



BEST START in the OTTAWA SOUTH COMMUNITY

In January 2007, an invitation was sent out to key community stakeholders of early years' services in Ottawa South to request their participation in the planning process of Best Start System Integration and Hub Implementation.

The process was conducted in two steps:

- An overview session, held on February 13th 2007, to provide stakeholders with an understanding of the Best Start Initiative; planning that had been done to that date and future direction for community engagement strategies;
- Following the Best Start Overview Information Session, participants interested in moving forward with Service Integration took part in an all-day planning table event held at the Jim Durrell Complex on February 19, 2007. During the course of this day, participants were asked to answer a questionnaire to provide recommendations in terms of service integration for the City of Ottawa. Recommendations collected from all nine Planning Tables were incorporated in Ottawa's Community Plan Report that was submitted to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services on June 30, 2007.

The purpose of the 2007 plan was to provide:

- A tool to support communities in developing plans for moving forward with a locally integrated system of services.
- An opportunity for communities to provide an update of the progress achieved in 2006-2007 towards implementation of key components of Best Start.
- Support for the ongoing policy development process with respect to Best Start.

2010 update

Since 2007, a great deal of work has been accomplished in Ottawa South. The goal of this document is to debrief those same community stakeholders on the progress that has been made in Ottawa South; to provide an understanding of Best Start to new community stakeholders; and to identify ways in which all stakeholders can get involved.

Q: What is Best Start?

A: Best Start is the Ontario government's early learning and care strategy. The aim is to create a system of services that seamlessly support families and children from birth through their transition into grade one – right in their own communities. It focuses primarily on meeting children's and family's needs by strengthening, enhancing, building on and integrating programs and services.

Q: How does Best Start connect with the Dr. Pascal report: “With Our Best Future in Mind, Implementing Early Learning in Ontario”?

A: As stated in Dr. Pascal’s report, the “Best Start strategy, launched in 2004, was aimed at improving service coordination in Ontario’s communities through the creation of “tables” with representation from municipalities, school boards, parents, and community agencies. Best Start laid the groundwork for what I am proposing, but real systemic change needs more than resources and goodwill. Without fundamentally changing the approach to delivery and doing the re-engineering required for integrating services into something new, Ontario will be stalled at the level of “improving coordination”. (p. 15)

One of Dr. Pascal’s recommendations is the use of schools as community hubs. He emphasized the importance of providing a continuum of services for children and parents. With the recommendation of creating Best Start Child and Family Centres, Dr. Pascal emphasizes the importance of transforming the service delivery model to allow parents and caregivers in Ontario to access a “one-stop opportunity” of early childhood programs and services of programs and services.

Dr. Pascal also recommends that these goals and outcomes “need to be planned, managed, implemented, and monitored at the local level. The lead for this belongs with municipal authorities, working in partnership with boards of education and other community Best Start partners.” (p. 22) “Designating municipal authorities as the lead in this process does not replace the community-building process developed under Best Start, but rather gives it the authority necessary to drive the changes needed. The planning process will require effective collaboration among service providers. Representatives from the community should be included at the planning table and participants renewed on a regular schedule.” (p. 22-23)

Overall, the recommendations made by Dr. Pascal in his report should help build on the work that has been done by the Best Start planning tables.

Q: How is Best Start being implemented?

A: Best Start is a long-term strategy to be implemented, in two phases, over 10 years.

Phase one involved the:

Expansion of Child Care

Beginning in the fall of 2005, the provincial government used its share of federal Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Initiative funding to expand subsidies for licensed child care for kindergarten-aged children. In January 2007, the government announced that, in spite of the cut in support from the Federal government, almost 15,000 new licensed child care space had been created by municipalities.

Development of Local Networks

Local municipal social service agencies have lead in developing local Best Start networks mandated to build partnerships among health, social service, and school boards that provide services for young children.

Implementation of Demonstration Sites

Three sites (Hamilton, Lambton-Kent, and Timiskaming) were chosen to pilot Best Start initiatives in 2005-06. The sites planned for:

- wrap-around child care for children enrolled in junior and senior kindergarten;
- a half-day free preschool program and half-day child care program for two-and-a-half to four-year-olds with links to the kindergarten program;
- newborn health screening;
- early identification of specialized hearing and language needs; and
- 18-month well-baby check-up.

