



London- Middlesex

Child Care & Early Years Service
System Plan

2024-2028



London
CANADA

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City of London

Land Acknowledgment Statement

We acknowledge that we are gathered today on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapéewak and Attawandaron.

We acknowledge all the treaties that are specific to this area: the Two Row Wampum Belt Treaty of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy/Silver Covenant Chain; the Beaver Hunting Grounds of the Haudenosaunee NANFAN Treaty of 1701; the McKee Treaty of 1790, the London Township Treaty of 1796, the Huron Tract Treaty of 1827, with the Anishinaabeg, and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum of the Anishnaabek and Haudenosaunee.

This land continues to be home to diverse Indigenous people (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) whom we recognize as contemporary stewards of the land and vital contributors to society. We hold all that is in the natural world in our highest esteem and give honour to the wonderment of all things within Creation. We bring our minds together as one to share good words, thoughts, feelings and sincerely send them out to each other and to all parts of creation. We are grateful for the natural gifts in our world, and we encourage everyone to be faithful to the natural laws of Creation.

The three Indigenous Nations that are neighbours to London are the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation; Oneida Nation of the Thames; and the Munsee-Delaware Nation who all continue to live as sovereign Nations with individual and unique languages, cultures and customs.

This Land Acknowledgment is a first step towards reconciliation. Awareness means nothing without action. It is important that everyone takes the necessary steps towards decolonizing practices. We encourage everyone to be informed about the traditional lands, Treaties, history, and cultures of the Indigenous people local to their region.



Middlesex County Land Acknowledgment Statement

We acknowledge that the land we stand upon today is the traditional territory of the Attawandaron, Anishinabeg, Haudenosaunee, and Lunaapeewak peoples who have long standing relationships to the land, water and region of Southwestern Ontario. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames First Nation, and Munsee-Delaware Nation.

We acknowledge the treaties that are specific to this area: Treaty 2 (McKee Purchase), Treaty 3 (Between the Lakes Purchase), Treaty 6 (London Township Purchase), Treaty 21 (Long Woods Purchase) and Treaty 29 (Huron Tract Purchase).

We value the significant contributions, both in the past and the present of local and regional first nations of Turtle Island.

We acknowledge historic and ongoing injustices that Indigenous peoples endure in Canada and we affirm our commitment to honouring Indigenous voices, nations and cultures, and to moving forward in the spirit of reconciliation and respect.



Introduction

There is no greater resource than children, which is why their well-being and success must be a top priority. Research has proven what parents already know—children are born intelligent and curious, with a strong desire to learn about the world around them. We know a child’s mind develops the fastest in the early years of life and that is why Ontario has long recognized the importance of quality learning experiences for our youngest learners.

These early experiences have a significant and measurable lifelong impact on a child's brain for life. Research shows that early learning programs strengthen a child’s social, emotional, language, literacy, cognitive and self-regulatory skills. That is why we need to take advantage of this critical window of opportunity and ensure children have positive early childhood education and learning experiences.

Studies have shown that early years programs have a number of benefits for children’s development, community wellbeing, and economic prosperity, including:



Academic Achievement: Children in quality early childhood education programs have stronger cognitive development over the course of their lives, have better grades at school and increased chances of attaining postsecondary education.



Health and Well-Being: Children experiencing caring and responsive relationships in early years programs grow up happier, healthier and more resilient.



Lifelong Success: Children with positive early childhood educations are more likely to have a highly-skilled job and better lifelong outcomes.



Economic Benefits: Economists estimate that for every dollar spent on early childhood education, there is a seven dollar return on investment. We also know that accessible and affordable child care options support economic empowerment for women. Child care allows more parents to participate in the labour market, as well as pursue post-secondary education and training.

Purpose

The Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 (CCEYA) requires Service System Managers (SSMs) to establish a child care and early years programs and services plan (service system plan) that addresses matters of Provincial interest under the Act. Service system plans allow for a province-wide opportunity to analyze the impacts of programs and services, identify progress and service gaps, and foster evidence-based decision making to continue to support SSMs and the early years and child care sector.

Regulations under the CCEYA provide information on procedures and content related to service system plans and duties of SSMs. These regulations require SSMs to update their plans at a minimum every five years and consult with service providers and families in the development and implementation of plans.

This document presents a single service system plan for the City of London and Middlesex County. This plan recognizes the differences between London and Middlesex County, and the importance of a coordinated, integrated approach to service system planning across the SSM geographic area.

The City of London and Middlesex County have a long history of working collaboratively with children, families, and community partners to plan for an increasingly integrated system of services for children and families.



Provincial Context

Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework

In 2017, the Province released the Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework (renewed framework) that set a system vision where:

“ All children and families have access to a range of high-quality, inclusive and affordable early years and child care programs and services that are child-and family-centered and contribute to children’s learning, development and well-being.”

The renewed framework, developed following extensive engagement that included over 6,000 online responses from over 20 communities, identified seven key Provincial priorities for action, including:

- Increasing access to early years and child care programs and services
- Ensuring a more affordable child care and early years system
- Establishing an early years workforce strategy
- Determining a provincial definition of quality in the early years
- Developing an approach to promoting inclusion in child care and early years settings
- Creating an outcomes and measurement strategy
- Increasing public awareness of Ontario’s child care and early years system



The renewed framework also identified **four important pillars** which were chosen based on feedback from system partners, and reinforced through the findings of the province's engagement processes.



Affordability

Ensuring that early years programs and services, including licensed child care, are within affordable reach for families.



Access

Increasing access to early years programs to give families more opportunities to benefit from high-quality early childhood programs and services.



Quality

Enabling safe and reliable programs built on positive, responsive relationships, engaging environments, and meaningful experiences for children and families and delivered by educated and well-supported staff.



Responsiveness

Providing a range of early years and child care programs that are inclusive and culturally appropriate, located in schools, communities, workspaces and home settings so that parents—including parents who work irregular hours—can choose the options that work best for their family.

Canada-Wide Early Learning & Child Care Agreement

The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (CWELCC), signed by federal and provincial governments on March 27, 2022, aims to make child care more affordable. The framework, established under CWELCC seeks to lower costs while improving the accessibility, quality, and inclusivity of Ontario's child care and early years sector. Ontario, under this agreement, plans to facilitate the creation of 86,000 new CWELCC licensed child care spaces by the end of 2026.

Ontario Child Care Workforce Strategy

The purpose of the Ontario Child Care Workforce Strategy is to support the recruitment and retention of qualified professionals, help achieve system growth, and ensure increased access to high quality licensed child care in the province. The Ontario Child Care Workforce Strategy support Ontario's child care and early years professionals by implementing better wages and working conditions, supporting career laddering and entry to the profession, and building the profile of the profession by implementing new programs and building on existing initiatives.

The focus of this strategy is:

- Workforce Compensation
- Professional Development and Mental Health Support
- Innovation Fund
- Expansion of Early Childhood Education Qualifications Upgrade Program (ECE QUP)

Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework

Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework helps local Service System Managers create plans focused on making child care more accessible and inclusive. The goal is for all children, no matter their abilities or background, to fully participate in child care and build strong relationships with peers and educators. This framework aligns with Ontario's commitment to increase access to child care for low-income families, vulnerable children, those from diverse communities, children with special needs, and Indigenous children.

Local Approach

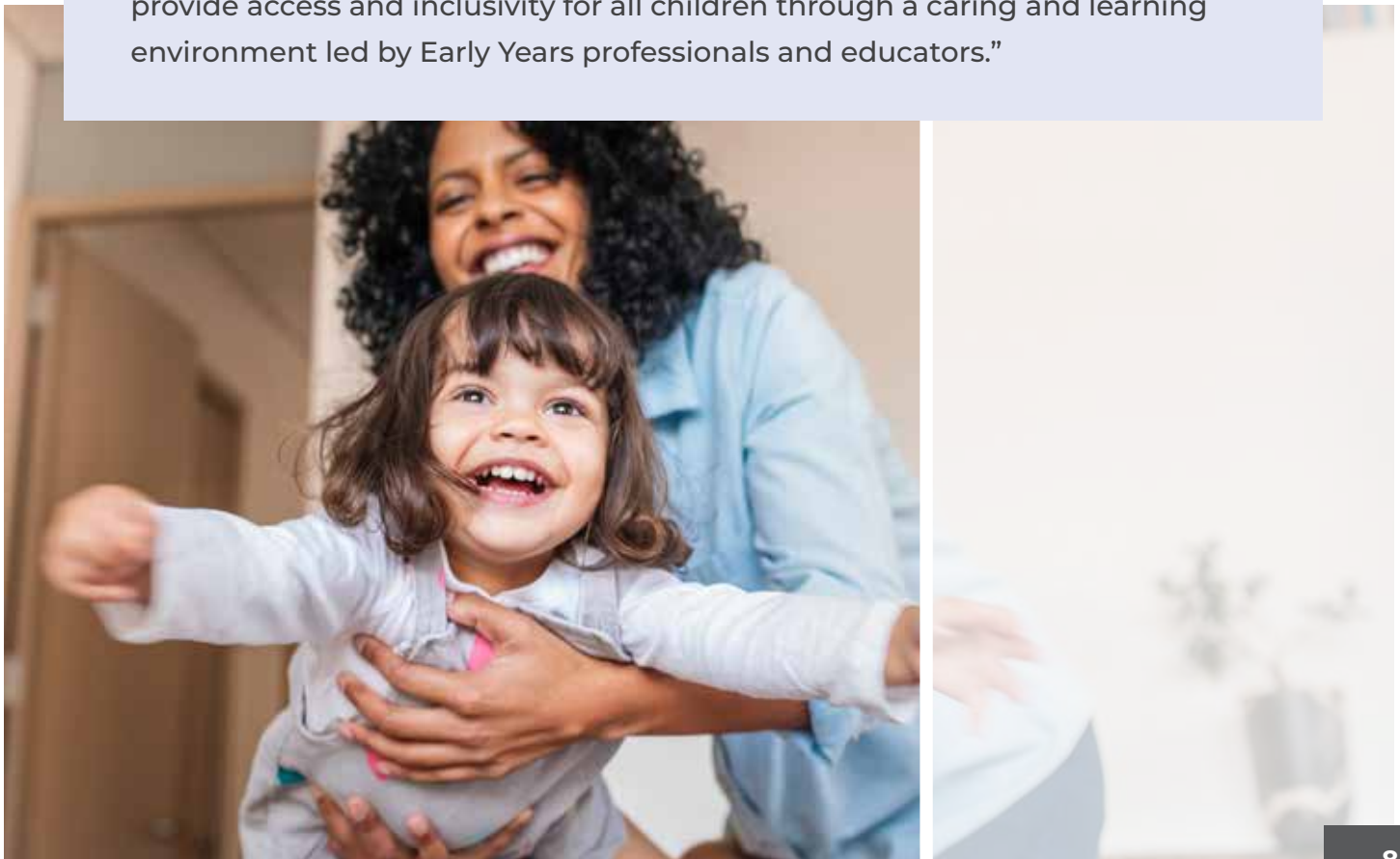
Our Service System Management Approach

Although the City of London is the formal SSMS for London-Middlesex, Middlesex County is contracted to provide child care and early years services in Middlesex.

Local Early Years Policy Framework

Locally, the research-based, evidence-informed Early Years Policy Framework developed by Fanshawe College offers considerations for the child care and early years system in London and Middlesex that align with the provincial policy framework, with the addition of a pillar focused on relationships. It has been assessed and validated by professionals, students, and others across the child care and early years sector. The policy framework outlines a vision for:

“ A child care system that at its foundation is responsive to the needs of the children and their families through relationships that benefit the child, parents, the family, and the community. This affordable, quality child care system will provide access and inclusivity for all children through a caring and learning environment led by Early Years professionals and educators.”



CWELCC Implementation

The City of London and Middlesex County administer the CWELCC system under Ministry direction. The revised licensing procedures, effective January 1, 2023, task SSMs with advising license applicants regarding their CWELCC funding eligibility, including alignment with the directed growth strategy outlined in the service system plan. This strategy aims to support access and inclusion and guide strategic expansion where the need is most critical. SSMs advice at this stage is based on current information and doesn't guarantee CWELCC funding post licensing; refer to O. Reg. 137/15, s. 13(1) for details.

Directed Growth Plan

The London and Middlesex Child Care Directed Growth Plans align with the Ministry of Education's expectations for Service System Managers, as outlined in Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework 2023. The Directed Growth framework envisions greater access and inclusion, fostering active participation in child care for all children regardless of abilities or socio-economic backgrounds.

Both plans detail how municipalities will support child care operators to enhance access for various groups, including low-income families, vulnerable children, those with special needs, diverse communities, Indigenous and Francophone families, newcomers, and those requiring more flexible care models.

A five-year plan has been initiated by the City of London and Middlesex County to establish 2,889 new licensed child care spaces by 2026, encompassing centre-based and home-based care.

