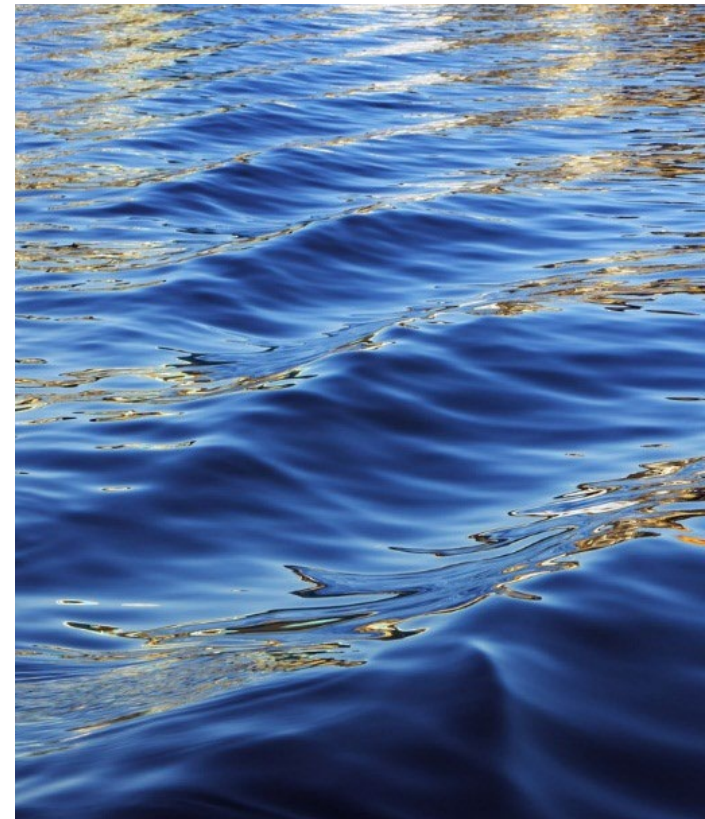




# District of Timiskaming Children's Services Access & Inclusion Framework 2023

A District for All Children and Families



# Summary

The plan is written through the lens of recovery, renewal, and reinvigoration. Although much has changed since the pandemic was declared in January 2020, we are still affected by COVID in 2023. Additionally, previous challenges prior to COVID of staffing shortages have been exacerbated which we predict will take 3-5 years to recover from. Access and inclusion are also prime considerations of the plan.

## Background

The District of Timiskaming Social Services Administration Board (DTSSAB) developed a 5-year Early Years Draft Plan at the end of 2019, which was put on hold due to the COVID pandemic. The plan had goals and activities, many of which are still relevant today, to address the opportunities and challenges of the status of early years services. The 2019 plan focused on: child care service expansion including extending hours of operation to supporting the mining industry and other businesses which operate 24/7 hours, affordability, public education and additional supports for school age child care.



# DTSSAB - Ontario's Access & Inclusion System Service Plan Addendum

## Recovery/Moving Forward

With the new federal/provincial childcare (Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care - CWELCC) system affordability is predicted to not be an issue as the provincial government works toward reducing the cost of child care for families. The reduction will require a new approach to supporting families who may still require fee subsidy, even with lower costs and we look forward to working with the province to explore the reallocation of funds. A recent survey was conducted with families regarding using licensed childcare if the cost was reduced to \$10.00 per day, eighty-two (82%) of respondents indicated they would be more likely to use a licensed child care space when costs are reduced. When child care fees are decreased, demand for service will increase.