Establishment of Expert Panels

The Ministry of Children and Youth (MCYS) established three expert panels which reported their findings:

- Getting it Right at 18 Months (“Getting it right at 18 months... Making it right for a lifetime” report); completed September 2005; available at <http://www.ocfp.on.ca/local/files/CME/Research/FinalRpt-18MonthPrjct-ENG.pdf>
- an early learning program to link the program of preschools and kindergartens (Early Learning for Every Child Today (E.L.E.C.T.) report); completed January 2007; available at http://www.gov.on.ca/children/graphics/stel02_183342.pdf
- A quality and human resources expert panel to look at recruitment and retention of early childhood educators, and to review ways to improve informal care (Investing in Quality: Policies, Practitioners, Programs and Parents report); completed March 2007; available at http://www.gov.on.ca/children/graphics/stel02_183340.pdf

Establishment of the College of Early Childhood Educators

The Ministry of Children and Youth has established a professional college for early childhood educators. As of December 2009 there are 24,000 registered members. More information about the College of ECE is available at www.collegeofece.ca.

Phase Two will involve the implementation of the full Best Start vision across the province, including:

- Community Hubs that will pull together screening, assessment and treatment, child care and parenting programs, and will have direct links to other children’s services such as mental health and speech and language resources.
- Creation of closer links of services for children to neighbourhood schools.
- Other programs and strategies being considered include the expansion of Preschool Speech and Language and Infant Hearing Services to the end of Senior Kindergarten, enhanced 18-month developmental assessment using primary care providers for every child in Ontario, and the post-partum mood disorders strategy.

Q: What is the Best Start vision?

A: The vision is to provide families with better access to services locally while increasing children's readiness to learn at school.

Q: What is the goal of Best Start in Ottawa?

A: Our goal is to plan collaboratively for the implementation of community hubs across the city of Ottawa.

Q: What is a "Hub"?

A: A Hub is the neighbourhood venue for delivering an integrated system of services for early learning & care and healthy child development. Hubs are intended to increase access to program resources for children and their families.

Q: What are the key features of a hub?

A: The key features of hubs are:

- Clearly identifiable location and/or phone number
- Simplified easy access for parents
- Explicit mechanisms for service integration

Q: What core services should be available at a hub?

A: The core services that should be available at hubs are:

- Junior and senior kindergarten
- Quality child care
- Preschool programs (e.g. speech & language, literacy)
- Screening, assessment, and referrals for specialized services
- Public health services (e.g. well baby clinics, immunization, HBHC)
- Healthy child development programs; parenting programs; nutrition programs
- Information about community services and pathways to them

Some services would be available on-site while other services may be located off-site with strong links to the main hub location.

Q: What is the "Schools First" policy?

A: The "Schools First" policy is to create hubs in schools, ideally with child care on site. If child care isn't on site there should be strong links to nearby child care providers. If a school is not possible as a hub site we should consider the best alternative, a location where some of the core services are already being delivered.

Q: What is the focus of the Best Start Planning Tables?

A: The focus is to work with community partners to develop a system of services that seamlessly support families and children right in their own communities. All existing organizations that provide services for children from the prenatal stage through to grade one are asked to share their expertise and plan together.

The planning tables will develop linkages, increase awareness of services, foster information sharing and share best practices as part of their work.

The community is asked to align planning processes and delivery models by strengthening, enhancing, building on and integrating programs and services so as to maximize the benefits of collaborative planning. The beneficiaries are the children and their families.

Q: What is the mandate of the Ottawa South Planning Table Steering Committee?

A: The mandate of the Ottawa South Best Start Planning Table Steering Committee is to collaborate with our community partners to plan for and monitor implementation of Best Start in the twelve Ottawa South Planning Table neighbourhoods: Alta Vista; Blossom Park/Windsor Park; Clementine; Hawthorne; Hunt Club East and West; Ottawa South and South East; Riverview/Hawthorne; Riverside Park; Findlay Creek and Uplands/MFRC.

Q: What has been accomplished in Ottawa South?

