

SUPPORTING PEOPLE
*Hastings*TM
AND OUR COMMUNITIES

**CHILD CARE AND
EARLY YEARS
SERVICE PLAN:
PHASE ONE**

2025-2029



MAY 2025

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Hastings County is located on the traditional territory of many nations including the Huron-Wendat, Anishinaabe, and the Haudenosaunee peoples. Hastings County Council acknowledges our shared obligation to respect, honour and sustain these lands and the natural resources contained within. We honour their cultures and celebrate their commitment to this land. We would also like to acknowledge the Mohawk and Algonquin nations whose traditional and unceded territory we are gathered upon today. Hastings County is situated on treaty land that is steeped in rich Indigenous history and home to many First Nations, Métis and Inuit people.

HASTINGS COUNTY

VISION

People and businesses thrive in Hastings County because of its support for individuals and families, strong communities, its natural beauty, and respect for its history and traditions.

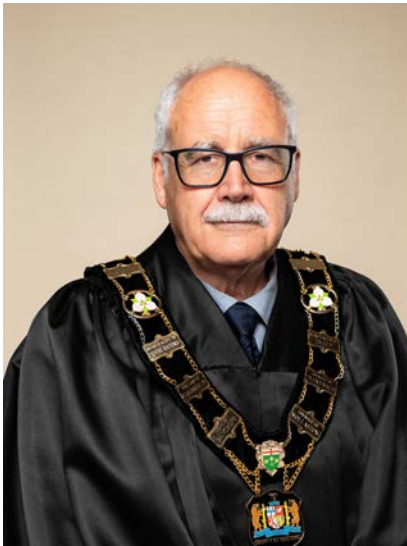
MISSION

Supporting People & Our Communities

CORE VALUES



MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERS



BOB MULLIN

Warden, Hastings County

It is my pleasure to introduce Phase One of our 2025-2029 Child Care and Early Years Service Plan. This foundational report sets the stage for a renewed commitment to supporting the well-being, development, and success of children and families across our communities.

High-quality, accessible child care is essential for our communities and I know that the staff at Hastings County and our local partners are committed to ensuring the best delivery of these essential services and to supporting the children and families in our region.



JAMIE LYNNE OSMOND

Director, Community & Human Services

It is my privilege to join Warden Mullin in presenting Phase One of our 2025-2029 Child Care and Early Years Service Plan. This foundational phase represents our shared vision for creating inclusive, high-quality supports that nurture children's growth and strengthen family stability across Hastings County.

As Director of Community and Human Services, I work alongside our dedicated staff and local partners to translate this vision into action. By fostering collaboration and innovation, we are committed to ensuring every family can navigate and access the services they need today and into the future.

MAP OF HASTINGS COUNTY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Hastings County Community and Human Services is dedicated to supporting and strengthening the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. The Children's Services division of Community and Humans Services plans and facilitates the delivery of Child Care and Early Years programs, manages funding for licensed Child Care services and EarlyON Child and Family Centres, and administers Ontario's Child Care Fee Subsidy Program. Child Care Centres and Early Years programming play a vital role in children's development while supporting families and caregivers.

Hastings County recognizes that investing in safe, high-quality Child Care and Early Years Services that are accessible, affordable, inclusive, and responsive, is essential to promoting the well-being of children and families across the community.

In accordance with the Ministry of Education's mandate that Service Managers review their planning and service delivery every five years and in keeping with Hastings County's commitment to continuous improvement, the Children's Services department is undertaking the creation of a new two-part Service Plan. Although the development of this Service Plan fulfills a formal requirement of the Ministry of Education, Hastings County Children's Services views this plan as more than a compliance obligation. This plan will serve as a compass, a strategic and living document that will guide our service delivery, support continuous improvement, and help track progress toward measurable outcomes. This document constitutes Phase One of that plan.

Phase One of the Service System Plan lays the groundwork for transformative change across Hastings County's Child Care and Early Years system. This phase explores the current landscape through an environmental scan providing a detailed assessment of demographic trends, socio-economic conditions, and current child care service availability. This scan helps strengthen an understanding of existing challenges and future needs within the region. Phase One defines high-quality services and the pillars that are its foundation: accessibility, affordability, inclusiveness, and responsiveness. These pillars were developed in direct response to the insights gathered through the environmental scan and community engagement as well as in partnership with the Children's Services' Community Planning Committee. In addition, Phase One discusses the importance and impact of the sector and outlines significant sector changes since the 2019-2024 Services Plan.

To ensure this plan reflects the voices and experiences of the community, extensive engagement activities were conducted throughout 2024. These efforts included a County-wide survey distributed to parents, caregivers, educators, and child care staff, as well as a series of focus groups involving families, early years professionals, and local community agencies. The results of these consultations played a key role in shaping the priorities and direction of the plan and set the stage for future analysis.

Looking ahead, Phase Two will build on these findings by identifying concrete actions under each pillar. Specific strategies and measurable outcomes will be developed to chart a clear course for service enhancement, ensuring that this compass, rooted in high-quality care, continues to guide the delivery of Child Care and Early Years Services for the next five years.

By setting a strong foundation through research, reflection, and collaboration, Hastings County remains steadfast in ensuring that every child, family, and educator feels supported, valued, and has a strong sense of belonging in our community.



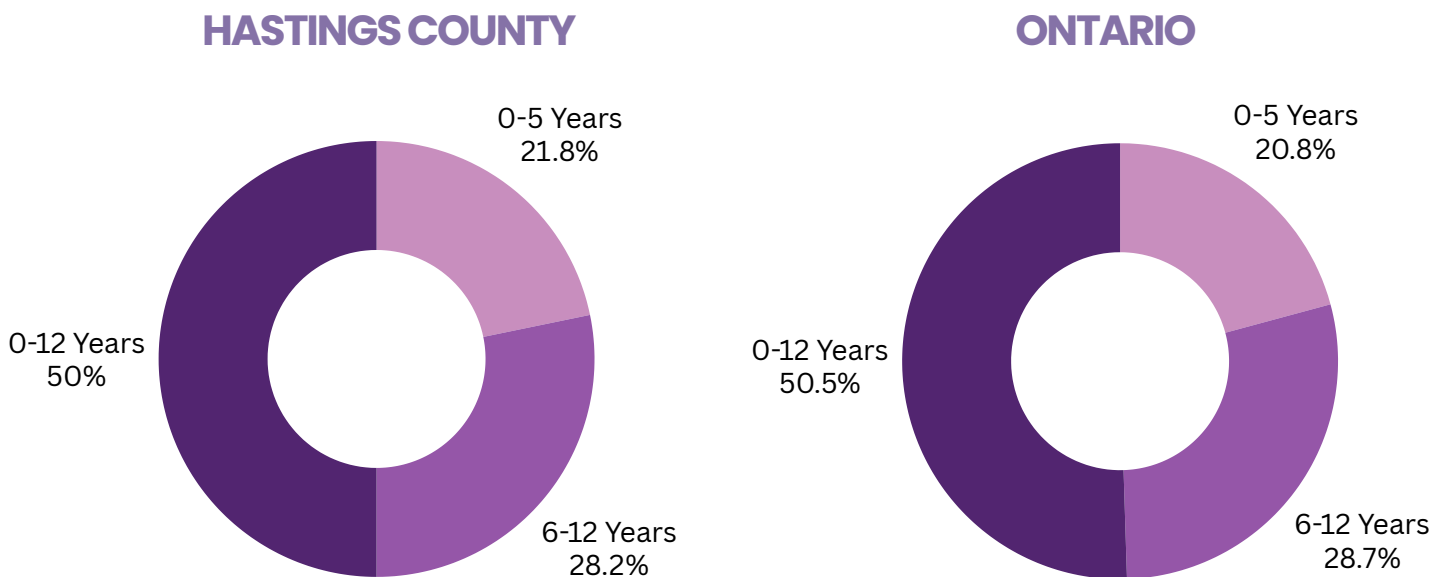
COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Hastings County is located halfway between Toronto and Ottawa. It is the second largest County in Ontario stretching nearly 160km from the shores of the Bay of Quinte to the forests of Algonquin Park. Hastings County is home to a population of 145,746 residents and provides a broad range of services to those living in our 14 Member Municipalities, as well as services to the separated cities of Belleville, and Quinte West.

Hastings County is comprised of both urban and rural communities and is home to 8 Wing/CFB Trenton, a Francophone community, and multiple cultures and identities, including Indigenous and New Canadian communities.

Hastings County Children’s Services is committed to providing quality Child Care and Early Years Services respecting Hastings County’s unique composition. Child development and learning occurs within a community contextⁱ. What follows is a snapshot of Hastings County, compared to Ontario:

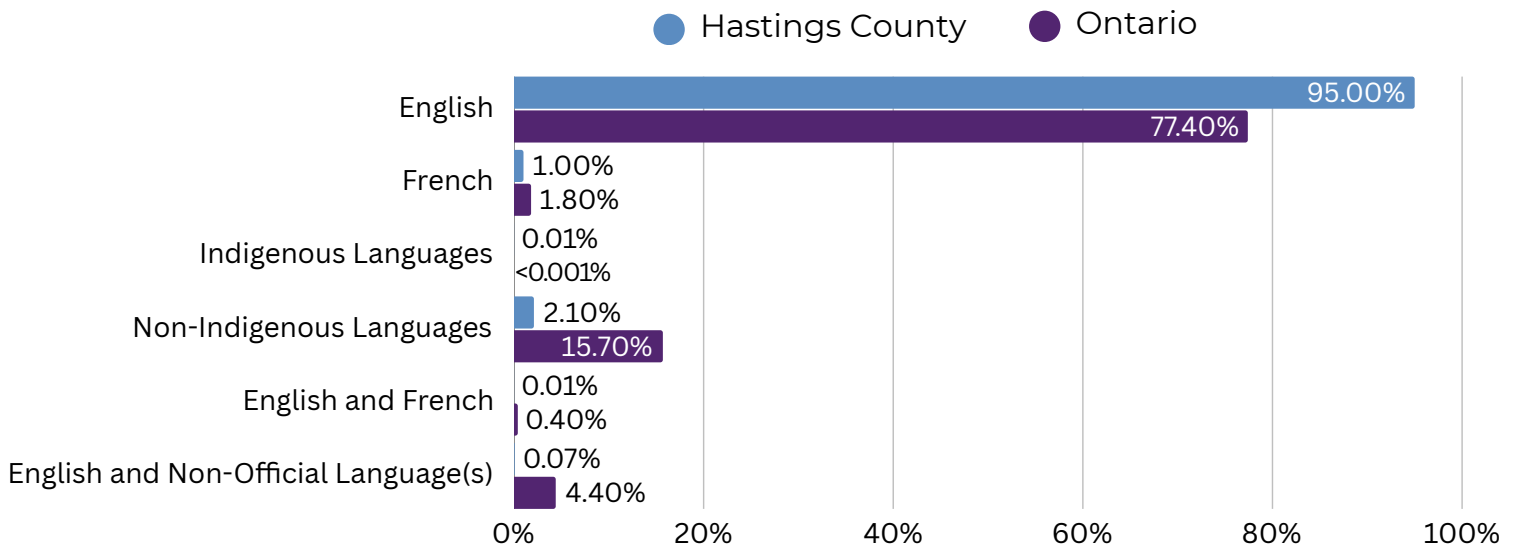
POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS – PERCENTAGE OF CHILDRENⁱⁱ



