



Early Learning and Child Care Service System Plan



2025
2029

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Acknowledgment

The County of Simcoe acknowledges that the land on which we live, work and play is the traditional territory of the Anishinabek Nation, which includes the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Pottawatomi Nations, collectively known as the Three Fires Confederacy. We also recognize the Huron-Wendat, who occupied these lands prior to the middle of the 17th century. We embrace the enduring presence and partnership of the Indigenous Peoples of this region including the Chippewa Tri-Council First Nations, comprised of the Beausoleil First Nation, the Chippewas of Rama, and the Georgina Island First Nation. We also recognize the diverse Métis and Inuit communities within our region. The County of Simcoe is dedicated to honouring our Indigenous history and culture and is committed to coming together to learn, heal, and create future prosperity, respect and understanding in all of our communities.



Forward

It is with great enthusiasm that, as the Service System Manager (SSM) for the County of Simcoe and separated Cities of Barrie and Orillia, we present the 2025-2029 Early Learning and Child Care Service System Plan. This plan is a testament to our unwavering commitment to creating conditions for all children and families across Simcoe County to thrive.

The vision is to create an inclusive and accessible Early Learning and Child Care sector, with a thriving and sustainable workforce, that is continually produced through meaningful and ongoing collaboration and consultation.

This plan is designed to guide the work of the Early Learning and Child Care System Management team towards that vision, ensuring a system of quality early learning opportunities is available to meet the needs of all children and families. Quality and affordability should go hand in hand, and making this a reality is a commitment set forth within this plan.

A thriving and sustainable workforce is the backbone of a quality early years system that families rely on. System planning and management will focus on providing educators with the support and resources they need to excel in their roles and relationships with children and families. Their dedication and passion are truly the foundation of our sector.

Finally, collaboration, transparency and innovation will remain at the heart of our approach. This plan lays the groundwork for how our team will lead with openness, working in partnership with children, families, service providers and sector partners. Together, the team will create a dynamic and responsive system that meets the evolving needs of the community, ultimately creating economic and social capital today, and into the future.

Samantha Zuercher, Director
Early Learning and Child Care System Management



Simcoe County's Community

Simcoe County is one of Ontario's largest counties. In 2021 in Simcoe County, the top reported ethnic origins were English (27%) followed by Irish (21%), Scottish (21%), Canadian (17%) and German (9%). There are three First Nations communities in Simcoe County: the Beausoleil First Nation, the Chippewas of Rama, and the Georgina Island First Nation. In addition there are diverse Métis and Inuit communities within the county. The rate of people identifying as Indigenous in Simcoe County is higher than the provincial rate across all age groups. Below, is the population rates of children 0-4 years of age in Simcoe County, and the rates of children who are Francophone, Indigenous, and Immigrants.

Sources: [Statistics Canada, 2021](#) and [Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit](#)

533,169

Total population of Simcoe County

27,110 ▶ 420

Children 0-4 years
(5.1% of population)

Francophone
(1.5% of child population)

1,510

Indigenous
(5.6% of child population)

125

Immigrants
(0.5% of child population)

About the Service System Manager

The County of Simcoe is designated by the Government of Ontario as the Service System Manager (SSM) of the licensed child care and early years system for Simcoe County including the two separated Cities of Barrie and Orillia.

The Early Learning and Child Care System Management Department, a department within the Social and Community Services Division, is responsible and accountable for system planning, funding administration, and overall management of the child care and early learning service system.

Overview of The County of Simcoe's Child Care Service Plan

The County of Simcoe's Child Care Service Plan ("the Plan") provides guidance on how to achieve key priorities that align with strategic actions as they relate to the licensed child care and early years system over the next five years. The Plan is a result of collaboration among diverse shareholders and advisors, which stewards the corporate vision of Working Together to Build Vibrant, Healthy, and Sustainable Communities through services and infrastructure that are affordable, sustainable, and accessible through leadership and innovative excellence.

Source: [Corporate Strategies - Simcoe County](#)



Highlights of the Plan

Outlined below is a synopsis of key priority areas, objectives, and corresponding strategic actions planned for the next five (5) years.

<p>Inclusive and Accessible Early Learning and Child Care Experiences</p>	<p>Enhance access points for families to helpful information about the early learning and child care system</p>
<p>The County of Simcoe is committed to planning, funding, and administering an early learning and child care system that is inclusive, affordable, accessible and high-quality for children and families in Simcoe County</p>	<p>Seek creative ways to build awareness about the widespread benefits of quality early years experiences</p> <p>Support the development of culturally appropriate early childhood education programs</p> <p>Enhance conditions of equitable access for children with special needs</p> <p>Apply a data-driven lens to the Canada-wide early learning and child care (CWELCC) directed growth strategy</p> <p>Support identification and enactment of pedagogical values, in alignment with Ontario's pedagogy for the early years</p>
<p>Thriving and Sustainable Early Learning and Child Care Workforce</p>	<p>Broker mentorship opportunities for early learning and child care professionals to promote recruitment and retention in early learning and child care workforce</p>
<p>The County of Simcoe will lead innovative approaches to foster positive working conditions for an adaptable, resilient and diverse early learning and child care workforce</p>	<p>Find innovative ways to collaborate with early learning and child care partners to strengthen connections with students and support pathways to local vocation</p> <p>Prioritize professional development opportunities for early learning and child care professionals that are aligned with areas of need and build collective capacity</p> <p>Lead initiatives that improve working conditions in Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) system</p>
<p>Cohesive Community Planning and Strategic Action</p>	<p>Lead community planning tables toward unified strategic priorities</p>
<p>The County of Simcoe will lead with transparency and innovation by building partnerships that collectively improve outcomes for children and families, the sector, and the Early learning and child care workforce</p>	<p>Optimize operational efficiencies in ELCC service system management</p> <p>Seek innovative ways to engage diverse perspectives in collaborative system planning</p>

Development of the Plan

Focus groups and surveys were conducted to learn about system needs, assets, barriers, gaps, and opportunities. Insights from these consultations provided new ways to respond to the changing needs of children and families and service providers in local communities and the early learning and child care workforce. In addition, a scan of local data provided information about community demographics, readiness to learn, and past survey results.

