

WINDSOR-ESSEX CHILD CARE AND EARLY YEARS SERVICE SYSTEM PLAN



2026–2030



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A photograph of three young children lying on their stomachs on a green rug, looking at an open book. The child on the left is a girl with long dark hair in a braid, wearing a light-colored shirt. The child in the middle is a boy with short dark hair, wearing a white shirt. The child on the right is a girl with long blonde hair and a pink headband, wearing a pink shirt. They are all smiling and looking at the book. A large white number '1' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

1

OVERVIEW

- Background
- Reflection on 2020-2025 System Plan
- Service System Plan Development Process
- Contextual Considerations

BACKGROUND

The City of Windsor is the Service System Manager (SSM) for child care and early years services in Windsor-Essex County, as mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education and legislated through the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* (CCEYA). The child care and early years ecosystem is composed of several programs and services, including the following:



Under the CCEYA, the City of Windsor’s Children’s Services division plays a key role in planning, funding, and administering child care and early years services across Windsor and Essex County, while also directly operating programs for families in the region.

As the SSM, the City of Windsor’s Children’s Services division has the following responsibilities:





CHILDREN AND YOUTH PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Windsor-Essex Children and Youth Planning Committee (CYPC) is a long-standing, cross-sector planning and engagement table comprised of representatives from more than 40 agencies and community partners with expertise across the child and youth continuum. The CYPC brings together organizations serving children and families from birth to 12 years, including early years, child care, education, health, and social services. Members collaborate through various subcommittees that focus on key components of the child care and early years system.

The CYPC plays a central role in supporting the City of Windsor's Children's Services division in its responsibilities as Service System Manager. Through ongoing engagement, the CYPC provides feedback, subject-matter expertise, and strategic advice at all stages of child care and early years system planning. An important function of the CYPC is to identify opportunities for alignment, coordination, and collective action among system partners to strengthen service integration and improve outcomes for children and families.

The 2026–2030 Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan is intended to align with and complement the strategic priorities of CYPC member organizations. Through this alignment, the Service Plan seeks to enhance collaboration, reduce duplication, and contribute to broader community outcomes for children, youth, and families across Windsor-Essex.

REFLECTING ON THE 2020-2025 SERVICE SYSTEM PLAN



In developing a new Service System Plan for the Windsor-Essex County region, it's important to reflect on the progress made since the previous plan. The following feedback and themes were identified as priorities in the previous plan, and details are provided on what has been accomplished to date.

Key Themes	What We Heard	What We've Achieved
ACCESS & FLEXIBILITY	Need for more flexible child care hours, mobile services, increased number of licensed child care spaces, increased number of infant spaces, and more transportation options.	• Created 130 new infant spaces. • On track to create over 1,500 new licensed child care spaces across all age groups by December 2026.
SYSTEM COORDINATION	Need for integrated services, aligned policies, consistent resources, and improved referral pathways.	• Implemented HEADS-ED Under 6 as a referral tool in EarlyON Child and Family Centres (CFC). • Resource Consultant Services available to all licensed child care centres.

Key Themes	What We Heard	What We've Achieved
INCLUSION & SPECIAL NEEDS SUPPORT	Need for sustained investment in program supports and customized training for educators to address increasing complexity of child and family needs.	• Circle of Security training offered across the sector. • Self-regulation training offered across the sector. • Accessibility in Child Care Series: Creating Inclusive Environments for All Children - A professional development event designed to support early childhood educators and assistants in creating inclusive and accessible child care environments for all children, using the concepts of Universal Design. • All EarlyON CFC facilitators offered a micro-credential in Infant and Early Years Mental Health.
CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS & INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP	Need for Indigenous-led hubs, culturally grounded programming, and increased focus on Indigenous workforce capacity.	• Supported creation of an Indigenous Hub and expanded Indigenous-specific licensed child care (both centre and home-based care options). • Supported EarlyON CFC and system navigators at Ska:na Northway site.
WORKFORCE CAPACITY	Need to increase the number of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs), to deliver professional learning, and work to address workforce retention challenges across the sector.	• Implemented the WERECE Workforce Campaign, including new partnerships with local colleges and school boards and launch of a dedicated job search website. • Delivered extensive paid professional learning opportunities open to all in the sector. • Implemented a wage floor for RECEs.

Key Themes	What We Heard	What We've Achieved
		• Implemented a community mentorship program for RECEs. • Increased the number of RECEs working in licensed child care from 1,166 in 2022 to 1,651 in 2024.
AFFORDABILITY & FUNDING	Need for lower parent fees.	• Decreased parent fees by over 50%, ensuring a maximum of \$22/day fee for all licensed child care spaces for children 0-5 years. • Sustained an average fee of \$17/day in Windsor-Essex (lower than the provincial average).
AWARENESS & NAVIGATION	Need for families to have access to information about available services, including program types, hours, and financial supports (e.g. child care fee subsidy).	• Improved use of OneHSN for locating and learning about licensed child care options, registering for child care, and navigating wait lists. • Launch of a fully digital Fee Subsidy information and application process (now including document upload) through OneHSN.



SERVICE SYSTEM PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan (Service System Plan) is a mandated multi-year road map to guide funding and delivery of child care and early years programs and services from 2026 to 2030. The Service System Plan builds upon the sector's focus on an increasingly integrated system of services for families and children, and aims to strengthen quality of services and outcomes for children and families.

