

EYCP 2016-2020
Progress Review Summary Report
Summer 2019

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the City of Hamilton and a wide range of partners in the early years and human services community have worked together to plan and implement a system of early years services and supports for children and families in our community. Hamilton's early years community has shown it has the willingness, leadership and capacity to work together to make a positive difference in the lives of young children and their families.

Building on this strong foundation, Children's Services & Neighbourhood Development Division (CSND) staff engaged consultants in 2016 to facilitate a community planning process and the creation of a 4-year plan that outlines our community's common early years vision and priorities. The *Hamilton Early Years Community Plan, 2016-2020*¹ was completed and shared with City Council in the fall of 2016.

The EYCP 2016-2020 identifies a Course of Action aimed at creating a more integrated system of programs and services that provides an opportunity for all partners to work together to achieve collective impact for the benefit of all children and families. Included in the course of action were the following primary elements:

- ▶ An equity and engagement lens to collectively work towards equitable outcomes for all children and families.
- ▶ A new organizing structure that enables the system to effectively work and learn together. The structure was comprised of:
 - System Planning Collaborative
 - Learning & Mobilization Network
 - Equity and Engagement Advisory Group
- ▶ Seven strategic priorities with specific goals and recommended actions for the future. These priorities being;
 - Quality, Evaluation & Learning

**Hamilton's Early Years
Vision**

*A responsive, high quality,
accessible and
increasingly integrated
early years programs and
services that contribute to
healthy development
today and stronger
futures tomorrow.*

¹ For an electronic copy of the EYCP 2016-2020 Executive Summary see: <https://www.hamilton.ca/social-services/early-years-and-child-care-services/resources-early-years-community-partners>

- Child Care System Planning & Stabilization
- Access & Pathways
- Family Support Programs
- System Advocacy & Education
- Special Needs Resourcing & Strategy
- Before & After School Programs (BASP) Community-Wide Planning

In the two years since the EYCP launch, the early years community has made significant progress in a number of key priority areas and lessons have been learned along the way. This is due to the high level of commitment of Hamilton's early years community and the investment of time, energy and insight from the many stakeholders involved in helping to bring the new plan and organizing structure to life.

There also have been several changes within the early years and broader human services landscape since the EYCP was originally launched and further policy and funding changes are anticipated. Thus, given the current climate and being at the mid-point of the EYCP, this is an opportune time to step back and reflect on progress made to-date and identify any course corrections to ensure that the City of Hamilton and its early years community partners are best serving families and children in our community.

Given their familiarity with the early years sector and the course of action recommended in the plan, the original EYCP 2016-2020 consultants were asked to conduct a targeted EYCP progress update focusing on three key areas:

1. Progress and challenges faced to-date;
2. Changing landscape since the inception of the EYCP and identification of any emerging priorities;
3. Opportunities for course correction with respect to either the collaborative organizing structure or the strategic priorities.

This progress review is not meant to replace the current EYCP 2016-2020; rather it will serve as an addendum to the original EYCP.

2. The Approach

The following EYCP progress update is based upon input and feedback from a range of sources including members of the newly established groups from the EYCP organizing structure (such as, the Learning & Mobilization Network, the Systems Planning Collaborative, and the Equity and Engagement Advisory Group), CSND staff and early years community leaders who participate in multiple groups and committees across the EYCP organization structure (see Table 1).

Table 1. EYCP Progress Update Consultations

STAKEHOLDERS	METHODOLOGY
Children’s Services and Neighbourhood Development Staff (CSND)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Group with staff team (8 participants) • Staff Leads identified accomplishments and next steps for all strategic EYCP Groups/Committees & other associated priorities
Systems Planning Collaborative (SPC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Group (6 participants) • Key Informant Interview with 1 other member
Equity & Engagement Advisory Group (EEAG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Group (9 participants) • Key Informant Interviews with 2 other EEAG members
Learning & Mobilization Network (LMN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-line survey with 22 respondents for a response rate of 33% (primarily child care and BASP partners). • Consultation at February LMN meeting (23 participants)
Key Informants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 key informants participating in multiple EYCP groups/committees (system thinkers)

In addition to the above consultations, relevant documentation was reviewed including Terms of Reference and work plans (where available) for all EYCP groups and committees, membership lists, and related research and policy documents from the local, provincial and federal levels.