To inform the Plan, we created purpose-driven spaces to hear from diverse shareholders and system partners including:

- Parents and caregivers
- Licensed child care operators (centre and home based services)
- Community partners

The Value of a Strong Early Learning and Child Care System

Benefits to children

Nurturing environments and opportunities to learn in the early years are crucial because they lay the foundation for a child's future development. The first five years of a child's life strongly influence their brain development and overall development. Experiences in the early years impact a child's cognitive, social, physical and emotional abilities. A child's brain develops rapidly during this period, making early experiences critical for overall well-being and for establishing lifelong learning skills. Children who participate regularly in quality early childhood education programs:

- Have higher graduation rates
- Make better decisions
- Improve work habits and grades
- Make gains in reading and math
- Are excited about learning
- Develop strong social skills

Source: [McCain, N.M., 2020](#)

Quality early learning and care have a positive impact on brain development, cognitive skills, social and emotional development, and physical development. The impacts are lifelong. Simcoe County promotes this concept through the tagline, 'The Years Before 5 Shape Lives'.

“

“If we can address needs of children early, rather than later, we can help each child reach their maximum potential. It also means we can equal the playing field for all children.”

Dr. Fraser Mustard
Source: *Offord Centre*



Benefits to families

Access to quality child care means parents are able to work, increasing household incomes and potentially leading to career advancement. Quality child care can also promote healthy family environments. Ideally, children learn skills and values, such as unconditional love, an understanding of right from wrong, empathy and mutual respect from their families. These skills support children to engage positively at school, at work and in society. However, it can be difficult for parents to meet their children's needs when they are struggling with personal or familial issues. Children living in these circumstances are at risk of social and emotional disruption, such as health, learning or behaviour challenges. In times of family chaos, quality early childhood education provides a haven for young children and provides parents with time to attend to family disruptions.

Source: [McCain, N.M., 2020](#)

Community benefits

Quality early childhood education can break cycles of exclusion and build more equal and inclusive societies. With exposure to values such as gender equality and respect for the environment, children are more likely to hold these beliefs in later stages in life.

“Early education programs can help strengthen solidarity within communities across class, ethnic and racial lines. Diversity is a key part of the early learning context. Consequently, ECE programs can be a central point for newcomer and refugee families making children and families part of civil society and helping build social cohesion at the community level.”

Source: [McCain, N.M., 2020](#)

Economic benefits

Early learning and child care is essential to the social infrastructure of communities. It contributes to the backbone of our economy and supports economic growth in a multi-pronged way:

- Early learning and child care creates a generation of engaged and well-prepared young learners;
- The early learning and child care system provides jobs for workers;
- Affordable, quality child care enables parents to reach their full economic potential; and
- Employers rely on the availability of child care to support a robust workforce.

Source: [Department of Finance Canada, 2021](#)

“

“...for every dollar spent on early childhood education, the broader economy receives between \$1.50 and \$2.80 in return.”

Source: Government of Canada, TD Economics, 2021

”



Social benefits

Children flourish in nurturing, stimulating, and loving environments. Parents want to provide these environments for their children, but some struggle due to challenges such as mental health issues, addictions and poverty. When families have few opportunities and find it difficult to set their children up for success, poverty is passed on. Cyclical poverty has a negative impact on society as a whole. Breaking the cycle of poverty can result in economic growth, improved public health, lower crime rates, better education outcomes, reduced government burden, greater social mobility and stronger communities.

Source: [Lee & Briggs, 2019](#)

Affordable access to positive early years experiences is a protective factor and can help families move from surviving to thriving. Quality early education plays a key role in breaking the cycle of poverty. Inequities are reduced when children from all socioeconomic backgrounds receive equal educational opportunities. Through participation in quality early childhood education programs, children are more likely to be prepared for school and this results in more productive learning environments for everyone. Children also learn from each other in child care. They learn to share, to consider the feelings of others, to listen, to contribute, and to be patient.

Source: [McCain, N.M., 2020](#)

The importance of the early learning and child care workforce

Early childhood educators (ECEs) make critical contributions to the development of children, and to the well-being of families and society. Well-qualified, well-paid, well-supported ECEs are a key piece of a quality early learning and child care system.

“

“Child care is central to providing support to children and families, enabling parents to contribute to the economy and ensuring the learning, care, and developmental needs of children are met. The child care workforce is critical to the success of these outcomes and to the well-being of a healthy and productive society.”

Source: [Beach, J. et al., 2004](#)”





The Early Learning and Child Care System in Canada and Ontario

In March 2022, a Canada-Ontario early learning and child care agreement was announced. It is a five-year plan to reduce child care fees in the short term and to provide, on average, \$10-a-day child care for Ontario families by the end of March 2026. It will also create 86,000 new licensed early learning and child care spaces in the province.

In addition to improving access to early learning and child care programs and services, the plan strengthens the workforce of ECEs through higher wages and more opportunities for professional development. The funding also supports the inclusivity of vulnerable children and children from diverse populations. The plan includes a commitment to engage Indigenous partners in developing a collaborative plan.

In March 2025 an extension to the early learning and child care agreement was announced. In principle, the extended agreement states that the federal government will invest \$36.8 billion over five years, starting in 2026-27. Ontario's portion of the investment is \$16.77 billion.

Source: [Prime Minister's Office, 2022](#)

The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) Plan

CWELCC is a federally funded program that is administered by the County of Simcoe that:

- gives families access to more affordable and high-quality child care options
- helps lower child care fees for parents and guardians of children under the age of 6
- increases child care spaces
- supports the child care workforce
- supports inclusive child care

Source: [Ministry of Education, 2025](#)

The plan commits to a **parent fee reduction and expansion of spaces for children**. Child care base fees are capped at \$22 per day for 0-5 year old children effective January 1, 2025. This is only for programs enrolled in the CWELCC system. The goal is to transition to average fees of \$10 per day by March 2026.