London-Middlesex Child Care and Early Years System Snapshot

The following section of the plan provides a snapshot of the London-Middlesex Child Care and Early Years System.

Licensed Child Care - Centre-Based (as of December 2023)

Centre-Based Child Care Agencies¹

63 Total Agencies



Centre-Based Child Care Sites

207 Total Sites



System Capacity

15,726 Total Licensed Capacity



Licensed Child Care - Home-Based (as of December 2023)

Home-Based Child Care Agencies

4 Total Agencies



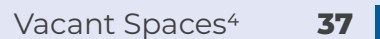
Licensed Child Care Operating Homes

132 Total Operating Homes



System Capacity

792 Total Licensed Capacity



Average Daily Cost Of CWELCC Enrolled Child Care (as of January 2023)



Infant

\$28.42 (London)

\$27.97 (Middlesex)



Toddler

\$26.73 (London)

\$25.22 (Middlesex)



Preschool

\$23.87 (London)

\$23.21 (Middlesex)






4,854 Children Waitlisted⁵
(Distinct Count)

Licensed Child Care As of January 2024

Licensed Child Care - Fee Subsidies & Supports (full year 2023)

Average monthly number of children supported by fee subsidy (full year 2023)

By Age Group (Regular Only)

| | | |
|---|---------------|------------|
|  | Infant: | 152 |
|  | Toddler: | 413 |
|  | Preschool: | 944 |
|  | Kindergarten: | 439 |
|  | School Age: | 715 |

By Support Type

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|
| Regular Only: | 2,665 |
| Recreation Only: | 245 |
| Ontario Works Formal: | 83 |
| (Regular) % of System Enrollment | 26.83% |

Average monthly number of children supported by SNR

SPECIAL NEEDS RESOURCING (AKB)⁶

496

Licensed Child Care - Workforce (as of December 2022)

| London | | | Middlesex | |
|--|---|-----------------------|---|--|
| Number of Staff within Role ⁷ (LDN) | Average Hourly Wage ⁸ (\$) (LDN) | Role | Number of Staff within Role ⁷ (MX) | Average Hourly Wage ⁸ (\$) (MX) |
| 889 | \$21.93 | Educator (RECE) | 110 | \$19.01 |
| 99 | \$25.73 | Supervisor (RECE) | 26 | \$22.39 |
| 872 | \$18.76 | Educator (Non-RECE) | 159 | \$16.53 |
| 417 | \$23.67 | Supervisor (Non-RECE) | 26 | \$19.85 |
| 12 | n/a | Other | 28 | n/a |

Staff Supported by Wage Supports

1,655 WEG⁹/HCCEG⁹

1,513 CWELCC Wage Supports

319 WEG⁹/HCCEG⁹

112 CWELCC Wage Supports

Workforce Capacity Building (time period required)

65 PD Workshops - Delivered

1,001 Participants (Distinct Count)

65 PD Workshops - Attended

EarlyON (as of December 2023)



15,459 Children Served (Distinct Count)

70,997 EarlyON Visits by Children

13,697 Caregivers Served (Distinct Count)

57 EarlyON Centres

34 RECE Program Staff

Directed Growth Plan (as of January 2024)

| | School Based | Community Based | Total | By Auspice |
|--|--------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------------------------|
| New Space Targets | 582 | 2,307 | 2,889 | 2,503 Non-Profit 386 For-Profit |
| New Spaces Licensed¹⁰ (Progress Towards Target) | 172 | 689 | 861 | 742 Non-Profit 119 For-Profit |

Footnotes for System Snapshot (See Pages 12-15)

*Unless otherwise specified or labelled, data presented represents totals for both London & Middlesex.

1. Total Agencies may be less than the sum between London and Middlesex, as some agencies operate in both regions.
2. Operating Capacity is self reported by child care operators and represents the total number of spaces child care operators intend to serve based on budget allocations and staffing complement
3. Enrolled Spaces = Operating Capacity - Vacant Spaces
4. Vacant Spaces are self reported by child care operators and represent spaces within Operating Capacity that remain unfilled for an entire reporting month.
5. Children Waitlisted refers to the total distinct number of children on the OneHSN waitlist. This total includes children who are requesting care prior to 3 months from the reporting period (includes children requesting care prior to April 2024).
6. Special Needs Resourcing (AKB) refers to the average monthly number of children supported by funding offered by All Kids Belong (AKB).
7. Number of Staff Within Role refers to the number of roles being filled by staff, not the total number of staff. An individual may occupy more than one role. Totals do not accurately represent the total distinct number of individuals contributing to the child care labour market. This total represents staff within WEG-receiving child care sites
8. Average Hourly Wage (\$) includes applicable federal / provincial compensation supports for eligible workers. This represents staff within WEG-receiving child care sites.
9. WEG / HCCEG refer to the Wage Enhancement Grant and Home Child Care Enhancement Grant programs.
10. New Licensed Spaces do not include additional spaces that have been approved to be created but have not yet been licensed.

Community Snapshots



Click here to view London's Neighbourhood Profiles

<https://london.ca/living-london/community-services/child-care-services/child-care-supports>



Click here to view Middlesex County's Community Profiles

<https://www.middlesex.ca/departments/socialservices/childrenservices/childcareserviceplan>

Overview

London-Middlesex Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan | 2024-2028

Plan Engagement

A comprehensive engagement plan was developed to effectively connect, consult, listen, and respond to a diverse range of parties interested in and impacted by the City of London and Middlesex County's child care and early years system. Information collected resulted in a comprehensive set of data and information that reflects successes, challenges, and opportunities with respect to access, inclusion, affordability, responsiveness, and quality of the system.

The data collected directly informed the design and improvement of the local child care and early years system based on the needs, strengths, priorities, and desired outcomes of the community. This renewed service system plan includes an increased focus on inclusion as it relates to access.

Key Audiences

The engagement plan involved several key audiences, including:

- Licensed Child Care Operators
- Early Years Service Providers
- Community Partners
- Families (parents and caregivers with children 0-12 years of age)
- Children

Data and engagement of the above groups prioritized connections with operators and families with the following backgrounds or experiences:

- Indigenous
- Francophone
- Children with special needs
- Black and racialized
- Low-income
- Newcomers
- Family Support program providers
- 2SLGBTQIA+
- Low proximity to child care or early years programming sites
- Other equity-denied groups

Engagement Activities

To gather data from interested key audiences, the following engagement activities were implemented:



1,400 parent and caregiver, **164** educator, **72** operator surveys completed



16 community partner focus groups, with **over 150 participants**



2 child care and early years sector-wide meetings, with **over 140 participants**



40 community events attended, with over **500 families** engaged



205 child-focused inputs such as drawing and **stories**



Focus of the Plan

The London-Middlesex Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan focuses on five strategic priorities, called **Building Blocks**.



Accessibility



Inclusion



Quality

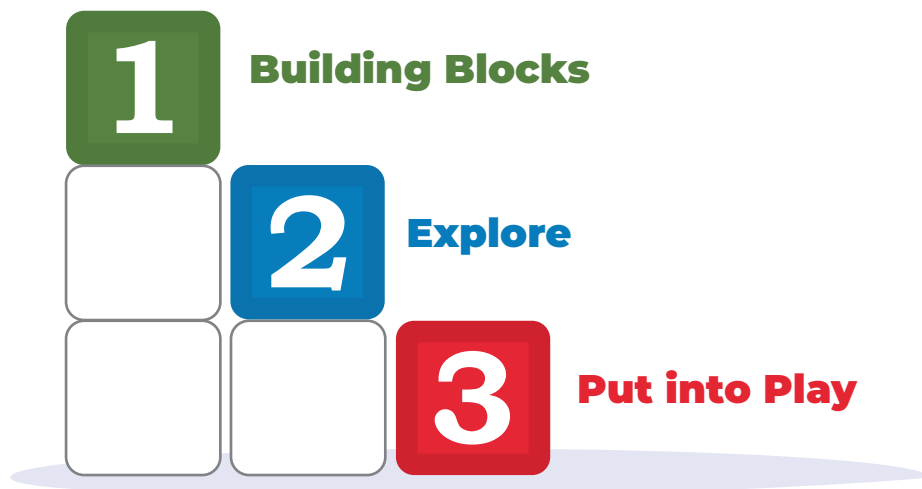
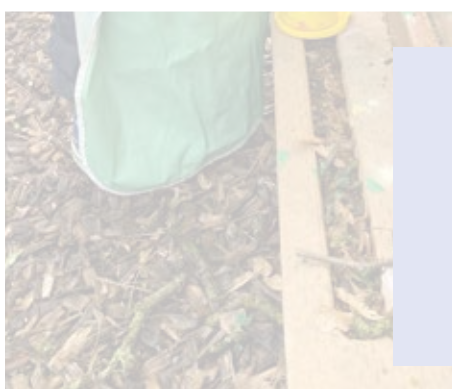


Collaboration



Backbone

Over the course of the five years of the plan, we will **Explore** Areas of Focus in each of these **Building Blocks** and then **Put into Play** actions designed to create forward momentum.



This section of the plan outlines the five year plan for **London-Middlesex** by highlighting the **Building Blocks** and areas to **Explore**. The actions that will be **Put into Play** are detailed in the London and Middlesex sections of the plan.



Accessibility

Increasing access to early years programs to give families more opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood programs and services. This includes ensuring programs are affordable and responsive so that parents can choose the options that work best for their family.

- Affordability
- Access and Flexibility
- System Navigation and Support



Inclusion

Creating inclusive environments where all children and families feel included and connected.

- Inclusive Professional Learning
- Inclusive Policies and Environments
- Commitment to Truth & Reconciliation



Quality

Enabling safe and reliable programs built on positive, responsive relationships, engaging environments, and meaningful experiences for children and families, delivered by educated and well-supported staff.

- Workforce Recruitment and Retention
- Pedagogical Professional Learning
- Leadership and Business Development
- Commitment to Standards of Excellence
- Mentorship



Collaboration

Focusing on relationships, partnerships and collaboration to establish a seamless and family-centred service system.

- Strong Connections
- Seamless Transitions
- Interprofessional Relationships



Backbone

Supporting the child care and early years system through responsive and accountable service system management.

- Data Sharing
- Evidence-Informed Decision Making
- Funding and Sustainability
- Third-Party Relationships and Financial Accountability





How to Read this Document

This document provides highlights of the findings from engagement processes and environmental scans. These findings have guided the development of this plan.

The City of London and Middlesex County are represented within individual sections of this document. This was intentional to preserve and respect the unique needs and opportunities of urban and rural environments.



London



Licensed Child Care



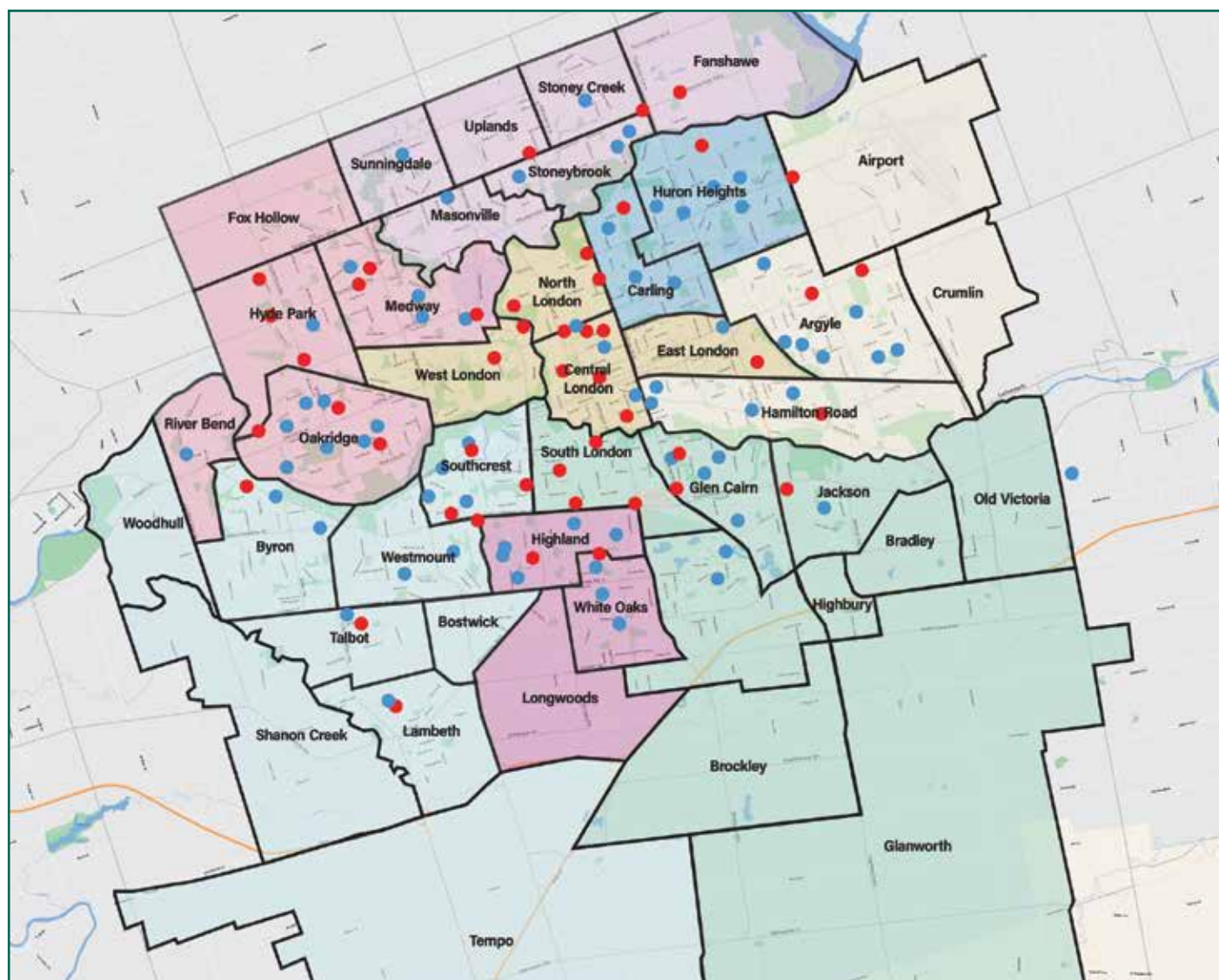
Centre-Based

- **49** centre-based child care agencies
- **169** centre-based child care sites
- **13,391** licensed centre-based child care spaces



