



Social Services | Services Sociaux
Zhawenimi-Anokiitaagewin
Sault Ste. Marie District
Here to help.
Ici Pour Aider



2019-2024

Early Years Service System Plan



Created by the SSM Early Years
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board (DSSMSSAB) has led four community planning processes and reports since 2016. All four consultation processes have included families, Service Providers, Boards of Directors, community partners and School Board Partners, and have been premised on guiding documents from the Ministry of Education pertaining to early years, child care, child and family programs, and Journey Together-Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Data from previous plans, as well as new data gathered in 2019 from additional community focus groups and surveys have been incorporated into this new 2019-2024 Five Year Strategic Plan for the system management of Early Years Services.

This plan assessed the needs of the community of Sault Ste. Marie and prioritized strategic direction, outcomes and implementation in accordance with provincial interest for Early Years services. At the same time, it heightens awareness of the challenging EDI vulnerability rates in Sault Ste. Marie and identifies opportunities to improve outcomes. The new plan builds upon the Early Years System strengths, identifies gaps in capacity within the system and supports the four key components of Ontario's vision for Early Years services: Affordability, Accessibility, Responsiveness and High Quality. Early Years planning has been integrated with local community direction, which is strategically important to expanding and improving services for children and families.

ACCESSIBILITY

The District of Sault Ste. Marie has been very successful in increasing accessibility to Early Years services in both licensed child care and EarlyON programs. The most noteworthy risk to accessibility for all of these initiatives remains the lack of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE), which affects all Early Years System services.

AFFORDABILITY

Accessibility and affordability have a close relationship in Early Years; as the cost of a child care space increases it becomes a barrier for many who require access. For more spaces to become accessible to families, qualified Early Childhood Educators are required. In order to recruit people, salaries and benefits need to be more competitive, which raises costs for parents and affects affordability. Subsidized spaces in the system have been at an all-time high and a waitlist for fee subsidy implemented.

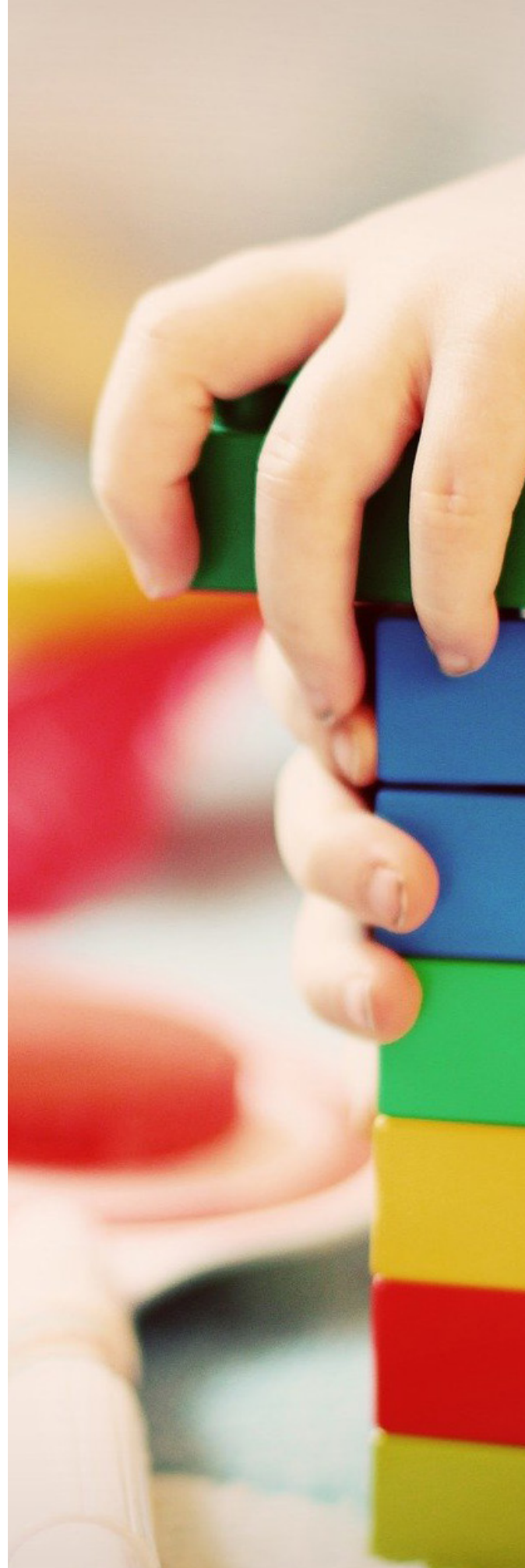
RESPONSIVENESS

Implementing or restructuring programs in response to parent feedback is critical to maintaining credibility and trust in the Early Years system. The outcomes and actions that are part of this system plan are taken directly from feedback provided by families.

HIGH QUALITY

The DSSMSSAB's 2016 Child Care Plan identified a Vision for the community "To have the highest quality early years system in the province at all levels". Since that time, we have implemented a Quality Assurance Framework. Professional development is held regularly and feedback is consistently sought. Support and resources are provided to build internal program capacity.

The Early Years System is experiencing a number of pressure points in affordability and accessibility that are dependent on the successful recruitment of Early Childhood Educators, as well as additional funding to fully address. Lack of qualified staff is the biggest barrier to consistent, high quality programming throughout the Community.