The development of the Service System Plan followed a comprehensive review and engagement process:

Environmental Scan

- Reviewed service plans of comparator municipalities
- Gathered relevant community data
- Reflected on progress since 2020-2025 Service System Plan

Stakeholder Engagement

- Launched public surveys for both child care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres (CFC)
- Hosted consultations with Children and Youth Planning Committee, Child Care Network, and EarlyON CFC Network
- Hosted family consultation sessions
- Hosted front-line staff focus groups

Data Review

- Reviewed thematic data collected from focus groups and consultations
- Reviewed data from survey responses
- Analyzed relevant community data sets

Recommendation Development

- Synthesized findings into high level summaries for stakeholder review
- Developed recommended Vision, Values, Strategic Pillars, Goals, Objectives, and Sample Activities

Stakeholder Validation

- Validated with stakeholders the Vision and Values guiding the plan
- Reviewed and validated the Strategic Pillars, Goals, and Objectives
- Co-created Sample Activities and potential action plans
- Identified highest priority activities for inclusion in the plan

Contextual Considerations



1. TRANSFORMATIONAL MILESTONES

Over the past 15 years, the child care and early years system in Ontario and across Canada has experienced significant transformation. This timeline provides a snapshot of key milestones across the sector experienced at both the provincial and local levels.

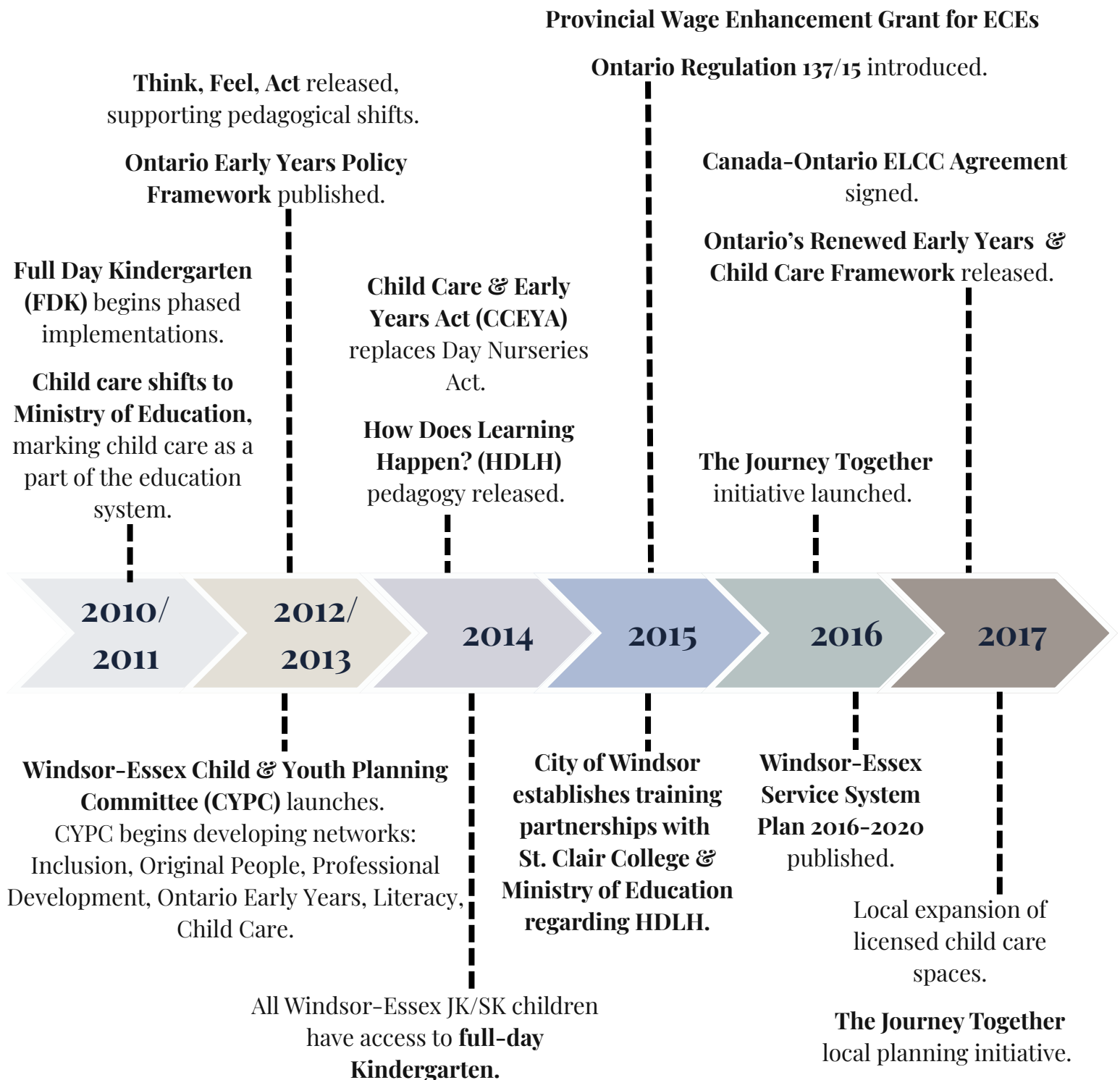
2. CWELCC

The 2021 CWELCC agreement between Canada and all provinces marked a major transformation in child care. This section provides an overview of the legislative changes and the impacts on the local child care and early years sector.

