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DATE: March 5, 2012

REPORT TITLE: **BEST START RESERVES (R1258) LEARNING IN OUR  
NEIGHBOURHOODS PROGRAM REQUEST**

FROM: Janet Menard, Commissioner of Human Services

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

**That a one-time withdrawal of \$270,000 from Best Start Reserves (R1258), to fund the Learning In Our Neighbourhoods (LION) program from July 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012, be approved;**

**And further, that the Region of Peel continue to provide ongoing in-kind maintenance and fuel contribution for the LION program until December 31, 2012.**

### **REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- Since 2008, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) has provided funding to implement the LION program in order to meet the needs of high immigrant, low service areas in Peel.
- In December 2011, CIC announced they would no longer fund the LION program as of March 31, 2012.
- Staff submitted a request to extend funding from CIC and as a result, on February 3, 2012, CIC announced they would provide a maximum of \$129,231 to sustain the program from April 1, 2012 to June 30, 2012.
- Staff recommends a one-time withdrawal of \$270,000 from the Best Start Reserve (R1258) in order to fund the continuation of the program from July 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012, to allow for the development of an alternate plan to fund and deliver the service or failing that, plan for the organized phase out.
- Best Start Reserve (R1258) funding is to be used to fund the child care components of Best Start.

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **1. Background**

In February 2008, the Commissioner of Human Services submitted a report entitled "Learning in Our Neighbourhood Strategy - Mobile Early Learning Hubs". The report recommended that the Region of Peel enter into a partnership with Success By 6 Peel and the Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) to provide mobile early learning programs.

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The Region of Peel created early learning mobile centres, called Learning in our Neighbourhoods (LION), by retrofitting recreational vehicles. This was based on a mobile early learning model from Edmonton, Alberta (Classrooms on Wheels - COWS), where old transit buses had been retrofitted to provide early learning space and driven to high growth areas where services were not available. This model seemed to fit the situation in Peel where high growth areas exist and where infrastructure and services could not keep pace. The LION parks at such locations for a full day with different groups scheduled in the morning and afternoon, serving the needs of children and parents/caregivers.

A variety of programs, such as Come Learn with Me and Baby and Me and literacy programs, are offered for parents and caregivers with children up to 18 months and other programs are offered for children up to six years of age. Each vehicle operates with a program staff, driver, and outreach worker. The LION Program operates Monday to Friday, offering two programs in the morning and one in the afternoon, totalling approximately five hours of program time. The remaining hours of the day include pick up and drop off of each vehicle, travel time to sites, and refueling.

### **a) Partners**

LION is the outcome of a very collaborative partnership which includes the boards of education, Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC), libraries, and the Region of Peel. This model of cooperative problem-solving was developed in response to the need for services for families with young children in high growth, high immigration, low service areas of Peel.

The Region of Peel oversees the program and purchases, houses and maintains the RV's which are leased to the Ontario Early Years Centres through a legal agreement. The partners include:

- Peel District School Board (PDSB) and Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB)
  - Provides parking, hydro, and classroom space
- Malton Neighbourhood Services (MNS); Child Development Resource Connection Peel (CDRCP); Mississauga Parent Child Resource Centres (MPCRC)
  - Staff drive the RV's, plan and implement the LION program to the community
- Brampton and Mississauga Library System
  - Provides a library service to the children's program

### **b) Outcomes**

The Learning In Our Neighbourhoods Information database (LIONIS) is an application designed to capture client registration, referral and service information, program and participant tracking for the Learning in our Neighbourhood (LION) program.

The following chart outlines the number of LION program participants from January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2011.

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<b>LION User Statistics – # of Participants January 1 to December 31, 2011</b>		
<b>Organization</b>	<b># of unique participants</b>	<b># of times participants participated at the centre</b>
<b>MNS</b>	742	8,960
<b>CDRCP</b>	843	6,824
<b>MPCRC</b>	689	4,566
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2,274</b>	<b>13,526</b>

*\* Unique participant = participant recorded once, no duplication*

Approximately 138 families participated in an evaluation of the LION program from October to December 2011. Parents reported several benefits from attending the program, including an increased awareness of:

- Age appropriate activities for their child
- Behaviour management strategies
- Activities to engage their child in at home
- What to expect from their child at different ages, and
- An overall understanding of their child

The LION program has also been a gateway to many other services in the community. Several clients accessing services from the LION program have been referred to other community resources. In 2011, over 500 referrals were made to another Ontario Early Years Centre; over 600 referrals to other parenting services; over 450 referrals to children's health care; and several other community programs and services.

**c) Funding**

In February 2008, Regional Council approved the purchase of two recreational vehicles and retrofitted them to meet the needs of the LION program. In September 2008, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) provided funding to purchase and retrofit a third vehicle to serve the areas with high immigrant populations in Mississauga. CIC committed to providing funds for the program provision of all three vehicles. For the year 2011 – 2012, CIC committed approximately \$800,000 to the LION operating budget. Currently, there are a total of 16 designated LION sites, including 14 schools and 2 other community sites. Please see Appendix I for a list of LION sites.

