



EarlyON Newsletter

January 2021

EarlyON Staff Profile

Name: Maria Peter

Position: EarlyON Facilitator

Organization: Agincourt Community Services Association (ACSA) in Scarborough

Years of Service: Early Childhood Education working experience—15 years. Working with ACSA—11 years

What do you love about your job?

I love children and working with them, preparing their young minds for the future, watching them grow and develop every year.

I love to come up with different ways of teaching children. It's rewarding because I am able to be creative and improve my technique.

Words of Wisdom for working in pandemic times?

Have a good team around you. Make sure you are in contact with each other. Greet each other often. The little things—make sure you acknowledge the little things everyone does.

Give a helping hand to others. Keep in touch with colleagues as well as clients. Do wellness checks with each other. Take things one day at a time. Know that we are in this together. Know that we are still impacting families even though we are not seeing them in person.



How are you serving families in a neighbourhood highly impacted by COVID-19?

I call to connect with families every week, to find out what help they need. Then I contact our Parent Support & Resource Worker who connects them to different agencies for special needs. So many parents need food help if they

are unable to go outside. We have been doing food drop-offs with our Food Bank and gift drop-offs for Christmas.

We modified our services through trial and error. It took me a while to adapt to the new online environment. It has been a learning experience for all of us. We had to be creative, able to overcome, learn how to adjust. We learned so many technical things. It was hard in the beginning, but our manager continued to support us through this.

Giving Our Children the Gift of Indigenous Language

Great news! Native Canadian Centre of Toronto has developed Indigenous Language Learning Kits that have started to be delivered to community members.



We caught up with Lindsay Hachey, Cultural Language Coordinator for NCCT, to hear the story of how and why these kits were developed.

What do these language kits mean to the community?

Learning our languages plays a huge role in how we reclaim our identity as we walk this path to re-awaken our Indigenous identity and sovereignty as a nation. The great legend

stories were all first told in the Indigenous languages by elders and this should continue on. We believe our elders play a huge role in language revitalization; it's important to have our elders take part in this process. This is vitally important in remembering our heritage and culture.

How was this project seeded and how did it grow?

Since we went all online due to COVID we were talking among friends and family and single mothers about home schooling. I thought it would be interesting to come up with a homeschool language kit and ran the idea by the team. Diane is the elder who works with us. There was no language revitalization on her reserve. We all jumped on the idea.

It was only back in September that this idea was shared at the Indigenous Language Revitalization Initiative. But it took a while to get the curriculum going. It is also evolving because we want to honour the seasons. Children learn the language as parents talk and share about the weather outside. So, the first kit, Part 1, is all about fall and winter. The seasons change through the curriculum, and the curriculum changes through the seasons. Next is spring and summer.

In the development of the kits and curriculum, staff at NCCT engaged elders to help guide the development of the material. This support from the elders was crucial as traditionally most teachings have been verbally passed from generation to generation. It is a child-focused curriculum; I bring my background in ECE and child mental health to this project.

We have had such a great response! The kits moved like hotcakes and we are now making digital versions to meet the demand. People have seen it on the Facebook page and everyone wants one. Schools on reserves are requesting the kits too; they are wanting to have language initiatives and revitalization. Word is getting out and we are getting

exposure in more than just the GTA now. There are a lot of Mohawk in Quebec and in the East so the impact is far-reaching. I am excited about the future of this program. Many will benefit from it.

Tell us about the many hands that touched this project.

The curriculum was developed by Ojibway Elder and Anishinaabemowin teacher Dianne Bob along with Mohawk teacher and language activist Mitchel Mittlestaedt.

Diane is a "first speaker" which means that she has been speaking her language since she was a child. One of the positive sides of COVID was that she was staying on reserve, connected with the elders. Because of this she managed to add Old Ojibway to the curriculum. The elders came into some of the Zoom classes and shared Old Ojibway songs.

Mitchell, our Mohawk teacher, has had a real vision, since he was a child, of reviving the languages. And so he started to remember the language again. He is currently working at a Mohawk school and has met a lot of elders on the reserve.

Building the curriculum and kits has been an incredible endeavour. I want to thank the whole EarlyON crew, our funders, and a huge thanks to Joe Rock for always being very supportive during these times. I'd like to thank those who welcomed our language teachers into their programs with open arms—2Spirit of the 1st Nations, many EarlyON locations with Native Child and Aboriginal Head Start's locations.

It goes without saying that we all learnt so much from each other as we worked together and embraced the task of adding Indigenous languages to their programs. We would like to also acknowledge our designer & branding consultant Holly Fisher. Toronto Children's Services and EarlyON made this project possible through support and understanding of Indigenous Self-Determination. To register for

the Indigenous Language Homeschool Program, simply email Lindsay at lindsay.hachey@ncct.on.ca.

A Letter from Sharn Peters of The Black Collective at The 519

Creating Braver Spaces

My esteemed colleagues,

As we work together to create braver spaces that affirm Black families and the broader Black community, we need to draw on our resources and community partners to help us achieve this important work.

This includes Black community centers, Black professional associations and Black-owned businesses. We must work across sectors and professional backgrounds to draw on our diverse experiences. We must also look into our current assets within the Black community, such as Black Radio stations like G98.7 Grapevine, which is a great way to connect to the Black community and to hear what our thoughts are on the issues that affect us all.

The issues and concerns of the Black community must be addressed across all aspects of everyday life, and we must recognize how Black and Indigenous communities experience oppression, discrimination, and systematic exclusion differently from other marginalized groups. We are persecuted, policed, and subject to surveillance in public spaces and silenced in public deliberation and community engagement.