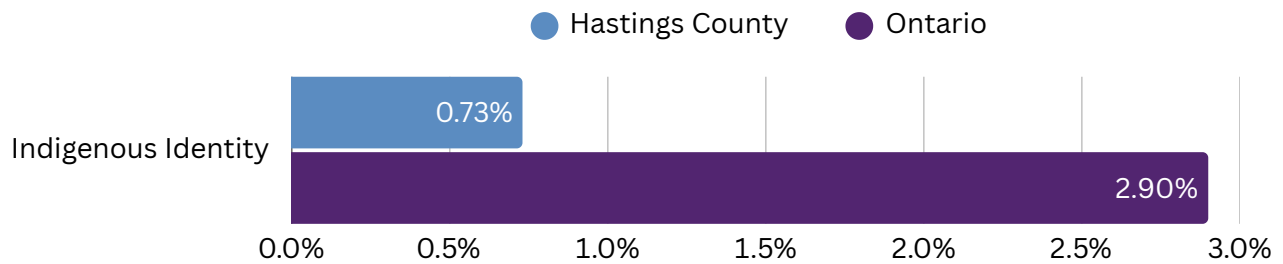
i. The Social-Cultural Contest of Child Development and Learning <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/equity/social-cultural-context>

ii. Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

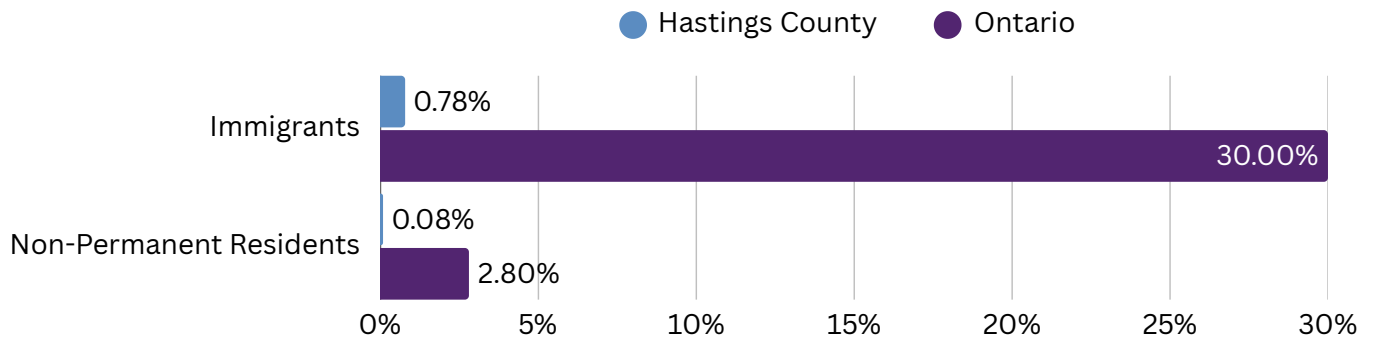
LANGUAGE SPOKEN MOST OFTEN AT HOME^{III}



INDIGENOUS POPULATION^{IV}



IMMIGRANT STATUS

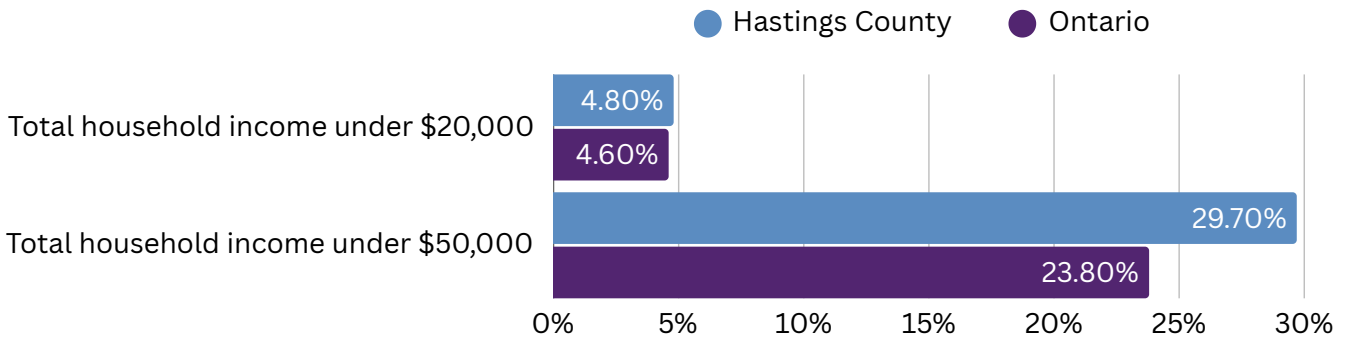


iii. The percentages of French and non-official languages; English, French and non-official languages; and multiple non-official languages was negligible

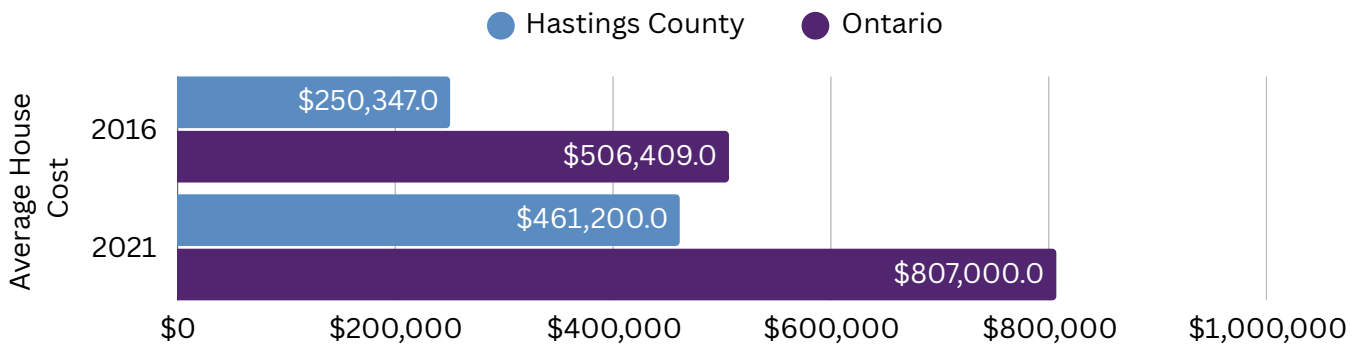
iv. Indigenous identity includes First Nation; Metis; Inuk (Inuit), multiple Indigenous responses, Indigenous responses not included elsewhere.

INCOME

	HASTINGS COUNTY	ONTARIO
MEDIAN TOTAL INCOME OF INDIVIDUALS (2020)	\$ 38,400	\$ 41,200
MEDIAN TOTAL INCOME OF HOUSEHOLDS (2020)	\$ 75,000	\$ 91,000



HOUSING COSTS^v



POVERTY^{vi}

	HASTINGS COUNTY	ONTARIO
CHILDREN IN POVERTY	1 IN 4	1 IN 5

v. Source: <https://townfolio.co/on/hastings-county/housing>

vi. Ontario Campaign 2000, Nov 19, 2024, and Case Study: Community Engagement for Poverty Reduction in Hastings Prince Edward Counties, Leena Sharma Seth & Christine Durant, 2017, p. 2.

FOOD INSECURITY 2021–2022^{vii}

	HASTINGS COUNTY	ONTARIO
HOUSEHOLDS' FOOD INSECURITY PREVALENCE AVERAGE	23%	17%

EDI SCORES

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a valid and reliable questionnaire completed by kindergarten teachers for each student in senior kindergarten. It measures children's ability to meet age-appropriate development expectations in five domains: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication skills and general knowledge.

Children who score below the 10th percentile cut-off of the Ontario baseline population are considered vulnerable in that domain. Higher vulnerability indicates that a greater percentage of children are struggling in that domain and in need of more supports.^{viii}

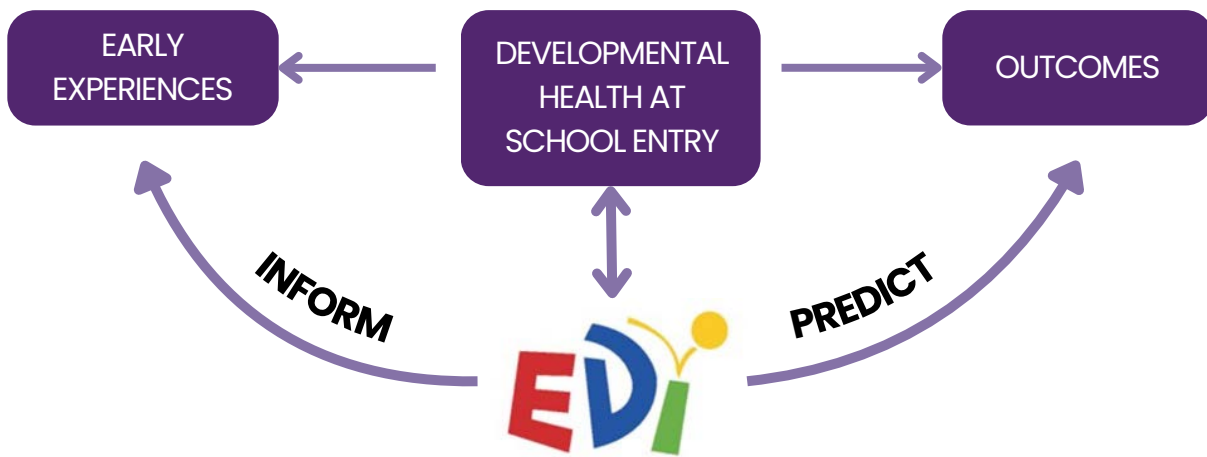
EDI data is an indicator of the strengths and needs of children and their community and serves to inform planning, programming, and policy.

