



EarlyON Newsletter July 2021

EarlyON Staff Profile

Name: Donia Kobrosly

Position: Nutritionist and Program Support Worker partnering with the EarlyON Program

Agency: College Montrose Children's Place

Years of Service: I've been working here since I moved from Lebanon 2 years ago. It was hard to move to a country and then go into lockdown shortly after. Networking has been challenging but working at College Montrose has helped with settling here. It's like family.

What do you love about your job?

I love being able to support parents build healthy strong children, create a bond and connection between them. I co-host a cooking-with-kids YouTube video series with my son. The idea for this came when the lockdown started. My son was 2.5 years old and needing constant attention which made it hard for me to work. I assumed that other families also had young kids at home and didn't know what to do. So I got him involved in my work as a nutritionist and the show was born! It was a hit. Cooking with kids is so natural--everyone loves it. It gives parents more ways to connect with their kids through teaching, developing senses,

touching, and communicating. You're active with the child, you follow their lead, and this is how they learn. Check out our [YouTube channel here](#) with more than 40 recipes, including things like sweet potato cookies, chocolate avocado pudding, and fruit pizza.



Words of Wisdom for other EarlyON staff in the sector?

With lockdown and working virtually it showed us a lot of things that we have inside and that we can do. We started working virtually very quickly. We learned many skills and showcased our abilities. It has made us stronger. We believe in ourselves more. We had some hidden things inside us that we didn't know. You all are doing an amazing job. We have an energy inside us; it started showing us what we are capable of. Keep nurturing that.

Announcements

EarlyON is Reopening!

The Ministry of Education and Toronto Public Health have given the go-ahead for EarlyONs to offer indoor and outdoor programming. We are very excited to kick off this exciting new phase of reconnecting with families across the city, face to face!

If you are looking for fresh ideas for outdoor programs, check out [Run Wild with My Child](#), a Facebook page recommended by EarlyON Supervisor Sarah Pitawanakwat of Native Child and Family Services of Toronto. A refresher of the Outdoor Programming Training session hosted by Seeds of Play might also be in order. You can re-watch this training session online [here](#) and access the accompanying Resource Guide [here](#). To support you with making the transition, we will have a series of Community of Practice sessions in July focused on outdoor programming, so stay tuned for more details!

Launch of 2SLGBTQ+ Learning and Resource Materials for Early Years

2SLGBTQ+ learning and resource materials for the early years sector are now [here](#)! These resources were created to help you welcome, celebrate, and affirm 2SLGBTQ+ families and gender-independent children in a variety of Early Years environments.

Developed by independent researchers for Toronto Children's Services, the set of resources includes pamphlets, posters, and a Reflection Guide. The pamphlets and posters support both staff and program participants and are available in English, French, Farsi, Spanish, Tamil and Traditional Chinese. The Reflection Guide, which is aimed at Early Years staff is available in English and French. All 2SLGBTQ+ learning and resource materials are available on the [City Wide Training website](#).

Resources

Talking to Kids about Residential Schools and Reconciliation

Award-winning Indigenous storybook writer [Monique Gray Smith](#) shares tips in [this video](#) on how to talk to kids of various ages about Residential Schools, and also how to prepare yourself as the adult to have these conversations.

The video is for anyone with children in their lives, be it educators, parents, grandparents or other caregivers. Smith also gives recommendations in the video for books to read and podcasts to listen to for the purpose of deepening and continuing your learning.

We encourage you to visit Monique Gray Smith's website to learn about her work and about the [children's books she has written](#), which you may consider adding to your EarlyON centre's collection. Some of her published titles are: My Heart Fills with Happiness, You Hold Me Up, When We Are Kind, Speaking our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation, and Tilly: A Story of Hope and Resilience.

The National Indian Residential School Crisis Line provides emotional and crisis referral services to survivors and families. The 24-hour line can be reached at 1-866-925-4419.

[Anishnawbe Health Toronto](#) also offers mental health supports to First Nations, Inuit and Métis (status or non-status, and their families).