3. TRUTH & RECONCILIATION: REFLECTING ON THE JOURNEY TOGETHER

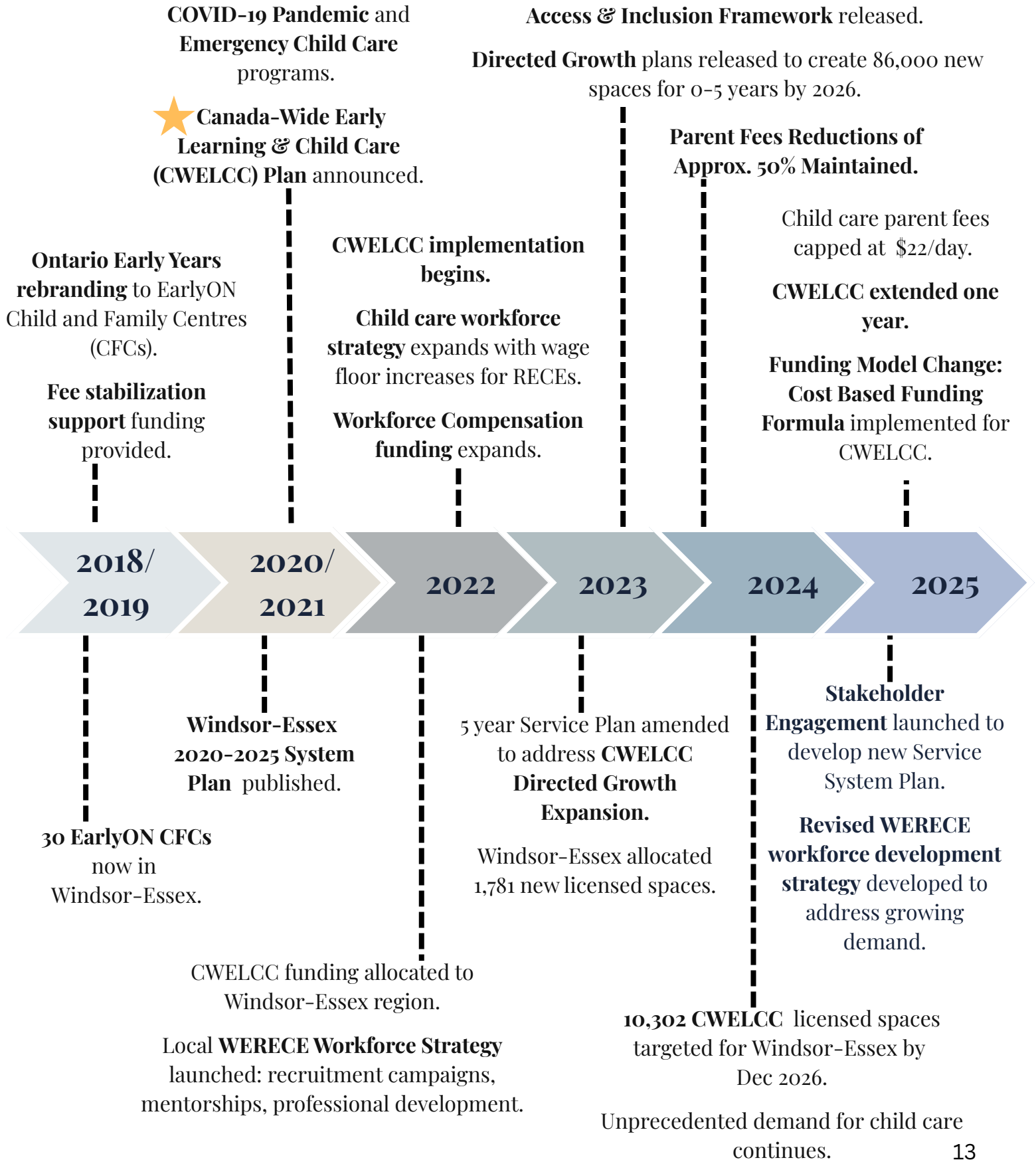
Ontario's Journey Together committed to expanding off-reserve child care and providing culturally relevant programs through urban Indigenous and municipal partnerships. This section provides an overview of local progress on the Journey Together.

Key Moments Across 15



This timeline is organized to show the relationship between provincial direction and local impact. Provincial developments and key milestones are presented along the top half, while the local changes, initiatives, and responses that followed are shown along the bottom half, illustrating how decisions translate into action at the community level.

Years of Transformation



CANADA-WIDE EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE (CWELCC) AGREEMENT

The 2021 announcement of the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) Agreement between the Government of Canada and all provincial governments represented a generational transformation in the sector. The Government of Canada identified child care as a national priority to enhance early learning and childhood development, support workforce participation, and contribute to economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The CWELCC system has two primary components:

1. Fee reduction for parental child care fees
2. Workforce compensation for those working in child care and early years programs

On March 28, 2022, the Government of Canada and Province of Ontario signed the CWELCC Agreement. Under this agreement, Ontario received \$13.2 billion dollars over six years (beginning in 2021-2022) to reduce parent fees for licensed child care for children 0-5 years of age and to create 86,000 new licensed child care spaces for children 0-5 years of age across the Province by the end of 2026.

Since the previous Service System Plan, the City of Windsor's Children's Services division has:



50% +

Reduced parent fees by **50%** since 2022.



1,587

Aimed to create **1,587** new CWELCC spaces through the Province's Directed Growth Plan (including spaces projected to be operational by the end of 2026).



98%

Sustained a **98%** enrollment rate for centres in the local CWELCC system.



70%

Maintained a proportion of **70%** not-for-profit CWELCC spaces within the local system.



15,000

Supported **10,000** total CWELCC spaces (for children 0-5 years) and **5,000** school aged spaces (for children 6-12 years) across Windsor-Essex (projected by the end of 2026).



\$17

Maintained an average parent fee across Windsor-Essex of \$17/per day (below the \$22 per day fee cap required in Ontario and the \$19 per day provincial average).

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION: REFLECTING ON THE JOURNEY TOGETHER

In 2016, Ontario released The Journey Together – Ontario’s Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action. The Ministry of Education committed to increasing off-reserve licensed child care spaces and providing culturally relevant programming, delivered by urban Indigenous organizations in partnership with municipalities.

Specific to the early years sector, the primary objectives of The Journey Together framework were to:

- Increase access to culturally relevant early learning programs and licensed child care spaces off-reserve.
- Enhance Indigenous control of service design and delivery.
- Foster opportunities for children to learn culture and language early.
- Support improved outcomes for children and families, including employment and training for parents.