2019—2024 EARLY YEARS SYSTEM PLAN SUMMARY



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Vision: *The highest quality Early Years System in the province, at all levels.*

STRATEGIC AREAS OF FOCUS

Service Delivery Supports	Community Partners	Registered Early Childhood Educators	Clear and Consistent Communication	Diverse & Integrated Programming
<p> Early Years Professionals have access to resources and attend regular training opportunities.</p> <p>Organizational supports are provided for the consistent delivery of quality services.</p> <p>EarlyON & Licensed Child Care Operators deliver quality services and provide healthy food offerings to children and families, and ensure that resources and programming are inclusive of family diversity.</p>	<p> Families have alternative supports while waiting for referred services.</p> <p>Parents, Teachers and classrooms are prepared when children enter the school system.</p> <p>Informed collaborative Early Years Partners support each other in the delivery of services and programs, and improve outcomes for children and families by addressing EDI vulnerabilities.</p>	<p> Increased number of qualified staff through alternative educational pathways.</p> <p>Strategic succession planning for leadership positions through ongoing planning and mentoring.</p> <p>Increased job satisfaction through mentorship, promotion of staff wellbeing, ongoing learning opportunities and access to resources.</p>	<p> Ongoing, direct feedback can be provided by families interacting with the Early Years System.</p> <p>Families have easy access to information & materials on healthy child development in the format and language of their choice.</p> <p>Families, Community Partners and Early Years Professionals are well informed of the Early Years services offered in SSM and know what constitutes quality service.</p>	<p> Early Years services are fully accessible and considerate of a wide variety of family needs.</p> <p>Cultural Resources & Indigenous programming become integrated into Early Years service delivery.</p> <p>Family-centred Early Years services celebrate differences, are inclusive of family diversity, strengthen relationships with families to better address individual needs and offer quality service that complements each family's lifestyle.</p>



BACKGROUND

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Background

The District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board (DSSMSSAB) has led four community planning processes and reports since 2016. In addition to the 2019-2024 Early Years plan, a Child Care Strategic plan was developed in 2016 and both Child and Family Centre and Journey Together Plans were developed throughout 2017. All four consultation processes have included families, Service Providers, Boards of Directors, community partners and School Board Partners. Data from previous plans as well as new data gathered in 2019 from additional community focus groups and surveys have been incorporated into this new 2019-2024 Five Year Strategic Plan for the system management of Early Years Services.

In 2018, the DSSMSSAB developed and approved an organizational Strategic Plan with three pillars to success: Organizational Excellence, Service Delivery and Community Partnerships. Objectives such as Best Leadership, Service Excellence, Inclusionary Planning and Shared Outcome Planning are well aligned with the goals you will see in the Early Years Division Five Year Plan.

The DSSMSSAB is very fortunate to have strong partnerships on which to build all of its strategic growth and this provides unique opportunities to integrate, collaborate and innovate to support children and families in the District of Sault Ste. Marie.

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COMMUNITY PLANNING INTEGRATION

The City of Sault Ste. Marie as a whole has embarked on a community strategy through the local Community Adjustment Committee with an approach to community development that includes 4 pillars. These pillars are Economic Growth and Diversity, Cultural Vitality, Environmental Sustainability and Social Equity.

The main goal of the Social Equity Committee is “Sault Ste. Marie will be a welcoming and inclusive community where everyone is valued and respected, has an acceptable standard of living, can fully engage and participate in all aspects of community life and is able to realize their full potential.” The District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board (Social Services) has taken the lead for the Social Equity Committee and will also be working through the Algoma Leadership Table, which includes local leaders who have an interest in the well-being of all members of the community.



Physical Health and Well-Being

Sample EDI question:
Would you say that this child is well coordinated (moves without running into things or tripping over things)?



Social Competence

Sample EDI question:
Would you say that this child is able to follow one-step instructions?



Emotional Maturity

Sample EDI question:
Would you say that this child comforts a child who is crying or upset?



Language and Cognitive Development

Sample EDI question:
Would you say that this child is able to read simple words?



Communication Skills and General Knowledge

Sample EDI question:
How would you rate this child's ability to tell a story?

One of the main goals of the Social Equity Committee is to improve the Early Development Indicator (EDI) outcomes in all domains for children in the community so that within 10 years they surpass the Provincial averages. Early Years services across the system provide the forum to support this goal and aligning our Early Years planning with local community direction is strategically important to expanding and improving services for children and families. The local Child and Family Network, which coordinates with the Algoma Leadership Table, has always prioritized this work and will incorporate the work of the Social Equity Committee into their own Network planning. The City of Sault Ste. Marie's Community Development and Enterprise Services department in partnership with the Algoma Leadership Table also hired a Social Equity Coordinator, who will support this work.

The Early Years Division of Social Services is submitting a new 5 year Early Years' Service System Plan. In order to cultivate seamless service delivery and facilitate more integrated planning, the Social Equity Coordinator was contracted to work with the Early Years Division of Social Services in the development of the community plan, which will ultimately inform and align the work and interests of the community. This plan will assess the needs of the community of Sault Ste. Marie and prioritize strategic direction, outcomes and implementation in accordance with provincial interest for Early Years services. At the same time, this will heighten awareness of the challenging EDI vulnerability rates in Sault Ste. Marie and identify opportunities to improve outcomes. With the collaborative efforts of the Sault Ste. Marie Child and Family Network Planning Table (which includes representation from organizations providing services to children from across the community), consultations will result in an informed system plan. It will be built upon the Early Years system strengths, will identify gaps in capacity within the system and will support the four key components of Ontario's vision for Early Years services: Affordability, Accessibility, Responsiveness and High Quality.