Finally, several early years system indicators were updated with 2018 data and compared to the 2016 figures, which are interspersed throughout this progress review report.

3. Progress Made

Over the last two years, significant progress has been made towards achieving the goals set out in the EYCP 2016-2020. This section summarizes the progress made in three main EYCP components:

- (i) the equity and engagement lens to collectively work towards equitable outcomes for all children and families;
- (ii) the new organizing structure that enables the system to effectively work and learn together; and
- (iii) the seven strategic priorities and associated work groups.

These three key elements of the EYCP's collaborative organizing structure were designed to work together to support implementation of the EYCP vision. For example, the new organizing structure helps to drive the strategic work, and the equity and engagement lens helps to improve the system's ability to respond to the needs of Hamilton's diverse populations.

3.1 EYCP Organizing Structure Progress

Quick establishment of most elements of EYCP's organizing structure

Over the past two years, much effort has been put into establishing the new organizing structure including the creation of:

- 3 new community groups, including the Learning and Mobilization Network (LMN), the Equity and Engagement Advisory Group (EEAG), and the System Planning Collaborative (SPC)
- 4 new strategic priority work groups (EarlyON Child and Family Centre Advisory Committee, Special Needs Resourcing Advisory Committee, Hamilton Early Years Quality Program Advisory, and Before and After School Programs Work Cluster) as well as the Early Years' Research and Evaluation Network jointly established amongst key early years partners

EYCP Organizing Structure Highlights

- ✓ 3 new community planning or advisory groups
- ✓ 8 strategic work groups
- ✓ Approximately 140 individuals engaged in the work
- ✓ 7 learning sessions
- ✓ Equity & engagement framework

"I am very thankful for our strong early years community in Hamilton and a responsive and supportive CMSM (City). There are strong relationships and lots of commitment across the sector."

- Terms of Reference and work plans for the EYCP organizing structure components and strategic priority work groups

This is notable progress over a 24-month period; a relatively short timeline for implementing a new community organizing structure.

Flexible structure and responsive oversight

The current EYCP structure has proven to be flexible and responsive to emergent priorities as demonstrated by the creation of two additional strategic priority work groups:

- *Infant and Early Years Mental Health System Support Committee* (IEYMH Committee) established to facilitate cross-sector planning for infant and early years mental health services in the City of Hamilton.
- *Early Years Work Force Work Committee* established to develop strategies to support quality recruitment and retention of Registered Early Childhood Educators in Hamilton.

Additional examples of progress made with respect to the new EYCP organizing structure include (but are not limited to):

- Learning and Mobilization Network launched with:
 - seven learning sessions offered with an average of 31 participants per session
 - increased participation amongst child care and before- and after-school program providers (however, a corresponding loss of several strategic connected partners was also experienced)
 - positive feedback on the learning sessions that focused on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) Calls to Action
 - strong desire amongst participants to engage in mobilization discussions

“Impactful learning linked to the Middle Years Strategy presentation and Indigenous viewpoints...”

“The focus on TRC has heightened our awareness in the system about equity & is fostering a culture of questioning the status quo.”

-LMN participants & survey respondents

- Equity and Engagement Advisory Committee established with:
 - two active family representatives
 - creation of an early year’s equity and engagement framework
 - education and awareness presentations to early years partners underway
- Systems Planning Collaborative established and:
 - supported the development of the LMN learning series
 - responded to emerging issues (such as, infant and early years mental health and early years workforce) by establishing new strategic priority work groups within the EYCP structure

“This (the EEAG) is a safe and comfortable environment. We have meaningful conversations....and are able to challenge and debate each other and learn.”

“There is a willingness and openness to learn about equity and engagement amongst the early years community.”

-EEAG members

3.2 Strategic Priorities – Progress Made

The early years community is making good progress in six of the eight strategic priority areas with a great deal of advancement in the areas of child care system planning and stabilization, family support programs (EarlyON Child and Family Centres), before and after school programs (community-wide planning), special needs resourcing and strategy, and quality.