In 2017, the City of Windsor secured provincial funding to support Indigenous-led planning for early learning and care. Guided by Elders, Knowledge Keepers, families, and service providers, Windsor’s vision emphasized collaboration, cultural safety, and the centrality of Indigenous knowledge. Implementation of these planning efforts to date has focused on community recommendations to create a team of Indigenous Specialists to lead service design and delivery and to expand Indigenous-led early years hubs across the city.





In 2024, the City of Windsor's Children's Services division engaged a research team, advised and guided by Ska:na Family Learning Centre, to reflect on our local Journey Together progress since 2017. The review identified several areas in which Windsor-Essex has made significant strides:

- Indigenous staff, Elders, and leadership now guide service design and delivery.
- A multi-service Indigenous-led early years and child care site was established in Windsor's west end (Northway site).
- Mobile and co-located services increase access for families.
- Indigenous-informed curriculum is being developed and partially implemented.
- Families report greater recognition of culture within early learning.
- Mainstream organizations have begun integrating Indigenous knowledge through training and collaboration.

Despite progress, several persisting structural and systemic challenges were identified:

- **Staff turnover and capacity:** High turnover undermines continuity, making it difficult to sustain Indigenous approaches in mainstream child care.
- **Workforce development:** Recruiting and retaining Indigenous staff remains an urgent challenge, limiting capacity for leadership and succession planning.
- **Unstable funding:** Current project-based or short-term funding prevents long-term planning, relationship building, and sustainable service delivery.
- **Policy barriers:** Eligibility rules, subsidy access, and the limited number of licensed Indigenous spaces continue to constrain growth.
- **Cultural confidence in mainstream organizations:** Non-Indigenous providers often fear "making mistakes," resulting in inaction rather than respectful engagement.

From the 2024–25 community reflections and consultations, the research team described six broad priority areas that emerged.



Priority Areas

Relationships, Partnerships, and Collaboration	Prioritize Indigenous-led spaces and partnership in all funding and planning efforts. Appoint cross-departmental coordinators to maintain follow-up, accountability, and inclusion of Indigenous voices.
Culture	Create culturally safe childcare environments. Expand land-based learning, language integration, and opportunities to engage with Elders.
Education	Provide consistent Indigenous mentorship and training for educators. Establish an Indigenous-led Curriculum Advisory Committee. Host quarterly learning circles and bi-annual reviews.
Policy	Advocate for local and provincial policy changes to expand Indigenous spaces and adjust subsidy eligibility. Ensure Indigenous-led planning remains central in decision-making.
Resources	Advocate for stable, multi-year funding for Indigenous-led agencies to provide mentoring, education, training, and service delivery. Invest in infrastructure such as outdoor learning spaces, mobile outreach, and curriculum development. Develop a three-year community plan with budget projections tied to sustained provincial and municipal commitments.
Observing and Reflecting	Establish clear evaluation frameworks, including cultural indicators and community voice metrics. Publish regular updates (e.g., “State of Urban Indigenous Early Years” report).

Together, these six priority areas reflect what Indigenous partners, families, and community leaders have identified as essential to advancing truth and reconciliation within the early years sector. They are interconnected and necessary, and meaningful progress across all areas will require sustained commitment, Indigenous leadership, and long-term investment beyond the scope of any single planning cycle. While this 2026–2030 System Plan may not fully address every priority in the timeframe ahead, it recognizes them as critical guideposts for decision-making, advocacy, and partnership.

Windsor-Essex has already made important and tangible progress toward embedding Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing within early years services. This Plan is intended to build on that momentum, support continued learning and relationship-building, and affirm that reconciliation is not a destination, but an ongoing journey that must remain central to system planning and service delivery.



2

INFORMING THE PLAN

- Snapshot of Windsor-Essex Data
- Current State Review

Snapshot of Windsor-Essex Data

The Windsor-Essex County region, located in Southwestern Ontario, is Canada's southernmost region, comprised of the City of Windsor and seven surrounding municipalities: Amherstburg, Essex, Kingsville, Lakeshore, LaSalle, Leamington, and Tecumseh. It acts as a major international border hub with Detroit, Michigan, driving strong automotive, manufacturing, and agricultural sectors, and is also known for its multiculturalism, diversity, and growing community.

As the economic realities of these sectors grow more complex and the region's population rises, the needs of children and families living across Windsor-Essex County continues to evolve.