As evidenced by EDI data, children in Hastings County are more vulnerable; scores indicate increased vulnerability in Hastings County compared to the Ontario average. Over each of the last six EDI cycles, Physical Health & Well-Being has consistently been the most vulnerable domain. In the most recent cycle (2022/2023), 24.4% of children in Hastings County were identified as vulnerable in this domain. These results reflect the needs of children and families in Hastings County and provide important contextual information for ongoing planning and programming.



vii. Hastings Prince Edward Public Health: Food Insecurity <https://www.hpepublichealth.ca/food-insecurity/>

viii. Children and Youth Planning Table of Waterloo Region: Early Development Instrument (EDI) <https://childrenandyouthplanningtable.ca/early-development-instrument-edi/>



EARLY DEVELOPMENT INSTRUMENT DOMAINS

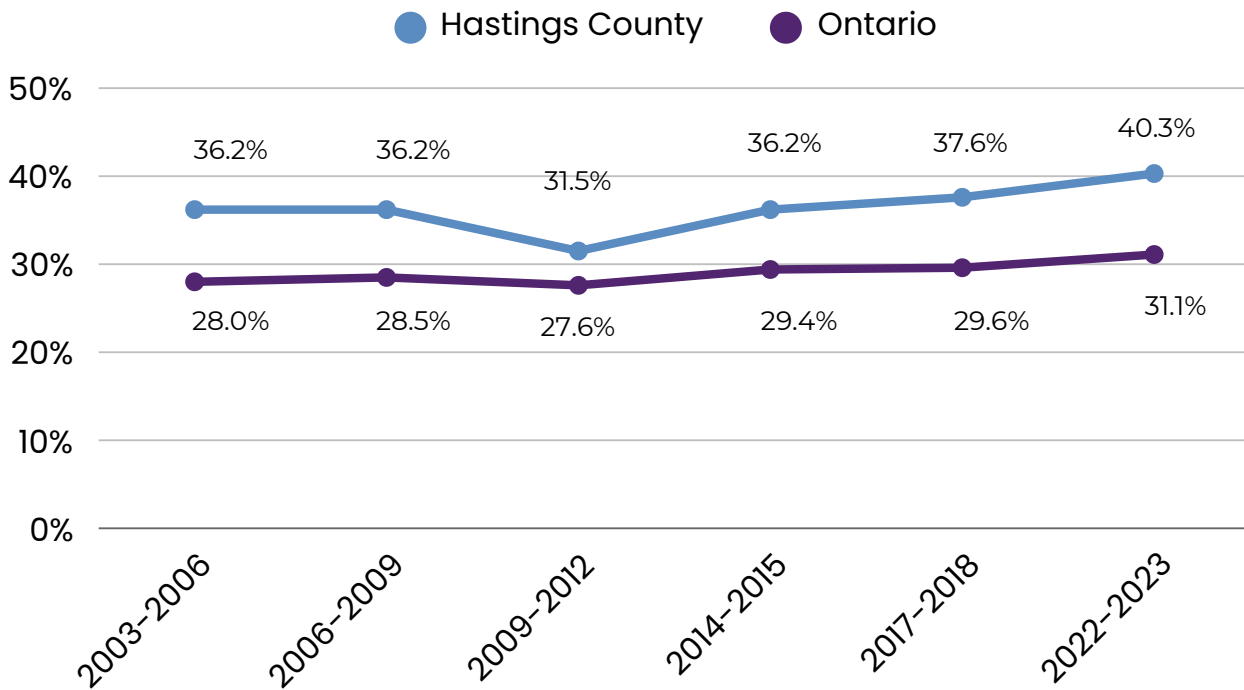
Physical Health & Well-Being	Social Competence	Emotional Maturity	Language & Cognitive Development	Communication Skills & General Knowledge
Physical readiness for school day	Overall social competence	Prosocial & helping behaviour	Basic literacy	Communication skills & general knowledge
Physical independence	Responsibility & respect	Anxious & fearful behaviour	Interest in literacy / numeracy & memory	
Gross & fine motor skills	Approaches to learning	Agressive behaviour	Advanced literacy	
	Readiness to explore new things	Hyperactivity & inattention	Basic numeracy	



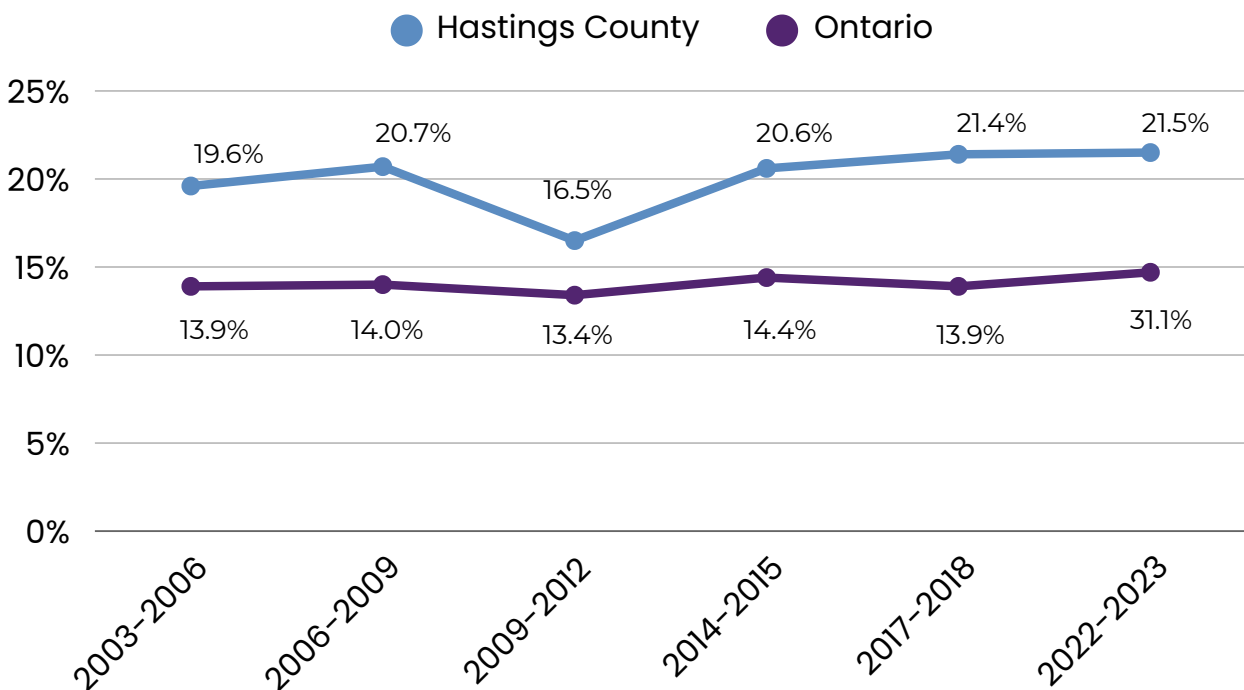
VULNERABLE CHILDREN ACCORDING TO THE EDI

The graphs below illustrate the percentage of children experiencing vulnerabilities.

VULNERABLE ON ONE OR MORE DOMAINS



VULNERABLE ON TWO OR MORE DOMAINS



IMPORTANCE AND IMPACT OF CHILD CARE AND EARLY YEARS

Research supports the importance of early childhood education. Since eighty percent of brain development occurs before age three and ninety percent before age five,^{ix} making early childhood programs a priority only makes sense. Child care centres and early years programs and staff are shaping the future. High-quality early childhood education programs that also provide family support services improve both child and family outcomes.^x

DOCUSERIES VIDEO: THE BENEFITS OF ATTENDING CHILDCARE AND EARLY YEARS PROGRAMS



DOCUSERIES VIDEO: THE VALUE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS



ix. 10 Facts About Early Child Development You Need to Know

<https://www.unicef.org/turkiye/en/stories/10-facts-about-early-childhood-development-you-need-know>

x. Role of Early Childhood Education Intervention Programs in Assisting Children with Successful Transitions to School by Nicholas Zill and Gary Resnick, in Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, June 2009

IMPACT OF INVESTING IN CHILD CARE AND EARLY YEARS PROGRAMS

“Children in these programs have “higher levels of peer engagement, positive relationship with teachers, more frequent pretend play, secure attachment” and “enter school ready to learn”^x

“High-quality early childhood education can equalize disadvantages caused by economic inequality and lower-quality parenting”^{xi}

“Efforts to improve early child development are an investment, not a cost. For every dollar spent on improving early child development, the return can be \$8.14...”^{xi}


“Enriching children’s early environments has lasting beneficial effects on adolescent and adult outcomes”^{xi}

An “investment in early education for disadvantaged children from birth to age 5 helps reduce the achievement gap, reduce the need for special education, increase the likelihood of healthier lifestyles, lower the crime rate, and reduce overall social costs”^{ix}

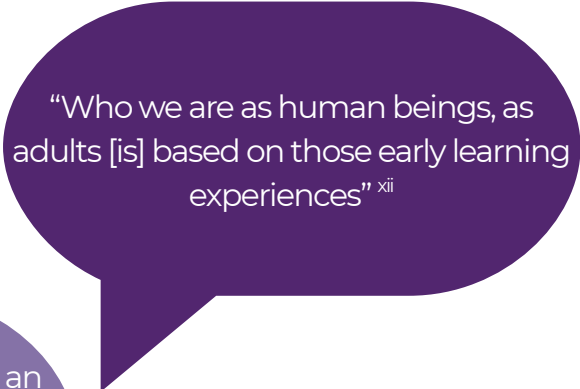
“Adverse impacts of genetic, parental, and environmental resources can be overturned through investments in quality early childhood education...”^{xi}

Recognizing that children are not only developing physically, but cognitively and psychosocially as well. During their early years, children develop language skills, communication, self-regulation, problem-solving, and empathy. They learn to adjust behaviour, learn from others, get along with peers and authority, exercise autonomy and creativity, and balance challenge and safety, while building confidence. The influence of early childhood educators cannot be underestimated.

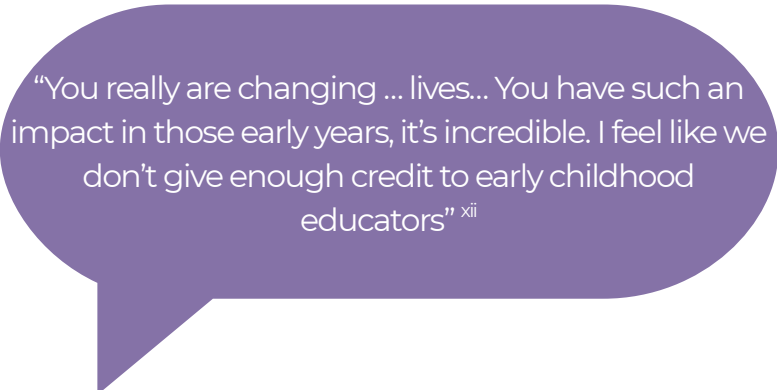
Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) recognize the importance of their work:



“Part of our identity as a community and our values and beliefs is to cultivate [a] culture of caring from the earliest years”^{xii}



“Who we are as human beings, as adults [is] based on those early learning experiences”^{xii}