The remaining two strategic priorities (Access & Pathways and System Advocacy & Education) were originally conceived as pieces of work to initiate once the more time sensitive elements (such as, the provincially mandated establishment of EarlyON Child & Family Centres) were up and running. What emerged from our progress update consultations, however, was the realization that these strategic priorities address cross-cutting issues. Rather than establishing separate work groups, the work should be embedded within the existing committees/structures:

- The Access & Pathways Work Group’s specific goals and recommended actions could be embedded into the terms of reference and work plans of several existing EYCP groups (such as, Equity & Engagement Advisory Group, Special Needs Resourcing Advisory Committee, EarlyON Child and Family Centres Advisory Committee, and Infant and Early Years Mental Health System Support Committee).

- The System Advocacy & Education Work Group’s goals and recommended actions could be embedded within, and led by the community, outside of the formal auspices of the EYCP organizing structure. The System Planning Collaborative can play a supportive role by sharing system-level information with stakeholders to build awareness of changes that may impact the local system.

Examples of progress made in the EYCP strategic priorities areas include, but are not limited to the following:

(i) Child Care System Planning & Stabilization:

▶ ***Significant investments helped to improve access and affordability***

Examples of progress made include:

- Expanded the licensed child care system by providing funding and supports to 935 new spaces
- Increased access to child care by providing a fee subsidy to 6918 children, an increase of 1250 more children compared to 2016
- Increased affordability of child care through an Affordability Grant that reduced child care costs by \$10.00 per day per child for approximately 4500 licensed child care spaces for children aged 0-4 years
- Outdoor play space funding had significant impact for programs and families across the entire city and resulted in an increased number of naturalized playgrounds

Child Care System Snapshot, 2018

- 13,649 operating spaces (10% increase since 2016)
- More spaces for infants and toddlers
- \$31.5M in fee subsidy funding provided
- 6918 children receiving child care fee subsidy (22% increase since 2016)

(ii) Quality

▶ Successful launch of Hamilton’s new early years quality program

Examples of progress made include:

- Successful launch and implementation of the Hamilton Early Years Quality Program (HEYQP) – a process to guide continuous quality improvement for organizations providing early years programs through funding agreements with the City of Hamilton.
- Creation of two new groups to guide the implementation of HEYQP and build a shared understanding and approach to high quality early years programs and services in Hamilton – the Hamilton’s Quality Advisory Group and the Hamilton’s Quality Operations Group (HQOG) to provide operational-level advice to the Advisory Group
- Over 100 initial quality visits made to local child care operators per year (for 2017 and 2018)
- Only 20% of operators required follow-up visits (down from 23% in 2017)
- Positive feedback from providers with 74%² agreeing that the HEYQP had an impact on the quality of their programs and services
- Expansion of the HEYQP to EarlyON Child and Family Centres in 2019

“I really like the change (to the quality program) and how it’s being implemented...it’s more reflective of best practices.”

“The systems priorities adopted for the quality initiative are meaningful and useful.”

- Early Years key stakeholders

(iii) Family Support Programs (EarlyON Child & Family Centres):

▶ Smooth transition to new EarlyON Child and Family Centre (EarlyON CFC) model

In February 2016, the Ministry of Education announced the provincial plan for moving forward with the integration and transformation of child and family programs which involved blending of Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) and Parenting & Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs) into EarlyON Child and Family Centres. The City became responsible for the local management of the EarlyON CFCs.

The service delivery model change resulted in the closure or transition of some program sites due to the transition of PFLCs and to better respond to family needs.

² City of Hamilton CMSM quality survey for licensed child care providers October 2018 with n = 61 surveys completed for a response rate of approximately 64%

Currently, Hamilton has 46 EarlyON CFC sites, which are equitably distributed throughout the city, providing almost 95,000 child visits in 2018.