Ontario's Action Plan

Ontario has a plan that focuses on 5 key pillars:

- **Lowering fees**
 - As of January 1, 2025, the reduced fees were capped at \$22 per day. By March 2026, fees will be lowered to an average of \$10 per day.
- **Increasing access**
 - 86,000 net new licensed child care spaces will be created by the end of 2026. New child care spaces will be created in areas where they are needed most.
- **Enhancing high-quality child care**
 - Increased compensation for lower-wage Registered ECEs working with children up to age 12 in licensed child care.
 - Develop a workforce strategy to better support recruitment, retention and professional learning for child care and early years staff.
- **Supporting inclusion**
 - Ensure plans and programs are designed to support the needs of vulnerable and diverse populations in communities.
 - Gather data and assess the barriers to access. Release Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework.
- **Enhancing data and reporting**
 - Evaluate and improve the ways in which the child care system supports children and families. Use enhanced data collection and analytics capabilities to report on progress toward meeting federal requirements

Source: [Ministry of Education, 2025](#)

New CWELCC spaces

Ontario is creating affordable child care spaces where they are needed most by prioritizing new CWELCC spaces in areas where there is low child care space availability, and in rural communities, Indigenous and Francophone communities and underserved populations, including children with special needs, children in low-income families, vulnerable children and children from diverse communities.

Source: [Ministry of Education, 2025](#)



The Early Years in Simcoe County

The Current Context

The demand for care is expected to increase as CWELCC continues to make child care more affordable for families. The County of Simcoe is increasing access to licensed early learning and child care in prioritized neighbourhoods by supporting the creation of 4,995 new spaces for children younger than 6 years by the end of 2026. New spaces are being created progressively each year. The County of Simcoe is committed to supporting the principles of Ontario's access and inclusion framework and stabilization of the existing service system as our directed growth plan is operationalized. Specific neighbourhoods in Simcoe County have been identified as initial priority areas for directed growth, through analyses of socio-economic and demographic indicators.

Source: [County of Simcoe, 2024](#)

Simcoe County's Early Learning and Child Care Growth Strategy Goals

- **Create more licensed child care spaces for children**
 - Total of 4,995 new spaces for children 0-5 years of age by 2026
 - Promote equity and equality for our children
- **Increase affordability for families**
 - Reduce parent fees to \$10/day on average for children 0-5 years of age by 2025-2026
- **Enhance quality and stability for licensed child care operators**
 - Support high-quality early learning and child care environments
- **Build up the early learning and licensed child care workforce**
 - Enhance wages
 - Provide professional development opportunities
 - Support recruitment and retention of high quality Educators
- **Build knowledge in our community**
 - Promote rewarding career opportunities in Early Childhood Education
 - Educate the public on the positive long-term impacts of positive early years experiences
 - Evidence-based service planning

Source: [County of Simcoe, 2023](#)



Readiness to Learn

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) measures children's ability to meet age-appropriate developmental expectations at school entry. A number of studies have shown that early vulnerability is associated with a child's lifelong health, learning, and behaviour. Other research has shown that Kindergarten vulnerability predicts ongoing vulnerability in the school system.

Source: [ELCCSM Data Dashboard](#)

The Simcoe County EDI Summary Report showed that the rates of children in Simcoe County vulnerable in EDI domains are similar to provincial rates, with just more than 3 out of 10 children being vulnerable in one or more domains in Simcoe County and Ontario.



Early Learning and Child Care Services in Simcoe County

The Service System Manager (SSM) for the County of Simcoe and separated Cities of Barrie and Orillia plays a central role in the planning, funding, administration and operation of early years and licensed child care services in Ontario. The SSM is responsible for licensed child care, the child care fee subsidy program, before and after school programs, EarlyON/ON y va Child and Family Centres, Indigenous-Led Child and Family programs, special needs services, providing information to parents/caregivers, and supporting the early learning and child care workforce.

Early Learning and Licensed Child Care

Simcoe County is committed to planning and administering a system of affordable access to quality child care services that enhance opportunities for early childhood development. Licensed child care is offered in centres and homes. Extended before and after school programs are also available.

Child Care Sites and Licensed Home Agencies

	April 2025
Total Child Care Sites, Licensed Home Agencies, School Age Sites and Indigenous Sites	226
Child Care and Home Child Care – CWELCC Enrolled	192
Child Care and Home Child Care – CWELCC Not Enrolled	34
Total # of Licensed Home Agencies	14
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total In Simcoe • Total Out of Area 	6 8

Auspice Ratio – Child Care and Home Child Care

	April 2025
Licensed Child Care Centres	212
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-profit • Profit / Commercial 	147 65
Licensed Home Agencies	14
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-profit • Profit / Commercial 	4 10

Francophone Centres and Indigenous Sites

	April 2025
Total Francophone Centres	8
Total Indigenous Sites	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Off Reserve 	1

Recreational Programs

	April 2025
Total Recreational Programs	10

Source: [Ministry of Education - Child Care Licensing System](#) and [Ontario Child Care Management System \(OCCMS\)](#)



Choosing Quality Licensed Child Care

Simcoe County provides an interactive map showing child care sites and an Early Learning and Child Care data dashboard with information about child care and early years programs.

Source: [Interactive Map - County of Simcoe](#)

The Ministry of Education Licensed Child Care Page allows families to search by type of program (centre or home), age group, and language of service (English, French or other).

Source: [Ministry of Education - Search for licensed child care](#)

EarlyON Child and Family Centres / centres ON y va

EarlyON Child and Family Centres / centres ON y va offer free, drop-in programs for children up to six years old and their parents/ caregivers. Qualified professionals provide support, advice, and helpful resources. At EarlyON Child and Family centres / centres ON y va families engage and connect with others in the community and feel a sense of belonging. Supported by staff, children and their parents/caregivers learn, play, make friends and engage with others.

EarlyON / ON y va Sites and Programs

	April 2025
Total Number of EarlyON / ON y va Main Sites	8
Total Number of EarlyON / ON y va Satellite Sites	24
Total Number of EarlyON Indigenous Sites	1
Total ON y va Francophone Sites	6

Child Care Fee Subsidy Program

Financial assistance is available to support eligible families with the cost of early learning and child care and/or authorized recreation programs in Simcoe County. Eligibility is based on a standard assessment based on income. In 2024 subsidies were provided for 4,225 children and 3,730 families.

Services Available for Children with Special Needs

Resource Consultation and Inclusion Support Services are available to support children with special needs in early learning and child care programs in Simcoe County. These services are delivered by community agencies throughout the service areas in Simcoe County.