So How Are We at The 519 Creating a Braver Space?

We have Black representation within our Board of Management, leadership team, and staff team. Our working group, The Black Collective, is making certain that we have the education

and training opportunities to support this work. We are also working towards integrating our *Anti-Black Racism Equity Framework*, which will further guide our programmatic, policy, and advocacy work as well. This work will result in the organization implementing long-lasting change that affirms black culture, black excellence and honours the lived experiences of black people.

We are undertaking a thorough analysis of our organizational structures, seeking out deficiencies and opportunities that can help us think critically about how we can implement long-lasting affirming strategies that result in us moving towards our braver goals of celebrating Black Queer, Trans and two-spirited people and the broader Black Community of our organization.

More on The Black Collective

The collective is comprised of 10 Black staff from various departments and various positions in The 519. The collective comes together bi-weekly to help guide broader organizational strategic planning, lead projects, events, programs and communications related to Black resilience, engagement, and prosperity within our communities.

We have left no stone unturned and continue to ask ourselves if we can do better. We also come with the mindset that this work is everyone's work and a part of their 2021 workplan.

What We Are Doing to Make Long-Lasting Change

1. For 2021 we are working with a Black equity lens to bring best practices to our family programming.
2. We are implementing Black programming and Black community needs suggestions within all of our programming.

3. We are working collaboratively with our black families and The 519 Black Collective to shape our work.
4. The 519 is looking at hiring practices and thinking about where we post job announcements—who is the audience, and will it re-produce oppressive Anti-Black hiring practices?
5. We have made a commitment to diversify our vendor list by focusing on who is not at the table and resolving to buy from black-owned businesses.

These projects are just getting started and more is on the way to advance this work.



Recipe for an EarlyON Program that is Affirming to the Black Community

1. Make a conscious decision as an organization to work towards developing a strong understanding of how to address and confront Anti-Black Racism and dismantle oppression.
2. Provide training so that everyone can recognize and work on their unconscious biases.
3. Ask yourself — Who isn't at the table? Who are we not seeing on our staff team? Who isn't on our board? Who are we not seeing in our program? Representation matters!
4. Ask yourselves — Are we engaging in hiring practices that connect with Black professionals? How might our practices be exclusionary? We must decode and unpack our hiring practices and address assumptions, hiring biases, and see what improvements can be made.

5. Have we thoroughly engaged with Black families? Have we done intentional outreach and made meaningful relationships with Black community groups? Are we working towards sustaining these connections throughout our programs and services?
6. Have we provided the Black staff space to celebrate Black excellence and give them the tools they need to thrive?
7. What training is our Board of Directors missing? What training for the staff team is missing? What workshop would benefit our families to support an affirming inclusive space and to shape the foundation for a braver space?

By creating braver spaces, we aim to break free from social isolation, improve Black mental health outcomes, and create spaces of belonging where we can be our whole selves.

Thank you.

Sharn Peters RECE, RSSW (she/her)
 Manager, Child and Family Programs
 The 519

Announcements

Virtual Check It Out

The Toronto Child and Family Network (TCFN) continues to support the implementation of the Check It Out model, a comprehensive screening and early identification process. This model is being adapted for virtual implementation, and the TCFN is looking to EarlyON to take a lead role in implementing the virtual Check It Out program in partnership with TCFN members. More information to come soon!

Toronto Public Health

We're happy to report that Toronto Public Health has designated a Public Health Nurse to support EarlyON through targeted parental supports and education and supporting staff

capacity to address mental health needs. TPH will begin by working with EarlyON organizations in communities that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

The Learning Corner

Do you know about City Wide Training?

Popular in the child care sector, this professional learning resource provides information about free and fee-based training sessions on a wide range of topics. Although some are specific to childcare, many sessions are relevant for EarlyON programs. Check out the [website](#) and subscribe for updates if you want to receive emails on upcoming trainings.

Virtual Services Community of Practice

We're pleased to launch a series of Community of Practice sessions for program-level EarlyON staff. Participants will have an opportunity to connect with their peers, share ideas, troubleshoot problems, and get inspired. The first few sessions will also give us an idea of what staff are thinking about and the topics they are most interested in for future sessions. Please connect with Training Coordinator Jess Abraham for more information and to register: Jessica.Abraham@toronto.ca.

Key 2021 EarlyON Dates

Reporting Deadlines

2021 Safe Restart Funding Report – Mid-April

2021 Mid-Year Report – Due July 16

EarlyON Leadership Network:

Jan 29th, May 28th, Sept 24th, Dec 3rd

EarlyON Manager Networks:

East – Jan 22nd, Feb 25th, March 26th

West – Jan 22nd, Feb 25th, March 26th

North – Jan 21st, Feb 26th, March 25th

South – Jan 21st, Feb 26th, March 25th

Resources

COVID-19 Resource List for Families

This resource list provides parenting supports and information for families to meet their mental health, financial, housing and food security needs at this time. You can download the latest copy on the City of Toronto [EarlyON page](#).

Free Virtual Therapy for EarlyON Staff and / or Families

Feeling anxious? Sad? Not yourself? AbilitiCBT can help with virtual therapy on any device. Internet-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy programs to support anxiety and depression during COVID-19. [Click on this link to access the AbilitiCBT website.](#)

Professional Network for Black ECEs

Email communityofblackeces@gmail.com to get more information and find out about joining.