Progress highlights to date include:

- Establishment of advisory and operational groups to advise and implement the transition
- A successful transition and warm hand-off (e.g. open houses and welcome events) of families who attended the former PFLCs or OEYCs to the new EarlyON CFCs in their neighbourhood
- The addition of two new operators to the EarlyON CFC community for a total of eight community partners involved in the delivery of local EarlyON CFC programs. The additional operators aligned with the transition to a one service provider per location model to facilitate seamless transitions for families and a better job design for staff.
- *Your Voice Matters*: a series of family engagement activities conducted to gather feedback from families and caregivers in order to facilitate a smooth transition from the PFLCs and OEYCs to the new EarlyON CFCs. Efforts included two family surveys (with almost 3,000 respondents in total) and eight focus groups (including Indigenous and French-language focus groups). The surveys and focus groups highlighted what's most important for families visiting EarlyON CFCs (such as, social interaction for their child with peers, exposure to a variety of activities for their child, etc.).
- Indication – via the Children's Voice artifacts that the EarlyON CFCs create space for families to feel welcome and provide opportunities for meaningful ways to participate and interact that establish positive, responsive relationships.

"The groups are able to have open and honest conversations....it feels like a collaborative effort."

- EarlyON CFC operator

"They (my children) get to play with other children and we get to meet our neighbours."

- Family & EarlyON CFC participant

"I feel happy and excited when I come here."

"I can run and plan and be me."

- Children & EarlyON CFC participants

(iv) Special Needs Resourcing & Strategy

▶ *New funding & service delivery model implemented resulting in more children & programs served*

A new model for delivering special needs resources (SNR) to child care programs was implemented in Hamilton in January 2017. The new model includes broader

eligibility criteria and expanded service from children aged 0-6 years to children aged 0-12 years.

Progress highlights to date include:

- Establishment of advisory and operational groups to advise and collectively coordinate and integrate implementation of the new model while seeking opportunities for continuous improvement
- Approximately 200 licensed child care programs and 1,300 children received some level of SNR staffing support in 2018. This is an increase of approximately 300 children from previous years.
- The new model for SNR provided supports to 160% more child care locations.
- Ongoing evaluation and monitoring from 2017-2019 provided evidence-informed enhancements (e.g., Tools for Life Pilot) for building capacity to cultivate inclusive learning opportunities for children
- Positive feedback from the small number of families who participated in the 2018 SNR family survey; 72% were positive about their child's inclusion related to Special Needs Resourcing supports.

(v) Before and After School Programs (BASP) - Community-wide Planning:

▶ ***Increased availability of BASP at all Hamilton elementary schools***

Examples of progress include:

- Establishment of a collaborative community-wide planning structure (the BASP Work Cluster)
- All elementary schools in Hamilton now offer a BASP that range from licensed before and after child care, authorized recreation programs, and school board operated extended day programs.
- Signs of further integration across early years programs with a more 'wrap-around' approach taken to supporting children and families by child care, EarlyON CFC and BASP providers

(vi) Evaluation, Research & Learning:

▶ ***Research and evaluation expertise across EYCP structure***

Examples of progress include:

- Early years research and evaluation embedded across the EYCP structure to provide evidence-informed system planning and implementation as evidenced from the data provided throughout this report

- Creation of the Hamilton Early Years Research & Evaluation Network and launch of the first research and learning event in partnership with the Canadian Evaluation Society of Ontario
- Research partnerships established with Ryerson University, Mohawk College and McMaster University Hamilton Health Sciences
- Progress made with system and program data initiatives including:
 - The successful mobilization of EDI results and successful pilot of MDI, leading to adoption by both School Boards in 2018, and
 - The transition to web-based citywide Early Years Services Information System (EYSIS) at EarlyON Child & Family Centres³

(vii) Emergent Priorities

In addition to progress made in the six strategic priority areas above, the system also made strides in addressing two new strategic priorities that emerged following the inception of the EYCP in response to community needs; specifically, infant and early years mental health and early years work force.

▶ *Increased awareness and understanding amongst providers of mental health issues during the early years*

Examples of progress made include:

- Creation of the Infant and Early Years Mental Health (IEYMH) System Support Committee
- Adoption of one common community definition of Infant and Early Years Mental Health
- Infant and early years mental health community profile completed
- Annual Symposium on Infant and Early Years Mental Health (2018 and 2019)
- Certificate in Infant Mental Health Promotion (SickKids) offered to local educators and ECE students free of charge
- Buy-in amongst key partners and sectors to work together to improve coordination of services and supports including establishing consistent screening, assessment tool(s) and system referral pathways

“It is very beneficial to have the City’s research and evaluation expertise and supports at each of our work groups...if we ask for information or data, it happens.”

