



**Family Focus Groups:
Report Back Summary**

What We Did

In 2024, Children's Services met with over 100 parents and caregivers across Toronto. The purpose was to hear the experiences of Indigenous, Black, racialized, newcomer, 2SLGBTQ+ families, and families of children with disabilities while developing the Early Years and Child Care Service Plan. The [Service Plan](#) is now available to the public and has been adopted by City Council. For a brief summary of the Service Plan, please see this [Placemat](#).

The goals of the conversations were to understand:

1. How families access early years and child care programs and services
2. What barriers they face; and
3. What families value most in early years and child care programs and services.

This document summarizes what families shared during these conversations.

What We Learned

Parents and caregivers face many **barriers to accessing child care and EarlyON programs**, including:

- Securing a space in a child care program
- Finding affordable child care for children with disabilities who need extra support to enable early identification.
- Being on multiple waitlists for years.
- Child care costs, especially for families who didn't qualify for fee subsidy.
- Rules surrounding the fee subsidy program, like limits on days a child could be absent or which programs they could access.
- Care for school-age children being more expensive and not covered by fee reductions from the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care program.
- Standard hours of care (7 am – 6 pm) not meeting the needs of families with shift work or more than one job.
- Lack of short-term or drop-in care options that would be valuable as a family support resource.
- Not enough and unclear information online and in the community about child care, EarlyON, and the fee subsidy program.
- Information on early years and child care programming not being available in different languages.
- Not enough EarlyON and child care programming that is culturally safe and responsive.
- Difficulty finding information on EarlyON programs in one spot.

"\$10 a day child care sounds wonderful, but I still can't afford it."

- Focus group participant

Parents and caregivers talked about the **benefits of child care and EarlyON programs**, including:

- The developmental benefits of child care, such as getting help supporting children with disabilities, social benefits for children, and mental health benefits for both parents and children. Some parents prefer to keep their children at home but still want part-time programs, like those at recreation centres and libraries.
- Helping parents, especially mothers, find or keep a job or go back to school.
- Helping newcomers settle in a new place, find employment, and attend school.
- Using EarlyON programs to support children's development and social skills, connecting children to their culture, language and community, and building a network of support for parents.
- Getting information on other social supports like health care, housing, education, learning English or French, food, transportation, internet, and other free or low-cost activities for children. Parents and caregivers wanted more of these supports.

"I found an EarlyON with a Black educator and she transformed my kid's development ...she helped them hit so many milestones like writing her name ..."

- Focus group participant

Parents and caregivers said **safety and inclusion** in child care and EarlyON programs are important. They explained the importance of:

- Seeing culture and community reflected in their child care arrangement through language representation in the space, 2SLGBTQ+ friendly images, and staff who are part of their community.
- Culturally-specific EarlyON programming led by Indigenous and Black staff.
- More Francophone EarlyON programming.
- Programs led by staff from their communities with more programs in their own languages.
- More resources and staff training to support the inclusion of children with disabilities.

"I'm looking for programs that are Indigenous-led. I would like to see a program that are just Indigenous."

- Focus group participant

Parents and caregivers also shared **challenges and solutions** that they wanted decision-makers to know about:

- Black, Indigenous, and equity-denied communities often need having to travel significant distances to access culturally relevant programs. Transportation supports would help.
- Parents from Indigenous, Black, and equity-denied groups shared concerns about discrimination and anti-Black racism at their child care arrangement based on their past experiences or experiences of others in their community. When parents raised issues around allowing and not addressing racist stereotypes, bodily harm, verbal abuse, and lack of supervision, they encountered unclear reporting processes, limited accountability, and little follow-up or support.
- Need for more services like speech and language for children who require extra support.
- Need for a dedicated staff member who is trained to support inclusion for children with disabilities.
- Children were unable to get developmental services because of their parent's immigration status.

Thank You

Children's Services would like to sincerely thank families for their time and willingness to share their experiences during the focus groups. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns related to this summary, please contact Yuna Kim at yuna.kim@toronto.ca.