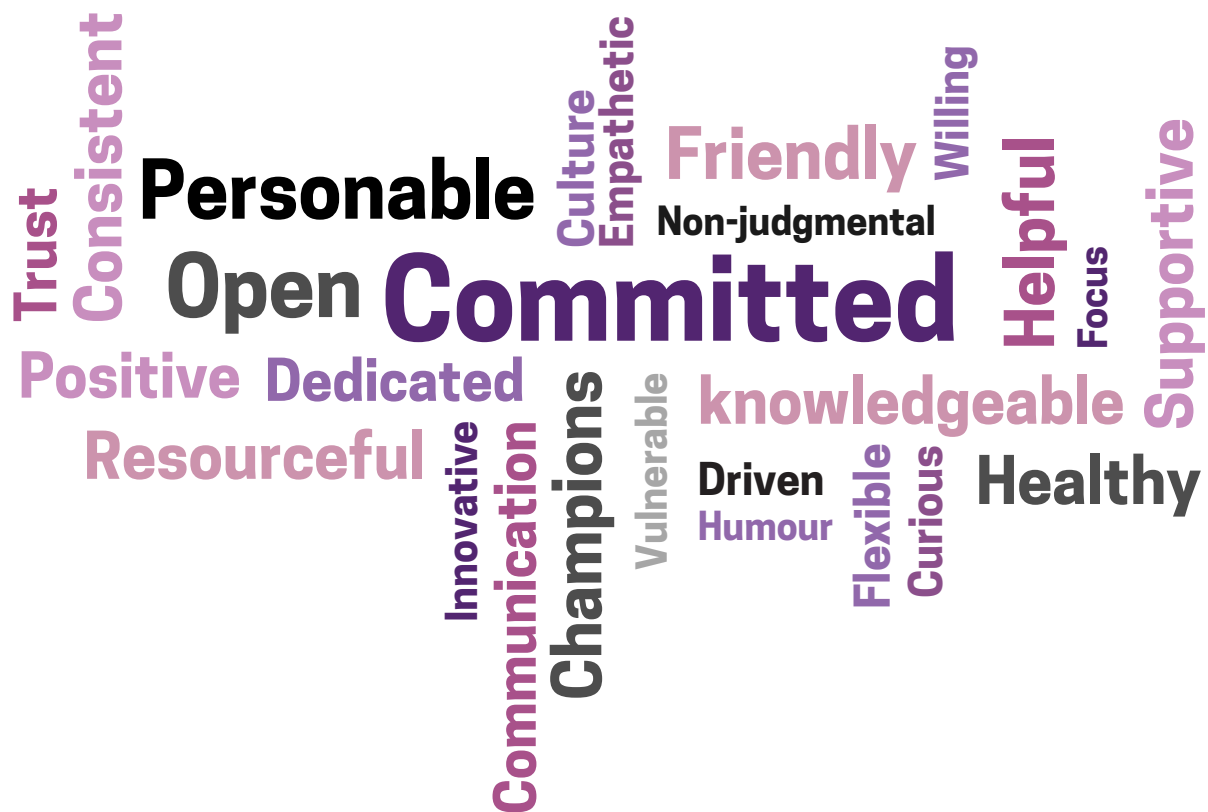
“You really are changing ... lives... You have such an impact in those early years, it's incredible. I feel like we don't give enough credit to early childhood educators”^{xii}

Imagine a world without child care and early learning programs. How would the absence of child care affect our economy, child development, school-readiness, socialization, emotional management, self-regulation, physical, mental and character development? “Without RECEs where would the world be? These little humans, we're shaping them to be who they are in the years to come.”^{xii} Investing in children is investing in the current and future community and an opportunity to create a culture we all want to be part of.

xi. The Economics of Inequality: The Value of Early Childhood Education by James J. Heckman in American Educator.

xii. Hastings County ECE Docuseries: <https://hastingscounty.com/ece-docuseries>

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW



Hastings County Children's Services believes in the value of investing in safe, high-quality, licensed child care and early years programs that are accessible, affordable, inclusive, and responsive and is committed to providing services that meet the diverse needs of the community, ensuring a strong sense of belonging and well-being for children, families, and educators. The importance of Child Care and Early Years in supporting optimal learning, development, and overall family well-being is central to the mission.

Hastings County Children's Services is dedicated to meeting goals as a team by establishing key objectives, such as empowering educators; promoting a clearer understanding of roles across the team, organization, and community; building capacity; and fostering harmonious partnerships with service providers, clients, and community stakeholders. Through these efforts, Hastings County Children's Services ensures a supportive and nurturing environment where children, families, and educators can grow and thrive.

In addition to supporting children and families, the department provides financial support, training, and services to families, educators, and service providers to promote quality child care in the community. Hastings County Children's Services also plays a vital role in planning, enhancing the quality of, and managing funding for licensed child care services, EarlyON and Family Centres, and the Ontario Child Care Fee Subsidy Program. Furthermore, the department advocates for system improvements, implements and supports Ministry changes across the community, and ensures the timely sharing of resources through effective communication and collaboration.

Hastings County supports licensed child care through:

- Child Care Fee Subsidy
- Canada-Wide Early Learning Child Care (CWELCC) supporting ages 0-5
- Funding for programs supporting ages 6-12
- Directly Operated Before and After School Programs
- Capacity Building and Professional Learning Opportunities
- Special Needs Resourcing
- EarlyON and Indigenous-Led Programs

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES

CENTRE-BASED CHILD CARE

Centre-Based Child Care Services are licensed under the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, ensuring that programs meet high standards of care and safety. These services are typically provided in dedicated facilities such as schools, community centres, or other buildings and are staffed by trained professionals with expertise in early childhood education. Centre-based care is crucial as it provides children with a structured and supportive environment where they can engage in educational and developmental activities designed to promote their cognitive, social, and emotional growth. It offers families a reliable option for child care while supporting the overall well-being of children by ensuring they receive care from qualified educators. Centre-based care also fosters a sense of community, as children interact with peers in a diverse setting, helping to build essential social skills that contribute to their success in later stages of life. This form of child care plays a key role in preparing children for school and future learning, while also offering families peace of mind knowing their children are in a safe, nurturing environment.



NUMBER OF CENTRE-BASED CHILD CARE SPACES 2022-2024

Centre-Based	2021	2022	2023	2024
Infant	129	129	129	149
Toddler	305	320	320	350
Preschool	738	778	794	841
Kindergarten	769	821	860	938
Family Age Group	28	28	28	28
School Age	1,446	1,457	1,487	1,511
Total	3,415	3,533	3,618	3,817

LICENSED HOME-BASED CHILD CARE

Licensed Home-Based Child Care (LHCC) Services are regulated under the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, ensuring a high standard of care and safety. This type of care offers a family-like setting in the provider’s home for up to six children, from infants to school-age. It provides a personalized and intimate environment, where children can explore and learn in a safe and nurturing setting. Home-based care is ideal for families seeking a smaller, flexible setting that focuses on the individual needs and developmental growth of children. It creates a safe, comforting atmosphere that supports children’s cognitive, emotional, and social development while offering families a reliable, flexible child care option.



NUMBER OF LICENSED HOME-BASED CHILD CARE (LHCC) HOMES AND SPACES 2022-2024

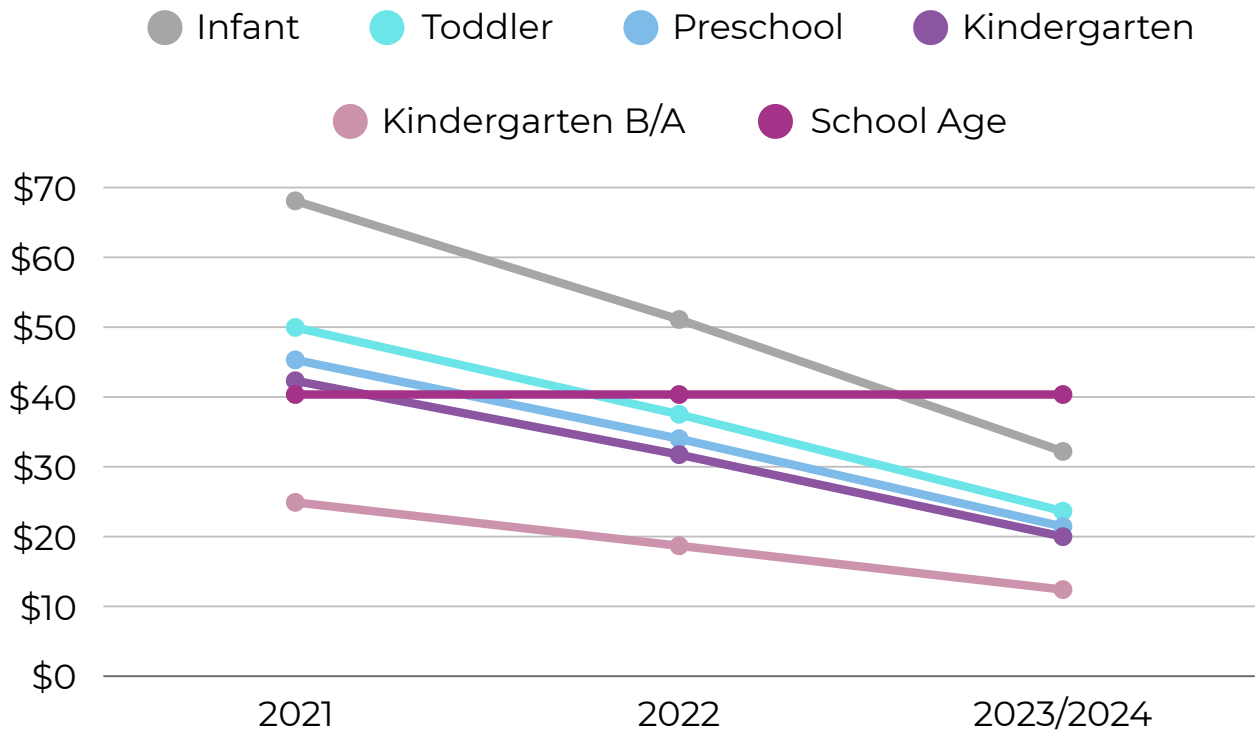
LHCC	2021	2022	2023	2024
Homes	56	69	83	89
Spaces	336	414	498	534

THE CANADA-WIDE EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE SYSTEM (CWELCC)

