face in learning about, accessing, and maintaining a child care fee subsidy, even when they are eligible?
  - ▷ What are some options for reducing or eliminating these barriers?

**10. Work with partners to build a system where children with extra support needs and their families experience a welcoming and inclusive environment that is high in quality and rich in learning opportunities.**

- ▷ What can TCS do to improve experiences for children with extra support needs and families in the child care and early years system?
- ▷ What can TCS do to improve experiences for these children and families, particularly as they enter before and after school programs?

**11. Improving access to early learning and child care programs, including increasing the flexibility of the system to serve families with diverse needs.**

- ▷ How can we support the system of licensed home child care, and how can its benefits be communicated to families so they see it as a good option?
- ▷ What can TCS do to increase part-time and flexible licensed child care options especially for those in precarious or irregular work?

**Taking Action:** collaborative, aligned, sustainable



ces Service Plan

- ▷ What would you need to offer extended (earlier and later) child care hours?
- ▷ What opportunities do you have to increase capacity in your programs?
- ▷ What strategies can we use to improve affordability by reducing child care fees?

## Taking Action

Taking collaborative and sustainable action that is responsive to relationships and learnings is a key part of every Service Plan. The priorities in this section focus on areas where some information gathering or planning has occurred so we are closer to being able to take concrete steps forward.

### **12.** Improving the ability of the Toronto Child & Family Network (TC&FN) to address the complex challenges of growing up in Toronto.

- ▷ What do you see as the role of the TC&FN in terms of supporting and managing changes in the early learning and child care sector?
- ▷ If you do not participate at the TC&FN, how connected do you feel to its work? What would help you feel more connected or informed?

### **13.** Use technology to improve customer service and access to programs, to make it easier for families to find programs, and streamline administration for service providers.

- ▷ Building on recent projects like the My Child Care Account and Online Services for child care providers, what technological improvements should we pursue next?
- ▷ What technology are you using to communicate with and improve access to information for families?

### **14.** Developing inclusive program requirements to ensure the system is accessible, welcoming, and responsive to all families in Toronto.

- ▷ What program changes have you implemented to be more responsive and inclusive for families experiencing inequities and exclusion?
- ▷ What resources would help you and your colleagues learn about and implement practices that enhance inclusion and belonging for all communities?

**15. Improving communication, system navigation, and family engagement so that families have what they need to make informed choices about accessing programs and supports.**

- ▷ How well do families understand the early learning and child care system, and what do they need to make informed choices about different services (e.g. tools such as a website, social media, “apps”, or public awareness campaigns)?
- ▷ What outreach strategies and partnerships could help to connect with “hard to reach” families?

## Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and for supporting the development of the 2020-2024 Service Plan. Our next step is to look for opportunities to develop priorities based on the feedback that we receive from our partners and from families. Our intention is to be responsive to issues that fall within our control or influence. We are also committed to reporting back and further discussing these ideas with you at existing tables, forums, and network meetings when all results have been reviewed and analyzed.

If you have questions about how to share your feedback with us, or about next steps, please email [childcare@toronto.ca](mailto:childcare@toronto.ca)