Expansion of services will require a concerted effort by DTSSAB and service providers to attract more qualified and credentialed employees as well as support staff. To move forward, the following activities will take place:

- A marketing plan will be developed which will improve the recruitment and retention of qualified staff, which will include but not be limited to the promotion of the ECE grant program offered by the provincial government
- DTSSAB will explore with home child care service agencies the expansion of additional homes throughout the community, with the creation of a promotion/marketing plan to offer incentives to unlicensed home child care providers to join the licensed system, and the development of marketing tools which address the benefits of belonging to a licensed system of child care
- Discussions with child care service providers regarding meeting their current licensed capacity and their interest and ability to expand beyond what they currently operate will be pursued.
- Discussions with local employment agencies and school boards to offer Early Childhood Assistant programs to support additional staffing needs and implement a plan
- Explore new opportunities to better utilize qualified staff through the potential of blending of EarlyOn staff to also offering before and after school programs will be discussed.
- Hold discussions with local school boards will occur regarding available space to start or enhance current services happening within schools.
- Work to improve relationships with external stakeholders including but not limited to high school guidance counsellors and school principals
- Discuss opportunities with local school boards to share staff between kindergarten programs and before and after school programs
- Explore the development of a wage grid for all childcare staff and home child care providers

## DTSSAB - Ontario's Access & Inclusion System Service Plan Addendum cont'

### Staff/Service Provider Training

Employment within Early Years services is a career which requires staff to stay current in their practices to ensure the provision of a high-quality program. Training for employees will support the efforts of service providers to retain more staff to meet their licensing capacity and expand. Inclusion starts with all staff knowing and utilizing the tenets of "How Does Learning Happen" and respecting the needs various populations, including but not limited to vulnerable individuals, Indigenous, Francophone, LBGTQ. A community training plan which will be driven by the needs of employees will assist staff in staying current in their practices to support families having access to high quality inclusive services.

To achieve more engaged staff and service providers, a needs survey will be conducted for all employees and service providers which will address the community need to support inclusion, and anti-bias.

A training plan will be developed, and a service contract addendum will be created which will require service providers to support staff in their participation and will set targets for participation

A focus on the **EDI** will be discussed with service providers through the Quality Assurance Coordinator and each service provider will create an action plan which will address the results and plans which will focus on program offerings and potential staff training.

The promotion of external training programs for early years staff will occur and financial assistance will be offered if funding is available to do so.

The exploration of home child care training requirements and needs to support providers in the operation of their own businesses will occur.

# DTSSAB - Ontario's Access & Inclusion System Service Plan Addendum cont'

## Improving Access

Barriers for participation exist for several families which include issues such as: waitlists for services, location of services, hours of service and language. A survey was conducted in December 2022.

Often families have barriers to participate due to the developmental needs of their children and special needs resources availability.

As a result, the following will occur:

- a) A review of delivery of services for children with needs will be conducted. The review will consider supports for child care service providers as necessary to support the child being successful in their inclusion in the program. Based on funding availability, "additional hands funding" will be made available to service providers.
- b) With a lens of EDI results, a review of current locations of EarlyON will be conducted to identify if locations, hours of operation and types of programs offered, continue to meet the needs of the community.

Access for services is contingent on the ability of service providers to find additional qualified staff to work within their programs due to the staffing crisis not only is DTSSAB but across the province, DTSSAB has taken a balanced approach in expansion to be successful in the creation of additional spaces.

**See Appendix (A)** for CWELCC Space Reporting Template). In 2023, 15 additional community based child care spaces in Larder Lake will be created. By 2026 an additional 30 spaces will be created in Virginiatown and Englehart. All three communities will serve low-income families and children with disabilities. Larder Lake will serve Indigenous children while Virginiatown will support Francophone children.

# DTSSAB - Ontario's Access & Inclusion System Service Plan Addendum cont'

## RECOVERY

### Child Care Spaces

COVID 19 took its toll in some way on everyone. The Early Years Recovery will look differently to every individual and organization. A review of the current child care spaces in the TDSSAB indicate the following current status:

Number of total licensed spaces		1029	
Number of total operating spaces		937	
Operating spaces vs licensed spaces breakdown of age groups		Licensed	Operating
	Infants	49	56
	Toddlers	115	116
	Preschool	246	299
	Kindergarten	109	270
	School Age	468	196
		LICENSED	OPERATING
	Infants	49	56
	Toddlers	115	116
	Preschool	246	299
	Kindergarten	109	270
	School Age	468	196
Projected number of additional staff required to provide services to meet current licensing capacity.		Approximately 20 additional staff to meet licensing capacity for School Age Children	
Number of families waiting for a space-breakdown of ages	Infants	64	
	Toddlers	85	
	Preschool	86	
	Kindergarten	39	
	School Age	55	
Number of families in receipt of fee subsidy pre covid		177- December 2022	
Number of current families in receipt of subsidy		175 – December 2022	
Current number of Home Child Care Homes		13	
Licensed Capacity of Home Child Care Homes		60	