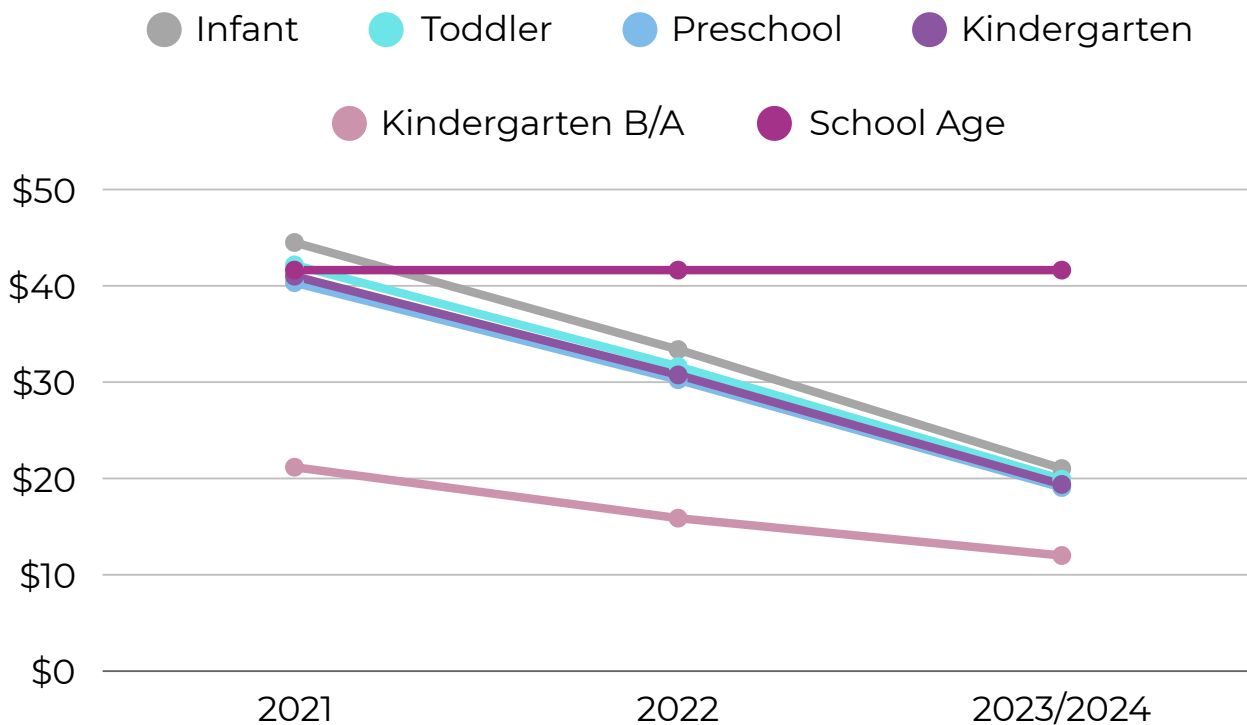
The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System (CWELCC) is a federal and provincial initiative aimed at making licensed child care more affordable and accessible, with fees decreasing annually to an average of \$10/day by 2026. The program focuses on increasing the availability of quality child care spaces, supporting the early childhood workforce with improved compensation and training, and addressing barriers to inclusive and flexible care. As part of the CWELCC expansion, Hastings County has been allocated 651 new child care spaces (553 community-based and 98 school-based) in priority neighbourhoods by 2026, targeting underserved and vulnerable populations, including low-income, Francophone, Indigenous, Black, racialized, and newcomer communities, as well as children with special needs.

AVERAGE CENTRE - BASED CWELCC MONTHLY SAVINGS PER CHILD (BASED ON FULL-DAY PROGRAMS ONLY)	2022	2023/2024
	\$228.36	\$589.54

COST PER CENTRE-BASED CWELCC SPACE 2021-2024



COST PER HOME-BASED CWELCC SPACE 2021-2024



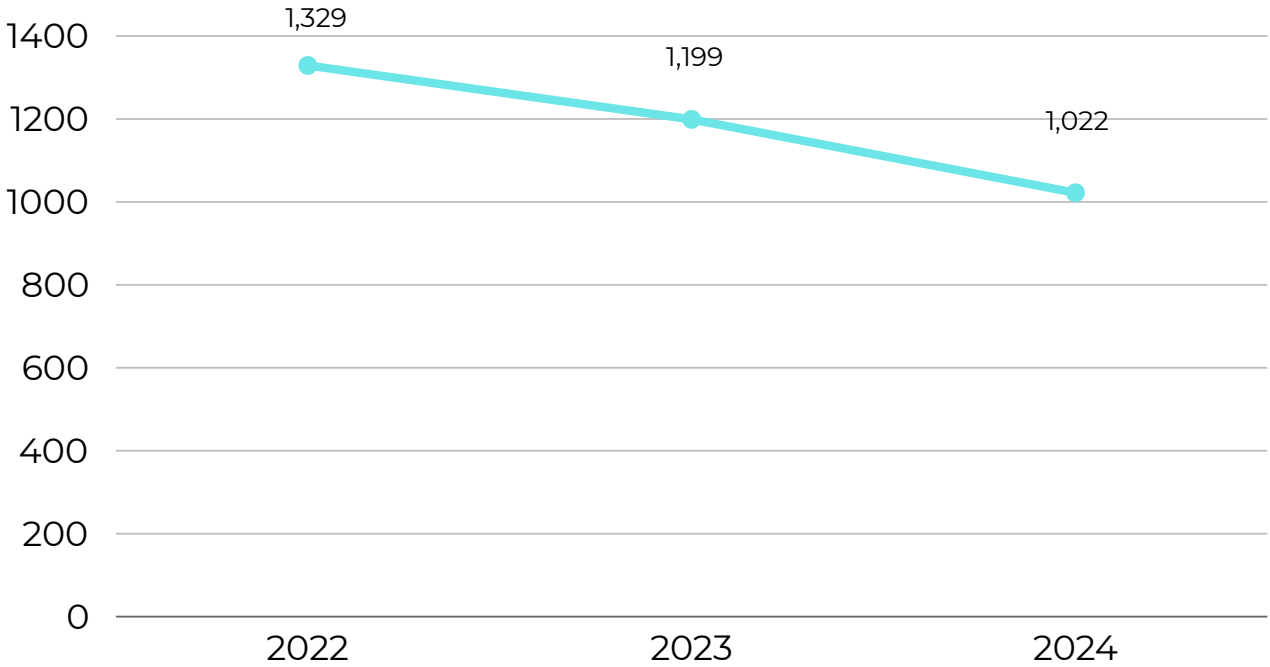
AVERAGE HOME-BASED CWELCC MONTHLY SAVINGS PER CHILD (BASED ON FULL-DAY PROGRAMS ONLY)	2022	2023/2024
	\$228.36	\$481.81

FEE SUBSIDY

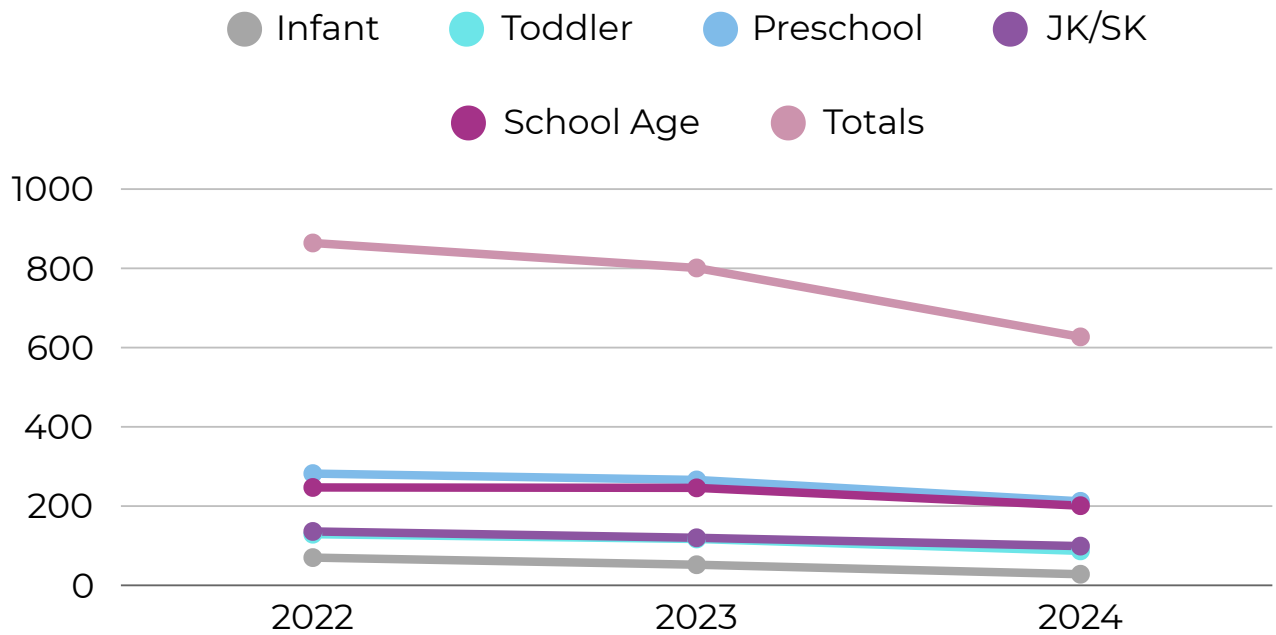
Hastings County Children’s Services provides child care fee subsidy to help families living in Hastings County access and afford high-quality, licensed child care. The cost of child care may be fully or partially subsidized for qualifying families using licensed, CWELCC-enrolled child care providers (centre or home based), licensed before and after school programs, and eligible recreational summer programs.

Hastings County Child Care Fee Subsidy does not currently have a waitlist, meaning any family who qualifies has access.

TOTAL UNIQUE CHILDREN ACCESSING FEE SUBSIDY PER YEAR



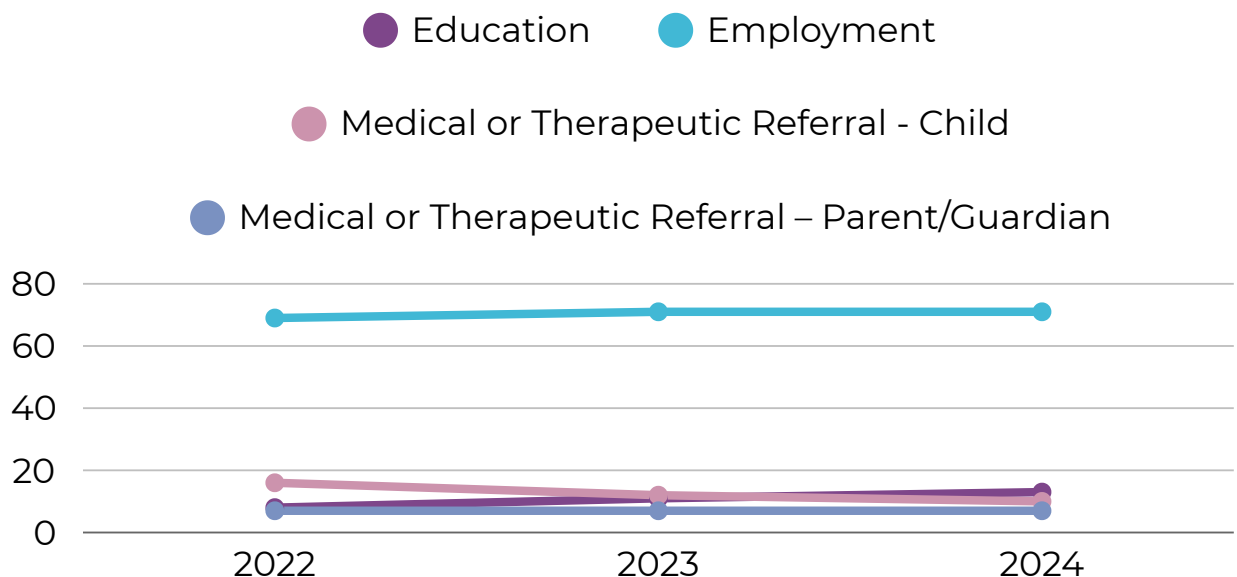
TOTAL MONTHLY AVERAGE # OF CHILDREN ACCESSING SUBSIDY BY AGE GROUP



The decrease to the number of children and families accessing subsidy from 2022 to 2024 may be due to:

- The increase of families' net incomes without Ministry changes to the financial eligibility criteria.
- CWELCC cost savings resulting in families not applying for fee subsidy.