- Early years program operator & member of EYCP organizing structure

³ The Early Years Services Information System (EYSIS) is a program registration and participant-tracking data management tool used to collect, record and report data on early years programs.

▶ ***Organized events and initiatives aimed at supporting quality recruitment and retention of Registered Early Childhood Educators***

Examples of progress made include:

- Creation of the Early Years Work Force Work Cluster to coordinate RECE recruitment and retention initiatives across sector
- Literature review and environmental scan completed
- Hosted community events that supported graduating students connecting with potential early years employers

4. Changing Landscape

The early years population, community, and political landscape have changed since the inception of the EYCP in 2016 and it will continue to change throughout the EYCP's lifecycle. Many of the changes – both realized and anticipated - will have significant implications for early years programs, providers, and most importantly children and families in Hamilton.

Significant changes to Hamilton's early years landscape include:

- A new provincial government and accompanying policy and funding changes that will impact many programs and services used by families (such as, social assistance, special needs funding, education policy and strategy, child care tax credit, etc.)
- Changes at the City of Hamilton including new elected officials and organizational leadership.
- The City of Hamilton's commitment to human services integration with the goal of providing more holistic services and responding to needs in a seamless fashion.
- Loss of provincial funding to early years and human service sector may result in reduced capacity to support community partnerships.
- Launch of Hamilton's Urban Indigenous Strategy and the identification of opportunities to celebrate and honour Indigenous people, cultures and traditions, and for education and internal collaboration among city staff to strengthen the relationship with the Indigenous community.
- Anticipated retirements of key early years champions and leaders will result in the loss of early years historical knowledge and memory. The community needs to consider succession planning across the sector at various leadership levels. Relationships will need to be re-established as the community prepares for new leaders, ideas and approaches.
- On-going demographic shifts including a continued growth in the number of children in Hamilton, the rise of real estate values and rental costs in certain neighbourhoods that cause displacement of families living in lower income households, the arrival of newcomers, influx of families from the Greater Toronto Area etc.

The 2016 -2020 Early Years EYCP was developed in a relatively stable early years environment. Over the course of the next several years it is certain that change – be it demographic, policy or funding – will be constant.

Given the uncertainty that dominates the environment today, the EYCP - its organizing structure and its areas of focus – must be agile and continue to evolve in response to the environment.

Consultations uncovered a shared sense amongst early years stakeholders that in the current climate a collective impact or collaborative approach to planning and delivering early years services is more important than ever.

The following section describes the key learnings from this review, and highlights opportunities for course corrections moving forward that reflect the uncertainty surrounding the current early years environment.

5. Key Learnings & Opportunities for Course Correction

Key Learnings

On the basis of our consultations and document review a number of lessons learned have been identified.

▶ ***Working well together - commitment & willingness to work together:***

- All persons and organizations consulted for the progress update remain deeply committed to working together.
- Community partners are very appreciative of the supports and resources provided by the City of Hamilton. Many shared their appreciation of the City's presence and accessibility in the community and their responsiveness to emerging issues.
- The EYCP and collaborative organizing structure is bringing together diverse partners who are connected to the broader system, enabling human services integration such as Health Care, Child Protection, Housing, Recreation etc.
- Numerous stakeholders provided examples of the early years system making further inroads with respect to service integration for families. For example, many locations now have one service provider offering multiple programs and services within a school (e.g. licensed child care, BASP, authorized recreation program, EarlyON CFC, etc.). This model supports seamless transitions for families.
- The City of Hamilton and the broader EYCP organizing structure are able to respond to emergent priorities such as, infant and early years mental health and early years workforce.

"I am very thankful for our strong EY community in Hamilton. We have built strong relationships and commitment across the sector."

"We have a responsive and supportive CMSM."

"We are working better together as a system."