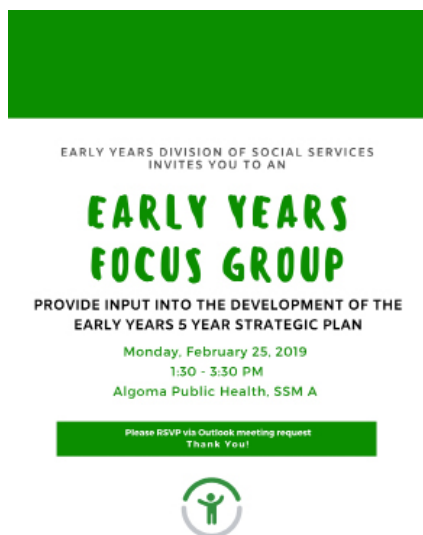
Affordability	Access	Quality	Responsiveness
Ensuring that early years programs and services, including licensed child care, are within affordable reach for families	Increasing access to early years programs to give families more opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood programs and services	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	Providing a range of early years and child care programs that are inclusive and culturally appropriate, located in schools, communities, workplaces and home settings so that parents – including parents who work irregular hours – can choose the options that work best for their family
<i>“An affordable early years system would ensure that every parent has access without having to sacrifice their other basic needs and where every caregiver is empowered to enter the workforce if they choose.”</i> – Early years partner	<i>“An accessible system is one that can accommodate all children for whom there is a desire for them to participate.”</i> – Municipal partner	<i>“High-quality early years and child care programs involve the establishment of positive and responsive relationships between children, families and educators and are environments where children are valued as individuals and as active and competent contributors with their own unique interests and points of view.”</i> – Early childhood educator candidates	<i>“We understand responsiveness in Ontario's early years and child care system to mean that there is a natural flexibility in the system so that it can easily change to meet families' ever-changing needs.”</i> – Child care partner

METHODOLOGY

In 2016, the Early Years Division at Social Services completed a comprehensive Child Care Operational Plan that included a community needs assessment utilizing both online and paper surveys and multiple focus groups. Information gleaned from this child care operational plan is useful for the creation of the 2019-2024 system plan in that it allows the Early Years Division to gauge the effectiveness of the implementation of the 2016 plan and inform the strategic direction of the 2019-2024 plan.

For the 2019-2024 system plan, several community consultations were conducted to provide a holistic depiction of the Early Years system in Sault Ste. Marie. This included seven focus groups beginning February 12, 2019 until the closing of the concurrent public parent surveys on April 23, 2019. Regular updates on the progress of the Early Years system plan were brought forward to the Algoma Leadership Table, a community-planning table comprised of executive management from health, education and social service sector organizations, by the Social Equity Coordinator throughout the planning process.

Focus groups participants included Child Care Supervisors from licensed child care and home child care programs, the Child & Family Network, and many other community planning partners. In addition, Algoma District School Board/Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board Junior and Senior Kindergarten Teachers and classroom Early Childhood Educators, the Integrated Services committee, community organizations concerned with the special needs of



children and Algoma District Services Administration Board Early Years' service providers were consulted. A culturally relevant focus group dedicated to Indigenous parents was held on March 19, 2019 supported by Waabinong Head Start Child & Family Resource Centre.

Online teacher and public parent surveys in both official languages were made available beginning February 5, 2019 until April 23, 2019. In total, there were 168 additional responses from parents to this latest survey. Early Childhood Educator surveys from the Huron Catholic District School Board and French translated surveys were also completed.

On March 28 & 29, 2019, a facilitated strategic planning session was held with the Child & Family Network. The Child & Family Network was provided with a preliminary highlight of the qualitative data gathered from the community consultations to inform them in the development of the Network's planning process. Feedback from the presentation of this data aided in the data analysis process.

At that time, the Network identified three priority areas to focus on for the next two years. These included Transition to School, Increased Parent Engagement and Access to Services and an exercise to reduce the number of planning tables for Early Years Services under the umbrella of the Child and Family Network. In this time of increased workload, it was felt that an opportunity to align strategies and maximize use of time would be beneficial to all partners.





SERVICE SYSTEM PLAN

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SERVICE SYSTEM PLAN

The Plan

Research has clearly demonstrated that the early years in a child's life are critical to their healthy development and future success. Ontario's vision for the Early Years is built upon a child and family centred system of services that contribute to children's overall well-being, learning and development, are high quality, inclusive and affordable, and can be accessed by everyone. Four key components of this system include affordability, accessibility, responsiveness, and high quality.

In the District of Sault Ste. Marie, the service system plan that has been developed addresses all of these components in a number of ways. Feedback from the community helped identify needs, priorities, strengths and barriers and this information has been incorporated, not only within the resulting plan, but into other related planning sessions (Child and Family Network) and integrated with previous recent reports.



ACCESSIBILITY

The District of Sault Ste. Marie has been very successful in increasing accessibility to Early Years services in both licensed child care and EarlyON programs. The many opportunities for expansion of the system, be it through the Expansion and Early Learning and Child Care portfolios, the EarlyON transfer, the Journey Together Initiative or Community Based Capital funding, have all been successfully initiated in our community. Based on needs identified in 2016 consultations, a concerted effort was made to increase the number of infant spaces in the system, with those spaces growing by 55 percent by the end of 2018.

The number of Before and After School programs have also increased as part of the new funding portfolios, with increases of 18 percent for School Age spaces and 31 percent for Kindergarten spaces. Within the DSSMSSAB catchment area, 73 percent of schools have a Before and After School program. A review is conducted yearly with gaps identified and addressed in partnership with local School Boards.

The most noteworthy risk to accessibility for all of these initiatives remains the lack of Registered Early Childhood Educators (addressed in Goal 3). This labour shortage significantly impacts opportunities for sustained and further expansion of the system in order to increase access to services reflective of community need. The lack of qualified

staff impacts all Early Years system services, including licensed child care, EarlyON Child and Family Centres, Special Needs Resourcing, Journey Together (there are three new programs in the community), as well as the ability to provide Francophone services.