Special Needs Resource Agencies

	April 2025
Special Needs Resource Agencies	3





Before and After School Programs

Before and after school programs provide a seamless day with fewer transitions for children and families. The programs also provide children with more opportunities to learn and grow. These programs are operated in schools and community-based programs by a qualified licensee.

Workforce

One of six recommendations of a national report in 2021 was to ensure an adequate supply of quality ECEs. There was a recognition that providing competitive wages would ensure that educators have the skill sets and experience to provide high quality care and learning opportunities for children [Source: Deloitte, 2021]. It is recognized that there are many positions, in addition to ECEs, in the early learning and child care workforce. Competitive wages for all positions in the workforce would benefit the early learning and child care system.

Placement Opportunities

Most staff responding to a workforce survey (N=171) in Simcoe County (2023) reported that their programs support ECE placement students (87%) and high school co-op placement students (68%). Staff were also asked about their number of years in service. Most (68%) of people responding to the survey responded that they had five or fewer years in service.

Source: Workforce Survey, 2023

Retention

Slightly over half of staff (51%) responding to a workforce belonging study (N=77) in Simcoe County (2023) reported that they were not considering leaving their current place of employment. Some (44%) shared that they were open to a new opportunity but are not currently looking.

Source: Workforce Belonging Study 2023

Professional Learning Opportunities

Professional development and capacity building opportunities are made available for early learning and child care program staff. The number of staff who participated in workforce professional learning in Simcoe County in 2024 include:

- 1,063 child care program staff and supervisors, home child care providers and home visitors from 51 licensees and licensed home child cares.
- 48 EarlyON program staff and supervisors from 4 EarlyON providers
- 454 individuals were supported through mentorship programs

Source: Simcoe County professional learning funding data, 2024

Early Learning and Child Care Agency Support

The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system

This program is administered by Simcoe County. In Simcoe County, 194 licensed operators have opted into the program.

Beginning in 2025, the Ministry of Education moved to “cost-based funding”. Operators enrolled with CWELCC are funded based on provincial benchmarks and eligible costs incurred in the calendar year, up to a maximum amount of funding. They are also funded for an amount in lieu of profit/surplus (business operation risks or to reinvest in child care), offset by money received for base fees.

As part of the new child care funding approach, starting 2025, local priorities allocations to support CWELCC-enrolled child care programs are as follows:

For children 0 to 12 years of age:

- Professional learning
- Fee subsidies
- Special needs resourcing
- Capacity building

For children 6 to 12 years of age:

- General Operating Expense
- Wage Enhancement Grant (WEG)/Home Child Care Enhancement Grant (HCCEG) and Workforce Compensation

Indigenous-led Child Care and Child and Family Programs

The County of Simcoe partners with Indigenous-led agencies to enhance access to child care and child and family programs in both urban and rural areas. These initiatives support Indigenous communities in identifying and addressing their child care and early years needs, while providing direct support to children and families.

The Wage Enhancement Grant and Home Child Care Enhancement Grant

These funding programs are provided by the provincial government to support wage enhancement for eligible child care professionals working in licensed child care settings. The Wage Enhancement Grant (WEG) and Home Child Care Enhancement Grant (HCCEG) are intended to help retain Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs). This will increase equitable, affordable access to quality early learning and child care services for children and families. The wage enhancement is also intended to close the wage gap between RECEs, other child care program staff working in licensed child care settings and higher paid RECEs working in full-day kindergarten programs. The WEG supports an increase of up to \$2 per hour, plus 17.5% benefits for licensed program staff and home visitors. For home child care providers contracted with a licensed home child care agency, the HCCEG supports an increase of up to \$20 per day.



General Operating Expense

General Operating Expense funding is used to support eligible costs associated with operating a licensed child care program in order to reduce wait times and fees for services, stabilize service levels, and improve access to high quality affordable early learning and child care services. In Simcoe County, 90% of the General Operating Expense allocated must be used to support an increase in salary to individuals working in a licensed child care program. The remaining 10% can be applied to business transformation, and for repairs and maintenance.

Purchase of Service - Fee Subsidy

A Purchase of Service Agreement is a legal agreement between the County of Simcoe and a CWELCC-enrolled licensee or authorized recreation program, which allows the licensee to provide child care for children from birth to twelve years of age, in receipt of child care fee subsidy.

Child Care Inclusion Support Funding

The funding allows licensees to hire Inclusion Support Facilitators to support the inclusion of children with exceptional and significant needs that are attending Licensed Child Care and School Age Programs. Inclusion Support Funding is delivered through CLH Developmental Support Services.

Supporting Relationships for Learning (SRL)

Simcoe County supports child care and EarlyON/ON y va agencies through Supporting Relationships for Learning (SRL). A team of pedagogical companions actively engages with early years educators in a continuous learning process. The principles of SRL are founded in collaboration, participation and possibilities. SRL supports programs by working side-by-side with educators to enhance each program's unique and inspired approach. This involves:

- Building relationships with educators through reflective dialogue.
- Engaging with educators to discover their perspectives about learning and how they align their role with it.
- Discussing perspectives about possible ways to implement ideas that enhance the program.
- Observing practices and experiences in the program.
- Documenting observations and dialogues.
- Discussing documented observations and dialogues from previous visits.
- Developing and maintaining an emergent commitment plan annually.

French Language Services

The French Language Service Plan (FLSP) plays an important role in supporting the Early Learning and Childcare System Management (ELCCSM) department to provide quality services in French to children, families, and community partners within Simcoe County. Simcoe County has three (3) designated French Language communities (Tiny and Essa Townships and Town of Penetanguishene). FLSP supports mutual respect and recognition of both official languages in accordance with the [French Language Services Act](#), which guarantees access to services in French in head offices and government agencies located in or serving designated areas of the province. The County of Simcoe's ELCCSM department, in collaboration with partners, strives to offer equal access to all services in both official languages.

Professional Development and Capacity Building

Funding is provided to support professional learning and development opportunities that builds the capacity of the licensee, supervisor, program staff/caregivers, home visitors, home child care providers and non-profit volunteer board members to support the provision of high-quality programs for children.

