

Section Five: Conclusion

Looking to the Future: What Does Science Say?

The evidence is clear. Research tells us that the building blocks of the brain are created during the very first years of a child's life. Scientific research tells us that the years before six are the most influential to a child's development as they set the stage for their lifelong learning, behaviour and health. *The Early Years Study 2: Putting Science into Action** - confirms clearer links between early child development and its impact on the growing brains of young children, increasing evidence that experience-based brain development in the early years of life sets neurological and biological pathways that affect lifelong health, learning, and behaviour.

Ideally, by age six, children have a solid foundation for reaching their full potential in the years ahead. As a society, we cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults, nor can we wait until they reach school age. In Peel, the population of children is rising. Over the next five years, Peel anticipates a 7.9% increase in children ages 0-6 years and a similar increase in the 7-12 year old population. Therefore, the provision of ample developmentally-appropriate services to meet growing demand is vital.

Setting Directions

Numerous studies have proven that good early learning and care programs can reduce inequities among children, and economists have demonstrated that public spending in early childhood provides far greater return on investment than interventions later in life. As a result, establishing a strong foundation in the early years, and building on it, is essential to Peel's social and economic future. This plan has been designed to help build that foundation.

As the Service System Manager for early learning and child care in Peel, Regional staff are working closely with community partners including school boards, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association, service providers, Success By 6 Peel and the Peel Best Start Network to develop a transition plan to stabilize early learning and child care services for children. The success of this transition is contingent upon sufficient resources and tools to support new funding models, address service levels, ensure high quality of services and establish an integrated service system that is seamless and accessible to families and their children aged 0 to 12 years.

Regional staff will continue to advocate in support of service providers as they experience the largest transformation of early learning in the history of the province to ensure that the system remains stable and sustainable as it re-engineers its services. The transformation of the child care system into a cohesive and resilient 0-3.8 sub system requires adequate base funding and transitional resources. Regional staff are committed to working with the broader community to develop and implement a new

* McCain, N., Mustard, J.F., and S. Shanker. (2007) *The Early Years Study 2: Putting Science into Action*.

model of the child and family service system that meets the needs of Peel families while strengthening the current system of early learning and child care.

Peel's vision is clear: together, the early learning community envisions a future where partners will be able to:

- Provide a multidisciplinary, collaborative environment that is well-planned and resourced;
- Offer improved co-ordinated, seamless and integrated services and supports that meet the diverse needs of families;
- Maximize the strengths of each service without duplication;
- Act on our collective responsibility to support the development of our youngest citizens, regardless of the system from which the community partners come; and
- Focus on the outcomes for children and families rather than inputs.

Peel's early learning and child care community fully supports quality-focused early learning services which prepare children to succeed and promote school readiness. United, Peel service providers are committed to support programs which strengthen and build supportive caring environments that contribute to the positive future of children, families and the community. Through this plan, Peel's partners will continue to collaborate on innovative early learning community initiatives which result in enhanced service provision to families in Peel.