A recruitment and retention committee has been initiated with interested service providers to look at potential



solutions. In the meantime, the DSSMSSAB has successfully piloted an Ontario Works/Early Years training program to begin addressing this severe shortage. Managers in the Early Years and Ontario Works Divisions of Social Services worked collaboratively to address this shortage by providing a unique opportunity for Ontario Works employment-ready participants. Significant training as well as strong mentoring were key to the initial success of the pilot, which after 9 months has resulted in 9 people obtaining employment in the Early Years sector.

The nine-month pilot program assisted Early Years Service Providers to build capacity and to recruit potential Early Childhood Educators to meet the ongoing need for full-time and part-time program staff. Addressing the workplace staffing shortage has given Service Providers the opportunity to maintain and/or increase program operating capacity. Families also have increased access to licensed child care, thus reducing local waitlist pressures.

Based on consistent positive feedback, there are plans to continue to use this model to promote both employment opportunities and recruitment of staff who are interested in becoming Early Childhood Educators.

At the same time, Indigenous partners worked together to bring an Early Childhood Education College Program opportunity to the community where up to 15 individuals are able to participate in face to face and online training while continuing



to work in the field. They are also eligible to receive the Grant Assistance funding through the Ministry of Education.

We are optimistic that as the community partners work together to address this issue as part of our system plan, we will be able to create further opportunities and success stories.

LICENSED CHILD CARE

In 2019, our Child Care Centralized Application Site identified over 1100 children waiting for a licensed child care space. This number has been adjusted for those who have found a space but are waiting for a preferred space at a different location. Families are desperate and often take the first space they are offered, regardless of whether it meets their needs related to hours of care or home and work locations.

Over 45 % of the current applications on the centralized waitlist include requests for subsidy. In Sault Ste. Marie, we currently have a waiting list for both spaces and fee subsidy.

It is possible that the new Ontario Childcare Tax Credit will provide some relief to families waiting for a Fee Subsidy.

The lack of spaces for School Age Summer programs and extended hours of service have been identified in both the 2016 and 2019 consultations and plans. In 2018/2019 one Provider was willing to pilot an extended hours program; however, initial uptake was very limited. Plans are in place to incorporate the service in a second, new location and provide additional marketing of this availability.



In 2020, expansion will occur in two capital projects. One School Board Capital Retrofit project, opening in January 2020, will see an expansion of 10 infant, 15 toddler and 3 preschool spaces, while later in the year, a Community Based Capital project will open with 10 infant, 15 toddler and 24 preschool spaces.

EARLYON PROGRAMS

In 2018, all local Child and Family programs were integrated and streamlined into EarlyON Centres, and increasing access to all families was prioritized based on the results of the 2017 consultative process.

EarlyON services are well utilized in the District of Sault Ste. Marie. Since point of transfer in 2018, EarlyON sites have increased from nine to 13 sites. Hours and days of service are strategically varied across the community and are reviewed regularly. Francophone services are regularly offered. In Sault Ste. Marie, we have the advantage of all EarlyON sites using a Digital Sign-In system for families, which can identify the data impacts and trends by mapping and analyzing the information by site and across the community (see Appendix 1: Environmental Scan).

Based on the premise that it makes sense to bring services to where families are, Social Services and the local EarlyON Service Providers have regularly gone out to areas of the



community that are considered more isolated. This outreach has been very successful to date. With the addition of the Mobile EarlyON vehicle, and in partnership with other early year's services, an increase in participation of parents and children in activities brought to their own neighbourhoods has occurred. This outreach facilitates further participation at other events and gradually at the closest EarlyON sites. Experience has taught that once a trusting relationship is established with a staff member, families will often feel it is safe to go to other places where that person will be.

Accessibility in the form of increased attention to diversity is included within each of the goals of the system plan. It is widely acknowledged that more work can be done in recognizing the wide variety of cultures, needs and/or lifestyle choices across our community.



AFFORDABILITY

Accessibility and affordability have a close relationship in Early Years; as the cost of a child care space increases it becomes a barrier for many who require access. For more spaces to become accessible to families, qualified Early Childhood Educators are required. The challenge in Early Years is that in order to recruit the qualified educators required to provide accessibility, salaries and benefits need to be more competitive, which in turn raises the cost of care. Solving one issue creates another. As the cost of child care increases, fewer parents are able to afford a licensed space. Without addressing this challenge, affordability and accessibility will continue to be problematic.

New allocations for expansion have been welcomed as an opportunity to address accessibility for families. In Sault Ste. Marie, service targets identified by the Ministry of Education to build accessibility have been met and exceeded. At the same time, subsidized spaces in the system have been at an all-time high and a waitlist for fee subsidy implemented. Unfortunately, because of successful expansion opportunities available, there has been no capacity to provide reductions in parent fees, which has

been an option for some in communities where expansion has been more limited.

As per the intent of the new Licensed Home Child Care (LHCC) funding, a small reduction in parent fees for Licensed Home Child Care has been negotiated with the local Service Provider. Unfortunately, this large agency also offers many centre-based programs and there is no capacity for similar reductions to all families they serve.

For late 2019 and 2020, expansion will occur in two capital projects. One project will see 10 infant, 15 toddler and 3 preschool spaces, while later in the year a second project will open with 10 infant, 15 toddler and 24 preschool spaces. In anticipation of these openings, general operating funds have been set aside to ensure sustainability. Availability of qualified staff and additional fee subsidy will be a challenge.

The Early Years system is experiencing a number of pressure points in affordability and accessibility that are dependent on the successful recruitment of Early Childhood Educators, as well as additional funding to fully address.