The County of Simcoe, in consultation with the early years learning committee, offers a range of workshops, sessions and consultations that are open to educators working, either directly or indirectly, with licensed child care in Simcoe County. Professional development release and overtime funding is intended to support increased access to a range of professional learning and development opportunities.

Collaborative Community Planning

The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system

The **Best Start Network** (BSN) of Simcoe County is a strategic planning table for Early Years services and programs. BSN action networks are the Early Years Learning Committee, the Simcoe County Child Care Committee, the Infant and Early Mental Health Committee, and the Early Intervention Council. The Network is unified in their overarching commitment that all infants and young children in Simcoe County thrive. The priority indicators the Network will be working towards are that all infants and young children in Simcoe County:

- are healthy
- are safe
- are secure
- are learning
- belong

The **Simcoe County Child Care Committee** (SCCCC) is a committee for professional networking and learning. The committee shares responsibility for enhancing quality child care and supporting early learning professionals. Members promote advocacy and awareness of the importance of early learning and development.



Engagement to Inform the 2025-2029 Service Plan

Development of the plan was informed through engagement with parents and caregivers, child care operators, and community partners. Consultations through focus groups and surveys guided a shared understanding of system needs, assets, barriers, gaps and solutions. Insights from these consultations supported innovative thinking to explore new ways to respond to the changing requirements of children and families in local communities. In addition, a scan of local data provided information about community demographics, readiness to learn, and past survey results.

The Plan was developed and supported through consultations with, and feedback from, the following partners:

- Parents/caregivers who had been involved with child care centres, home-based child care, EarlyON Child and Family Centres, before and after school programs, and special needs resourcing.
- Child care/early learning Program Operators and direct service providers
- Community partners, including Best Start Network Partners, Indigenous partners, and workforce administration/support.

Two focus groups were held for parents and caregivers accessing programs and services, with a total of 14 participants. Among these participants that were involved with child care (centre or home-based), EarlyON Child and Family Centres, before and after school programs and special needs resourcing.

After excluding ineligible responses, 185 parents/caregivers responded to the survey.

Best Start Network Partners: Two focus groups were held, with a total of 14 participants.

Child care/Early Learning Program Operators: One focus group was held, with 8 participants. One participant was from a Francophone agency.

Indigenous Partners: One focus group was held, with 8 participants. Among these participants often interact with Indigenous-led programs, licenced child care centres, before and after school programs, EarlyON Child and Family Centres, child care fee subsidy, and special needs resourcing.

After excluding ineligible responses, 62 community partners responded to the survey.

Key highlights from the consultation findings can be found in **Appendix A**.

Partners from Indigenous organizations who were consulted were asked how they would like to be acknowledged. The following people provided input that informed the creation of this Service Plan:

- Angelia Brooks, R.ECE. RT, Indigenous Coordinator at EarlyON Child and Family Centres in Simcoe County, Empower Simcoe
- April Dumont-Moreau, RECE, Indigenous Child & Family Services Team Lead
- Corrie LePage, RECE, Biinoojinsauk School Readiness Coordinator
- Kylie Sauve, Biinoojinsauk Child Care Centre Lead
- Lorna Lawson, BSR Coordinators (Biinoojinsauk School Readiness)
- Natalie Poirier Biinoojii Biidabin Coordinator for the Maapii Enji Zaagi Gzwaad
- Jalna Crotty, RECE, Resource Consultant

2025-2029 Early Learning and Child Care Priorities in Simcoe County

Recommended Areas of Focus

Leaders working in the County of Simcoe's Early Learning and Child Care System Management and Policy Development departments participated in facilitated discussions around proposed priority areas and short-, mid-, and long-term strategic actions. These priority areas and actions were derived from the main themes emerging from consultation findings and local data scan.

A smaller subset of this group was assembled to develop key performance indicators (KPIs) that align with the strategic actions.

The following sections detail each priority area, including the overarching goal, areas of alignment with [*Simcoe County's Early Learning and Child Care \(ELCC\) Growth Strategy*](#), associated actions and KPIs.



Inclusive and Accessible Early Learning and Child Care Experiences

The County of Simcoe is committed to planning, funding, and administering an early learning and child care system that is inclusive, affordable, accessible and high-quality for children and families in Simcoe County.

Areas of alignment with the Simcoe County ELCC Growth Strategy

- ✓ 1. Creating More Licensed Child Care Spaces for Children
- ✓ 2. Increasing Affordability for Families
- ✓ 3. Enhancing Quality and Stability for Licensed Child Care Operators
- 4. Building Up the Early Learning and Licensed Child Care Workforce
- ✓ 5. Building Knowledge in our Community

Actions	Key Performance Indicators
Enhance access points for families to helpful information about the early learning and child care system	# of inquiries received through Service Simcoe for information available on the website # new iterations made to improve data dashboard % of people who indicate the website is providing them with the information they need
Seek creative ways to build awareness about the widespread benefits of quality early years experiences	# of council reports about early learning and child care # of county-driven awareness building campaigns # of new partnerships created to build awareness through campaigns
Support the development of culturally appropriate early childhood education programs	# of joint initiatives implemented with Indigenous peoples # of system-level decisions made jointly with Indigenous partners that will affect Indigenous programming # and % of ELCC programs participating in the Workplace Inclusion Charter
Enhance conditions of equitable access for children with special needs	# and % of programs supported through a statement of relationship % of inclusion support funding applications that are partially funded # of programs practicing zero-refusal enrollment of children with special needs # and % of programs conducting early screening
Apply a data-driven lens to the Canada-wide early learning and child care (CWELCC) directed growth strategy	Access ratios for CWELCC program at the county level Access ratios in underserved communities and populations # of barrier-reducing initiatives enacted in the system to improve access
Support identification and enactment of pedagogical values, in alignment with Ontario's pedagogy for the early years	# of Supporting Relationships for Learning commitments active in system % of Supporting Relationships for Learning commitments achieved in system

Thriving and Sustainable Early Learning and Child Care Workforce

The County of Simcoe will lead innovative approaches to foster positive working conditions for an adaptable, resilient and diverse early learning and child care workforce.