Supporting Kids and Families Impacted by Islamophobia and Hate-Based Violence

[This resource booklet](#), created by The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, highlights strategies for having age-appropriate conversations with children about Islamophobia and hate-based violence against Muslims.

It is suitable for educators and support professionals as well as being a useful resource to share with families, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

You can find in this booklet practical ideas and actions to support children, families and communities impacted by hate-based violence as well as links to Muslim-relevant mental health and wellness resources.

Impact of Systemic Racism and Discrimination on Children

Harvard's Center on the Developing Child has created [this brief animated video](#) that highlights the impacts of systemic racism and discrimination on children's development and life outcomes. It challenges us to think about the part we can play in the early years sector to dismantle these problems and address their impacts.

The "Why" of Delta's Black-Focused Kujistahi Programs

In the words of: Felicia Christmas, Kujistahi Team Lead and Cynthia Pommells, EarlyON Manager



At Delta Family Resource Centre, we have a Black-focused program called Kujistahi (respect) that teaches Africentric culture,

history, heritage and bases early learning on the 7 African principles (Nguzo Saba):

- Umoja (unity)
- Kujichagulia (self-determination)
- Ujima (collective work and responsibility)
- Ujamaa (cooperative economics)
- Nia (purpose)
- Kuumba (creativity)
- Imani (faith)

In the Kuji-kids 0-6 program everything is done from the lens of these 7 principles. For example, when we are watching a movie and talking about it, the kids' task is to find the principles in the plot—"This is all about Nia (purpose)! He uses his Kuumba (creativity)." We want the kids and families to see these principles in normal everyday life. We also learn Swahili, do circle time with African folk tales, learn African and Black Canadian heritage, share culturally-specific food, have

Black representation in learning materials, get to know our drums, and our arts and crafts. It's very grounding for kids. It gives them a better sense of self. They feel good that they know stuff about their own people and that's their foundation. They are not an Other. Their way of being is not something alternative.

The interesting thing is that when we first started our Black-serving program we faced resistance from Black families. They were not very accepting of the program. It looked like a return to segregation and they questioned why we would do this. We have been separated and segregated for so many years. Now that we have inclusion, why are we going back? It took some unlearning, a lot of promotion and conversation on our part to create acceptance. Now, hearing the testimonials from the Black families, they have come to really appreciate it. Being *centered* is a very different feeling from being segregated.

We have had many conversations with Black families when they come in about the "why" of having a Black-focused program, about the

importance of having our own space where we can have the ability to look into our culture and understandings. When you are in a mixed program, it's hard to teach a specific culture and get to the root of things. You can only just get to the surface. To get to the root of things, you have to feel comfortable in your skin when you are there and you have to feel free to speak how you want to speak. Only then can you get to the roots and change things if they need to be changed. For instance, when we are sharing teachings about parenting and talking about discipline, parents may be afraid to talk about how they were disciplined by their parents because they are afraid of being judged. In an integrated program, they are afraid to talk about it. When we can talk freely and deeply about things, with shared context and away from judgment and stigma, we can start to make changes.

Inclusion is about creating a space that everyone can be in, but unfortunately that is often thought to mean the same *kind* of space. Inclusion should be about saying: I see you and I recognize the things that you need and I will provide those things so that you can be included. Inclusion is about providing the space that people need so they can feel a part of the community. Our Black-serving programs are these centred spaces. It is important that we view inclusion as meeting the needs of special groups and providing spaces that are reflective of the needs of the community. That is exactly why we have a deep end of the pool and a shallow end of the pool.

We need these spaces for Black kids and parents so that we can have a conversation without always having to explain ourselves and provide the context because we already know it—we live the context. Families really see the value of having a space to talk about the Black parenting experience, about all the extra heavy stuff that black parents carry. Black fathers talk about stigma a lot and how it colours their parenting experience. No doubt when their kids

come into a program they feel the energy of the stress their parents go through. In our Black-focused program everyone gets to name that and we break it down with them.