RESPONSIVENESS

Ensuring diversity, in its broadest definition, was identified repeatedly as an important component of any Early Years System. Diversity goes beyond culture and language to include all types of family situations, working/non-working families and families who have children with different developmental needs.

Consultations identified the importance of regularly gathering feedback from parents in order to more fully understand the changing needs of the community and ensuring this information is widely shared across the community. Early Years community service providers have all committed to working towards enhanced parent engagement as part of local network planning. They are partnering to identify new

ideas and interpretations of what families need and want in order to feel supported.

Implementing or restructuring programs in response to parent feedback is critical to maintaining credibility and trust in the Early Years system. The outcomes and actions that are part of this system plan are taken directly from feedback provided by families.

Goal Two's actions and outcomes will be key to ensuring genuine responsiveness of the whole system. Goal Two is also linked to community responsibility in improving EDI scores and reducing the vulnerability of children in the community, which is supported by the local Social Equity Committee comprised of community leaders.



HIGH QUALITY

The DSSMSSAB's 2016 Child Care Plan identified a Vision for the community "To have the highest quality early years system in the province at all levels". Since that time we have implemented a Quality Assurance Framework that incorporates the foundations of *How Does Learning Happen?*, the importance of ensuring that Early Years environments support children's play and exploration, and parent engagement. Professional development is held regularly and feedback is consistently sought. Support and resources are provided to build internal program capacity through the identification of Professional Practice Leaders from each site, who attend monthly training and transfer the practice to their home programs. Leadership training and mentorship are key components woven throughout the framework as well.

A focused program for staff working in Before and After School sites has also been implemented. The importance of, and provision of, High Quality programs continues to be a theme we heard throughout all our consultations and has been incorporated in more detail within the first goal of our

plan. Moving forward we plan to develop the framework to more fully represent EarlyON programs and their unique environments.

In 2018, A Service Delivery Review was conducted for each new EarlyON Child and Family Centre location. A tool was developed to initially review the following:

- Policies and Procedures
- Service Data
- Staffing and RECE Exemptions
- Program Alignment with Mandatory Core Services

Regular contact and communication with Service Providers occurs throughout the year and includes an annual visit to each program. Through consultation with service provider staff, visits confirm effective delivery of mandatory core services and customization to meet community/ neighbourhood need.

As we incorporate EarlyON programs into our local Quality Assurance Framework, an initial scan of the learning environment is being included in the 2019 site visits (see Goal 1) and this will provide a baseline of the centre's ability to create an engaging learning environment.

Service Providers submit an Annual Workplan, which directs organizational vision and ensures the plan is responsive to the Guiding Principles. This workplan identifies two key priorities for each mandatory core service, with an action plan and activities aligned with the priority areas, and appropriate adjustments based on neighbourhood need. An essential piece of the Annual Workplan is also a plan for engagement at all locations for French Language Services and Indigenous Programs and Services to be delivered.

Through partnerships with School Boards and Early Years community service providers, there are other opportunities for professional development regularly available. Since the



inception of the Algoma Leadership Table whose mission is “to leverage our leadership to strategically plan, coordinate and align our resources to improve the health, social well-being and educational outcomes of members of our communities”, collective planning and shared opportunities have been increasing.

Goal 3 of our plan is reflective of the critical need in our community for Registered Early Childhood Educators. Supervisors and Managers of Early Years organizations are continually required to be counted in ratios and unable to take the time required to perform their leadership role on a consistent basis. Lack of qualified staff is the biggest barrier

to consistent, high quality programming throughout the community.

Assisting parents in identifying quality and engaging parents regularly to provide feedback in a context in which they are comfortable has been identified by providers and parents as an ongoing challenge and is a priority in the current plan (Goals 1, 2, 4, 5).

The development of a consistent definition of program quality and an accompanying Provincial framework to measure this will be very welcome and will serve to augment work already planned and/or underway.



PARENT ENGAGEMENT

All Early Years’ Service Providers have identified parent engagement as an area requiring more attention (Goals 1, 2, 4, 5). The Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma Child and Family Network, which the DSSMSSAB co-chairs has identified this as a priority as part of their 2019 strategic planning process. Local planning tables have known for some time that there are many families who are harder to reach and less likely to access services.

Social Services and the local EarlyON providers have regularly gone out to areas of the community that are considered more isolated. It makes sense that to engage parents there must first be a trusting relationship and a familiar person to build it. This strategy is utilized in Social Housing complexes where units have been identified as Hub locations and a variety of social and other services, including EarlyON are available there. This is a very successful strategy. The addition of the Mobile EarlyON vehicle, in partnership with other early year’s services, provides further opportunities to build parent engagement in their own neighbourhoods, knowing that the program cares enough to come to them.

Identifying ideal ways to communicate with parents is key to parent engagement and to ensuring that information

provided is user-friendly and relevant. Service Providers across the system have identified a need to work together on how this will be accomplished. Diversity in language and style of communication will be key. Asking parents how best to communicate with them will be part of the process.

Ultimately, it would be very rewarding to know that families do not ever feel that they do not have the information they need to address their needs and they are well aware of their options and opportunities.

The Quality Assurance Framework also supports the promotion of parent engagement, whether it be through innovative ways to highlight documentation and child engagement, or by supporting opportunities for parents to participate actively in programs with their children in meaningful ways.

Additional support in the form of a comprehensive public awareness campaign at the Provincial level would be very beneficial to all Early Years programs. Branding has been completed and is very important; however, education tactics that go beyond public recognition are also needed.