**2. Current Situation**

Since 2008, CIC has provided funding for the provision of the LION program. On November 25, 2011, the Government of Canada announced revised allocations for federally funded settlement services in all Provinces and Territories outside Quebec for the 2012 – 2013 fiscal year that resulted in a decrease in Ontario funding. With that, CIC informed the Region of Peel that as of March 31, 2012, they would no longer be funding the LION program.

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The LION Steering Committee and staff are currently looking for new ways to deliver LION services. Recently, staff submitted a proposal to Citizenship and Immigration Canada regarding the temporary extension of funding for the LION program, which included the elimination of the three outreach staff positions. The program will work with the library and school board Settlement Workers to expand partnerships with other agencies providing newcomer services and build relationships with community members. This is particularly critical for newcomers who have limited knowledge of the Canadian social service system and can benefit from contacts that will assist their assimilation into Canadian society.

On February 3, 2012, CIC advised the Region of Peel that they would continue to fund the LION project, with the proposed changes, from April 1, 2012 to June 30, 2012, with a maximum contribution of \$129,231. CIC has not committed to any further funding after June 30, 2012.

### **a) Risk**

The LION strategy focuses on extending early learning and opportunities to children and parents that might otherwise have had difficulty accessing them due to the considerable lack of community infrastructure and supports available in their neighbourhoods. In 2011, over 2,200 participants utilized the LION program over 13,500 times. Lack of funding for this much needed program would impact both the agencies and families in the community and further isolate newcomer communities that the LION program is intended to support.

### **3. Strategy**

As stated above, strategies have been put in place to reduce the operating costs for the LION program. CIC has committed to extend their funding, based on these reductions, until June 30, 2012. However, in order to continue to serve the community's needs and mitigate the impacts of an abrupt halt to services, staff propose bridging financing for the LION program through the Region of Peel's Best Start Reserves (R1258) until December 31, 2012.

In doing so, the partners will have the opportunity to seek alternate funding sources to continue the program beyond 2012. The alternative would be to phase out the program and sell the vehicles.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

It will cost \$270,000 to continue serving the needs of the community through the LION program until December 31, 2012. The three mobile vehicles will continue to be operated by the following agency partners:

- Child Development Resource Connection Peel
- Malton Neighbourhood Services
- Mississauga Parent Child Resource Centres

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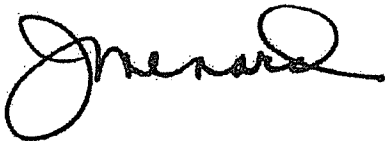
Staff recommends a one-time withdrawal of \$270,000 from the Best Start Reserve (R1258) in order to fund the LION program from July 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012. Citizenship and Immigration Canada has committed \$129,231 to fund the program from April 1, 2012 to June 30, 2012.

The Best Start Reserve balance as of February 29, 2012 is \$13.3 million. This reserve was set up in 2005 when the Region received an unconditional grant from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services in order to fund a range of Child Care services including building new Child Care spaces. This is an appropriate use of the reserve.

**CONCLUSION**


The LION program helps the whole family, including parents, grandparents and caregivers. It provides preventative services that strengthen the family and help assimilate them into the Canadian society. LION provides a much needed mobile early learning program to these high growth under-served communities. By providing one-time funding to maintain the LION program from July 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012, the program partners can continue to:

- find efficiencies in the program
- seek alternative funding sources, or alternatively
- plan the phase-out of the program; and
- continue to serve the needs of the community, in the interim.



Janet Menard  
Commissioner of Human Services

**Approved for Submission:**



D. Szwarc, Chief Administrative Officer

*For further information regarding this report, please contact Sonia Pace at extension 3807 or via email at [sonia.pace@peelregion.ca](mailto:sonia.pace@peelregion.ca)*

*Authored By: Sharon Navarro*

c. Legislative Services  
Manager, Financial Support Unit (FSU)



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**APPENDIX I**

The following chart outlines the designated LION program sites.

Designated LION Sites		
	Location	Municipality
1	Thorndale Public School	City of Brampton
2	Treeline Public School	City of Brampton
3	James Potter Public School	City of Brampton
4	Roberta Bondar Public School	City of Brampton
5	Brisdale Public School	City of Brampton
6	St. Lucy Catholic Elementary School	City of Brampton
7	Father Francis McSpritt Catholic Elementary School	City of Brampton
8	Holy Spirit Catholic Elementary School	City of Brampton
9	St. Sebastian Catholic School	City of Mississauga
10	McKinnon Public School	City of Mississauga
11	St. Angela Merici Catholic Elementary School	City of Brampton
12	St. Pio of Pietrelcina Catholic School	City of Mississauga
13	Father of Clair Tipping Catholic Elementary School	City of Brampton
14	Whitehorn Public School	City of Mississauga
15	Sheridan Centre Mall	City of Mississauga
16	Acorn Place	City of Mississauga