

Child and Family Centres

A Catalyst for System Reengineering

Our Vision

A Child and Family Centre is a community destination point where children and families come together to a) participate in a wide range of programs, services and supports and/or b) to be connected to specialized services through systems navigators or brokers attached to the Centre. Child and Family Centres are accessible, highly visible sites, located in schools or other community venues that meet the needs of the community.

Child and Family Centres, governed by local non-profit organizations, lead a collaborative local planning process that actively engages families and service providers and results in a service plan that truly reflects the community in which it is located. Services and programs under the auspices of the Child and Family Centre, while they may be provided by different organizations, are delivered in a seamless way from the perspective of the child and family..... a family-first model. Through these functions, Child and Family Centres are the catalyst for system reengineering including service integration.

The **Quality Early Learning Network of Ontario** believes that this vision is best achieved by:

- building on the existing strengths and leveraging the resources of each community;
- working with an integrated provincial policy framework to guide the process and to support appropriate local planning and model development;
- using Child and Family Centres to reengineer the service system and reduce barriers to access;
- systems coordination planned and managed by the Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs);
- clear and comprehensive guidelines to achieve transparency and accountability;
- maximizing the use of public space and the competencies of the non-profit sector.

This brief document proposes a conceptual framework for Child and Family Centres.

1. What services are provided by and/or through a Child and Family Centre?

- a) Child and Family Centres, governed by non-profit organizations, provide children, parents and caregivers seamless access to mandated core services as well as programs and services that are specific to the identified needs of the local community.

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- b) Each Child and Family Centre provides 5 core services:
 - Licensed home-based and centre-based child care (directly or through linkages with existing service providers)
 - Family support
 - Access to specialized services
 - Special needs resourcing
 - Local service coordination and planning
- c) Child and Family Centres serve as a resource for community-based child care programs in the catchment area (see below, Section 4).
- d) Child and Family Centres are linked to a family of schools.
- e) Managed by the local CMSM/DSSAB and governed by a local non-profit organization, the Child and Family Centres lead their community partners and families in a process to identify and address service and program needs in the catchment area. Needs may be addressed directly by the Child and Family Centre or through arrangements with other community or specialized agencies.
- f) Easy access for families is the key to success. Accessibility is achieved through the use of virtual services, neighborhood locations and a main site for each defined community.

2. How will it be determined which agency/organization becomes the lead agency?

Throughout Ontario there are strong multi-site, multi-service non-profit organizations poised to lead the Child and Family Centres. These organizations have the governance, human resource and service capacity to operate Child and Family Centres and to facilitate local collaborative planning initiatives. Multi-site, multi-service non-profit community agencies are governed by strong boards of directors with close ties to their own communities and who ensure the highest standards of accountability and effectiveness. In many instances, these organizations already house the core services identified above. They are a tremendous resource and they want to work with the government to ensure the best care and education for children and their families.

Many of these multi-site, multi-service organizations operate Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC), which already fulfill many of the proposed functions of Child and Family Centres and are well placed to provide additional core services. In the past year alone, more than 450,000 children participated in OEYC programs, many in high risk or settlement communities across the province. In the spirit of enhancing services to families and fiscal responsibility, it is good public policy to use OEYCs as a base from which to develop Child and Family Centres.

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If, within a community, the local non-profit organization operating the OEYC is not well placed to become the lead agency for the Child and Family Centre, then the principles identified below should guide the selection process.

The Principles:

- a) The selection process is guided by a Provincial Framework and managed by the local CMSM/DSSAB. Underpinning the Provincial Framework is a commitment to non-profit governance and quality service delivery that incorporates a high level of parent engagement.
- b) The Framework establishes criteria for selection including non-profit status, service record, history of collaborations, financial viability, etc.
- c) The process is inclusive. A wide range of community-based stakeholders, including parents, service providers and community members, are actively involved in the decision making process. Each community determines the most effective way of moving forward within the context of a provincially determined framework.
- d) CMSMs/DSSABs, as service system managers, play the lead role in ensuring that all appropriate stakeholders are at each planning table.
- e) The process is transparent and facilitates a community by community determination of which non-profit agency/organization is best positioned to serve as the lead agency for the Child and Family Centre.
 - i. Child and Family Centres may emerge from a coming together of a range of services under the auspice of an existing non-profit or public entity that will serve as the lead agency developing and delivering early years programs and services. It is also possible that stakeholders may decide that the needs of children and families can be more effectively met by pooling existing resources and creating a new organization.
 - ii. In some communities, an existing agency may already be delivering most of the programs and services that the community deems necessary for a Child and Family Centre. In this instance some additional roles and responsibilities will be added and re-branding may be necessary.