SPECIAL NEEDS RESOURCING

The District of Sault Ste. Marie and the District of Algoma share the services of Thrive Child Development Centre in the delivery of Special Needs Resourcing. The model combines the services of Resource Consultants and Resource Assistants who provide specific training as well as ongoing mentoring opportunities to all Early Years programs across the community. In Sault Ste. Marie, the minimum allocation required for this service is always exceeded and priority is placed on providing services to as many children as is possible with staffing available (the shortage of qualified staff has impacts on this program as well). Waitlist times for these services are kept to a minimum.

Surveys within the Early Years sector in our community have indicated that educators require further knowledge to successfully understand and respond to difficult behaviour. Educators have identified this a pressing need in the child care community.

As a result, throughout 2019, Thrive Child Development Centre has worked with the DSSMSSAB to facilitate an Early Years system-wide implementation of Collaborative and Proactive Solutions, Dr. Ross Greene's Skill Development and Problem Solving approach, in connection with Dr. Stuart Shanker's Self-Regulation. The training and mentoring of self-regulation, skill development and problem solving will continue to be a focus in 2020.

Promotion of diversity and inclusive programming are woven throughout the accompanying five-year Early Years plan. Thrive management is represented on both the Algoma Leadership Table and the Child and Family Network and are very active partners. Special Needs Resourcing is an integral part of our Early Years System and Thrive an important partner in promoting a high quality, inclusive, accessible and responsive Early Years system in Sault Ste. Marie.



INDIGENOUS SERVICES

Social Services, in partnership with local Indigenous partners, submitted a comprehensive community report and a needs assessment as part of the application process for Journey Together and were successfully funded for three new Early Years programs. Throughout 2018 and 2019, work has continued with existing, as well as, new Indigenous partners as part of the implementation of these programs.

Two new licensed child care programs providing 67 new licensed child care spaces and a new EarlyON Child and Family Centre will be opening early in 2020. The programs

have internal staffing to support the language and cultural components of their curriculum development.

Both Service Providers will continue to be part of the Quality Assurance Framework and are participants in a number of Early Years planning committees.

In addition, the DSSMSSAB has plans to hire a Cultural Resource Coordinator for the organization, who will provide supports to the Early Years sector to facilitate inclusion and responsiveness to the Indigenous community.



FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES

French Language services are available in the community in both licensed child care and EarlyON programs. In partnership with Conseil scolaire catholique du Nouvel-Ontario, both these services are available at their local school location. Services are also available in French on designated days in a centralized EarlyON program. The Francophone community is small and spread-out in Sault Ste. Marie so these locations make the most sense, and families have expressed their satisfaction with these locations.

The challenge of recruiting Francophone RECE's is ongoing, although these programs are fortunate and currently do have qualified Francophone Early Childhood Education staff.

The Child and Family Network partners in the delivery of some French programming in the community, for example the Triple P parenting program, and the Network is regularly apprised of the work of the Regional French Language Network.



SUMMARY

The work occurring in Early Years in Sault Ste. Marie is consistent with the DSSMSSAB's own Mission, which is Helping people, building lives and strengthening community as well as the Vision for a fully engaged community where everyone is valued, respected and recognized. Common pillars of success, Organizational Excellence, Service Delivery and Community Partnerships are easily identified in this Early Years plan.

The District of Sault Ste. Marie is also committed to providing a high quality, well-rounded, responsive continuum of Early Years services that are both affordable and accessible. The current plan reflects the gaps that have been identified and the supports that need to be put in place to be successful. Such a system will benefit children, families and the whole community now and into the future.



THE WORK PLAN

What you'll find: IN THIS SECTION

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SERVICE SYSTEM PLAN

The Work Plan

An important piece of the new 2019-2024 Five Year Strategic Plan for the system management of Early Years Services, was the development of a results driven, achievable Work Plan to guide the local Early Years sector towards the ultimate goal of The highest quality Early Years System in the province, at all levels.

This Work Plan takes into account insights and direction from four community planning processes and reports compiled since 2016. These include the 2016 Child Care Strategic Plan, both the Child and Family Centre and Journey Together plans developed in 2017 and finally, the 2019-2024 Early Years plan. All four consultation processes included focus groups and surveys with families, Service Providers, Boards of Directors, community partners and School Board partners.

Data was gathered from multiple focus groups and questionnaires, examining the strengths and challenges of the community's Early Years services. All of the feedback was themed and then further reflected upon by community stakeholders to inform the objectives and develop action strategies to improve outcomes in the EDI domains. Short-term goals were identified and key action steps shaped, along with timelines, expected outcomes, responsibilities and methods of evaluation.

Much thought and planning went into developing the Early Year's Division Five Year Plan, summarized in the infographic to the right. The plan aligns well with the DSSMSSAB's own organizational Strategic Plan, particularly the Objectives such as Best Leadership, Service Excellence, Inclusionary Planning and Shared Outcome Planning. The plan also supports the Child and Family Network's direction, which focuses on Transition to School, Increased Parent Engagement and Access to Services, as well as a consolidation in the number of Early Years planning tables.

GOALS OF THE 5-YEAR EARLY YEARS SERVICE SYSTEM PLAN



LONG TERM GOAL

*The highest quality Early Years System
in the province, at all levels.*

SERVICE DELIVERY SUPPORTS

Provide organizational supports needed to ensure the consistent delivery services within the Early Years System.



COMMUNITY PARTNERS

An informed Early Years System and community partners build opportunities for collaboration that support improved outcomes for children and families by addressing EDI vulnerabilities.



REGISTERED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

Increase the number of Registered Early Childhood Educators through provision of essential supports.



CLEAR & CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION

There is a clear and regular communication of the Early Years Services in the community.