REASONS FOR ACCESSING FEE SUBSIDY* - PERCENTAGES



*Data is from December of each year

EARLYON CHILD & FAMILY CENTRES

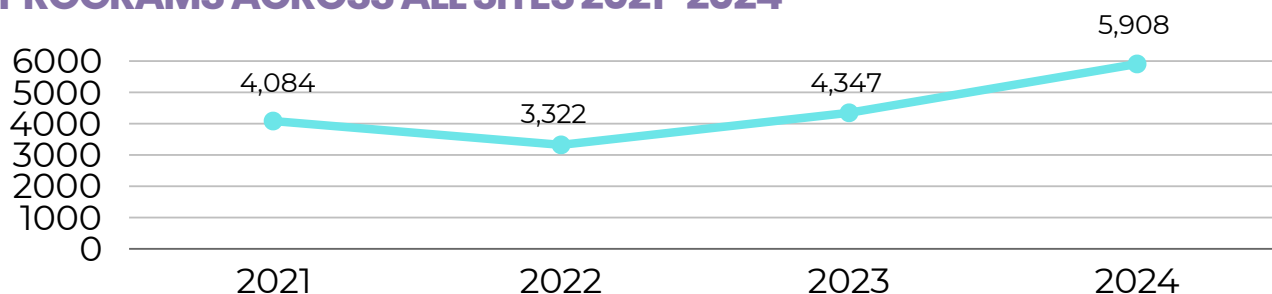
EarlyON Child and Family Centres offer free, high-quality programs for families and children from birth to six years old, providing caregivers and parents with the opportunity to learn, play, and connect with others while receiving advice from early childhood professionals. These centres offer a variety of activities, including reading, storytelling, sing-alongs, and games, and provide expert guidance from professionals trained in early childhood development.

Families can also learn about other community services and connect with other families with young children. Hastings County has four EarlyON providers that offer a range of services and resources across 41 sites, available mornings, afternoons, and evenings from Monday to Saturday.



These providers include Algonquin Inodewiziwin Child and Family Centre, Family Space Quinte Inc., North Hastings Children's Services, and Trenton Military Family Resource Centre, with services also offered through Indigenous-led programs and several outdoor programs. The Algonquin Inodewiziwin Child and Family Centre offers support to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents and caregivers, providing access to high-quality Indigenous services supporting parents and caregivers in their roles as a child's first teacher. Additionally, the Anishinaabe Baptiste Community Organization and the Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin Nation Community partner with North Hastings Children's Services to deliver EarlyON programming through Indigenous-led funding provided by Hastings County. The Kahwa:Tsire Initiative, in collaboration with Prince Edward Lennox and Addington, City of Kingston-County of Frontenac, Hastings County, and the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, further supports off-reserve EarlyON programs by providing Indigenous educator support.

TOTAL NUMBER OF UNIQUE FAMILIES SERVED BY EARLYON PROGRAMS ACROSS ALL SITES 2021-2024

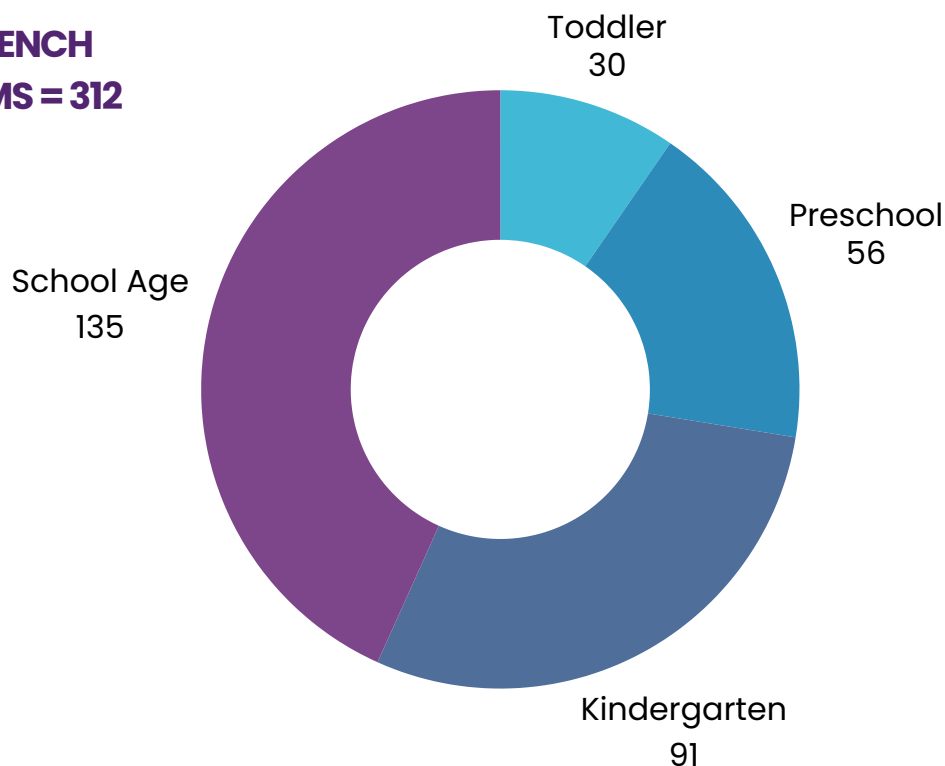


FRENCH LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

Hastings County collaborates with two French-speaking child care centres to enhance access to Early Learning and Child Care Services. Two Francophone schools, École Élémentaire Publique Cité-Jeunesse and École Élémentaire Catholique L'Envol, operate licensed child care centres within the school environment, offering both child care and before-and-after school care spaces. Although Hastings County is not one of the 26 designated areas for French services in Ontario, Hastings County prioritizes accessible, inclusive, and responsive child care for all residents, no matter their chosen first language. Providing child care and early years programming in French and supporting Francophone families and children remains a central objective for the community.

FRENCH PROGRAMS IN 2021-2024

TOTAL FRENCH PROGRAMS = 312

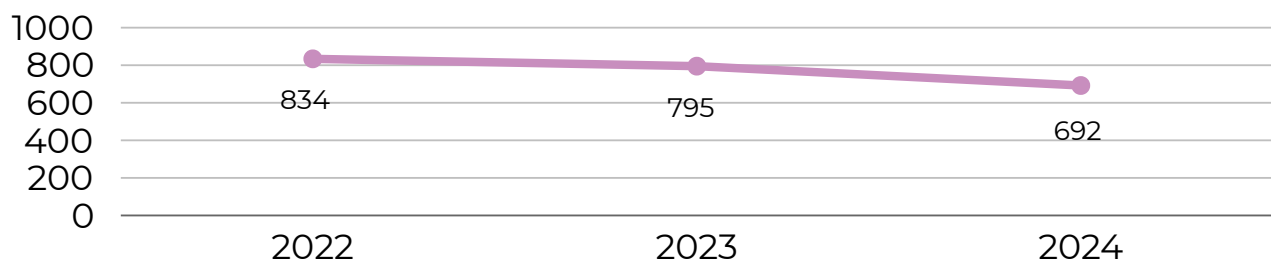


SPECIAL NEEDS RESOURCING (SNR)

Hastings County Children's Services supports the inclusion of children with special needs in licensed child care settings. Family Space Quinte Inc. is the lead agency for Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) for all of Hastings County.

The Inclusion Coach Program^{xiii} is designed to support child care educators in creating inclusive environments where all children, regardless of ability, can thrive. Inclusion Coaches work directly with educators, providing guidance, practical strategies, and tailored resources to help them meet the diverse needs of children in their care. They empower educators with hands-on coaching, strategies, resources, and professional learning to support children of all abilities. Inclusion Coaches work collaboratively with educators and families to support children with developmental delays, high medical needs, continuous needs (i.e., positioning, mobility, daily needs), or challenging behaviours. Inclusion Coaches model, coach, and educate utilizing a strength-based approach that is rooted and supported by “How Does Learning Happen?”^{xiii}.

NUMBER OF UNIQUE CHILDREN SERVED 2022–2024*



*Includes Enhanced Support, SNR and children supported in licensed child care

DOWN-TREND IN SPECIAL NEEDS RESOURCE (SNR) SERVICES

The recent downtrend in the number of children served with Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) funding in our community can be attributed to several interconnected factors. Firstly, there are increasingly long waitlists for child care programs, which means that children with special needs are often unable to secure a space in a program due to the lack of available child care spaces across the sector. For those who do gain access, the needs of children currently enrolled have become more complex and intensive. As a result, where child care centres may have previously been able to support a higher number of children with special needs in a single classroom, they are now only able to accommodate a few at one time.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hastings County believes that high-quality child care and early years services is provided by licensed programs and qualified educators. The Early Years &

xiii. <https://www.familyspacequinte.com/inclusion-coach>

xiv. <http://www.ontario.ca/page/how-does-learning-happen-ontarios-pedagogy-early-years>

Capacity Coordinator oversees service delivery in Hastings County to licensed child care as well as EarlyON Child and Family Centres, including budgeting, resource allocation, evaluation, and collaboration. They support the child care sector by coordinating professional learning opportunities established in evidence-based best practice that aligns with Ministry of Education initiatives. This role organizes and plans training that supports the unique needs of each child care provider, including peer support, networking, and mentorship/coaching to support educators. To continue to improve quality, Hastings County invests in professional development opportunities and facilitates planning committees.

RECENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INCLUDES:

San Yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training-October 2023

Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC) Professional Learning Series-October 2023-2024

Greatness Magnified Professional Learning (Partnership with City of Kingston and PELASS)-January 2024

Outdoor Winter Learning and Communities of Practice-February 2024

ECCDC Four-Part Professional Learning Series: Reconceptualizing Early Learning Materials & Environments-March to June 2024

Board Governance Training-April 2024

Excel Core Course Training-July to December 2024

Infant Mental Health Learning Series: Laying the Path for Lifelong Wellness-July 2024

Suicide awareness, prevention, and intervention – SafeTALK and ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training)

Stuart Shankers Self-Regulation series workshop

Julie Brown, How Mindfulness Helps Us Grow

COMMITTEES AND PLANNING TABLES:

Attended by Hastings County Staff:

- EarlyON Regional Network
- Early Learning, Childcare, and Education Committee
- Tahatikonhsotontie Head Start EarlyON Indigenous Educator Meetings
- Capacity Building Network (Central East/West Region)
- Capacity Building Network (East Region)
- Child & Youth Planning Table
- Algonquin Catholic & Hastings Prince Edward District School Board Collaborative Meetings

Facilitated by Hastings County:

- Male Educator Network
- Community Planning Committee
- Professional Learning Committee
- How Does Learning Happen Working Group

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Recruitment and retention of qualified staff is an ongoing issue for many sectors: the Child Care and Early Years sector is no exception. Part time opportunities and rural positions are particularly difficult to fill. With the goal of encouraging students into the field and to remind the sector of its value, Hastings County created a docuseries in the fall of 2023 (please see QR codes throughout this section). Each of the seven short videos highlight a different focus of the Child Care and Early Years sector: licensed centre-based care, licensed home-based care, EarlyON programs, the benefits of attending child care and early years programs, the value of educators, a day in the life of an early years and child care worker, and career opportunities in the sector. The QR codes featured throughout this document provide direct access to the docuseries.