3. How will Child and Family Centres be a catalyst for System Reengineering?

- a) The goal of system reengineering is improved access and simplified, cohesive delivery of comprehensive services. From the perspective of the child and family, this goal is achieved when they are able to access the services they need from one point of contact without having to reiterate their story.

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- b) The benefits of system reengineering for the child and family can only be achieved through integrated government policy and funding mechanisms that provide a consistent framework for all child and family support programs and enable Child and Family Centres to respond to changing local needs quickly and efficiently in an accountable way.
- c) The Child and Family Centre serves as a broker and system navigator connecting children and families to services. It also connects and integrates services through a variety of mechanisms including protocols and purchase of service agreements. Child and Family Centres take a lead role at local planning tables.
- d) An “Integration Assessment” tool is utilized in each community to support the Child and Family Centre to develop and implement a continuous improvement model with respect to fully integrated service provision within the community.

4. How will Child and Family Centres relate to licensed home-based and centre-based child care?

- a) In most cases, the Child and Family Centre will directly operate licensed home child care and licensed centres at the central site and/or at local sites within the service area. Alternately, the Child and Family Centre provides linkages and supports (see below) to licensed child care.
- b) Where appropriate, to further achieve integration, any expansion of the licensed child care system is under the auspice of the Child and Family Centre.
- c) Parental choice is an important principle with respect to the provision of high quality early learning and care. While independently-governed community-based child care centres may continue to exist, they are part of a collaborative network, led by the Child and Family Centre, to achieve improved access, professional development and quality assurance across the community (see below).
- d) Child and Family Centres provide support to the licensed child care sector within each catchment area by:
 - providing a central access point for parents to receive information about making a quality child care choice, be referred to available child care spaces and access subsidy applications;
 - providing professional development opportunities to build and strengthen quality and the delivery of seamless early years programming;
 - acting as a resource and leader for best practice policies and approaches;
 - entering into agreements to deliver additional support services;
 - providing administrative and budgeting support.

This support will be facilitated through memorandums of understanding.

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- e) Over the next several years, as a consequence of the introduction of full day kindergarten, there is likely to be a rationalization of some stand alone child care centres. To support continued access for children and their families, community-based child care programs may enter into discussions to merge or amalgamate with their local Child and Family Centre.

5. How will Child and Family Centres relate to their community?

- a) Provincial regulations identify CMSMs/DSSABs as the service system managers and assign responsibility for the development of a community-based planning strategy to the CMSMs/DSSABs.
- b) Parents and community members are supported and encouraged to play an active role in the planning and development of services provided at and through the local Child and Family Centre.
- c) Each Child and Family Centre has a Parent Advisory Council to ensure that there is a forum for parents to have direct input into the planning for programs and services.
- d) Child and Family Centres connect closely to their family of schools, facilitating opportunities for shared programming and professional development. Child and Family Centres and schools, together, lead community planning and priority-setting based on, for example, a collaborative review of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) scores.

6. How will Child and Family Centres be governed, funded and held accountable?

- a) Managed by CMSMs/DSSABs and governed by a local multi-site, multi-service non-profit organization, accountability will be measured against a service plan that includes an agreed upon number of service units and outcome measurements. The service plan will include targets, timelines and quality standards.
- b) Child and Family Centres are required to use evidence-informed practice and to establish/follow an evaluation strategy.
- c) Child and Family Centres are governed by boards of directors that include service users and community representatives with diverse professional and ethno-cultural backgrounds.
- d) CMSMs/DSSABs receive funding from the provincial government for the planning and management of the early years service system which includes a comprehensive network of Child and Family Centres.

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- e) Child and Family Centres enter into purchase of service agreements with CMSMs/DSSABs to receive base funding for the programs identified as being core services. This includes base funding for licensed home and centre-based child care.
- f) In order to fulfill their mission, Child and Family Centres require stable, sufficient and flexible funding.
- g) Child and Family Centres leverage resources and supports from existing specialized services to enhance the programs and services available to parents and their children.

Conclusion

In vibrant communities, the responsibility of meeting the diverse needs of children and their families is shared. The education system, municipal services (libraries, public health, parks and recreation) and the community-based non-profit sector (licensed child care, Ontario Early Years Centres, Children's Mental Health) may have different mandates, but they have a shared responsibility to collaborate as equals to provide healthy functioning environments for children and their families. Child and Family Centres provide improved access to multiple opportunities for children and families within the context of a community driven plan for early years programs and services. Child and Family Centres can provide the leadership and impetus for fundamental system reengineering that benefits children and families in consistent ways across Ontario.