A: The foundation for planning at the neighbourhood level has been established with the creation of a community planning table, the Ottawa South Best Start Planning Table Steering Committee. Early years service providers have been brought together at this table to plan for an integrated system of services for children aged 0-6 within the Ottawa South area.

The mandate and terms of reference have been defined. Using data mapping of the Ottawa South area, a list of possible hub locations has been drafted. After reviewing local data and research (i.e.: EDI, CSI, Census Data, Birth Data and other) the Steering Committee has chosen three initial neighbourhoods as the initial hub locations: Blossom Park/Windsor Park; Ottawa South East and Riverview/Hawthorne.

A working group has been created for each of the identified neighbourhoods. Each group is looking at strategies to implement the neighbourhood hub model in their specific area. Communication and planning tools are being created such as, service provider surveys and parent surveys.

Q: What are the next steps?

A: The Steering Committee and its working groups are looking to:

- Increase the engagement of parents, community members and early years service providers in decision-making through different mechanisms: surveys, meetings, community events, etc.
- Enhance the integration and/or collaboration of programs and services
- Achieve a common understanding of the Best Start vision including the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders
- Realign the delivery of services to meet community needs

Q: How can a community organization get involved?

A: Your organization can get involved by:

- Browsing the Ottawa South Best Start Planning Table website at www.ottawakids.ca for information, news and upcoming events in Ottawa South.
- Becoming an active member of the Ottawa South Best Start Planning Table Steering Committee
- Becoming an active member of the working group in your neighbourhood
- If you are unable to participate in meetings, you can get involved by receiving the minutes from above-mentioned meetings in order to stay up-to-date on what is developing in Ottawa South and your local neighbourhood
- Providing information about your services, programs and upcoming events to the Steering Committee and/or Neighbourhood Working Group.
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Q: How does getting involved benefit your organization?

A: Your organization may benefit in the following ways:

- Increased awareness of local data and research which is beneficial in planning and delivery of services
- Increased participation/involvement of children and/or families in your programs and services
- Increased community's awareness of your services and programs
- Increased awareness, communication and information sharing between your organization and others in the community
- Improved access to new opportunities, partnerships, resources and skills
- Strengthened image and reputation of your organization

Q: How do families benefit from this initiative?

A: Families will benefit in the following ways:

- Improved access to early years services in a seamless and integrated manner
- Increased parent understanding of early childhood development issues
- Strengthened parenting skills and role in children's' healthy child development
- Increased number of children ready for school

Success Stories in Ottawa South

Success in Blossom Park

First Words Screening Clinic at Blossom Park Public School

Blossom Park/ Windsor Park was one of the neighbourhoods chosen by the Ottawa South Best Start Steering Committee due to its high risk level, low EDI scores, lack of services and enthusiastic leadership in Julie Morris, Principal of Blossom Park Public School.

Once the Blossom Park Working Group was brought together, they reviewed the neighbourhood data and discussed their working knowledge of the community. It was identified that language development and communication was an important issue for children in Blossom Park.

With Natalie Kent of the OEYC Ottawa South acting as liaison, Julie Morris was able to connect with Kellie Denny of First Words Speech and Language Program in order to host a First Words Screening Clinic on November 12th, 2009. The event was publicized through First Words, Blossom Park Public School, Sawmill Creek Community Centre and Pool and the Ontario Early Years Centre Ottawa South of Andrew Fleck Child Care Services.

Julie led her enthusiastic team in actively promoting the clinic to their community. Julie contacted neighbouring schools (St. Bernard and Ste Bernadette) as well as the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board's family of schools for the Neil Yorke-Slader Superintendency area (25 local schools) to ensure they were aware of the event and able to publicize it on their end. Janet Marr, the Learning Support Teacher, as well as Susan Al-Riffai, the Multicultural Liaison Officer, personally called families with children for whom language development was a concern.

The clinic was a great success! 16 children attended, 13 were screened and 3 were directed to Overflow clinics. Of the 13 who were screened, 10 were referred for further assessment, 2 were discharged as being within normal limits and 1 had already been referred to the program. First Words stated that they would be pleased to offer another clinic at Blossom Park again in the fall and, if space was available, they would send 3 speech language pathologists to ensure a larger number of children are screened.

The success of this event is due in large part to multiple community organizations (schools, OEYC, recreation centre, First Words) working together in order to better serve the families of the larger community.