Home-Bases

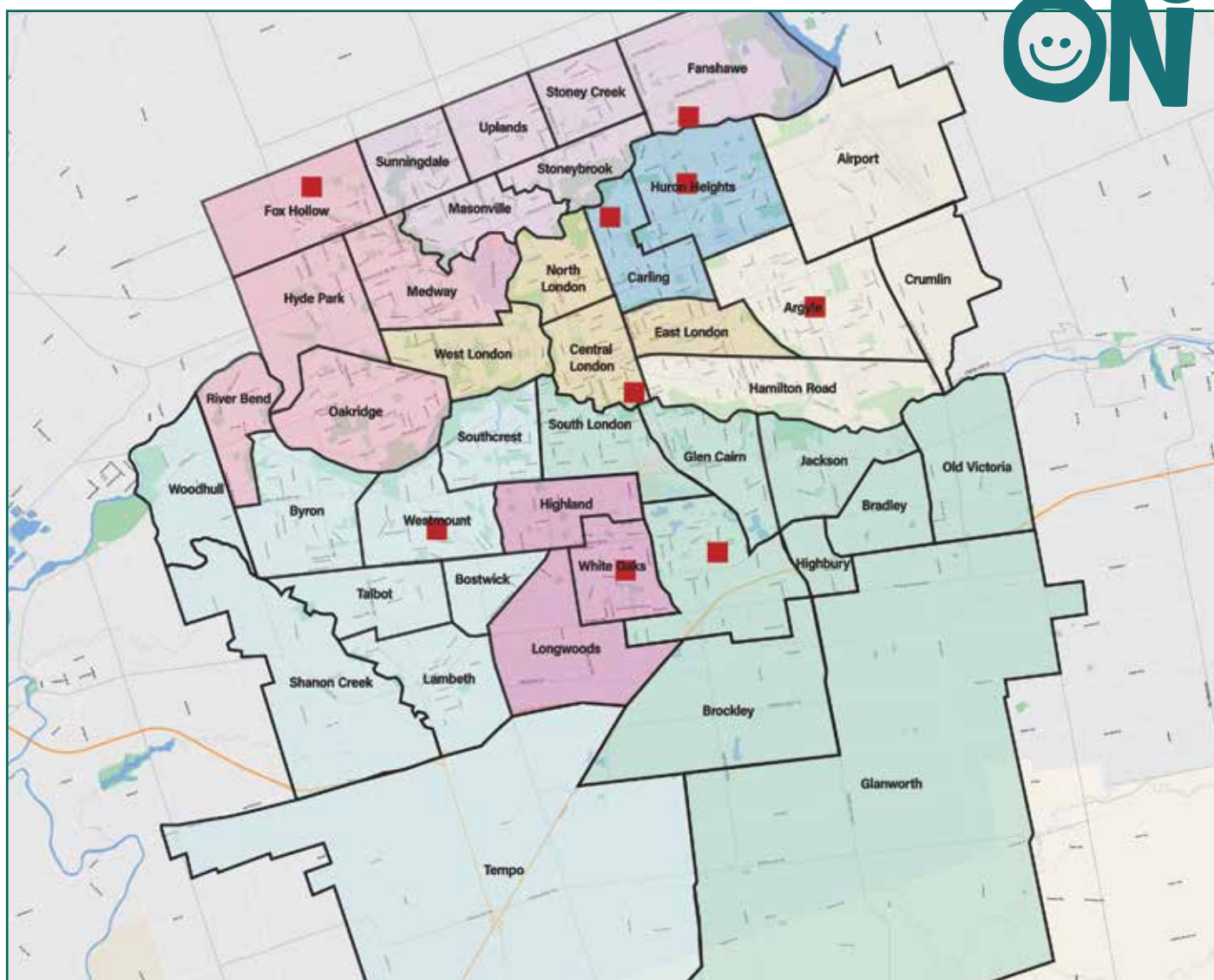
- **4** licensed home child care agencies
- **128** licensed and operating homes
- **768** maximum number of spaces within licensed and operating homes



- Child Care Centre Serving Non-School Age
- Child Care Centre Serving School Age

EarlyON Child and Family Centres

- **7 Family Centres** across London with defined neighbourhood catchment areas, with one being built and scheduled to open in 2025 including **1 Indigenous-Led** Family Centre
- Over **33 EarlyON** locations, including mobile community sites, are operational in London as of 2024
- **7 contracted lead agencies** operator contracted to deliver EarlyON programming through Family Centres in London
- **1 contracted operator** delivering **ON y va** programming for francophone families across London



■ EarlyON Child and Family Centres

The City of London has a growing population, including the population of 0-4 year old children requiring child care between the 2016 and 2021 Census:

- London’s total population grew by **10%**
- London’s 0-4 year population grew by **3.1%**
(most notably in: Central; Fox Hollow; Jackson; Bostwick; and Lambeth)
- London’s 5-9 year population grew by **11.5%**
(most notably in Fox Hollow; Longwoods; Bostwick; Lambeth; and Riverbend)

Demand for licensed child care in the City of London (and provincially) is very high.

- As of the 2021 Census, the 0-4 year population within the City of London is **20,930**
- As of the 2021 Census, the 5-9 year population within the City of London is **23,685**

10,955

individuals identify as Indigenous within the City of London (2021 Census).

This represents an increase of **1,235** individuals since the 2016 Census. (9,720 individuals identified as Indigenous on the 2016 Census)

28.7%

Total % visible minority population in 2021. (2021 Census)

7.98%

of the population immigrated between 2011 and 2021 (**33,205**) (2021 Census).

4,850

people identify French as the first official language spoken and **4,595** identify French as mother tongue (2021 Census).

As of the 2021 Census, fewer children aged 0-5 years within London are living in low income as compared to 2016.

- Within the City of London, **18.7%** of 0-5 year old children are living in low income based on Low-Income Measure - After Tax (LIM-AT). This represents a decrease from the 2016 Census which reflected **26.9%** of 0-5 year children living in low income based on the LIM-AT

As of the 2021 Census, the unemployment rate has increased in London as compared to the 2016 Census.

13.3% -2021

7.9% -2016



Accessibility

Child care and early years services and supports are accessible when they are available, affordable, and inclusive for all families, regardless of their socio-economic status, location, or special needs.

Accessible child care and early years services ensure that parents have convenient and equitable access to child care and early years facilities, programs, and services that meet their needs and preferences. This includes considerations such as proximity to home or work, affordability of fees, availability of spaces, and flexibility in scheduling.

Overall, accessible child care and early years services aim to remove barriers and provide equal opportunities for all families to access high-quality early childhood education and care for their children.



What We Know (Reflects London only unless indicated otherwise)



Licensed child care became more affordable for families. As of July 2023, the cost of licensed child care within CWELCC enrolled licensees has been **reduced by approximately half** (for eligible age groups)



Infant (Average)
Prior to CWELCC: **\$60.32/day**
As of January 2023, CWELCC enrolled only:
\$28.42 /day



Toddler (Average)
Prior to CWELCC: **\$56.46/day**
As of January 2023, CWELCC enrolled only:
\$26.73 /day



Preschool (Average)
Prior to CWELCC: **\$50.45/day**
As of January 2023, CWELCC enrolled only:
\$23.87 /day



Kindergarten (Average)
Prior to CWELCC: **\$26.95/day**
(before and after) As of January 2023, CWELCC enrolled only:
\$12.73 /day (before and after care)

CWELCC Enrollment (As of December 2023)

Licensed Spaces:



Infant: 668 (557 in London)



Toddler: 1,667 (1,388 in London)



Preschool: 3,412 (2,922 in London)



Kindergarten: 3,706 (3,189 in London)



12,607 Licensed centre-based spaces within CWELCC enrolled sites



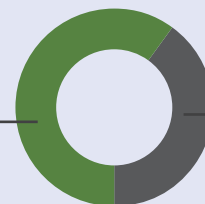
768 (maximum) number of spaces within licensed and operating homes

Enrolled within CWELCC

- **39** licensed centre-based agencies
- **4** licensed home-based agencies
- **156** licensed centre-based sites
- **128** licensed and operating homes

Child Care Location

Publicly Funded Schools (60%)



Community/Other (40%)

Waitlist

4,854 waitlist placements for licensed child care spaces⁵
(London and Middlesex) (as of December 2023)



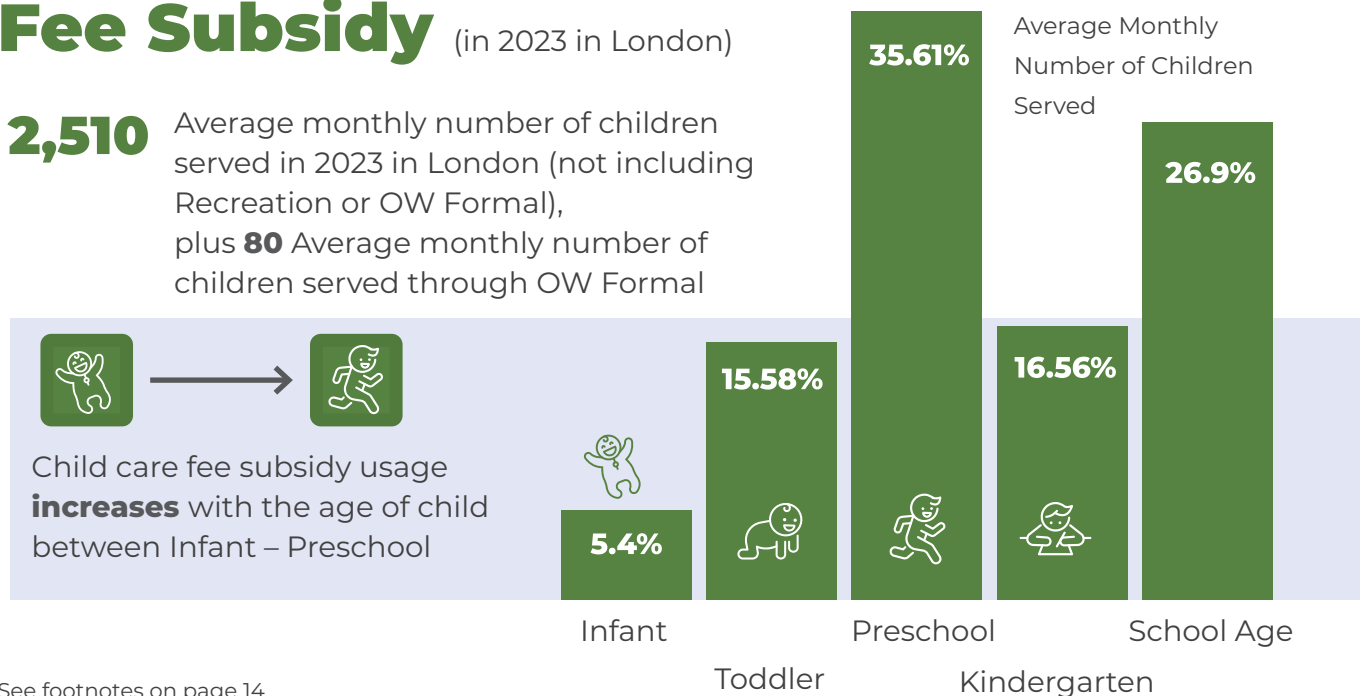
Within London, when comparing 0-4 year population size to the number of licensed child care spaces for children 0-4 years of age within each planning district, some planning districts require more spaces to reach the provincial benchmark of **37% access ratio** than others (per 2021 Census)