A DAY IN THE LIFE AS AN EARLY YEARS AND CHILD CARE WORKER:



CAREER OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE SECTOR:



Hastings County is committed to recognizing the invaluable contributions made by the individuals working in the Early Years sector and their positive impact on our communities. In 2023, the County hosted its inaugural Early Childhood Educator Appreciation Day event, followed by a second event in the fall of 2024. Together, these two events attracted approximately 500 attendees. The evenings featured a range of activities, including insightful speakers. The primary goal of these events was to unite the community and honour the vital role that Early Childhood Educators and Child Care staff play in Hastings County. Feedback from attendees has been overwhelmingly positive, and there is great anticipation for future events.

In February 2023, the Hastings County Early Childhood Education Scholarship was implemented to support current and future students of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program at Loyalist College. The scholarship provides a maximum of \$5,000 per eligible student paid in three installments: semesters two and four, and six-months post-graduation upon confirmation of employment in Hastings County at a licensed child care centre-based program, licensed home care, or EarlyON program. Students must be enrolled in the ECE program in-class full-time or attending as an online/distance student. The scholarship is based on academic achievement within the program and the submission of a brief essay

outlining their understanding of how critical ECEs are to the development and well-being of a child. For more information, please see www.hastingscounty.com



WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE THE PREVIOUS SERVICE PLAN

Hastings County completed a 2019-2024 Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan in the fall of 2019.^{xv}

HIGHLIGHTS OF WHAT WE LEARNED DURING THE CREATION OF THE 2019–2024 SERVICE PLAN:

- The lack of available space and waitlist time were parents' most pressing challenge when looking for child care (57%).
- In Hastings County, only 15% of children 0-12 years had access to licensed spaces in child care programs due to child care deserts.
- EarlyON programs were making a difference for parents/caregivers and their children; the primary area of impact was the interaction and socialization of children.
- Parents indicated children were learning new skills with opportunities to explore and discover. EarlyON programs facilitated development essential to school preparation.
- Parents were pleased with the outdoor programs and noted that one of the reasons they attended EarlyON programs was for the advice and recommendations educators provided, for interaction with other adults, and for the programming.

ACCESSIBILITY, AFFORDABILITY, HIGH-QUALITY, RESPONSIVENESS

As a result of community engagement conducted in 2019, the 2019-2024 Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan identified strategic priorities and measurement indicators in four key areas: accessibility, affordability, high-quality, and responsiveness.

ACCESSIBILITY

A key strategic priority identified in the 2019-2024 Child Care and Early Years plan was expansion. Since 2019, total child care spaces have increased from 3,123 to 4,351, a 1,228-space expansion across the spectrum of infant to school-age, centre-based and home-based.

xv. https://hastingscounty.com/sites/default/files/2023-07/Service-Plan.FINAL_.pdf

As part of the CWELCC child care expansion, Hastings County has been allocated 651 new child care spaces (553 community-based, 98 school-based) to be developed in priority communities between 2022 and 2026. As of December 31, 2024, Hastings County partners have created 235 community-based and 49 school-based, a total of 284 CWELCC spaces.

Another key strategic priority was awareness of EarlyON programs since EarlyON was just beginning. Currently, there are four EarlyON providers, providing a range of services and resources in 41 sites across Hastings County: Family Space Quinte Inc., North Hastings Children's Services, Algonquin Inodewiziwin Child and Family Centre, and Trenton Military Family Resource Centre. EarlyON is promoted on the Hastings County website and Children's Services case workers refer families to EarlyON programming. Ongoing referrals to EarlyON also come through the special needs resourcing agencies and inclusion coaches, child care fee subsidy case workers, licensed child care providers and various community partners.

AFFORDABILITY

The second component of the 2019-2024 service plan focuses on affordability, with strategic priorities aimed at maintaining fee subsidies for families and supporting licensed child care providers through General Operating Grant Funding and Wage Enhancement Funding. Since 2019, 2,359 families have received fee subsidies, and a yearly average of 28 licensed child care head offices have been supported with General Operating Grant Funding and Wage Enhancement Funding.

HIGH-QUALITY

A high-quality strategic priority identified in the 2019–2024 plan was that of supporting professional development. In 2019, the Children's Services staffing complement included a Quality Initiatives Coordinator. However, in late 2021, due to changes in staff roles, the position became vacant and was not filled for a year. A new Child Care Systems Coordinator position was temporarily created in late 2022, but due to other Ministry requirements and administrative responsibilities, this position's primary focus was not professional learning or capacity building. In the fall of 2023, the position was realigned and renamed the Early Years and Capacity Coordinator to refocus on its original intent, and a purposeful effort has since been invested in professional development and capacity building. This includes the implementation of the Professional Learning Committee, consisting of educators from licensed centre-based and home-based child care, Before and After School, and EarlyON programs.

RESPONSIVENESS

The fourth component of the 2019-2024 Service Plan was responsiveness. A key strategic priority was encouraging reflective practice to incorporate cultural and family diversity. Since 2019, the kaleidoscope of cultural diversity in Hastings County has changed. According to the 2016 census^{xvi}, 730 residents of Hastings County were immigrants compared to 915 reported in 2021 census^{xvii}. Additionally, 430 Hastings County residents were non-permanent residents per the 2016 census compared to 1,130 in 2021. Ongoing community engagement also indicates an increase in the cultural diversity of educators as well as in children and families.

Since the completion of the 2019-2024 plan, Children's Services has actively encouraged and engaged in reflective practice, particularly with the re-introduction of the Quality Initiatives Coordinator in 2023. A professional learning committee was struck, Indigenous Cultural Safety Training and other ongoing professional learning was implemented informed by regular community consultation.

ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN

The 2019-2024 service plan identified that the burden of data collection created stress and added complex demands due to a lack of resources to meet these needs. The identified strategic priorities required the Ministry's participation to mitigate the administrative burden. In 2020, OMSSA sent a letter to the then-Minister of Education addressing, among other items, funding, administration, and reporting. It suggested that "the Province consider efforts to increase funding simplicity and flexibility by streamlining child care and early years funding into a single envelope and developing an Ontario-wide system for all data reporting across human services programs" (OMSSA letter to Minister Lecce, August 31, 2020). Unfortunately, the Child Care and Early Years sector has yet to experience relief from the administrative burden. Instead, increased requirements have become a reality while funding to support administrative needs has not increased.

COVID-19

From 2019 to 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruption for families, service providers, and communities, halting many routines and systems

^{xvi}. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/index-eng.cfm>

^{xvii}. [Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population](#)

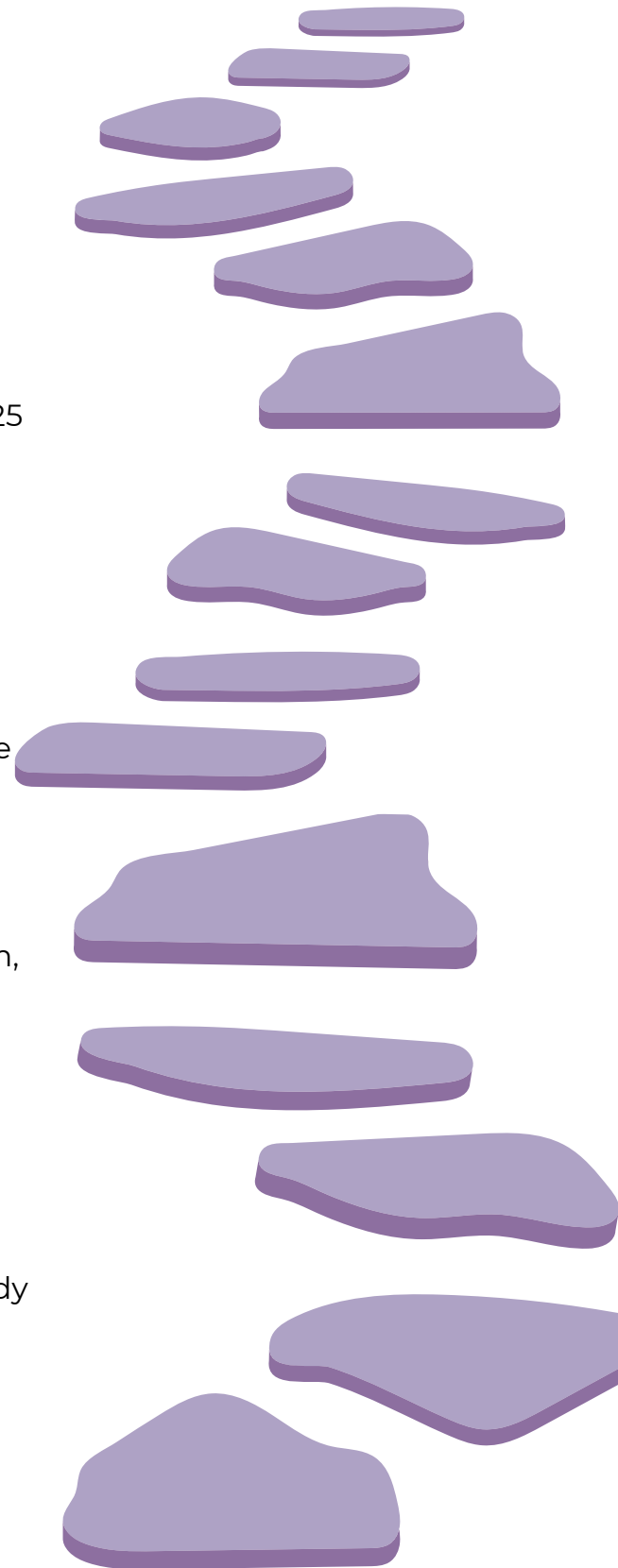
that were once taken for granted. On a societal level, children transitioned to virtual learning, while parents were required to work from home, unable to work, or had to work without consideration for their family needs. For service providers, child care agencies in Hastings County faced challenges as they adapted to new regulations and protocols set by the Ministry of Education and National Health advisories. In response to these challenges, Hastings County worked tirelessly to support families by pivoting our services to provide Emergency Child Care. Despite the constraints imposed by public health guidelines, which required reduced capacity and modified hours, local child care providers continued to offer critical care to essential care workers. Child Care Caseworkers completed intake calls for eligible families as determined by the Province of Ontario. Though this was a major adjustment for both our child care staff and service providers, we successfully provided care to 420 children across 13 licensed child care providers during this time.

Despite the impact of the pandemic, Hastings County Children's Services and the child care and early years community continued to strive for ongoing improvements and increased quality.