DIVERSE & INTEGRATED PROGRAMMING

The diverse needs of families are integrated into all Early Years programming.



2019 - 2024

EARLY YEARS SYSTEM WORKPLAN 2019-2024

GOAL 1

Long Term Goal: The highest quality Early Years System in the province, at all levels.

Short Term Goal: Provide the organizational supports needed to ensure the consistent delivery of quality services within the Early Years System.

Key Action Steps	Timeline	Expected Outcome	Person Responsible	Evaluation
Establish quality assurance metrics for EarlyON centres	Throughout 2020/21	EarlyON centres deliver quality services	Program Manager System Planning Coordinator	Quality assurance metrics are developed and implemented at EarlyON centres
A formal reporting process and ready-made resources are created for Professional Practice Leaders to provide to their home centre	Throughout 2021	Early Childhood Professionals have access to professional development resources and attend regular training opportunities	Quality Assurance Coordinator	Formal reporting process is used; # of ready made resources distributed
Centralized space to access resources and networking, is utilized at least once per month by Early Childhood Professionals	2021	Early Childhood Professionals have access to professional development resources and attend regular training opportunities	Program Manager	Sign in/sign out log for educators is used identifying work location; # of attendees at training by centre
All programs develop and implement food/nutrition policies for licensed child care and EarlyON centres that reflect APH best practice recommendations	2021	Licensed child care and EarlyON centres are committed to providing healthy food offerings to children and families	Quality Assurance Coordinator	Policies are written in consultation with APH and implemented in programs; # of programs implementing
All programs develop and maintain culturally diverse resources that are integrated into inclusive programming	Ongoing 2019-2024	Resources offered to and by early years centres are reflective of family diversity	Quality Assurance Coordinator System Planning Coordinator Cultural Resource Coordinator	# of resources available per centre; # of diverse family events
The System Management Table investigates various child care daily activity communication tools to share with parents	2021	Parents understand what constitutes quality services and are informed of opportunities their children experience daily	Subcommittee of System Management Table Quality Assurance Coordinator	Identify resource expenditures per communication tool; gather feedback from parents on effectiveness
Strategies are put in place in all programs that promote positive parent engagement	2020-2024	Parents regularly provide feedback to EarlyON and child care programs	Program Manager Quality Assurance Coordinator System Planning Coordinator Cultural Resource Coordinator	Literature review completed on best practices/strategies for parent engagement; # of centres actively using parent engagement strategies; # of early years staff involved in parent engagement training

GOAL 2

Long Term Goal: The highest quality Early Years System in the province, at all levels.

Short Term Goal: An informed Early Years System and community partners build opportunities for collaboration that support improved outcomes for children and families by addressing EDI vulnerabilities.

Key Action Steps	Timeline	Expected Outcome	Person Responsible	Evaluation
Liaise with the Algoma Leadership Table to ensure organizational commitment to continued partnership	2020-2021	The Early Years System is supported by organizations throughout the implementation of the System Plan	DSSMSSAB CAO Director of Early Years Social Equity Coordinator	EYS Director attends ALT Meetings
Integrate actions within the scope of the Social Equity Action Team and Algoma Leadership Table	2020-2021	The Early Years System is supported by organizations throughout the implementation of the System Plan	DSSMSSAB CAO Director of Early Years Social Equity Coordinator	EYS Director attends SEAT+E18 Meetings; # of partnership with ALT/SEAT orgs.
The Child and Family Network hosts an annual showcase and one other event that is meant to engage parents each year	Fall 2020 and Ongoing	The public is aware of the different organizations delivering early years services; Ongoing, direct feedback can be provided by families interacting with the Early Years System; Families will be more aware of early years services	System Planning Coordinator Child and Family Network	# of annual events; # of parents attending; # of parent surveys/ comments collected
Time is provided to members of child care organizations to participate in community planning	2020-2021	Local child care programs are active partners in community wide initiatives	Director of Early Years Program Manager System Planning Coordinator System Management Table	Track C & F Network attendees; # of child care orgs. partnering in community initiatives
Community organizations provide free services and clinics at EarlyONs and mobile services	2021 and Ongoing	All early years programs provide education, resources and social service support to parents	Director of Early Years System Planning Coordinator Child and Family Network	# of community organizations attending EarlyONs and mobile services
Child and Family Network designs and implements transition to kindergarten classroom and teacher preparation for children with extraordinary needs	2020-2021	Parents, Teachers and the classrooms are prepared when children are entering the school system	Child and Family Network Data Analysis Coordinator System Planning Coordinator	# of families using transition plan; track # of schools within local Boards who are using a transition plan; track # of child care centres using transition plan
The referral process for families who have been referred and are waiting for service begins with a warm hand-off amongst early years partners	2020-2021	Families are given alternative options while waiting to access services they have been referred to within the Early Years System	Child and Family Network System Planning Coordinator	Track the number of points of contact and support prior to accessing service they have been referred to
A list of accessible community hosting spaces is available to community partners	2021	Community organizations and EarlyONs provide services in the community	Early Years Manager System Planning Coordinator Child and Family Network	List is created and distributed to organizations

GOAL 3

Long Term Goal: The highest quality Early Years System in the province, at all levels.

Short Term Goal: Increase the number of Registered Early Childhood Educators through provision of essential supports.