Directed Growth (Pertaining To London and Middlesex)

| | School Based | Community Based | Total | By Auspice |
|---|--------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------------------------|
| New Space Targets | 582 | 2,307 | 2,889 | 2,503 Non-Profit 386 For-Profit |
| New Spaces Licensed¹⁰ (Progress Towards Targets) | 172 | 689 | 861 | 742 Non-Profit 119 For-Profit |

Fee Subsidy (in 2023 in London)

2,510 Average monthly number of children served in 2023 in London (not including Recreation or OW Formal), plus **80** Average monthly number of children served through OW Formal



See footnotes on page 14

EarlyON Child & Family Centres

9,977 Children Served (Indoor/Outdoor)
2,940 Children Served (Virtually)
159,047 Visits made by Parents or Caregivers

45 EarlyON Sites
3 new EarlyON Sites



What We Heard

Parents/Caregivers

- The process for obtaining a child care fee subsidy is often unclear and frustrating
- It is difficult for many families to afford before and after care or summer camps
- Families are struggling to find child care for infants, toddlers, before and after care, and special needs children
- Families are frustrated with the OneHSN system and the lengthy waitlist to access care
- Families have limited options for child care, often accepting what is available

Service Providers/ Community Partners

- The subsidy system is difficult to understand for families and providers
- Families with children who have special needs struggle with insufficient funding
- The high cost of before and after care affects families who need the service
- Many families are unclear on how to access information, programs and services
- Families are struggling with limited space affecting children's growth and family development
- Families often find it challenging to manage the OneList and Centres' waitlists because the system lacks clarity
- There are not enough staff to respond to the needs of the Child Care and Early Years
- There are limitations in physical space to grow programs

Themes from Engagement



Physical Accessibility

Ensuring physical spaces are designed to accommodate children with diverse abilities and cater to various needs



Affordability

Making services financially accessible by offering subsidies, fee reductions, and supporting programs that enable families from different socio-economic backgrounds to afford quality care



Geographical Accessibility

Ensuring child care and early years facilities are conveniently located and accessible via public transportation, to reduce barriers for families residing in different areas



Cultural and Linguistic Accessibility

Embracing diversity by respecting and accommodating different cultural practices, languages, and backgrounds, creating an environment where all families feel welcomed and understood



Inclusivity for Children with Special Needs

Providing inclusive programs and specialized support for children with disabilities or special needs, ensuring they have equal opportunities to participate and thrive



Transparent Information

Providing clear and transparent information about services, eligibility criteria, and application processes, ensuring families can easily understand and access available resources



Subsidies and Financial Support

Providing financial assistance or subsidies to families based on income levels, making child care more affordable for low and moderate-income households



Fee Reductions

Implementing policies and programs that reduce the overall cost of child care services for families, making them more financially manageable

Put Into Play

The actions that will be Put into Play to enhance Accessibility in the Child Care and Early Years System in London are:

Affordability

- Explore and implement options to enhance access to fee subsidies for families accessing care
- Continue the implementation of CWELCC, offering families further savings when accessing care
- Investigate ways to reduce costs associated with non-CWELCC eligible age groups

Access & Flexibility

- Drive Directed Growth under CWELCC to expand available licensed child care spaces
- Explore and implement flexible child care hours, including weekend/evening care
- Expand and diversify Early ON programs and services to cater to a wider range of demographics and needs, fostering inclusive environments

System Navigation & Support

- Improve communication channels by simplifying and centralizing information on accessing child care services
- Educate the public about how to access child care and early years services through multiple channels
- Partner with settlement agencies and colleges to support newcomer populations navigating the child care and early years system





Inclusion

Inclusive child care and early years services refer to a comprehensive approach that embraces diversity and accommodates the needs of all children, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or circumstances.

It involves creating an environment that promotes equity, accessibility, and acceptance, where every child feels valued, respected, and supported in their development. This includes providing necessary resources, adapting activities and facilities as needed, fostering an atmosphere of understanding and empathy among caregivers and peers, and actively working to remove barriers to participation and engagement for children with disabilities, special needs, or those from marginalized communities.

Inclusive child care and early years services aim to ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.



What We Know

Number of Children Served through Special Needs Resourcing (All Kids Belong) London and Middlesex is increasing.

 Average monthly number of children served



What We Heard

Parents/Caregivers

- Families reported a lack of programs for children with special needs and challenging behaviours
- Families have reported a lack of diversity in programming
- It is difficult for families who work non-traditional hours to find child care that can accommodate their flexible schedules

Service Providers/ Community Partners

- There is a limited number of sites with the capacity to support families with special needs
- The system does not reflect the diversity of our community
- Immigrant, low-income, and special needs families encounter more barriers to accessing the system
- There is a limited support system for the varied families with diverse needs in London and Middlesex

The Overall Themes from our Engagement



Diversity & Equity

Embracing and celebrating diversity in all its forms, including cultural backgrounds, abilities, languages, and family structures. Ensuring that every child and family has fair and equitable access to services and resources



Individualized Attention

Recognizing and respecting the unique characteristics, abilities, and interests of each child and providing personalized care and learning experiences



Accessibility & Accommodation

Providing accommodations and adaptations to meet the diverse needs of children, ensuring physical, intellectual, and emotional accessibility to services



Collaboration & Partnership

Building collaborative relationships between families, educators, and community partners to support children's holistic development and well-being



Empowerment & Participation

Encouraging active participation of children and families in decision-making processes, valuing their input and perspectives



Professional Development

Offering ongoing training and professional learning for educators and staff to enhance their understanding and ability to support diverse needs effectively



Respect & Positive Relationships

Fostering a culture of respect, kindness, and empathy among all individuals involved, promoting positive relationships and interactions



Inclusion & Belonging

Creating an inclusive environment where every child feels a sense of belonging, regardless of experiences or differences. Encouraging interactions and relationships that foster a sense of community and acceptance



Flexibility

Being adaptable to the diverse needs of families, which could include accommodating varying schedules, cultural practices, or specific requirements

Put Into Play

The actions that will be Put into Play to enhance Inclusion in the child care and early years system in London are:

Inclusive Professional Learning

- Prioritize Access & Inclusion through professional learning opportunities for child care and early years staff, focusing on diversity, equity, and inclusion training
- Facilitate visits by subject matter experts to child care and early years centres, focusing on education, inclusion, and introducing new cultures and practices
- Provide educational resources addressing the needs of newcomer families, 2SLGBTQIA+ families, and local Indigenous history to ensure representation of diversity in every classroom to foster an inclusive environment

Inclusive Policies & Environment

- Support operators with best practices in policies and procedures that support access and inclusion
- Continue to implement the French Language Service Plan to build upon and strengthen local French languages services capacity
- Support ongoing engagement mechanisms to understand and address barriers faced by equity-denied groups

Commitment to Truth & Reconciliation

- Provide supports to incorporate culturally safe practices into child care and early years settings





Quality

High-quality child care and early years services encompass programs and services that prioritize the comprehensive development and well-being of young children. This entails ensuring a safe, nurturing environment staffed by qualified and caring professionals who understand child development and engage children in developmentally appropriate activities.

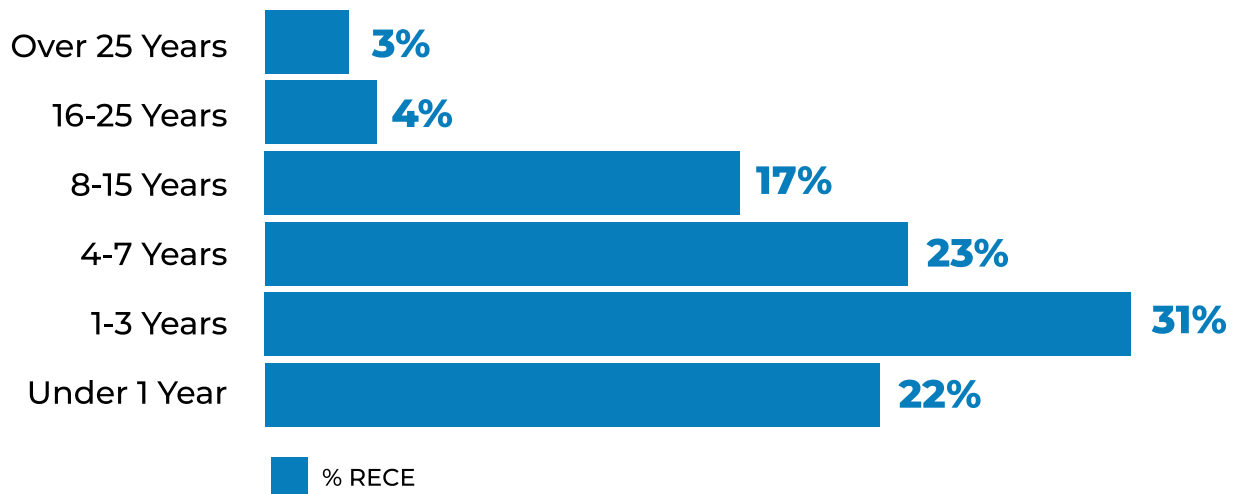
High-quality child care and early years opportunities involve meaningful engagement with families, promoting collaboration and communication to support each child's individual needs and preferences. Moreover, these services emphasize inclusivity, celebrating diversity and accommodating children with various backgrounds and abilities. Continuous improvement is integral, with providers regularly reflecting and refining their practices to uphold standards of excellence.

Overall, high-quality child care and early years services play a crucial role in laying the foundation for children's future success by fostering their social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development.



What We Know

Over half of London-Middlesex RECE Educators had **3 years** of experience **or less** and as of 2021, approximately **three quarters (74%)** of London CMA's ECEs and Assistants are **between 25 and 54** years of age.



By 2032, licensed child care spaces need to increase by almost **3,300**, resulting in the need for more staff

1,722 ECE Staff as of 2022

+ 404 projectional growth of ECE Staff

2,100 ECE Staff projection by 2032



To maintain quality, the region needs to educate and hire more than

400 additional qualified ECEs

over the next **10 years**

Themes from Engagement



Health & Safety

Prioritizing the safety, health, and well-being of children by maintaining a safe environment, implementing health protocols, and promoting healthy practices



Qualified & Supportive Staff

Employing trained, knowledgeable, and caring educators who understand child development, fostering positive relationships, and providing responsive care



Curriculum & Learning

Offering a comprehensive and developmentally appropriate curriculum that stimulates learning through play, exploration, and structured activities, supporting cognitive, social, and emotional development



Inclusivity & Diversity

Creating an inclusive environment that celebrates diversity, respects individual differences, and accommodates varied needs and backgrounds



Continuous Improvement

Engaging in ongoing evaluation and improvement, seeking feedback from families and staff to enhance the quality and responsiveness of services



Family Engagement

Encouraging active involvement and collaboration with families, recognizing them as partners in their child's learning and development



Positive Relationships

Cultivating strong relationships among educators, children, and families based on trust, respect, and open communication, fostering a sense of belonging and support



Environment & Resources

Providing a stimulating and well-equipped physical environment with age-appropriate materials and resources that promote exploration, creativity, and learning

Put Into Play

The actions that will be Put into Play to enhance quality in the child care and early years system in London are:

Workforce Recruitment & Retention

- Implement recommendations from the London-Middlesex Labour Market Study for recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce, emphasizing mentorship, internships, and employment sector collaboration

Pedagogical Professional Learning

- Continue to provide child-friendly and rights-based training for educators, emphasizing foundational principles and children's rights
- Offer basic training programs for newer educators to ensure a strong foundational understanding
- Offer tailored professional learning days for providers to meet their specific needs, ensuring relevance and practicality

Leadership & Business Development

- Develop specialized administrative leadership within the ECE curriculum to nurture leadership capabilities
- Offer professional learning opportunities for leadership to strengthen skills around financial management, human resources, and building a healthy workplace culture

Commitment to Standards of Excellence

- Collaborate with the community on a local approach to move the baseline from licensing requirements to a more comprehensive, measurable, and connected standards of excellence framework that focuses on continuous improvement

Mentorship

- Create a strategy that offers mentorship and recognition opportunities at key milestones for all staff and educators
- Increase mentoring opportunities for all educators, fostering skill development and quality enhancement





Collaboration

Collaboration within child care and early years refers to a proactive and interconnected approach among educators, families, and community partners to support the holistic development and well-being of young children. This involves frequent and open communication between child care and early years providers and families, ensuring alignment between home and child care settings to better understand and meet each child's unique needs.

Collaboration extends beyond the immediate child care and early years environment to include partnerships with health care professionals, social services, and educational institutions, fostering a network of support for children and their families. Through collaborative efforts, community partners can share resources, expertise, and best practices to enhance the quality of care and promote positive outcomes for children.

Ultimately, high collaboration in child care and early years services creates a cohesive and supportive ecosystem that maximizes the potential for children's growth, learning, and success.