Areas of alignment with the Simcoe County ELCC Growth Strategy

1. Creating More Licensed Child Care Spaces for Children
2. Increasing Affordability for Families
- ✓ 3. Enhancing Quality and Stability for Licensed Child Care Operators
- ✓ 4. Building Up the Early Learning and Licensed Child Care Workforce
- ✓ 5. Building Knowledge in our Community

Actions	Key Performance Indicators
Broker mentorship opportunities for early learning and child care professionals to promote recruitment and retention in early learning and child care workforce	# of new ELCC professionals (less than 5 years) participating in mentorship initiatives as mentees # of ELCC professionals (greater than 5 years) participating in mentorship initiatives as mentors % of mentees reporting an increase in competencies after participating in mentorship initiatives
Find innovative ways to collaborate with early learning and child care partners to strengthen connections with students and support pathways to local vocation	# of high school co-op and college students in placements within Simcoe County % of ELCC operators hosting a student placement within Simcoe County # of Georgian College students who are working in the early learning and child care vocation within 6 months of graduation from the ECE program
Prioritize professional development opportunities for early learning and child care professionals that are aligned with areas of need and build collective capacity	# of opportunities offered for professional development in each category of the Ministry of Education guidelines # and % of unique attendees who participated in PD of the total system
Lead initiatives that improve working conditions in ELCC system	# and % of ELCC programs who provide extended health benefits for employees # and % of programs who provide paid sick time for employees # and % of programs who offer pension plans in any form to employees # and % RECEs working in the system

Cohesive Community Planning and Strategic Action

The County of Simcoe will lead with transparency and innovation by building partnerships that collectively improve outcomes for children and families, the sector, and the ELCC workforce.

Areas of alignment with the Simcoe County ELCC Growth Strategy

- ✓ 1. Creating More Licensed Child Care Spaces for Children
- ✓ 2. Increasing Affordability for Families
- ✓ 3. Enhancing Quality and Stability for Licensed Child Care Operators
- ✓ 4. Building Up the Early Learning and Licensed Child Care Workforce
- ✓ 5. Building Knowledge in our Community

Actions	Key Performance Indicators
Lead community planning tables toward unified strategic priorities	% of community planning tables with aligned priorities # of collaborative initiatives across two or more partners
Optimize operational efficiencies in ELCC service system management	# of Service System Manager processes that have been streamlined / integrated
Seek innovative ways to engage diverse perspectives in collaborative system planning	# of parent/guardian advisory groups formed to support planning tables # of incentives offered for equity-deserving populations # of system planning practices that involve the voices of children

Ongoing Community Engagement

The County of Simcoe is committed to working with program operators, community partners, and parents/caregivers throughout the implementation of this Service Plan to ensure that the Simcoe County early learning and child care system is jointly planned and responsive in our evolving landscape.



References and Resources

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Appendix A: Highlights of consultation findings

Focus group and survey questions asked about early learning and child care system needs, assets, barriers, gaps and solutions. The tables and charts below show summaries of the responses. These responses guided decisions about priority areas and actions.

Two focus groups were held for parents and caregivers accessing programs and services, with a total of 14 participants. Among these:

- **13 participants** were involved with child care (centre or home-based).
- **7 participants** were involved with EarlyON Child and Family Centres.
- **1 participant** was involved with before and after school programs.
- **1 participant** was involved with special needs resourcing.
- **None of the parent participants** were involved with Indigenous-led programs.

After excluding ineligible responses 185 parents/caregivers responded to the survey.

Best Start Network Partners: Two focus groups were held, with a total of 14 participants.

Child care/Early Learning Program Operators: One focus group was held, with 8 participants.

Indigenous Partners: One focus group was held, with 8 participants. Among these:

- **6 participants** often interact with Indigenous-led programs.
- **4 participants** often interact with licenced child care centres.
- **Licensed child care quality**, before and after school programs, EarlyON Child and Family Centres, child care fee subsidy, and special needs resourcing were each represented by at least 1 participant.

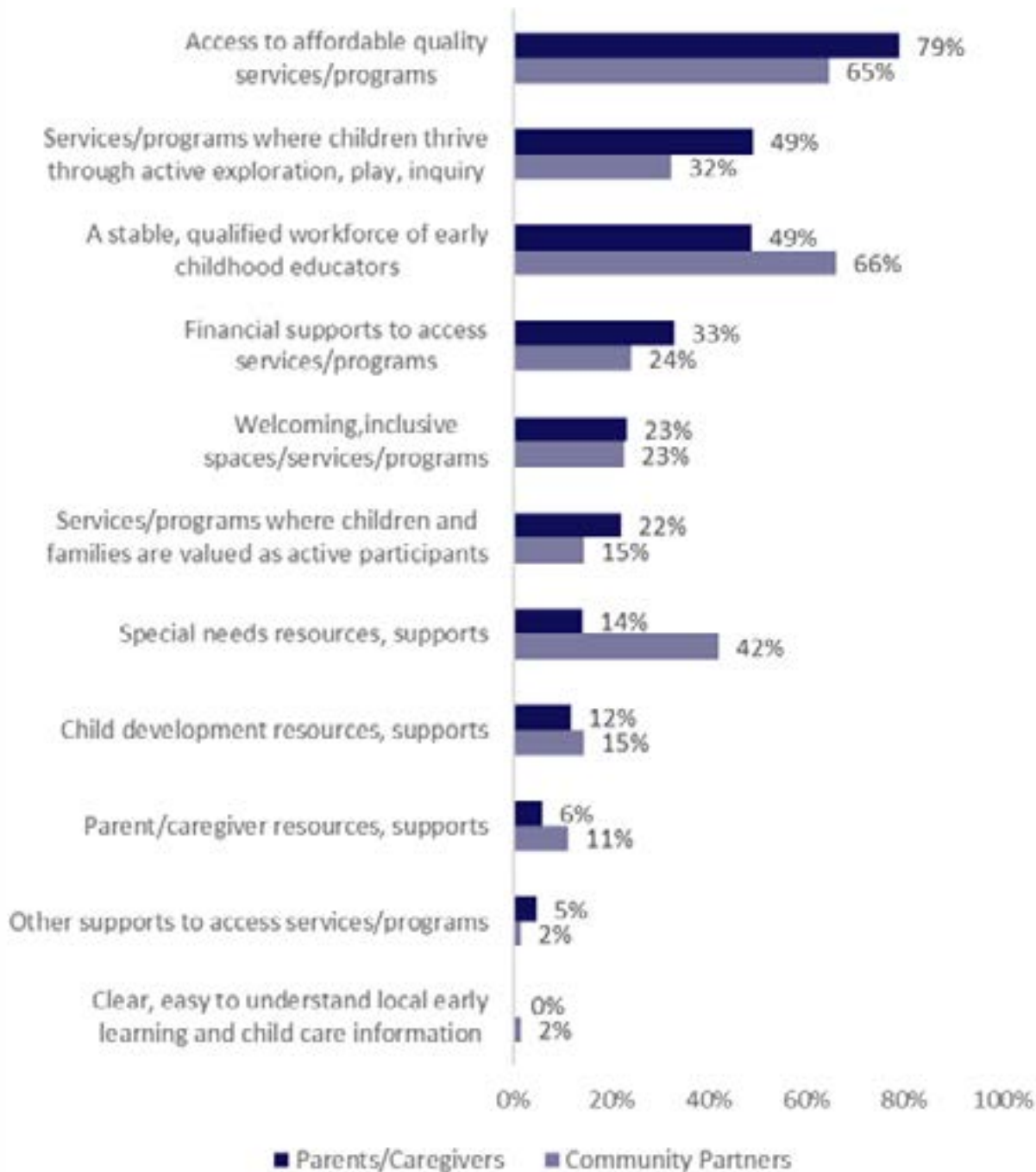
After excluding ineligible responses 62 community partners responded to the survey.