Key Action Steps	Timeline	Expected Outcome	Person Responsible	Evaluation
Promote the Early Childhood Education program as a potential career opportunity to high school students	2021-2024	An increase in the number of students who successfully enter and graduate from Early Childhood Education programs	Director of Early Years Program Manager System Planning Coordinator	# of outreach engagements; # of ECE enrollments at Sault College; increase in number of graduates from the ECE program at Sault College
Pilot training programs that support completion of Early Childhood Education qualifications	2019 and Ongoing	Alternative pathways to receiving Early Childhood Education qualifications are utilized often	Director of Early Years Program Manager System Planning Coordinator	# of participants; # of programs delivered
Recruit recent Early Childhood Education graduates from out of town	2021-2024	Available Early Childhood Educator job positions are filled by qualified educators	System Management Table	# of recruitment campaigns; # of outreach attempts with colleges/universities
The Early Years System Management Table promotes supportive and respectful recruitment and retention strategies, and healthy staff well-being as a standard of excellence within programs	2020-2024	An Early Childhood Professional's response to the stressors inherent in their work is managed appropriately; Registered Early Childhood Educator's feel valued by the organization recruiting and employing them	System Management Table	# of workshops provided related to well-being; # of supportive recruitment and retention policies in place for new employees
Mentorship is used as a strategy to promote recruitment and retention	2019-2024	Succession planning and job satisfaction include opportunities to mentor and be mentored	System Management Table Program Manager System Planning Coordinator Quality Assurance Coordinator	# of mentors; # of employees who feel they have been successfully mentored; # who gain confidence to apply for leadership positions
Potential leaders in the early years community are identified and mentored	2020 and Ongoing	Succession planning for leadership positions in early years programs is done strategically through a combination of ongoing planning and mentoring	System Management Table Program Manager System Planning Coordinator Quality Assurance Coordinator	# of persons being mentored; # of positions requiring mentoring

GOAL 4

Long Term Goal: *The highest quality Early Years System in the province, at all levels.*

Short Term Goal: *There is clear and regular communication of early years services in the community..*

Key Action Steps	Timeline	Expected Outcome	Person Responsible	Evaluation
Develop a multi-media communication strategy of early years information, schedules, activities and available services	2021 and Ongoing	The public is well informed of the early years services offered in SSM	Director of Early Years Program Manager System Planning Coordinator	# of different types of communication materials created
Parents are surveyed regarding best means of communicating with them. A variety of techniques to communicate with parents are considered and used	2021	Ongoing, direct feedback can be provided by families interacting with the Early Years System; Families will be more aware of early years services. Parents and the public are aware of early years services	Program Manager System Planning Coordinator Child and Family Network	# of parents filling out survey; # who are surveyed as they interact with the Early Years system and indicate increased awareness of same
Partners are provided with accurate information and resources that facilitate public education of early years services	2020 and Ongoing	Community partners are able to provide families with information about early years services	System Planning Coordinator	# of early years services resources available; # of orgs. disseminating materials
Public materials are available in different languages and are promoted with short, to-the-point messaging	2021-2022	Families have access to easily communicated information regarding healthy child development	Program Manager System Planning Coordinator	# of communication materials available in different languages
Utilize existing websites and if possible, the Child Care Application Site to promote early years services	2021-2022	Parents utilize publicly available materials and information	Program Manager System Planning Coordinator Child and Family Network	# of websites promoting early years services

GOAL 5

Long Term Goal: The highest quality Early Years System in the province, at all levels.

Short Term Goal: The diverse needs of families are integrated into all early years programming.

Key Action Steps	Timeline	Expected Outcome	Person Responsible	Evaluation
Staff are trained in anti-oppressive approaches when engaging with families	2021	Early Years Staff strengthen relationships with all families in order to address their needs	Quality Assurance Coordinator Cultural Resource Coordinator	# of training sessions; # of participants
A Cultural Resource Coordinator is hired to work with the Early Years System and partners	2021	Licensed child care and EarlyON centres have access to cultural resources	CAO Director of Early Years	A Cultural Resource Coordinator is hired
Programs liaise with the Indigenous Centre for Excellence for Early Childhood Education	2020 and Ongoing	Licensed child care and EarlyON centres integrate Indigenous cultural programming with service delivery	Quality Assurance Coordinator System Planning Coordinator Cultural Resource Coordinator System Management Table	# of times The ICECE was contacted per centre
Early Years programming regularly includes variety in food, celebrations and guest speakers	2021 and Ongoing	Early years services are family-centred, celebrating all differences	Quality Assurance Coordinator System Planning Coordinator Cultural Resource Coordinator System Management Table	# of resource requests for diverse speakers; # of resource requests for celebrations; track meal options
Improved access to school age summer programming and programs that offer extended hours for child care.	2019-2024	Families receive quality child care services that complement their lifestyle	Director of Early Years Program Manager System Management Table	# of extended hour child care; # of children attending summer programming
EarlyON programs offer more versatility in types of programming offered and provide supports to specific groups (infant play time; quiet play time)	2020-2024	Early years services are fully accessible and considerate of a wide variety of family needs	System Planning Coordinator Local EarlyON programs	# of programs dedicated to specific child groups
All Early Years programs offer indoor/outdoor recreational play and physical activities	2020-2024	Play opportunities enhance physical health and well-being	Quality Assurance Coordinator System Planning Coordinator	track amount of time spent outdoors per centre; track which physical activities are provided per day

SERVICE SYSTEM PLAN

Afternote

IMPACT OF COVID-19

A great deal of the work that went into the completion of this plan was being wrapped up in the two months immediately preceding the initial impact of COVID-19 and the accompanying changes to life as we once knew it. While this has naturally disrupted and subsequently delayed the completion of the document, it will also impact some of the implementations plans. That being said, all of the needs identified by the community are still current and, although in some cases the means of addressing them may need to be rethought, Social Services and Early Years Division remain committed to the vision of the highest quality early years system in the province and the accompanying Goals and Objectives.