The Overall Themes from our Engagement



Trust & Consistency

Building trust through consistent, reliable care and interactions, establishing a sense of security for children and families



Open Communication

Fostering transparent and open lines of communication between educators and families, encouraging regular exchanges of information, feedback, and insights regarding a child's well-being and development



Respect & Empathy

Cultivating an environment of mutual respect, understanding, and empathy among educators, community partners, children, and families, valuing each other's perspectives and experiences



Individualized Attention

Providing personalized care that acknowledges and responds to the unique needs, preferences, and developmental stages of each child



Collaboration & Involvement

Encouraging active participation and involvement of families in their child's care and learning, recognizing them as essential partners in the child's development



Positive Interactions & Attachment

Creating nurturing and positive interactions that support the development of secure attachments between educators and children, fostering a sense of safety and emotional well-being



Consistency & Reliability

Establishing consistent routines and reliable care practices that promote a sense of stability and predictability for children and families

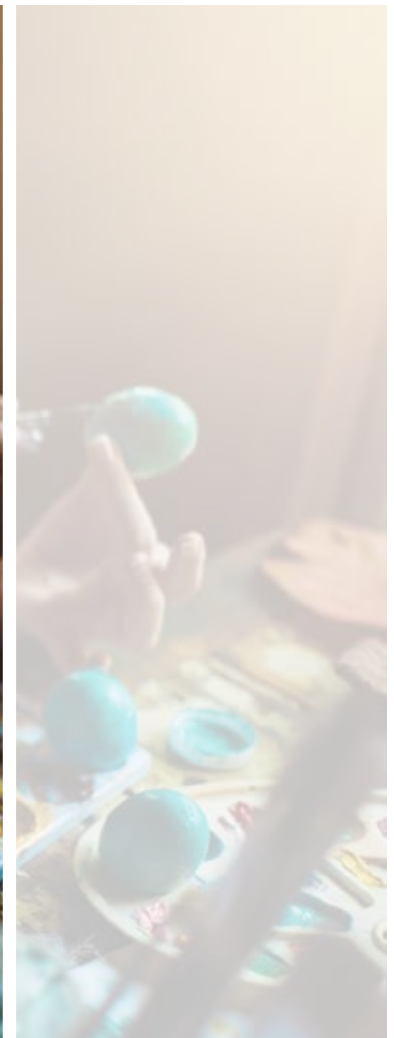
What We Heard

Parents/Caregivers

- Parents are unaware of many aspects of the child care system and programs and see the need to improve network communication and sector advertising

Service Providers/Community Partners

- The absence of a more collaborative system in the sector to better support educators and families



Put Into Play

The actions that will be Put into Play to enhance Collaboration in the Child Care and Early Years System in London are:

Strong Connections

- Implement Family Centre Service System (FCSS) actions to strengthen connections and collaboration among child care, early years, and related services
- Establish community connectors beyond Family Centres to enhance connections between different service providers

Seamless Transitions

- Improve the connection between child care and early years services, ensuring a seamless transition between milestones for children
- Facilitate conversations and networking between school boards, child care operators, and family-centered services to align strategies and practices

Interprofessional Relationships

- Enhance the interconnection between the health-care and child care sectors, promoting strategies to encourage healthcare providers to refer families to EarlyON programs
- Promote common knowledge, tools, and language within the child care and early years sector to collectively support mental health and brain development initiatives
- Promote networking among operators for collaborative benefits, including shared resources and planning





Backbone

As the SSM for child care and early years, the City of London plays a pivotal role in ensuring access to high-quality services by strategically planning, funding, and supporting child care and early years programs to meet the diverse needs of children and families. The City collaborates closely with other government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community partners to develop policies, allocate resources and implement initiatives that support the early years sector.

Additionally, the backbone facilitates collaboration and knowledge-sharing among service providers, promotes innovation and best practices and advocates for policies that prioritize the well-being and development of young children. By serving as a central hub for coordination and support, the backbone contributes to the establishment of a robust and responsive child care system that effectively meets the evolving needs of the community.



What We Know

| 2023 Budget Line/Part | Funding Allocation Amount |
|--|---------------------------|
| Child Care | \$51,292,946 |
| EarlyON | \$4,371,915 |
| Indigenous Led Child Care and Child & Family Programs | \$644,851 |
| Child Care and Early Years Workforce Allocation | \$854,921 |
| CWELCC | \$64,094,008 |
| Total | \$121,258,641 |

Themes from Engagement



Collaboration & Involvement

Encouraging active participation and involvement of families in their child’s care and learning, recognizing them as essential partners in the child’s development



Consistency & Reliability

Establishing consistent routines and reliable care practices that promote a sense of stability and predictability for children and families



Respect & Positive Relationships

Fostering a culture of respect, kindness, and empathy among all individuals involved, promoting positive relationships and interactions

Put Into Play

The actions that will be Put into Play to enhance the Backbone function in the Child Care and Early Years System in London are:

Data Sharing

- Implement shared tools and assessments to facilitate seamless data sharing among operators, schools, and other community partners"

Evidence-Informed Decision Making

- Implement a data strategy framework to guide decision-making and continually improve service delivery
- Maintain ongoing engagement practices and data collection strategies to keep services responsive and aligned with community needs

Funding & Sustainability

- Optimize available funding to support operators

Third-Party Relationships & Financial Accountability

- Measure the impact of third-party initiatives and review contract management practices to ensure efficiency and effectiveness
- Update financial accountability frameworks, including agreements like Master Funding Agreement, to adapt to regulatory changes, Access & Inclusion, and capital schedules



B



Implementation Plan

The following **Put into Play** actions will move the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan from a plan into reality. We have identified actions for each of the five **Building Blocks** and will work on implementing these actions over the five years of the plan.



Accessibility: Ensure families can easily access the programs and services they need

Affordability

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|--|-------------|
| Explore and implement options to enhance access to fee subsidies for families accessing care | 2024 - 2026 |
| Continue the implementation of CWELCC, offering families further savings when accessing care | 2026 |
| Investigate ways to reduce costs associated with non-CWELCC eligible age groups | 2025 - 2026 |

Access & Flexibility

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|---|-------------|
| Drive Directed Growth under CWELCC to expand available licensed child care spaces | 2024 - 2027 |
| Explore and implement flexible child care hours, including weekend/evening care | 2024 - 2026 |
| Expand and diversify Early ON programs and services to cater to a wider range of demographics and needs, fostering inclusive environments | 2024 - 2026 |

System Navigation & Support

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|--|-------------|
| Improve communication channels by simplifying and centralizing information on accessing child care services | 2024 |
| Educate the public about how to access child care and early years services through multiple channels | 2025 - 2026 |
| Partner with settlement agencies and colleges to support newcomer populations navigating the child care and early years system | 2024 - 2026 |



Inclusion: create inclusive environments where all children and families feel included and connected.

Inclusive Professional Learning

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|--|-------------|
| Prioritize Access & Inclusion through professional learning opportunities for child care and early years staff, focusing on diversity, equity, and inclusion training | 2024 - 2028 |
| Facilitate visits by subject matter experts to child care and early years centres, focusing on education, inclusion, and introducing new cultures and practices | 2024 - 2028 |
| Provide educational resources addressing the needs of newcomer families, 2SLGBTQIA+ families, and local Indigenous history to ensure representation of diversity in every classroom to foster an inclusive environment | 2024 - 2028 |

Inclusive Policies & Environments

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|--|-------------|
| Support operators with best practices in policies and procedures that support access and inclusion | 2025 - 2027 |
| Continue to implement the French Language Service Plan to build upon and strengthen local French languages services capacity | 2024 - 2028 |
| Support ongoing engagement mechanisms to understand and address barriers faced by equity-denied groups | 2024 - 2028 |

Commitment To Truth & Reconciliation

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|--|-------------|
| Provide supports to incorporate culturally safe practices into child care and early years settings | 2024 - 2028 |



Quality: support and empower educators and leadership to provide high quality programs and services

Workforce Recruitment & Retention

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|--|-------------|
| Implement recommendations from the London-Middlesex Labour Market Study for recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce, emphasizing mentorship, internships, and employment sector collaboration | 2024 - 2028 |

Pedagogical Professional Learning

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|---|-------------|
| Continue to provide child-friendly and rights-based training for educators, emphasizing foundational principles and children's rights | 2024 - 2028 |
| Offer basic training programs for newer educators to ensure a strong foundational understanding | 2024 - 2028 |
| Offer tailored professional learning days for providers to meet their specific needs, ensuring relevance and practicality | 2024 - 2028 |

Leadership & Business Development

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|--|-------------|
| Develop specialized administrative leadership within the ECE curriculum to nurture leadership capabilities | 2024 - 2028 |
| Offer professional learning opportunities for leadership to strengthen skills around financial management, human resources, and building a healthy workplace culture | 2024 - 2028 |



Commitment to Standards of Excellence

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|---|-------------|
| Collaborate with the community on a local approach to move the baseline from licensing requirements to a more comprehensive, measurable, and connected standards of excellence framework that focuses on continuous improvement | 2024 - 2028 |

Mentorship

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|---|-------------|
| Create a membership strategy offering mentorship, recognition, and milestones for long-term educators to act as mentors | 2024 - 2028 |
| Increase mentoring opportunities for all educators, fostering skill development and quality enhancement | 2024 - 2028 |





Collaboration: Establish a seamless and family-centred service system

Strong Connections

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|---|-------------|
| Implement Family Centre Service System (FCSS) actions to strengthen connections and collaboration among child care, early years, and related services | 2024 - 2028 |
| Establish community connectors beyond Family Centres to enhance connections between different service providers | 2024 - 2026 |

Seamless Transitions

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|---|-------------|
| Improve the connection between child care and early years services, ensuring a seamless transition between milestones for children | 2024 - 2028 |
| Facilitate conversations and networking between school boards, child care operators, and family-centered services to align strategies and practices | 2024 - 2025 |

Interprofessional Relationships

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|--|-------------|
| Enhance the interconnection between the health-care and child care sectors, promoting strategies to encourage healthcare providers to refer families to EarlyON programs | 2024 - 2028 |
| Promote common knowledge, tools, and language within the child care and early years sector to collectively support mental health and brain development initiatives | 2024 - 2028 |
| Promote networking among operators for collaborative benefits, including shared resources and planning | 2024 - 2028 |



Backbone: Commit to responsive and accountable service system management

Data Sharing

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|---|-------------|
| Implement shared tools and assessments to facilitate seamless data sharing among operators, schools, and other community partners | 2024 - 2025 |

Evidence-Informed Decision Making

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|---|-------------|
| Implement a data strategy framework to guide decision-making and continually improve service delivery | 2024 - 2025 |
| Maintain ongoing engagement practices and data collection strategies to keep services responsive and aligned with community needs | 2024 - 2028 |

Funding & Sustainability

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|---|-------------|
| Optimize available funding to support operators | 2024 - 2028 |

Third-Party Relationships & Financial Accountability

| Action Steps | Timeline |
|---|-------------|
| Measure the impact of third-party initiatives and review contract management practices to ensure efficiency and effectiveness | 2024 - 2025 |
| Update financial accountability frameworks, including agreements like Master Funding Agreement, to adapt to regulatory changes, Access & Inclusion, and capital schedules | 2024 - 2026 |



Middlesex

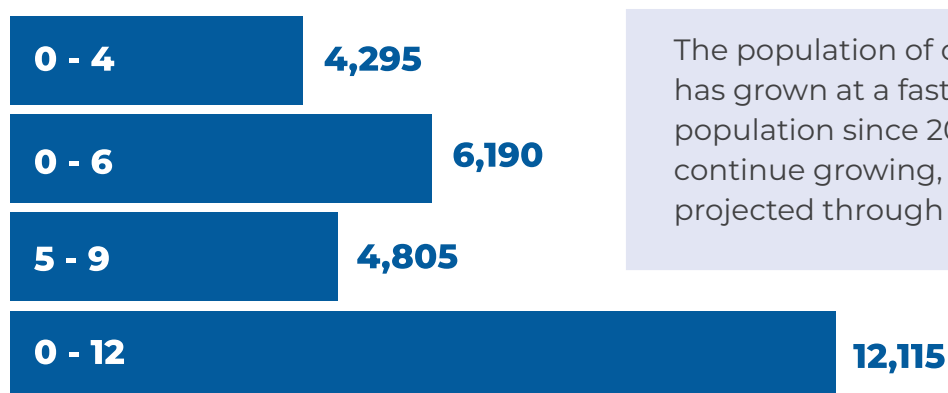


The Child Care and Early Years System in Middlesex

Who do we Support?

Middlesex County supports the provision of licensed child care and early years programs across eight municipalities.

Number of Children (2021)



The population of children **0-4 years** has grown at a faster rate than the total population since 2016. It is expected to continue growing, with a **13% increase** projected through 2031

- The population of North Middlesex is **projected to double** within the next decade
- Lucan Biddulph, Strathroy-Caradoc, and North Middlesex have the **fastest growing 0-4 populations**
- The County is experiencing growth throughout all municipalities - new subdivisions being built, new schools being constructed, more families calling the County home. It is essential that the availability of child care keeps pace.