Needs

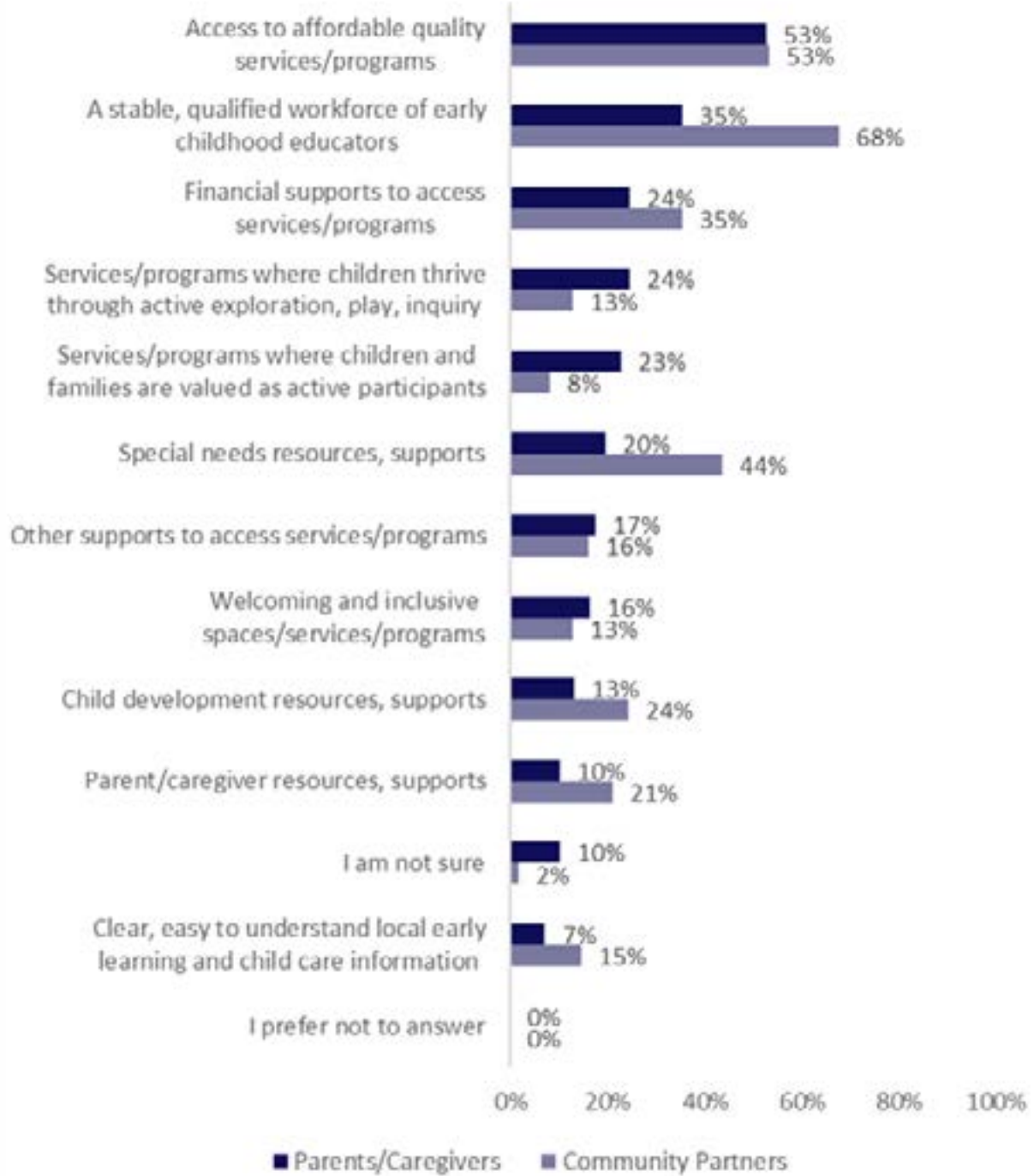
It is notable that identified needs were also identified as unmet needs.

Survey questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on the current early learning and child care system, what do you think are the top 3 things children and families in Simcoe County need? • Based on the current early learning and child care system, which needs do you feel are not being met for children and families in Simcoe County? 		
	Needs	Unmet Needs
Parents/ caregivers	Access to affordable services/programs	Access to affordable services/programs
	Early years services/programs where children thrive through active exploration, play and inquiry	A stable, qualified workforce of early childhood educators.
	A stable, qualified workforce of early childhood educators	Early years services/programs where children thrive through active exploration, play and inquiry, and Financial supports to access services/ programs
Community partners	A stable, qualified workforce of early childhood educators	A stable, qualified workforce of early childhood educators
	Access to affordable quality services/programs	Access to affordable quality services/programs
	Special needs resources, supports	Special needs resources, supports.