PATHWAY TO IMPROVEMENT 2019-2024

- 2019-2022 Emergency Child Care deployed during the COVID-19 Pandemic
- 2022 - Hosted an All-Centre Professional Learning Day
- 2022 - Child Care Expansion Survey deployed
- 2022 - Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System is introduced
- 2022 - ECE Scholarship in Partnership with Loyalist College; implemented 2023, revised 2025
- 2023 - Reinstated the Early Years and Capacity Coordinator and re-vamped Professional Learning through feedback from the Professional Learning Survey
- 2023 - Inaugural ECE Appreciation Day
- Fall 2023 Docuseries; planning and filming, seven-video series released in 2024
- 2024 - Development and Implementation of the Community Planning Committee and the Professional Learning Committee
- 2024 - Ministry of Education changed their guidelines of a qualified educator to include graduates of the recreation and leisure program, child and youth care graduates of teachers' college (Before/After school programs)
- 2024-2025 - Organized multiple focus groups and surveys with Inclusion Coaches, Child Care Supervisors, Educators and Staff, Parents & Guardians and Community Agencies to inform service plan.
- 2025 - Cross Jurisdictional Child Care Fee Subsidy agreements established with the City of Peterborough and the County of Northumberland
- 2025 - Cost-Based Funding Formula



PILLARS OF QUALITY CARE

Research and best practice show that quality child care is built on four pillars: accessibility, affordability, responsiveness, and inclusiveness. In consultation with leadership across Hastings County's Child Care and Early Years sector, high-quality is supported by four pillars:

ACCESSIBLE

HEALTH & SAFETY: A FULLY EQUIPPED CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENT WITH STRONG PRACTICES AIMED AT PROTECTING PHYSICAL AND MENTAL SAFETY

BARRIER FREE: CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING FOR STAFF

REDUCED WAITLISTS: CHILD:SPACE RATIO IS A CRITICAL INDICATOR OF ACCESS TO CHILD CARE SERVICES

AWARENESS: THE ABILITY OF FAMILIES TO MAKE INFORMED CHOICES ABOUT ACCESSING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, UTILIZING EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES, AND ENSURING CONTINUITY OF CARE FOR THEIR CHILDREN

AFFORDABLE

SUSTAINABLE & PREDICTABLE FUNDING: CONSIDER TIERED SUBSIDY MODELS, EARMARKED FUNDING FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS, AND COMMUNITY-BASED MODELS SUCH AS CO-OPERATIVE CHILD CARE CENTRES

INVESTMENT FRIENDLY: ADOPTION OF LAND USE POLICIES THAT SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILD CARE CENTRES

DATA-INFORMED: INFORM FUNDING POLICIES WITH DATA TO DEVELOP TARGETED INTERVENTIONS AND FORECAST DEMAND

BUDGET-FRIENDLY: CHILD CARE FEES SHOULD BE LESS THAN 10% OF A HOUSEHOLD'S DISPOSABLE INCOME TO QUALIFY AS AFFORDABLE

INCLUSIVE

EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION: CHILD CARE ENVIRONMENTS MUST BE INFORMED BY AN EDI FRAMEWORK

MULTI-SERVICED: INCREASED VARIETY IN EARLY YEARS AND CHILD CARE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES WITH THE INTENTION OF FOSTERING HOLISTIC SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE: THE ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF ALL DIVERSE GROUPS TO DEVELOP A CONSOLIDATED VISION FOR CHILD CARE AND EARLY YEARS PROGRAMS

SPECIAL NEEDS RESOURCING: INCLUSION COACH PROGRAM AND ENHANCED SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

RESPONSIVE

SUPPORT NETWORK: PROVIDING A PLATFORM FOR PARENTS TO SHARE EXPERIENCES, ADVICE, AND RESOURCES AND FOR THE COUNTY TO DEVISE TARGETED INTERVENTIONS BASED ON THIS FEEDBACK LOOP

PEDAGOGY: FLEXIBLE, ADAPTABLE CURRICULUMS THAT RESPOND TO EVOLVING, DIVERSE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

TRAINED STAFF: QUALIFIED STAFF WITH REQUISITE ACCREDITATIONS UPDATED BY CONSISTENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

MONITORING & EVALUATION: SYSTEMATIC PROCESSES TO IMPROVE AND ASSESS PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Recent and ongoing consultations provide evidence of the state of child care and early years programming in Hastings County and direct continual growth.

Recent community engagement includes the 2022 Child Care Expansion Survey, the 2023 EarlyON and Child Care Professional Learning Survey, the 2024 Leadership Meeting Questionnaire, and the 2024 Leadership Group Meeting.

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE CHILD CARE EXPANSION SURVEY IN 2022:

- a survey to assess the need for a Directed Growth plan.
- 504 completed surveys from child care centre and early learning provider families and the community.
- 18 respondents identified as Francophone, 109 as Indigenous, 58 as other, and 64 preferred not to answer.
- Most respondents were accessing child care within Hastings County, however some were on waitlist for care.

Of those waiting:

- 22% had been waiting for 0-3 months
- 20% for 3-6 months
- 38% for 6-12 months
- 20% for longer than 12 months
- 145 respondents indicated they had a child 0-18 months in need of child care
- 138 had a child 18-30 months
- 144 had a child 30-44 months
- 100 respondents had a child 44 months to six years in need of child care
- 70% of respondents indicated that their commute was less than 20 minutes which coincides with the majority response that participants were willing to commute for less than 20 minutes (49%).
- When asked, “Where do you feel child care is needed most around you?” the majority of respondents answered, “close to home”.
- Respondents also noted the need for child care in small communities, in or near schools, for flexible hours, and transportation.
- The main deterrent to accessing child care in Hastings County was identified as availability, then cost, location, and other (e.g., disability inclusiveness).
- Respondents noted that flexible hours would help, particularly per hour care.
- The majority of respondents also noted they would attend a licensed home child care program.

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE EARLYON AND CHILD CARE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SURVEY (NOV-DEC 2023):

- 98 total surveys completed by educators and supervisors
- Staff from 24 different organizations completed the survey
- 82% of respondents accessed professional learning in the past 12 months
- 72% of respondents felt that professional learning around challenging behaviours was necessary
- Mental health and wellness, self-regulation, outdoor winter play, and How Does Learning Happen? were all topics of interest for ongoing professional learning
- Burnout and mental health were reported as the biggest challenges faced by staff, according to 21% of respondents.

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE MARCH 2024 LEADERSHIP MEETING QUESTIONNAIRE:

- Sent out to all leaders/supervisors in the early years and child care community in Hastings County
- Three questions were provided for feedback:
 - What are the barriers/challenges impeding child care in your community?
 - What are the barriers/challenges impeding the highest quality of child care in your program?
 - What are your thoughts about the quality of child care in the sector?
- Four common themes emerged during consultations with early years and child care leaders:
 - Lack of funding
 - Staffing shortages and retention
 - Child care spaces - lack of spaces, availability, long waitlists
 - Networking - more opportunities to connect as a child care community

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE MARCH 28, 2024, LEADERSHIP GROUP MEETING:

- 56 participants
- 25 organizations represented
- Common themes from the consultation were:
 - Time needed for pedagogical mentorship and coaching
 - Additional funding for staff wages and predictable funding
 - Professional learning/conferences are highly valued (self-regulation, human resources, How Does Learning Happen?, Excel)

OTHER COMMUNITY CONSULTATION:

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

In early 2024, Loyalist College's Centre for Healthy Communities coordinated a series of Think Tank sessions with community organizations. The sessions focused on three core social determinants of health: Health Care Access and Quality, Social and Community Context, and Neighborhood and Built Environment. Within each category, discussions covered topics including Physical Health and Wellbeing, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Social Supports and Services, Justice and Community Safety, and Shelter and Housing. Organizations and individuals involved in this effort within related service sectors were invited to attend.^{xviii}

When asked what a healthy community looks like, "children thriving" (p. 7) and "affordable daycare" (p. 6) were identified as vital components. Additionally, adequate and sustainable funding and human resource challenges such as staff retention were noted as key obstacles in creating a healthy community, highlighting two significant issues facing child care and early years programming.

CURRENT SERVICE PLAN COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Engaging with families, service providers, and the public yields valuable insights into the current state of child care and early years services in Hastings County. Ongoing community engagement consists of four components: focus groups, a community survey, a parents' survey, and pending key informant interviews.

FOCUS GROUPS

Six focus groups were conducted with children's service educators in June and August 2024 to facilitate a thorough discussion of child care and EarlyON centres and services among sector staff. The focus groups were offered in the mornings, afternoons, and evenings, both in-person and virtually. More than 40 child care and early learning professionals participated, including inclusion coaches, child care educators from both centre-based and home-based settings, EarlyON educators, child care and EarlyON supervisors, child care case workers, and leaders from partner agencies.

xviii. Centre for Healthy Communities Think Tank Summaries, Kurstin Salisbury, 2024.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

The community survey, released in the fall of 2024, asked about the four pillars of children’s services in Hastings County: affordability, accessibility, inclusiveness, and responsiveness. There were 119 respondents, including child care and EarlyON educators and staff, community agency staff, municipal councillors, and other community members. This survey was made available via email, social media, QR code, URL, print, and telephone.

PARENT SURVEY

A parent survey was distributed digitally in early October 2024, with over 500 parents and guardians responding. This survey was available in both French and English via email, social media, QR code, URL, and print. Digital and printed bookmarks, along with posters, and a social media campaign involving children’s services educators, promoted the survey to parents. It was supported by school boards, community partners, child care centres, EarlyON centres, and early years community planning tables. Parents who provided their names and contact information were entered into a draw to win one of three \$50 grocery store gift cards as an incentive and a thank you for their participation.

Without the participation and active engagement of respondents, the collection of this vital data to inform the 2024-2029 Service Plan would not be possible. Sincere thanks to all those who took the time and energy to support the ongoing improvement of high-quality child care and early years services.

Phase Two of this plan will include key informant interviews with local sector leaders and the fulsome analysis of the data collected from the recent community engagement. The results of this analysis will provide orienting arrows pointing to key areas of growth and help develop performance indicators and processes for ongoing evaluation and quality improvement.



NEXT STEPS: LOOKING FORWARD

PHASE ONE

Phase One of the 2025–2029 Service Plan conducted a comprehensive environmental scan and assessed the current state of Child Care and Early Years Services across Hastings County. Through community consultations, stakeholders collectively defined "high quality" care, reaffirming that accessibility, affordability, inclusiveness, and responsiveness are central pillars guiding all efforts.

This phase also highlights major changes, improvements, and expansions undertaken since the 2019–2024 Service Plan. Data collected through community surveys, parent feedback, and sector focus groups will be further analyzed in Phase Two to deepen our understanding of community needs.

PHASE TWO

Phase Two will build upon this strong foundation, developing targeted strategies and performance indicators that anchor service delivery over the next five years. These strategies will act as true navigational points on our collective journey, guided by the "compass" of our four pillars and informed by the voices of children, families, educators, and service providers.

Meaningful collaboration remains at the heart of this work. Hastings County extends sincere gratitude to all sector partners for their continued commitment, insight, and support. Together, through partnership and shared vision, we move forward ensuring that every child has an opportunity to grow, thrive, and belong.





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