New Early Learning Opportunities in the Blossom Park/ Windsor Park Neighbourhood

The Blossom Park/ Windsor Park Working Group had also identified the need to increase access to free early learning opportunities for families in the Blossom Park area of this

area. The organizations continued to work together as they had done for the screening clinic in establishing, promoting and supporting new partnerships in their neighbourhood.

The first partnership to be formed was between the Sawmill Creek Community Centre and the Ontario Early Years Centre Ottawa South. Sawmill Creek Community Centre allotted the Best Start initiative a time slot on Wednesday mornings to use their facility, free of charge. Eager to offer new programs to parents in need, the OEYC Ottawa South has offered two types of parent/child workshops. The first was a “Cooking Club” series of workshops where participants were able to learn how to follow recipes, prepare and mix ingredients as well as taste their creations. A group of seven parents/caregivers and eight children participated in the three week series. The second is a “Craft, Snack and Circle Time” which will be offered once a month over a three-month period and is set to begin shortly. At the moment, a total of 15 parents/caregivers and 26 children are registered to participate in the workshops. This early learning workshop will help prepare children for school by giving them the opportunity to make a craft, prepare a snack and participate in a circle time.

The second partnership was between Blossom Park Public School and the Ontario Early Years Centre Ottawa South. The school was able to provide a room, free of charge, for the OEYC to offer a drop-in playgroup for parents/caregivers and their children 0 to 6 years of age where they can participate in early learning activities, access information and referral services as well as engage in community networking. This playgroup is offered free of charge two mornings a week. For the period of November 16th, 2009 to December 18th, 2009 a total of 36 parents/caregivers and 62 children attended the program.

Success in Ottawa South East

Welcome to Kindergarten Night at Hawthorne Public School

Hawthorne Public School hosted their first Welcome to Kindergarten Night in May 2009 for all of the families whose children would be attending school for the first time. This initiative was partly funded through the Learning Partnership, a non-profit organization devoted to helping kindergarten children get off to a positive school start, especially in areas where home resources to stimulate literacy and numeracy might be limited through economic barriers. The event was also a partnership with several organizations and individuals in our community: Aladin Child Care Services (Diane O'Neil, Tracey Lamoreaux), Elmvale Public Library (Courtney Mellor), Ontario Early Years Centre Ottawa South (Kathy Knight-Robinson) and the Public Health Department of Ottawa (Tu Nygen, PHN). All families received an orientation to the school, as well as hands-on training at various stations for how to help their child succeed. As part of the Learning Partnership involvement, each family was also provided a take-home bag full of literacy and math resources (such as magnetic letters, play dough, books and templates).

First Words Screening Clinic at Aladin Child Care Services

Aladin hosted a highly successful First Words Clinic on March 28, 2009. In fact, the demand far outstripped the capacity. Families were being turned away by 9:30 as the capacity for the day was met. Parents who were able to register were very pleased with the access and the waiting room. We provided age appropriate toys to entertain the children through their wait.

Aladin will be hosting another clinic January 23rd, 2010.

Partnership between the Ottawa Public Library and St. Luke's

A great success for St. Luke's Elementary School has been their increased partnership with the Ottawa Public Library, through the efforts of Courtney Mellor.

As well as increasing community partnerships, St. Luke's had approximately 140 out of a total of 210 students getting new library cards last year, as part of their literacy initiative. Courtney has also made inroads with staff in increasing awareness of available programs and resources.

Success at the Ontario Early Years Centre Ottawa South

Through a connection made at the Ottawa South Best Start Steering Committee level, the OEYC Ottawa South was able to establish a partnership with Beth McMillan, a volunteer from La Leche League Canada. The OEYC Ottawa South offered Beth McMillan with the use of its playroom once a month to offer a LLLC Breastfeeding Group for Moms of Multiples. It is well known that multiple birth children have higher risk factors for many health and developmental issues due to higher rates of premature birth as well as higher risk for Post Partum Depression for their mothers due to increased stress (emotional, financial, health, marital, isolation). It is a great success that a not for profit volunteer organization is able to work with the OEYC to provide support to these families in an area as crucial as parent to parent support for breastfeeding and mothering. The links made by connecting LLLC and the OEYC for these families can be invaluable. It allows them to be connected to community supports, services and early learning right from the beginning stages of their child's life.