Top 3 Needs



Top 3 Unmet Needs



Parent/Caregiver n=199
Partners n=66

Note: For the following questions Parents/Caregivers, Direct Service Providers, Workforce Support, and Collaborative Community Planners were asked to respond to different lists according to their areas of focus and expertise.

Assets

Assets are things currently in place that help all children and families have equitable, affordable access to quality early learning and child care services in Simcoe County.

<p>Focus group questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/Caregivers: Based on your experiences, what works well in early learning and child care programs and services in Simcoe County? • Community Partners: What currently works well to support equitable, affordable access to quality early learning and child care services in Simcoe County? 	
<p>Focus Group Themes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration, Partnerships and Connectedness • Communication and Information Sharing • Facilities and Programs • Access and Availability • Commitment to Quality
<p>Survey question: Please choose the top three things that help all children and families have equitable, affordable access to quality early learning and child care services in Simcoe County.</p>	
<p>Parents/Caregivers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualified educators • Accessible programs/services (timely availability) • Affordable programs/services
<p>Direct Service Providers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualified educators • Accessible special needs resourcing support for children • Multiple agencies working together to support a family
<p>Workforce Support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A well-compensated workforce • Professional development • Collaboration with ECE college programs
<p>Collaborative Community Planners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged, unified community partners • Program/service information sharing • Shared pool of data to inform policy, planning • Information/resources about best, promising practices • A motivated leadership team

Note: One of the ‘top 3’ lists has more than three choices because there were selections with an equal number of responses.

Barriers

Barriers are things that make it hard for all children and families to have equitable, affordable access to quality early learning and child care services in Simcoe County.

<p>Focus group questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/Caregivers: Based on your experiences, what does not work well in early learning and child care programs and services in Simcoe? • Community Partners: What are the current barriers to equitable, affordable access to quality early learning and child care service in Simcoe County? 	
<p>Focus Group Themes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long waitlists and limited choice • Staffing issues (recruitment, retention, wages) • Lack of information • Transportation • Variations in quality of care
<p>Survey question: Please choose the top three things that make it hard for all children and families to have equitable, affordable access to quality early learning and child care services in Simcoe County.</p>	
<p>Parents/Caregivers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lengthy waitlists • Limited program/service space availability • Complicated, inconsistent waitlist processes
<p>Direct Service Providers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lengthy waitlists • Educator burnout • Limited program/service space availability
<p>Workforce Support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low compensation • Low value image of the early years workforce
<p>Collaborative Community Planners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency mandates that are not aligned • Competing priorities • Lack of unity among partners • Lack of engagement among partners

Note: One of the 'top 3' lists has more than three choices because there were selections with an equal number of responses.

Gaps

Gaps are early learning and child care programs, services, or processes that are either missing or don't have enough resources in Simcoe County to support all children and families to have equitable, affordable access to quality services.

Focus group questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/Caregivers: What is missing from local early learning and child care programs and services? • Community Partners: What is missing to create equitable, affordable access to quality early learning and child care services for all children and families in Simcoe County? 	
Focus Group Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before/after school and summer care options • Continuity and transition support between daycare and before and after school care • Inclusive and culturally safe child care
Survey question: Please choose the top three gaps for all children and families to have equitable, affordable access to quality early learning and child care services in Simcoe County.	
Parents/Caregivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable licenced child care spaces • System funding • Equitable access to programs/services
Direct Service Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable licenced child care spaces • Child development services, supports • System funding
Workforce Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viable ECE diploma program options • Access to professional development opportunities • Information/resources about best, promising practices
Collaborative Community Planners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family experience voices in community planning • Lack of sufficient dedicated funding • Common approach to measure, monitor trends



Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Gaps

<p>Survey question: Please choose the top three gaps for equity-deserving (e.g., Francophone, 2S-LGBTQIA+, racialized, recent immigrants) and Indigenous children and families to have equitable, affordable access to quality early learning and child care services in Simcoe County.</p>	
<p>Parents/Caregivers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A plan for all families to have access to programs/services that help their children reach their potential • Culturally safe programs/services (e.g., feeling respected, heard) • Trauma and violence informed programs/services
<p>Direct Service Providers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equitable access for children with special needs • A plan for all families to have access to programs/services that help their children reach their full potential • Culturally safe programs/services
<p>Workforce Support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well compensated workforce • Professional development
<p>Collaborative Community Planners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enough representatives from equity deserving and Indigenous focused agencies available to meaningfully engage in multiple planning tables • Lived experience voices engaged in community planning

Note: Two of the ‘top 3’ lists have fewer than three choices because there were selections with an equal number of responses.



Solutions

<p>Focus group question: Thinking about the barriers and gaps we talked about and what you thought early learning and childcare services should look like, what could be done to better serve children and their families?</p>	
<p>Focus Group Themes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability and access • Workforce enhancement • Community planning support • Communication and engagement
<p>Survey question: Please choose the top three solutions you think would help all children and families to have equitable, affordable access to quality early learning and child care services in Simcoe County.</p>	
<p>Parents/Caregivers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase availability and access to licensed quality child care • Centralized information about where spaces are available in the County of Simcoe • Increase availability and access to special needs resource services in early years programs • Increase access to inclusive spaces for children and families
<p>Survey question: What solutions should be prioritized for all children and families to have equitable, affordable access to quality early learning and child care services in Simcoe County?</p>	
<p>Direct Service Providers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase availability of spaces/programs for Indigenous children and families • Increase availability and access to licenced quality child care • Increase availability and access to special needs resource services in early years programs
<p>Workforce Support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridge ECE diploma program students with local vocational opportunities (create workforce pipeline) • Increase diversity in the workforce • Increase workforce access to benefits (paid time off, extended health) • Increase societal perception of the value of the early years workforce
<p>Collaborative Community Planners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase backbone support for community planning groups • Set unified long-term results at community level • Increase cohesion with broader community infrastructure (Coalition)

Note: One of the 'top 3' lists has more than three choices because there were selections with an equal number of responses.



Social and
Community Services