Income Inequality (2021)

Low Income Measure (after tax) is decreasing in children

- 24.3% in 2016 for 0-5, **down to 16.8% in 2021**
- 22.4% in 2016 for 0-18, **down to 15.5% in 2021**
- In Middlesex-London, as of the 2021 census, **17.6% of families with children are single-parent-headed**, and of these families, **79.5% are female-headed**. These families are at **higher risk** of being low income

CWELCC-enrolled child care

\$27.97 infant average daily cost

\$25.22 toddler average daily cost

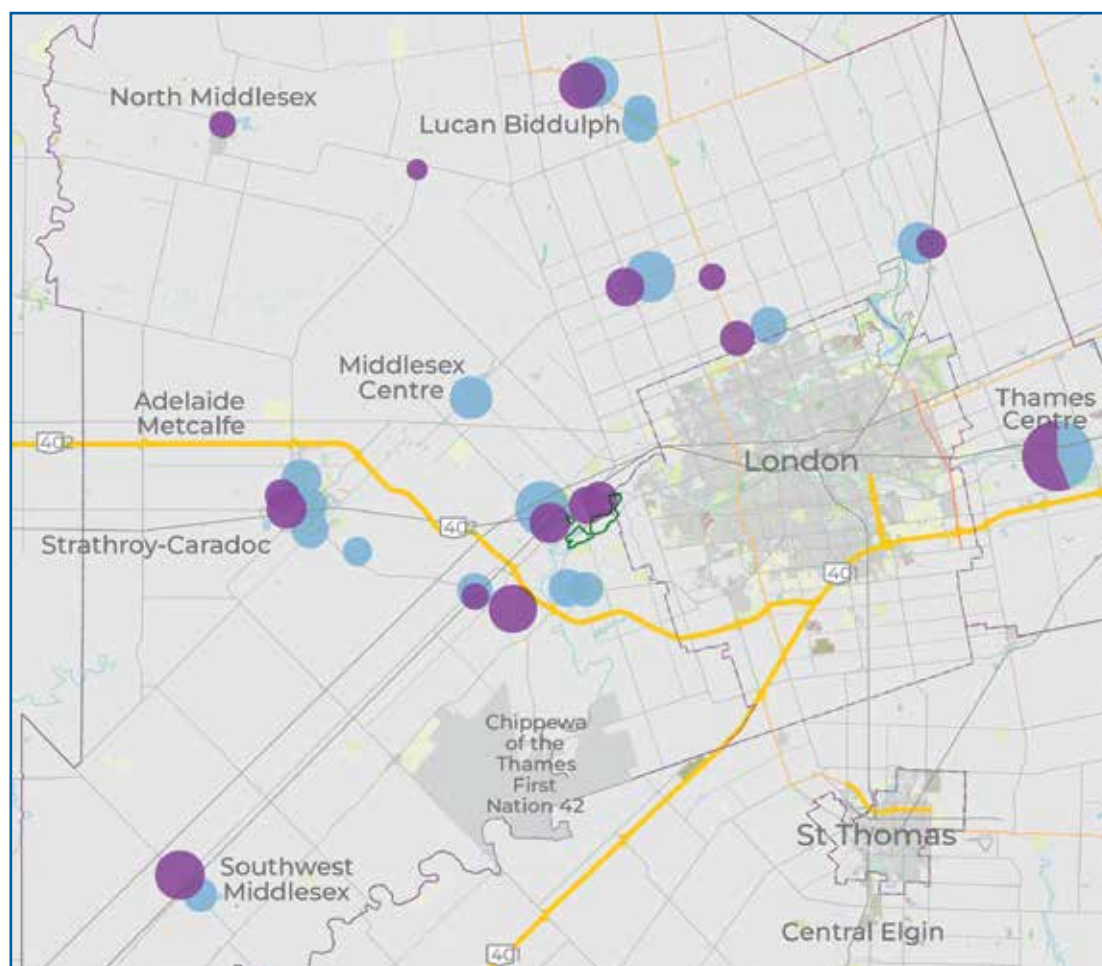
\$23.21 preschool average daily cost

the LIM-AT threshold is defined as half the Canadian median of adjusted household after-tax income, multiplied by the square root of household size (Statistics Canada, 2022)

What services are currently provided in the CCEY System?

Licensed Child Care

- **16 sites** offering **centre-based** care
- **5 sites** offering **home-based** care
- **3 nursery schools**
- **5 centres** offer before and after school care
- **21 schools** offer before and after school care



- Child Care Centre Serving Non-School Age
- Child Care Centre Serving School Age

1,030 Total number of 0-4 licensed child care spaces

1,364 Total number of 4-12 licensed child care spaces

- **Since 2018**, there has been an **increase** in the number of child care sites in the County by **seven**
- There are **630 more licensed spaces** than in 2016
- Only **18% of all spaces** are ear-marked for infants and toddlers, while **60%** are kindergarten and school aged

Licensed Child Care



Centre-Based

- **2,309** licensed child care spaces
- **18 centre-based** child care agencies
- **38 centre-based** child care sites

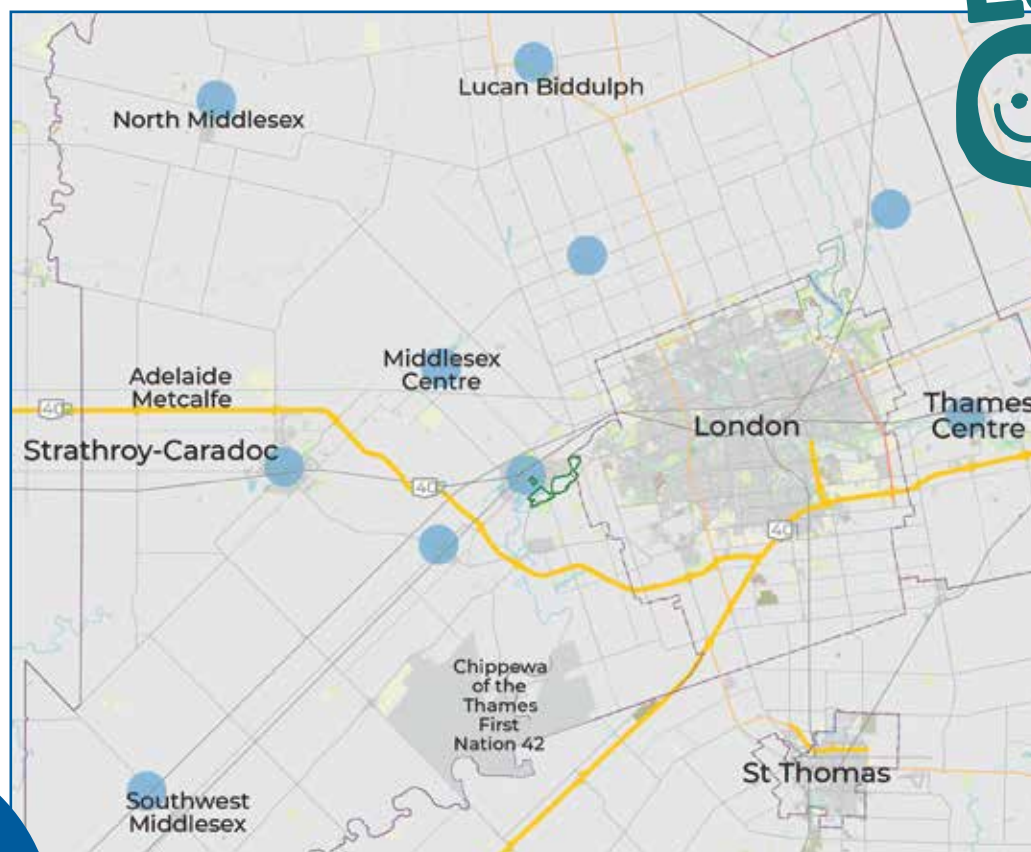


Home-Bases

- **24** licensed child care spaces
- **1 licensed** home child care agency
- **4 licensed** child care operating homes

EarlyON Child and Family Centres

- **9 main locations**, across 6 of the 8 Municipalities
- Occasional pop-ups in other locations and municipalities
- In 2023, EarlyON offered **948 in-person, 82 outdoor** and **54 virtual programs**
- In 2023, **2,482 unique children** visited EarlyON **11,369 times**
- In 2023, **2,055 unique caregivers** visited EarlyON **8,944 times**



● EarlyON Child and Family Centres



Accessibility

Increasing access to early years programs to give families more opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood programs and services. This includes ensuring programs are affordable and responsive so that parents can choose the options that work best for their family.



What We Know

Licensed Child Care

- Families **prefer** using licensed, centre-based care
- **Three-quarters** of families prefer to access care close to home and a quarter close to work
- **19% of families** report having a need for **earlier mornings**, and **17% report** requiring **later evenings** for licensed child care

“

The wait list for before and after is too long and unaffordable with 2 kids.”

– Parent

Licensed Child Care Access Ratio

Licensed Child Care Ratio

As an aspect of enrollment in CWELCC, the Province of Ontario has established a goal of making licensed child care more accessible. The Province has communicated the goal of the licensed child care access ratio throughout the Province reaching an average of **37%**.

What Does "Access Ratio" Mean?

The Access Ratio is defined as the proportion of children 0-4 years old who have access to a licensed child care space. To have an Access Ratio of **37%** would mean that **37 out of every 100** children in that age group would have access to licensed care.

Access Ratio = number of licensed spaces for children 0-4 / total number of children 0-4

| Municipality | Access Ratio |
|---------------------|--------------|
| Strathroy-Caradoc | 21% |
| Southwest Middlesex | 28% |
| North Middlesex | 12% |
| Lucan Biddulph | 24% |
| Middlesex Centre | 36% |
| Adelaide Metcalfe | 0% |
| Thames Centre | 25% |
| Newbury | 0% |

In Middlesex County specifically, this ratio is not met. In the individual municipalities, the Access Ratio varies from between 0% and 36% depending on the municipality. Having licensed child care close to home is important to families, so Middlesex County will monitor these ratios over the lifespan of this service system plan to observe the progress made in making licensed care more accessible.

Child Care Subsidy

Fewer families are accessing subsidy than in 2019 (152 families accessed subsidy in 2022, compared with 205 families in 2019)

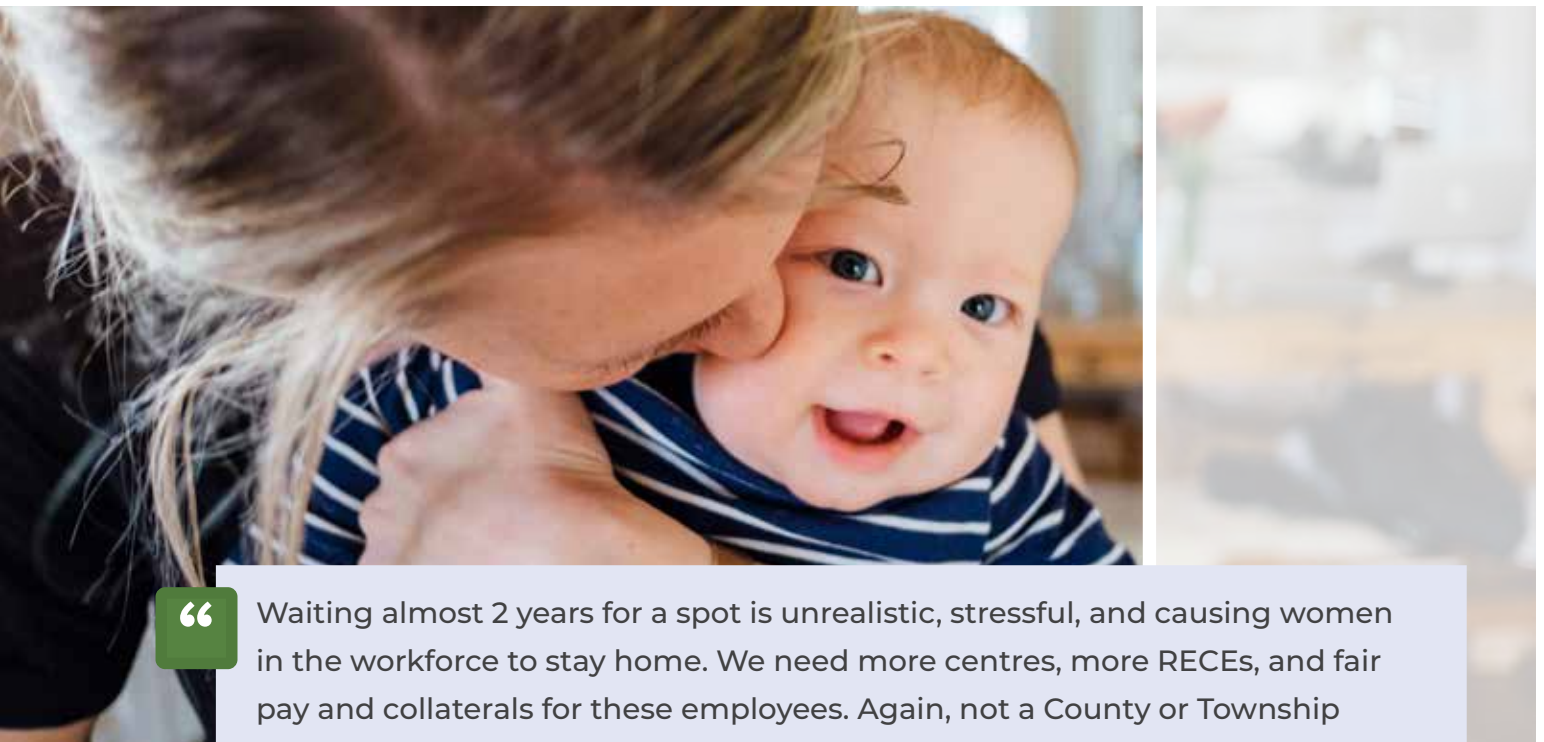
“

I have only ever been able to have family watch my children because the cost of child care is expensive. I feel myself and my children would feel more included if it was more affordable.”