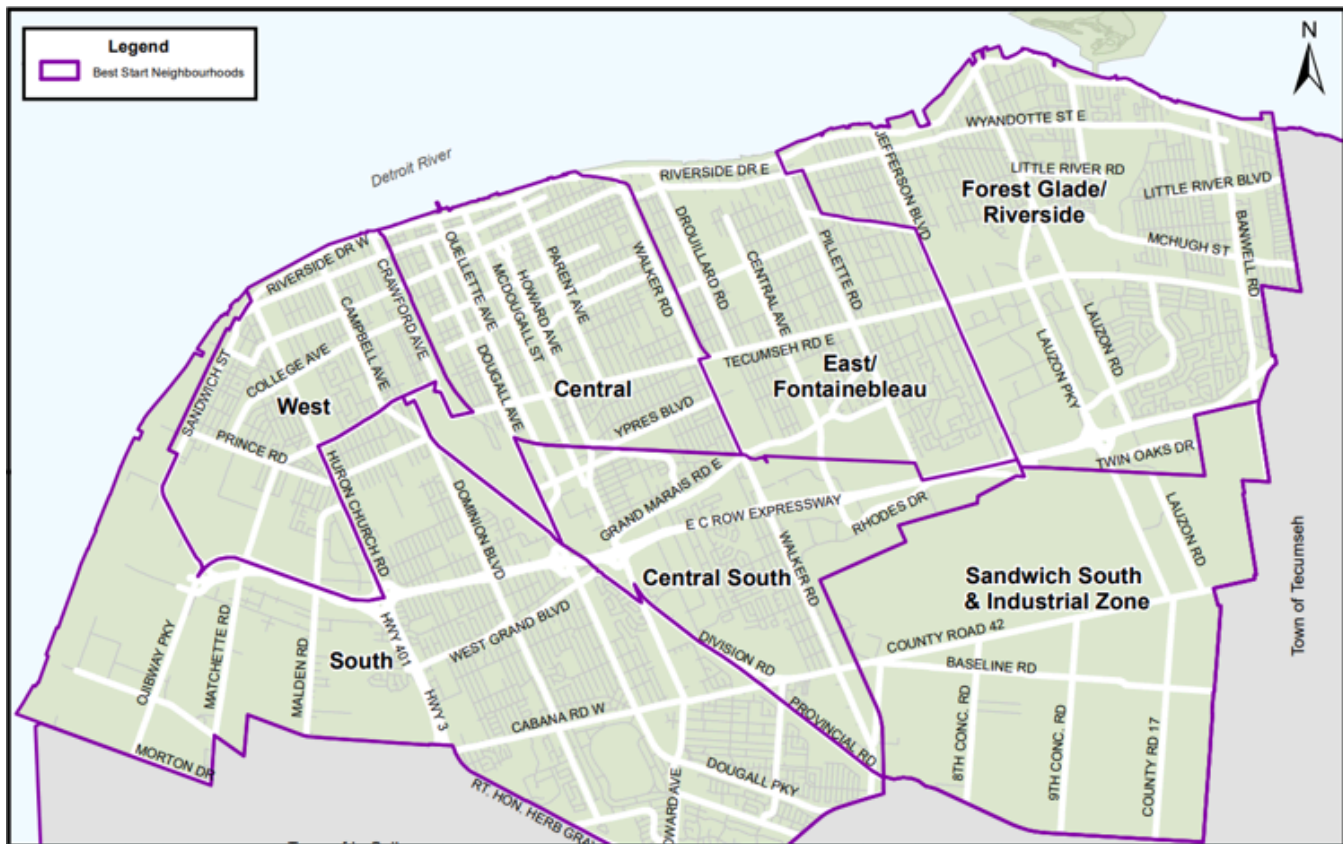
As the Service System Manager, the City of Windsor's Children's Services division monitors community data changes and trends to ensure that child care and early years programs and services meet the needs of the local community.

Best Start Neighbourhoods

Best Start Neighbourhoods (BSNs) were established in partnership with the former Best Start Network (now Children and Youth Planning Committee) in 2006. Best Start Neighbourhoods are geographical areas in Windsor-Essex used by City of Windsor's Children's Services division for planning purposes. A total of seven (7) BSNs have been established for the City of Windsor representing all City Wards, and seven (7) BSNs have been established for Essex County representing all County municipalities.



Best Start Neighbourhoods

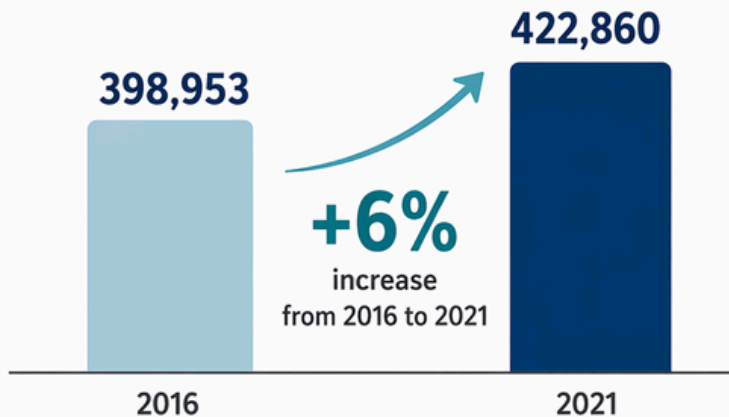


Population Demographics



STEADY POPULATION GROWTH: 2016 TO 2021

WINDSOR-ESSEX COUNTY POPULATION



COMPARISON TO ONTARIO



+5.8%

Ontario's population
growth from 2016
to 2021.



Windsor-Essex County is
expanding at a pace slightly
above the provincial average.



From 2016 to 2021, Windsor-Essex County grew from 398,953 to 422,860 people, **a 6% increase**—slightly above **Ontario's 5.8% growth**.



2021 POPULATION GROWTH BY MUNICIPALITY

These five municipalities contributed the largest increases in population across Windsor-Essex County between 2016 and 2021.



Lakeshore



LaSalle



Leamington

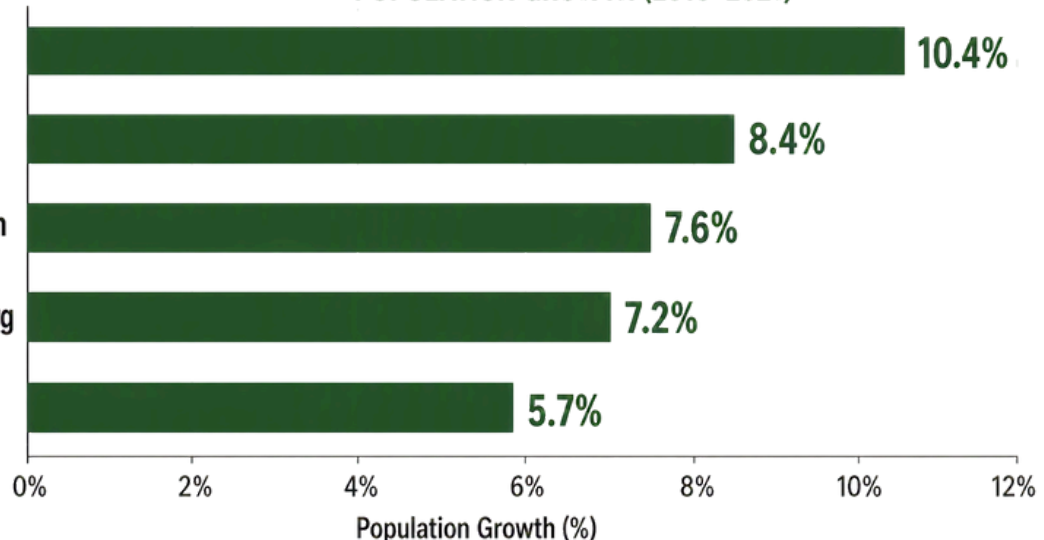


Amherstburg



Windsor

POPULATION GROWTH (2016–2021)