- Early years program operators & members of EYCP organizing structure

▶ ***What's Been Challenging – prioritizing the work and clarifying roles and responsibilities:***

The new EYCP (2016-2020) required the implementation of a new collaborative organizing structure. While good progress was made in implementing core parts of the structure, the resources required to support an effective change management process were underestimated. This resulted in some role confusion for both the CMSM and community partners in the new structure, and a feeling that human resources were spread too thin due to emerging priorities and changing environments. Coordination and communication between various parts of the organizing structure was also challenged. If stakeholders were not directly involved in the work, they were not aware of progress made. In the words of one stakeholder, "It feels like we have lost the 'glue' that holds us all together".

"I have little concept of how the whole Network & the different groups are functioning."

"There seem to be many opportunities for providers to come together for a similar purpose."

"It's all important work, but it's not feasible to do all at once."

"We need to let go of some things. Less is more."

- Early years program operators & members of EYCP organizing structure

Opportunities for Course Correction

The Early Years Community Plan (2016-2020) and organizing structure were established at a time when the environment was relatively stable and predictable. Input gathered for this review suggests that in the context of the changing landscape and anticipated policy changes, course corrections should include the following:

- ***Readjust priorities in order to respond to emerging policy and funding changes that will impact Hamilton's early years system:***
 - Set priorities for the EYCP in the context of the changing environment. This will require putting some work on hold in order to address emerging or time sensitive priorities.
 - Provide space for system partners to share information and intelligence about the changing landscape.

- Negotiate how partners will work collectively to respond to changes, and leverage opportunities.
- Ensure everyone is collectively committed and working towards the same direction (monitor and report on changing landscape and outcomes).
- **Streamline, simplify & coordinate the collaborative organizing structure to get ready for the important work ahead:**
 - Clarify the role of the CMSM within the early years plan, including 'directing traffic' – related to emerging early years issues/opportunities - to the appropriate Work Cluster/Committee, and designating and coordinating CMSM staff who will provide 'backbone' support to the collaborative organizing structures that will advance EYCP priorities.
 - Ensure a 'fluid' structure and membership that can effectively respond to the changing landscape.
 - Clearly articulate the scope and focus for the various Work Clusters/Committees and ensure alignment with identified EYCP priorities.
 - Create space for a broader cross-section of core and connected partners to get engaged and become active system champions (identifying shared priorities and mobilizing community change/impact).
 - Invest in improving coordination and communication between and across various Work Clusters/Committees that comprise the collaborative organizing structure.
- **Build on progress made, and continue to stabilize and integrate the early years and broader human services system:**
 - Sustain gains (relationships & programs/services) and continue to stabilize the system. For example, consider implications of the rising costs of child care and the shortage of RECEs and how this will impact the accessibility of licensed child care for Hamilton families.
 - Continue to seek and share input from families and system partners.
 - Broker relationships and partnerships that benefit the system, and contribute to human services integration (e.g. housing, OW, health, school boards).

- Focus on emergent and/or sustained priorities including: child care and EarlyON CFC stabilization, infant and early years mental health, ~~r~~-early years workforce (including recruitment, retention, staffing models, and wages), early years data infrastructure, service integration and succession planning.

6. Concluding Thoughts

The Hamilton Early Years Plan (2016 -2020) was an ambitious plan that built on the Hamilton Early Years community's commitment to working together to create a responsive and quality-driven early years system. It identifies a 'Course of Action' aimed at creating a more integrated system of programs and services that provides an opportunity for all partners to work together to achieve collective impact for the benefit of all children and families.

Over the past two years, the EYCP has made significant progress towards implementing a collaborative organizing structure and advancing strategic priorities. The key learnings and course corrections suggest opportunities to prioritize the work ahead, streamline the structure, engage more stakeholders, and cultivate system champions.

However, due to the changing landscape it is anticipated that many of the cornerstone programs, service directions and early years policies will experience significant modifications. This is creating tension and anxiety as to what the future state of early years and human services will look like. There needs to be a space and flexibility for system partners to consider and respond to changes as they emerge.

It is essential, moving forward, that the EYCP can respond to the anticipated changes in the early years and broader human services landscape, while sustaining the collaborative relationships that have defined and sustained Hamilton's Early Years System over the past decade.