Who can we contact for more information?

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The work accomplished in Ottawa South was made possible by the following community partners (past and present):

NAME	ROLE	AGENCY
Adams, Jennifer	Director	Aladin Child Care Services
Ahmed, Pakhsan	Newcomer Information Officer	Lebanese and Arab Social Services Agency (in partnership with Ottawa Public Library)
Al-Riffai, Susan	Multicultural Liaison Officer	Blossom Park Public School
Barnes, Neeka	Manager	Andrew Fleck Licensed Home Child Care
Beadle, Patricia	Director	Hawthorne Meadows Nursery School
Blenkiron, Diane	Manager, Child and Parenting Programs	Military Family Resource Centre, National Capital Region
Brown, Joan	Director	Dr. Ernest Couture Child Care Centre
Canning, Janice	Community Developer	Ottawa Best Start Initiative
Chakra, Manal	Newcomer Information Officer	Lebanese and Arab Social Services Agency (in partnership with Ottawa Public Library)
Collin, Monique	Early Literacy Specialist	Parent Resource Centre
Côté, Caroline	Program Coordinator	Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, OCDSB
Doré, Mia	Community Development Coordinator	Eastern Ottawa Resource Centre
Duhme, Walter	Constable	Ottawa Police Service
Emedi, Euphrasie	Community Developer	South East Ottawa Community Health Centre
Frith, Jeff	Principal	Elizabeth Park Public School
Gaudon, Sara	Councillor's Representative	Office of Councillor Diane Deans
Gere, Pat	Director	Ottawa Montessori School
Grier, Geeta	Program Coordinator	South East Ottawa Community Health Centre
Hiscott, Kim	Executive Director	Andrew Fleck Child Care Services
Johnson, Christine	Principal	Riverview Alternative School
Jones, Sandy	Program Facilitator	Parenting and Family Literacy Centre, Featherston Public School
Jouad, Radiah	Settlement Outreach Worker	Somali Centre for Family Services
	Community Connection Worker	South-East Ottawa Community Health Centre
Kendrick, Sara	Program Coordinator	Sawmill Creek Community Centre and Pool

Kennedy, Glenn	Principal	St. Luke's Catholic School
Kent, Natalie	Early Years Educator & Outreach Coordinator	Ontario Early Years Centre Ottawa South
Knight-Robinson, Kathy	Program Supervisor	Ontario Early Years Centre Ottawa South
Kopczewski, Francesse	Principal	Hawthorne Public School
Latreille, Marc	Area Recreation Supervisor (Former)	Sawmill Creek Pool and Community Centre
Marr, Janet	Learning Support Teacher	Blossom Park Public School
McMillan, Beth	Volunteer and Group Leader	La Leche League Canada
Morris, Julie	Principal	Blossom Park Public School
Mullan, Mark	Trustee Representative	Ottawa Catholic District School Board
Munn, Beverly	Representative	Office of Councillor Diane Deans Gloucester-Southgate Ward
Nurse, Valerie	Public Health Nurse, School Age Health Program (formerly assigned to Blossom Park Public School)	Ottawa Public Health
O'Neill, Diane	Executive Director	Aladin Child Care Services
Pranschke, Michael	Supervisor, Child Protection and Family Service	Children's Aid Society of Ottawa
Rea, Sarah	Parent Educator	Parenting and Family Literacy Centre, Prince of Peace
Rowe, Sonia	Manager (Former)	Ontario Early Years Centre Ottawa South
Stowe, Deborah	Program Facilitator	Parenting and Family Literacy Centre, Charles H. Hulse Public School
Tittley, Kristin	Area Recreation Supervisor	Sawmill Creek Community Centre and Pool
Tremblay, Lyne	Manager	Child Care Information
Woolard, Laurie	Librarian	Ottawa Public Library, Greenboro Branch
Vaz, Lenworth	Constable	Ottawa Police Service
Yao, Celia	Public Health Nurse, School Age Health Program (Blossom Park Public School)	Ottawa Public Health
Zeis, Nick	Program Coordinator	Albion-Heatherington Recreation Centre and Leadership in Training Program