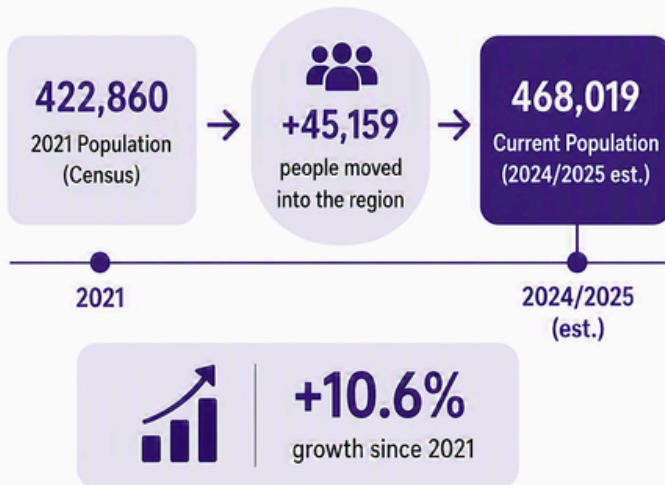




WINDSOR-ESSEX COUNTY: GROWTH SINCE 2021

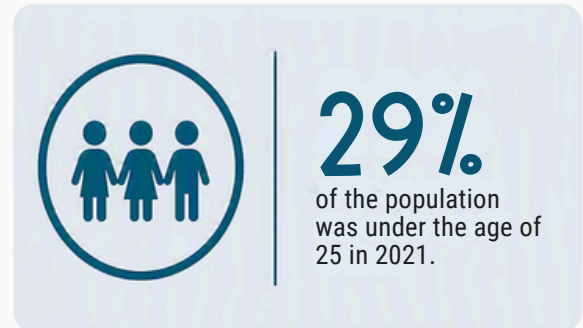
ACCELERATED GROWTH SINCE 2021

Since the 2021 Census, the Windsor-Essex County population showed increasingly accelerated growth, with 45,159 moving into the region bringing the total to 468,019 (10.6% growth).



A RELATIVELY YOUNG POPULATION

The region maintained a relatively young population, with 29% under the age of 25 in 2021, though the proportion of younger residents has gradually declined over the past decade.



CHILD POPULATION (0-9 YEARS) IN 2021

In 2021, there were 43,595 children aged 0-9 years in Windsor-Essex County.



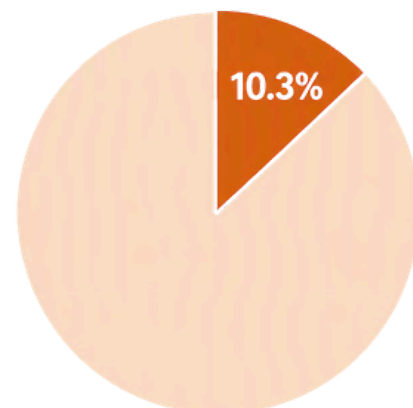
43,595

children aged 0-9 years in Windsor-Essex County (2021)



of the total population

Children aged 0-9 years make up 10.3% of the total population (2021).



0-9 years: 10.3%
All other age groups: 89.7%



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population

Diversity in the Region

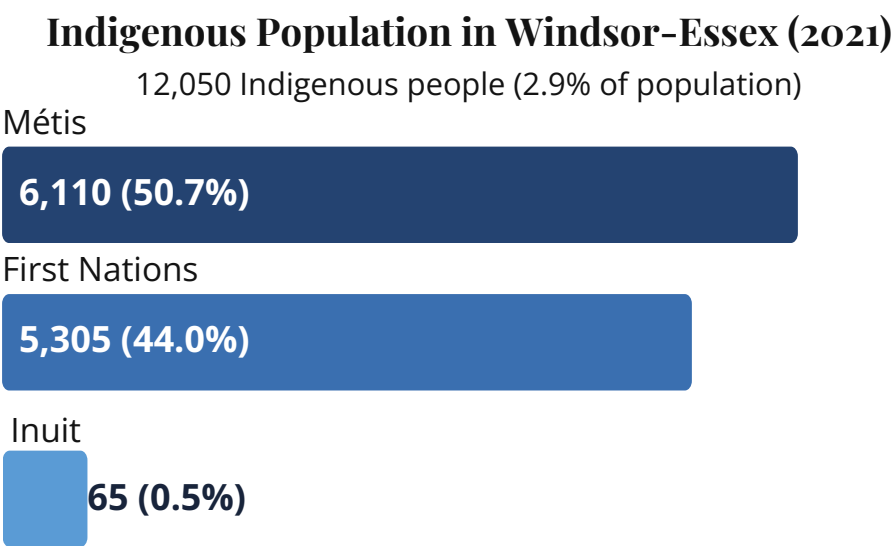
Windsor-Essex County is one of the most diverse regions in Southwestern Ontario, with a wide range of cultural and ethnic identities represented in our population.

