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Zhawenimi-Anokiitaagewin
Sault Ste. Marie District
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2019-2024 Early Years Service System Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





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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.