– Parent

Barriers to care

- **40%** of families report that lack of spaces is a challenge in accessing care
- **31% report cost** is an issue
- The percentage of families reporting that cost is an issue has decreased from 48% in 2018. This reduction of 17% demonstrates the positive effect the CWELCC agreement has had on the affordability of licensed care for families in Middlesex County



“

Waiting almost 2 years for a spot is unrealistic, stressful, and causing women in the workforce to stay home. We need more centres, more RECEs, and fair pay and collaterals for these employees. Again, not a County or Township issue, it's a provincial issue. But, that's what I'm seeing from this side as a parent of a toddler.”

– Parent

EarlyON Child and Family Centres

- **3 main centres** in Strathroy, Dorchester and Ilderton
- In 2023, the EarlyON centres in Middlesex County offer programming **42 hours per week**, covering **5 to 6 days per week** in different locations
- The average programming hours weekly for **comparative Counties is > 50 hours**, with main locations offering programs **5 days per week and >14 hours**
- **High income** families are **more likely** to access EarlyON programs. **Low income** families are **more likely to never have** accessed an EarlyON program
- Parents/caregivers would like to see additional days per week of programming and more open space/ outdoor activity opportunities



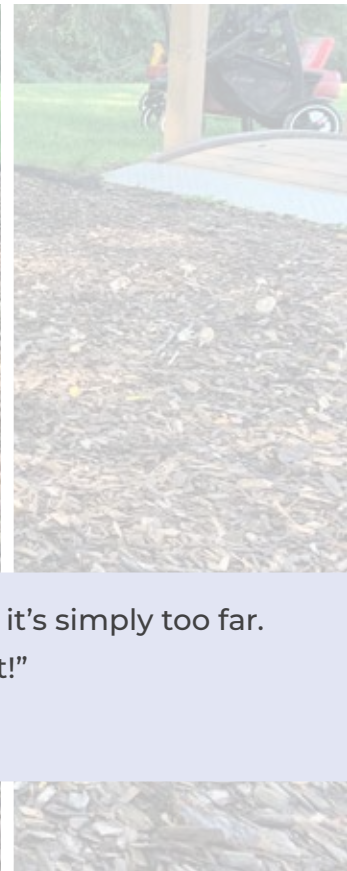
“

Komoka needs more options/times for EarlyON activities. This is a brand new, beautiful facility that serves so many people in Middlesex County. That is currently not reaching its fullest potential by reaching many families.”
– Parent



“

The outdoor classroom in Ilderton looks amazing but it's simply too far. Strathroy would benefit from having a space like that!”
– Parent



Put Into Play

The actions that will be Put into Play to enhance Accessibility in the Child Care and Early Years System in Middlesex County are:

Affordability

- Advocate for funding to increase the affordability of licensed child care in before and after school programs

Access & Flexibility

- Advocate for funding for new licensed child care spaces and improvements for physical accessibility of existing spaces
- Explore and support ways to continue to improve accessibility to licensed child care (non-traditional hours, equitable geographic and physical access)
- Explore opportunities to improve the licensed child care registration and wait list process
- Advocate for additional EarlyON funding to support operations in a large geographic rural area
- Explore opportunities to provide occasional evening and weekend programs for working parents and to respond to emerging community needs for programs and services through EarlyON
- Support the development of family-friendly spaces for community partners and families to meet

System Navigation & Support

- Explore new strategies to increase awareness and improve access to local information about child care, early years and family-centered services, supports and programs
- Expand the reach of the system by building connections with children and families currently not accessing programs





Inclusion

Creating inclusive environments where all children and families feel included and connected.



What We Know

Licensed Child Care

Cultural Diversity (2021)

- Approximately **1% of the entire population** of Middlesex County are immigrants who have immigrated since 2011. Middlesex County is seeing incredible growth, so it is expected the number of new immigrants will also increase
- Middlesex County has **1,640 residents** who identify as Indigenous as of the 2021 census, which is a **30% increase over 2016**
- Middlesex County has **115 individuals** who speak French most often at home as of the 2021 census. This is an increase from **35 (or 44%) since 2016**

“Occasionally there are books that are representative of the community, usually those books only come out during Pride month but our families are still queer the other 11 months of the year”
– PFLAG Focus Group Member

Special Needs Resourcing

- **All Kids Belong (AKB)** is a program under the organization Merrymount that promotes the **inclusion of all children with special needs** into licensed child care settings
- In 2023 the child care centres in Middlesex County utilized AKB for **just over 6,000 hours**, with an average of **190 hours per site**
- AKB reports high caseloads and need for more support hours
- Some caregivers with children with special needs report **not feeling fully included** in their care arrangement

“Have seen a 30% increase in enrollment compounded with post COVID issues leading to more children needing support with special needs and complex needs (independence skills – toileting, putting on a jacket, basic skills) – seeing 3x the number of children requiring additional adult support around personal care and safety”
– School Board focus group member

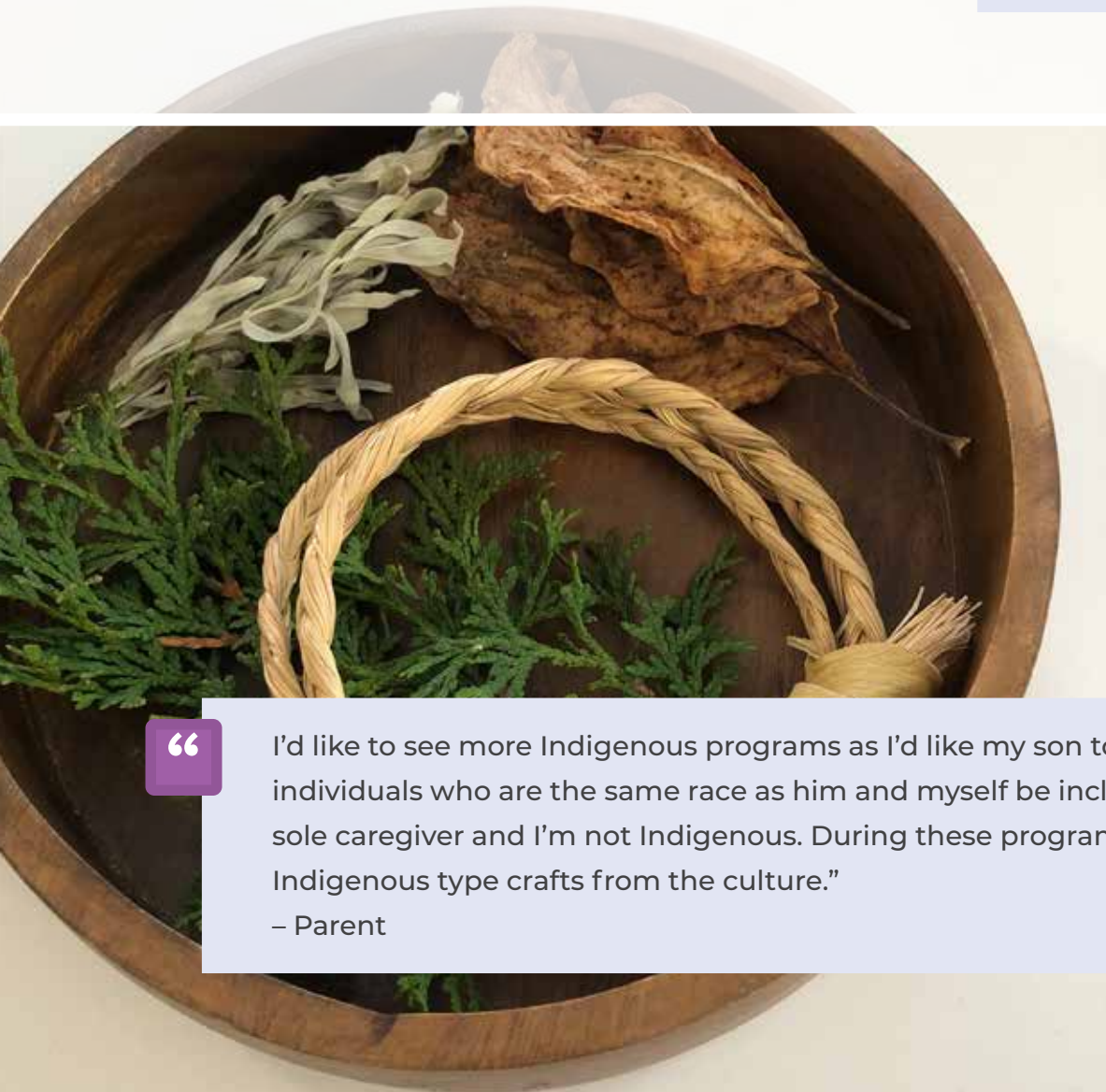
EarlyON Child and Family Centres

- Parents/caregivers would like to see **more sensory options** and **accommodations** and more **Indigenous focused days**



“

We're Indigenous and an easy way to include culture is to offer a smudge prior to the start of programming.”
– Parent



“

I'd like to see more Indigenous programs as I'd like my son to interact with individuals who are the same race as him and myself be included as I'm the sole caregiver and I'm not Indigenous. During these programs I'd like to see Indigenous type crafts from the culture.”
– Parent

Put Into Play

The actions that will be Put into Play to enhance Inclusion in the Child Care and Early Years System in Middlesex County are:

Inclusive Professional Learning

- Support equity and inclusion training for leaders, educators and providers

Inclusive Policies & Environments

- Explore opportunities for developing and offering inclusive and culturally-relevant programs or spaces for Indigenous, Francophone, 2SLGBTQIA+ and Newcomer families and for children with special or complex needs
- Advocate for increased services and funding to support equitable access to special and complex needs supports and services
- Advocate for additional funding to support operations in delivering programs that support the diverse needs of priority populations
- Strengthen connections by engaging with priority populations to identify and address barriers
- Collect demographic information





Quality

Enabling safe and reliable programs built on positive, responsive relationships, engaging environments, and meaningful experiences for children and families, delivered by educated and well-supported staff.



What We Know

Child Care Centre Staff

43% reported having **less than 1 year experience** working in their current role and organization

80% had **less than 3 years** experience working in their current role and organization

Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE)

45% reported having **less than 1 year experience** working in their current role and organization

73% had **less than 3 years** experience working in their current role and organization

Workforce Compensation

- The average wage for child care staff in Middlesex County, including school age, in 2022 was reported to be **\$18.12/hour (or \$25,741/year)**. This includes the wage enhancement grant (WEG)
- Middlesex County staff earn **\$2-4/hour less** than the Middlesex-London average, which equates to **almost \$5,000 per year**
- The Middlesex-London average wage is **\$1,000 below the provincial average**

“ ECE staff aren't compensated properly at all – we rely on them to care for our kids in the most pivotal times – this is very hard to staff for before and after when they pay such low wages to them and give low hours, that's a hard situation to be in.”
– School Board focus group member

Quality Supports

- Strive is a community initiative that provides capacity building and supports resource development to enhance service quality across London & Middlesex
- Strive offers both in-person and virtual programming
- There are reports of mentoring challenges related to staffing pressures and ratios, where staff are unable to leave their program to attend professional learning opportunities due to not having a colleague available to maintain mandated ratios in their absence

Child Care and Early Years staff are at different points in their career and require different levels of professional development. Younger educators require foundational skills and mentorship and more senior educators and leadership require mentorship and guidance in tasks like working with Boards of Directors and succession planning.