According to Statistics Canada, tables compiled for the region, top places of birth for immigrants arriving between 2016 and 2021 include: India, Syria, China, Iraq, Philippines, United States, Mexico, Pakistan, and Lebanon. In Windsor-Essex, 23% of residents identify as a visible minority and 17% of residents speak a language other than English most often at home. The most common spoken languages at home other than English are: Arabic, Mandarin, Punjabi, and Spanish.



Windsor-Essex County includes a recognized Francophone community which includes families with deep historical roots in the region, bilingual households, and newcomers from Francophone countries, and is supported by designated French-language education systems and community organizations that support Francophone cultural and linguistic vitality. Approximately 2% of residents report French as their first official language spoken, and it is estimated that almost 10% of the Windsor-Essex population have knowledge of French.

In addition to those who reported a single Indigenous identity, 265 people reported more than one Indigenous identity and 295 were defined as having an Indigenous identity that was not included elsewhere. It is important to recognize the limitations of Census data in this respect, as Indigenous Peoples are often underrepresented due to migration between geographical locations, unclear definitions of identity groups, and lack of trust for the Canadian government.



Socio-Economic Factors

In 2020, the median after-tax household income in the Windsor-Essex was approximately \$74,000, lower than the provincial median (\$78,600). This level of income reflects the region's economic structure and contributes to ongoing affordability challenges, particularly as living costs have increased in recent years.

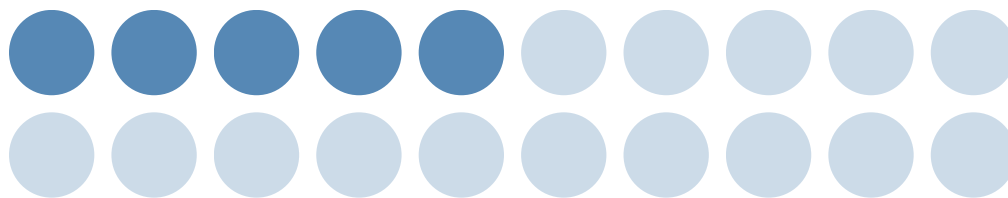
Approximately 9–10% of people in Windsor-Essex are living below the Market Basket Measure (MBM), Canada's official poverty line. The MBM reflects the cost of a defined basket of essential goods and services required for a modest standard of living. Statistics Canada reports MBM data at the person level rather than by family, the number of families must be estimated using these rates. Based on this approach, it is estimated that about 10,000 to 12,000 families in Windsor-Essex are living in poverty, meaning they may not have enough income to cover basic needs such as housing, food, and transportation.

Children in Low-Income Households

Windsor-Essex, 2021 Census

85,000

CHILDREN AGED 0-17 YEARS IN WINDSOR-ESSEX



● 20-25% LIVING BELOW LOW-INCOME MEASURE AFTER TAX (LIM-AT)

17,000 - 21,000

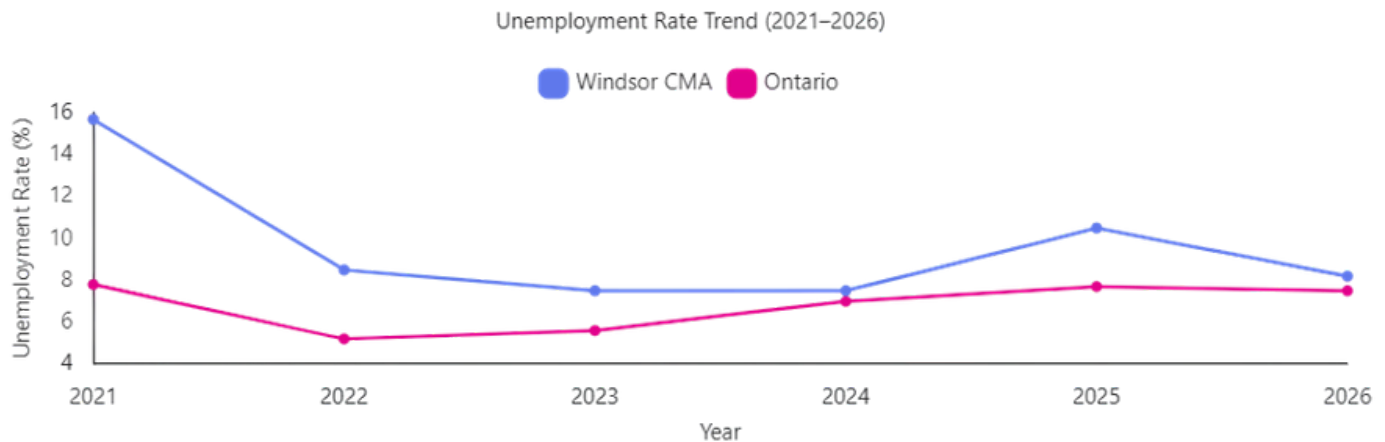
CHILDREN ESTIMATED TO BE LIVING IN
LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

The Low-Income Measure After Tax (LIM-AT) identifies people living in low-income if their household income is less than half of the national average (median) income after taxes, taking household size into account.

This highlights the significant number of children in the region who may face barriers related to income, including impacts on health, education, and well-being.

About one in five families in Windsor are led by a single parent, according to the 2021 Census. These families often face greater financial challenges because they rely on one income, which can increase the risk of housing and food insecurity.

Education and Employment



Over the past five years, Windsor-Essex's unemployment rate has trended higher than the provincial average. In 2021, Windsor's rate was 15.7% compared to Ontario's at 8%. While both improved in 2022 and 2023, Windsor's unemployment rose again in 2025 to about 10–11%, compared to around 7–8% in Ontario. By 2026, Windsor's rate dropped to about 8%, but it is still slightly higher than Ontario's ~7.5%.

In Windsor-Essex, approximately 50% of residents have postsecondary education, including college, trades, or university credentials. The region has a higher share of college and trades training, with fewer residents holding university degrees compared to larger Ontario cities.