## DTSSAB - Ontario's Access & Inclusion System Service Plan Addendum cont'

It must be noted, that during the pandemic many families withdrew their children from care because they were working from home and or they perceived that the centres were not safe due to Covid-19 spread. Throughout the worst of the pandemic, centres continued to operate when other services such as in school education was shut down and virtual programs took place. When emergency care was implemented, communities in the District of Timiskaming came together and offered care to 106 families equalling 184 children.

To recover, new technology is being explored. Having a better sense of care needs and waitlists will be understood by the implementation of a centralized waitlist which all service providers will be required to participate in. This will require additional funding, training and support to allow the sector to utilize the new technology. We will continue the dialogue with our provincial counterparts and the community to implement new technology as it arises.

Community engagement with the sector has been on going throughout Covid-19 and must be continued throughout the course of this plan. Success of a plan often hinges on the relationships that have been fostered in the Early Years.

## DTSSAB - Ontario's Access & Inclusion System Service Plan Addendum cont'

Additionally, childcare operators are requiring “additional hands” to support the children who are attending their centres. These factors will be additional challenges to securing qualified staff. It is currently estimated that more than fifty (50%) of the workforce in centres across the District are unqualified. Staff shortage is also a barrier to meet demands going forward. If the need cannot be met, child care operators will start placing children with needs on waitlists until they can safely accommodate the children.

It is hoped that if the current number of resource consultant increases that additional supports for families can be accommodated within the EarlyON centres, where a resource consultant would be able to attend the programs on a regular basis.

As the Community continues to recover, opportunities to renew operations from a new lens will occur. With changes for all sectors in employment, many individuals will continue to work from home on a full-time basis or have a hybrid model which will require them to only be at their employment location on a part time basis. As such, the dynamics of childcare will require close monitoring of need to capture new opportunities to provide service. The needs of early years services may change as the result of changing employment requirements, which could see further demand on EarlyON services due to parents working from home with young children. Children with special needs care and support requirements could also change. Close monitoring of need will have to occur and communication with the sector will be even more prevalent. Work will need to occur with the sector for them to be able to make shifts in service. As changes occur within the services, the community needs to have confidence that DTSSAB is being diligent in supporting families to meet the potential shift of services. During this stage of the plan discussions will occur with service providers regarding growth within the system. Once determined through the recovery stage of the plan, discussions for expansion will occur. The end goal of this stage is to increase childcare spaces by forty-five (45). Growth will be contingent upon the ability to retain current child care staff and to recruit new graduates. A concentrated effort to expand the number of home child care providers to the licensed sector will also support demand. Expansion of the number of home child care providers opens the opportunity to create a new model of service for families who work shift work and require various hours and days of care. To expand in this manner, a new funding model for compensation to home child care providers will be planned. DTSSAB recognizes the opportunity to enhance the work of Quality Assurance staff and is developing new strategies to work with service providers, from a compliance perspective to one that supports operators and staff in providing quality inclusive programs. The Quality Assurance Coordinator, along with the Data Analysis Coordinator will provide training and consultation on how to understand the EDI results and implement strategies to support the communities where service providers are located in.



## DTSSAB - Ontario's Access & Inclusion System Service Plan Addendum cont'

A considerable amount of work with service providers will be needed to support their staffing needs. As a result, DTSSAB has entered a contract with the Atkinson Centre to better understand the staffing needs of the community. The project, titled Knowing Our Numbers...Measuring the Health of the CCEY Workforce, One Community at a Time will better enable DTSSAB to understand the unique pressures we are faced with. Once results are received, DTSSAB will be able to formulate a plan of action.