Put Into Play

The actions that will be Put into Play to enhance Quality in the Child Care and Early Years System in Middlesex County are:

Workforce Recruitment & Retention

- Advocate for equitable wages for child care and early years staff
- Promote the benefits of living and working in a rural setting
- Implement a workforce recruitment and retention strategy
- Support child care educators and operators in having access to benefits and mental health supports
- Promote the county as a great place to open or expand a licensed child care centre

Pedagogical Professional Learning

- Support awareness, collaboration and equitable access to professional learning and capacity building opportunities
- Support opportunities for emerging professional learning and capacity building needs

Leadership & Business Development

- Offer support and professional learning opportunities for leadership to strengthen skills around financial management, human resources, and building a healthy workplace culture

Mentorship

- Create a membership strategy offering mentorship, recognition, and milestones for long-term educators to act as mentors
- Increase mentoring opportunities for all educators, fostering skill development and quality enhancement





Collaboration

Focusing on relationships, partnerships and collaboration to establish a seamless and family-centred service system.



What We Know

- Parent/caregiver feedback outlined they would like to see **greater communication** from centres **about their children**
- Community partners noted that **high turnover in staff** in child care settings **impacts the development of relationships** with families
- Community partners identified a need to **strengthen connections** and support a more seamless transition to school
- Fostering interprofessional relationships and implementing earlier identification **will improve transitions** between components of the CCEY system

Opportunities for Collaboration

“

Reciprocal information sharing. Child care centres promoting EarlyON and family supports with the families they serve.”

– Child Care Operator



Put Into Play

The actions that will be Put into Play to enhance Collaboration in the Child Care and Early Years System in Middlesex County are:

Strong Connections

- Support licensed child care educators in building relationships with caregivers and children

Seamless Transitions

- Explore ways to support a coordinated transition to school for children

Interprofessional Relationships

- Support earlier identification of developmental concerns and facilitate connections to support services and programs
- Expand the reach of the system by building connections with sectors, including health, education, employment, immigration, and social services





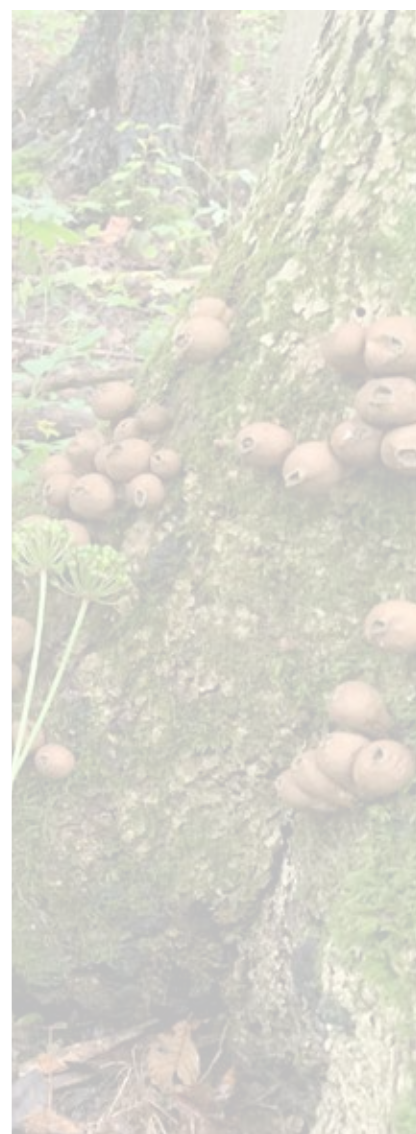
Backbone

Supporting the child care and early years system through responsive and accountable service system management.



What We Know

- We know that having a **strong backbone** that supports **responsive and accountable service system management** is critical to ensuring a quality child care and early years system
- **Data sharing** and **evidence-informed decision making** are important foundations of this backbone
- The **majority** of child care operators **feel supported** by Middlesex County
- Child care operators identified operational burdens (i.e. documentation, reporting, duplication of reports) that impact planning and program delivery, which are worsened by **staffing shortage**



Put Into Play

The actions that will be Put into Play to enhance Backbone support in the Child Care and Early Years System in Middlesex County are:

Data Sharing

- Implement shared tools and assessments to facilitate seamless data sharing among operators, schools, and other community partners

Evidence-Informed Decision Making

- Implement a continuous improvement process by collecting and analyzing data associated with the access and participation in quality improvement activities, reviewing feedback, evaluating outcomes, and adjusting strategies and activities as needed

Funding & Sustainability

- Address operational challenges that impact the planning and delivery of quality of care

Third-Party Relationships & Financial Accountability

- Update funding agreements with operators
- Implement random audits of operators

**B**



Implementation Plan

The **Put into Play** actions noted below will move the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan from a plan into reality. We have identified actions for each of the five **Building Blocks** and will work on implementing these actions over the five years of the plan.



Accessibility: Ensure families can easily access the programs and services they need

| Put into Play Direct Actions | Timeline |
|--|-------------|
| Advocate for funding to increase the affordability of licensed child care in before- and after-school programs. | 2024 - 2026 |
| Advocate for funding for new licensed child care spaces and improvements for physical accessibility of existing spaces. | 2024 - 2026 |
| Explore and support ways to continue to improve accessibility to licensed child care (non-traditional hours, equitable geographic and physical access). | 2024 - 2026 |
| Explore opportunities to improve the licensed child care registration and waitlist process. | 2024 |
| Advocate for additional EarlyON funding to support operations in a large geographic rural area. | 2024 - 2028 |
| Explore opportunities to provide occasional evening and weekend programs for working parents and to respond to emerging community needs for programs and services through EarlyON. | 2024 - 2025 |
| Support the development of family-friendly spaces for community partners and families to meet. | 2024 - 2025 |
| Explore new strategies to increase awareness and improve access to local information about child care, early years and family-centred services, supports and programs. | 2024 - 2025 |
| Expand the reach of the system by building connections with children and families currently not accessing programs. | 2026 - 2028 |



Inclusion: Create inclusive environments where all children and families feel included and connected

| Put into Play Direct Actions | Timeline |
|--|-------------|
| Support equity and inclusion training for leaders, educators and providers. | 2024 - 2026 |
| Explore opportunities for developing and offering inclusive and culturally-relevant programs or spaces for Indigenous, Francophone, 2SLGBTQIA+ and Newcomer families and for children with special or complex needs. | 2024 - 2026 |
| Advocate for increased services and funding to support equitable access to special and complex needs supports and services. | 2024 - 2026 |
| Advocate for additional funding to support operations in delivering programs that support the diverse needs of priority populations. | 2024 - 2026 |
| Strengthen connections by engaging with priority populations to identify and address barriers. | 2024 - 2025 |
| Collect demographic information. | 2024 |





Quality: support and empower educators and leadership to provide high quality programs and services

| Put into Play Direct Actions | Timeline |
|---|-------------|
| Advocate for equitable wages for child care and early years staff. | 2024 - 2028 |
| Promote the benefits of living and working in a rural setting. | 2024 - 2028 |
| Implement a workforce recruitment and retention strategy. | 2024 - 2025 |
| Support child care educators and operators in having access to benefits and mental health supports. | 2026 - 2028 |
| Promote the county as a great place to open or expand a licensed child care centre. | 2026 - 2028 |
| Support awareness, collaboration and equitable access to professional learning and capacity building opportunities. | 2024 - 2026 |
| Support opportunities for emerging professional learning and capacity building needs. | 2024 - 2026 |
| Offer support and professional learning opportunities for leadership to strengthen skills around financial management, human resources, and building a healthy workplace culture. | 2024 - 2026 |
| Create a membership strategy offering mentorship, recognition, and milestones for long-term educators to act as mentors. | 2024 - 2025 |
| Increase mentoring opportunities for all educators, fostering skill development and quality enhancement. | 2024 - 2026 |



Collaboration: Establish a seamless and family-centred service system

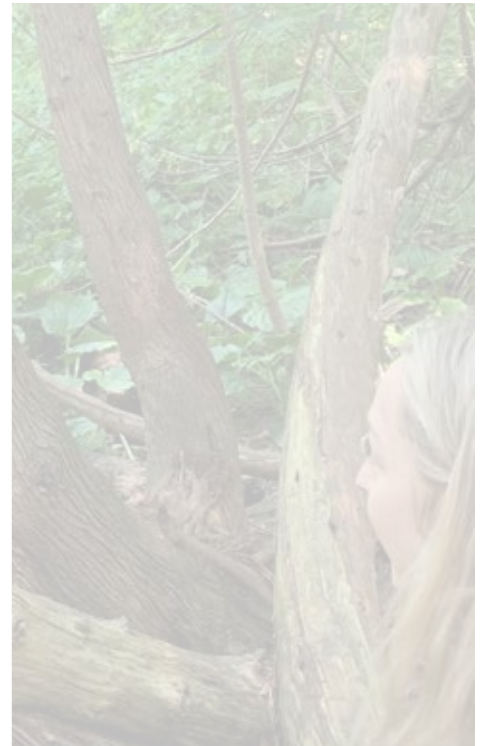
| Put into Play Direct Actions | Timeline |
|---|-------------|
| Support licensed child care educators in building relationships with caregivers and children. | 2024 - 2026 |
| Explore ways to support a coordinated transition to school for children. | 2024 - 2026 |
| Support earlier identification of developmental concerns and facilitate connections to support services and programs. | 2025 - 2028 |
| Expand the reach of the system by building connections with sectors, including health, education, employment, immigration, and social services. | 2026 - 2028 |





Backbone: Commit to responsive and accountable service system management

| Put into Play Direct Actions | Timeline |
|---|-------------|
| Implement shared tools and assessments to facilitate seamless data sharing among operators, schools, and other community partners. | 2024 - 2026 |
| Implement a continuous improvement process by collecting and analyzing data associated with the access and participation in quality improvement activities, reviewing feedback, evaluating outcomes, and adjusting strategies and activities as needed. | 2025 |
| Address operational challenges that impact the planning and delivery of quality of care. | 2024 - 2028 |
| Update funding agreements with operators. | 2025 |
| Implement random audits of operators. | 2024 |





London - Middlesex



Measuring Progress

To ensure continuous progress we will **measure and track outcomes**. Measuring progress will involve a number of different methods, including **surveys, social media** and the **review of data** collected as part of service and program delivery.

| Building Blocks & Outcomes | Measures |
|--|---|
| <p>Accessibility</p> <p>Families can easily access programs and services they need</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access ratio • Number of families accessing fee subsidies • CWELCC enrollment • Average daily cost of care (non-CWELCC spots) • Number of new licensed child care spaces • Number of flexible care options • Total number of families served and visits through EarlyON • Number of families accessing and utilizing digital platforms to inquire about child care, early years services, supports, and programs |
| <p>Inclusion</p> <p>Families feel a sense of belonging and inclusion within child care and early years services</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation rate of educators and leaders in learning about equity, diversity and inclusion • Integration and use of suggestions and resources across classrooms • Child, family and educator ratings of inclusion and belonging • Educator diversity • Opportunities for families and children to actively participate in decision-making processes related to child care and early years programs • Progress toward Truth & Reconciliation, which will be monitored based on guidance from Indigenous partners |

| Building Blocks & Outcomes | Measures |
|--|--|
| <p>Quality</p> <p>Child care and early years programs, services and staff are high quality</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average annual salary for child care and early years educators/providers • Number of workshops, seminars, training sessions, or events organized annually • Participation rate in professional learning • Satisfaction rates from providers regarding the relevance and practicality of tailored professional learning days • Participation rate in mentorship programs • Staff retention rate • Average number of years in the profession |
| <p>Collaboration</p> <p>The Child Care and Early Years Service System is seamless and family-centered</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caregiver, school, and operator feedback re: transition to school • Number of resources and supports provided to improve transition to school • Number of new connections with community partners • Satisfaction rates from families about their overall experience with the child care and early years system • Number of referrals from health care providers to EarlyON programs • Number of different organizations/sectors represented in Middlesex Childrens Service Network (MCSN) and the Child and Youth Network |
| <p>Backbone</p> <p>Service System Management is responsive and accountable</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilization of shared tools for data sharing • Amount of base funding allocated towards staff compensation • Number of serious occurrences |

Playing It Forward

The child care and early years system is a fundamental part of our communities' larger family-centred service system. As a result, this plan is grounded in and builds on the years of important and relevant work that has been accomplished in London and Middlesex County.

For many years, the child care and early years system has been growing and transitioning to make sure the needs of children and families are met. During this time, service providers have put children and families at the centre of this work, because, ultimately, this work is done with families and for families.

The City of London and Middlesex County believe that navigating change requires service providers from all sectors and geographies to come together for candid, productive conversation to generate actionable, impactful plans that will make life better for families. These conversations come easily to service providers in London and Middlesex County because of the time that has been invested in getting to know and trust each other, united by a common goal. Because of this, children and families in London and Middlesex County have been served well by child care and early years programs for many years.

As London and Middlesex County continues to move towards developing a high-performing system, this plan will support the collective work happening to help families access the services and supports they need to reach their full potential. In closing, the City of London and Middlesex County would like to acknowledge the children, youth, families, and service providers that help to foster and grow a strategic, responsive family-centred child care and early years system. A special thank you to those individuals who work in the child care and early years system. You are the foundation on which the system is built.



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