Young kids need to be equipped and affirmed in their identity so when bad stuff happens they know who they are.

The first time Black kids have their first racist incident—maybe the first time they are called the n-word—is almost always in elementary school. Every kid then asks: Is that true? That person called me *this*—what is *this* and is it true? The weight of the words and actions is to question yourself. The correct response would be: no I'm not *this*. Our hope is to equip kids to know *this* is not true and to stand firm in what they know and who they are.

There's so much internalized hatred in our communities. It's hard to even face that kind of thing as an adult. You have to start practicing when you are a kid, to be able to know and say to yourself and others "This is that and it's not me." We don't have an identity to stand firm in. It's not that it doesn't exist. It just isn't at the forefront in society and it doesn't get representation. It's important to give kids and families that grounding as early as possible.

We wrote a set of affirmations that are supposed to be aligned with our chakras. We had all of the kids come up with our own affirmations and it was from the crown of the head to their toes. We say it at the end of all of our sessions. It is that I understand that I am a loving person. I see positivity in my future. I speak good things into my life. I love my culture. I do good things to affect my future. I feel whole and complete. We want them to repeat this and say this to reframe a lot of doubt. We show up differently when these affirmations sink into our psyches. We see how proud the kids and families are when they are centered.



I UNDERSTAND

I am a Loving Person

I SEE

Positivity in My Future

I SPEAK

Good Things Into My Life

Bob Rumball EarlyON – A Community for Hearing Parents of Deaf and Hard-of- Hearing Kids

In the words of: Rosary Kwak, Early Childhood Development Specialist and Sheila Waller-Kellen, Childhood Program Associate



We started out in the program more than 13 years ago as parents of deaf babies and along

the way we started working here. We're lifers. This is our life.

We came to the Bob Rumball EarlyON because we wanted to see other families where kids were wearing hearing aids, families who were also wondering "what is my kid's life going to look like?" We wanted to meet other people who had the same kind of loss. And we wanted to be in a place where our children didn't keep getting that encouraging "Awwww" pity face. At Bob Rumball, my child didn't get that face.

We refer to the kids we work with as deaf or hard-of-hearing. It's common for hearing people to think that the correct description is

"hearing-impaired." But deaf people don't see themselves as impaired. They have a hearing loss and they have a community, a language, a culture, a history, and their own art. The deaf community is a very vibrant community.

What's it like going to a mainstream EarlyON Centre as a hearing parent with a deaf or hard of hearing child?

For one, you don't have as much in common with other parents, so you feel apart. Secondly, your deaf baby does not hear what is going on. You see other babies developing in a typical way and you are looking at other kids doing different things. That parent is grieving the loss of what they thought their child's life would be like.

Parents who go to an EarlyON Centre with a child who has a diagnosis don't themselves know how to be around their child. They probably also call their child "hearing-impaired." Most kids with hearing loss are born to hearing parents. Parents are completely new to it. They will make mistakes. They don't know how to parent a deaf or hard-of-hearing child. They've never done it before. This is the first deaf child they've ever met and now they're expected to raise them.

With screening these days some parents are finding out as early as 6 weeks about deafness. The first year of a diagnosis in particular is a tricky time for parents. They're thrown into this world of appointments and choices--Should I get a cochlear implant? What's the future going to look like? You're asked to become an expert very quickly and make decisions very quickly. Parents have a completely different life that first year. The number of appointments with clinical staff is overwhelming. I counted one day that my son had 75 appointments in one year only related to hearing.

"This is where I met my person."

Bob Rumball EarlyON offers specialized programming for families with a child who has a newly diagnosed hearing loss. Many families find us through referrals from the provincial Infant Hearing Program and from Toronto Public Health. Our staff are experienced in the area of hearing loss and provide an excellent resource. The Parent Mentor Program is invaluable. This is where I met "my person." At Bob Rumball, the new parent who is really stressed out ends up meeting the one who is 4 years in. Parents are generous to a fault. When you get to the point of feeling like you are going to be OK, you want to be reassuring to other parents. We have a roster of parents who help to guide parents who are newer to navigating all the options. For example, a parent transitioning their child to school to a mainstream program can get connected to another who may have done something similar. There are so many decisions to make and options to navigate that families want to meet other families who have gone through a similar option.