Other opportunities will be explored to support staffing, and the following will be explored

- \* Entering into a discussion with local school boards to determine if there is a possibility to share DECE's with service providers to offer before and after school programs. Once the results are received from the Atkinson Centre and discussion about utilizing staff from the local school boards takes place, DTSSAB may be in a better position to expand licensed spaces.

- \*DTSSAB will work with service providers to monitor and support growth within the system.

It must be noted that 100% of service providers in the DTSSAB signed onto the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan. The success of the ongoing program will require some changes to the way that the DTSSAB does business with the service providers which will include,

- \* The review and development of new contracts, outlining new expectations

- \* Exploring enhanced opportunities for the Quality Assurance staff and Data Analysis Coordinator to share the results of the EDI and work with service providers to offer programs with a focus on the EDI.

- \*On going discussions with the community providing service to ensure that issues, barriers and opportunities are dealt with in an equitable and timely manner.

# DTSSAB - Ontario's Access & Inclusion System Service Plan Addendum cont'

## Reinvigorating

As the system evolves it will be critical to discuss and support service providers and staff working in the early years with the ongoing needs and changes which will support the sector and users of services to ensure that further integration takes place. Community consultation will be required throughout the process to support the sector and the families that use services. Throughout, there will be a need for additional staff training to support the quality of programs that are being offered and to ensure that service providers and staff fulfil the tenants of How Does Learning Happen and who are knowledgeable in EDI results to create services and programs which support children and families.

- Continue holding community consultations at a minimum of twice a year

In order to continue to be connected with service providers DTSSAB will continue to host community consultations at a minimum of 2 times per year. In addition, the creation of a business advisory committee with designated representatives from the various sectors, including, but not limited to licensed non-profit child care, private child care, home child care, special needs service providers, school boards, Francophone and Indigenous programs and EarlyON centres will be pursued to obtain best advice from the various sectors and formulate plans from the discussions.

- Create a Business Advisory Committee for partners and child care service providers to receive their input for upcoming plans

Continuous community wide training will occur including, but not limited to (HDLH), working with vulnerable populations and understanding of community needs based on EdI results and based on funding availability.

- Continue to support community wide training, including outdoor education.

Also, we intend to continue to support Forest School graduates. A hub, with support from DTSSAB will be created which will continue the work and inspire and mentor staff from all funded sectors on outdoor education and how they can support all sectors. Our Indigenous population will be an integral mentor to provide their thoughts, guidance, and training. As many of our programs are rural and have challenges due to the yearly weather conditions (volume of snow etc.) it can be challenging for service provider staff to keep children engaged. We believe that a quality program, with meaningful outdoor activities keep everyone engaged. We will also continue to support mental health training for staff and will monitor changing needs.

- Pursue Client Satisfaction Surveys to better understand community needs

Additionally, to support families DTSSAB will create a parent satisfaction survey for families receiving services and a survey to the community for those who do not participate in programs to better understand the needs of the community and formulate a plan based on results.

## DTSSAB - Ontario's Access & Inclusion System Service Plan Addendum cont'

### Conclusion

Throughout the plan, everyone involved must remain nimble in order to be able to continue to be flexible in their approach to the services they provide. This will evolve as everyone engaged gains the confidence that their children are receiving the best, most flexible services that can be offered and that the sector has the ability to work collectively to provide services and programs that will meet the needs of the community. DTSSAB has an aggressive plan and is committed to provide the best services possible based on their ability to attract qualified staff both within their own operating structure and the community, funding availability and collaboration with and for parents, children, service providers, all levels of government and the community. We look forward to our ongoing collaboration.

# Appendix A: – DTSSAB - CWELCC Space Growth Plan

	School-based Spaces						Community-based Spaces						Total Spaces					
	Total	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Allocation in May 2023	0	0	0	0	0	0	45	0	15	15	0	15	45	0	15	15	0	15
Revised Space Creation Plan	0						0						0					
Variance	0	0	0	0	0	0	-45	0	-15	-15	0	-15	-45	0	-15	-15	0	-15