You realize how much that parent connection is when you see people who come in every day. For me, it became a part of my life. It's a small community so we all know each other.

Parents have become helpers and mentors for us, helping other families feel safe.

In addition to the EarlyON drop-in we have a Family Resource Library that houses research and articles, all centered around parents who have deaf or hard-of-hearing kids. We also have a collection of story-books that include characters who are deaf. Social events and workshops are organized for the community and we publish a newsletter and connect people to research opportunities.

Every EarlyON is inclusive--that's the goal. But where there is a special need or disability,

parents want to go where they feel comfortable, where they can be themselves and don't have to explain themselves or have awkward moments. For people to be able to enter a circle where the language is theirs—you can't beat that.

[EarlyON at Bob Rumball Centre of Excellence for the Deaf](#)

[YouTube Channel](#)

[Facebook Page](#)

[Online Registration Form for Families](#)

Ask an Every Child Belongs (ECB) Resource Consultant

May is Speech and Hearing Awareness Month so the ECB Resource Consultant Team, English-speaking and French-speaking, wanted to share a few tips and resources with you this month for creating spaces that are more inclusive of hearing families who have children that are deaf or hard-of-hearing.



Malika Attou (French): "Incorporate equipment and tools in your centre that are suitable for deaf and hard of hearing children and their families. For example, get some face masks that are see-through to enable children to read your lips. Incorporate multiple ways of giving cues, like using flashing lights instead of bells."



Stephanie Hennaoui (English): "Representation matters. Do you have pictures in your centre of kids with cochlear implants and other things that represent them like dolls, puppets and books?"



Joy Smith (English): "For parents, in the first year, there's a grieving process as they come to terms with what they had thought their child's life would be and what it now is. That's why, in the beginning, parents can be in denial or try really hard to restore hearing to their child. Once they start looking into the deaf community, they start to find a comfortable space. Where they thought their child would have a diminished life they realize their child now has two communities. Finding another parent who has been through the emotional journey can help. You can connect families to the [Parent Outreach Program \(POP\)](#) in Toronto. Through POP, they can find peer support."



Tanya Katala Ibalama (French): "Increasing the amount of visuals being used in the program is helpful. Do you implement visual cues for all daily program routines -- games, transitions, tidy-up time, hand washing, nap, snack, and outing? During Circle Time invite the child and their family to take a position where they can easily see you face-to-face. Communicate with the child by positioning yourself at the child's height. Don't try to speak louder. Instead, minimize background noise. Incorporate sign language or other movement to keep the child's attention."



Nancy Mudekeresa Mango (French): "[Centre Jules Léger de Ontario](#) is a francophone provincial institution offering special education in Ontario for children who are deaf or hard of hearing, who are blind or have low vision or who are deaf and blind."



Jodie Kanary (English): "If a child is deaf or hard of hearing the [Toronto District School Board \(TDSB\) Early Education Services](#) will

start supporting the family at a very early stage, as early as 18 months—2 years. It's one of the diagnoses that families get the most support for. During the pandemic not as many babies will have been screened for hearing so families may not be aware as early as they would have been. Family doctors can arrange for a referral to an audiologist."

ECB Resource Consultants are Available to Help You!

Resource Consultants are available to provide information, resources, coaching and training; work together to build partnerships; and provide an opportunity for feedback by visiting your programs virtually or in-person. To book a consultation, please visit the [EarlyON community partners website](#) and click on "Every Child Belongs Resource Consultation Service" to access the service request form. Alternatively, if you want to ask a Resource Consultant a quick question, you can always just email us at EarlyON@toronto.ca.