Windsor-Essex is expected to experience strong economic growth over the next five years, driven by major investments in the electric vehicle and advanced manufacturing sectors which are projected to create thousands of jobs in the region. At the same time, the area is experiencing rapid population growth and rising workforce demand across key sectors such as skilled trades, manufacturing, and health care.

While employment levels have reached record highs, ongoing labour shortages and the need to increase workforce participation remain key challenges. In this context, access to affordable and high-quality child care will play a critical role in supporting labour force participation, particularly for parents of young children, and will be essential to sustaining economic growth and meeting workforce needs in Windsor-Essex.



Early Development Instrument

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a population-level measure of children’s developmental health developed by the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University and used by the Ministry of Education. It is a questionnaire completed by kindergarten teachers for each student in senior kindergarten, with results aggregated and mapped by postal code. EDI data enables communities to identify areas of relative strength and vulnerability, monitor trends over time, and better understand how early childhood development relates to later outcomes in elementary school.

EDI Measures Child Development in Five Domains:



Physical Health
& Well-Being



Social Knowledge
& Competence



Emotional Health
& Maturity



Language
& Cognitive
Development



Communication Skills
& General Knowledge

EDI Cycle 6 Results (2022–2023)

Within the EDI framework, children are considered “vulnerable” if they score below the 10th percentile of the Ontario baseline population in one or more of the five developmental domains. When comparing regional vulnerability rates across EDI cycles, higher vulnerability indicates a greater proportion of children experiencing developmental challenges relative to the provincial baseline.

The Windsor-Essex County Cycle 6 EDI results show that, for the first time since EDI implementation in the 2005–2006 school year, vulnerability rates across all five developmental domains are slightly higher than the Ontario baseline. This represents a notable shift from previous cycles, during which Windsor-Essex generally performed at or below provincial vulnerability levels.

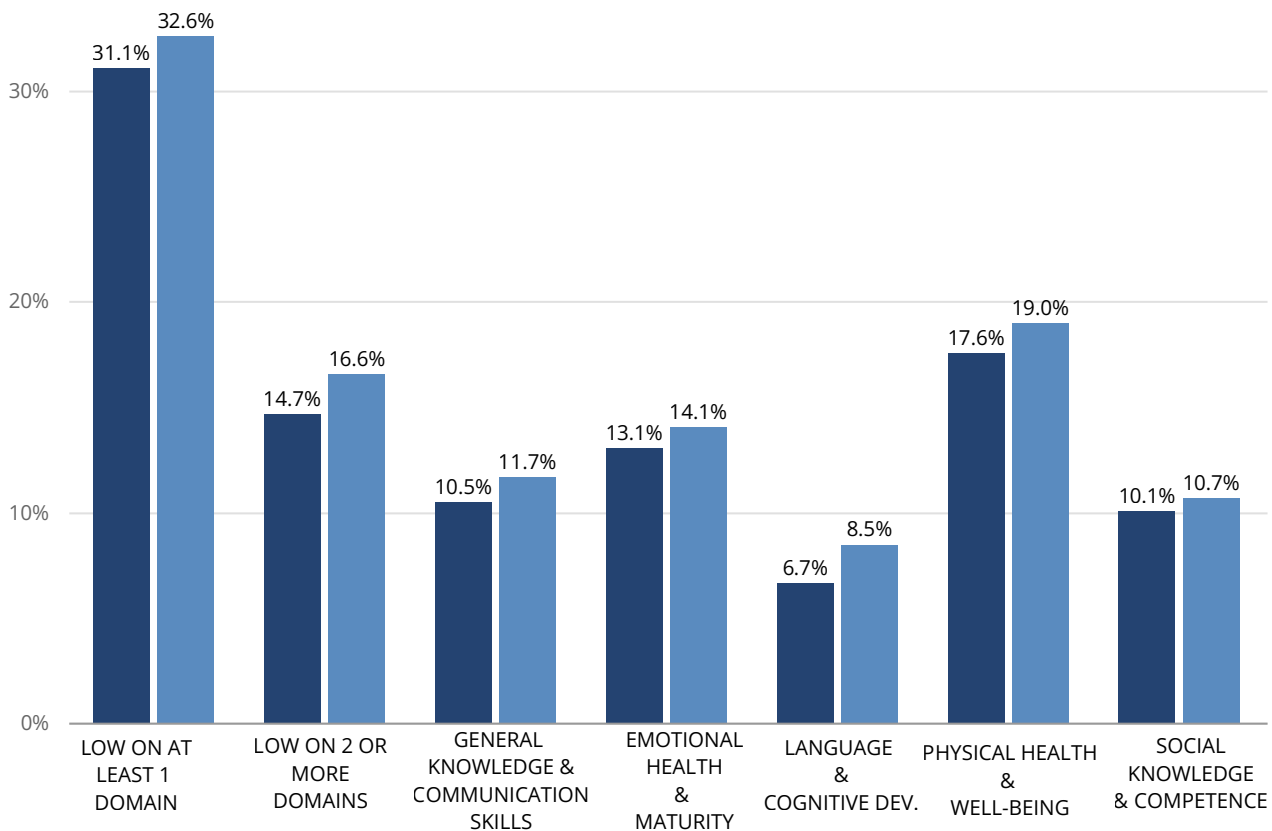
Comparing Cycles 5 (2017/2018) and 6 (2022/2023)

A comparison of the two most recent EDI cycles shows an increase in vulnerability across four of the five developmental domains, as well as an increase in the proportion of children who are vulnerable on at least one domain. These increases exceeded the critical difference threshold, indicating that they represent real and meaningful changes in developmental vulnerability. While vulnerability in Language and Cognitive Development decreased between Cycles 5 and 6, the change did not meet the threshold for a meaningful difference and is not considered statistically significant.

Overall, the EDI results indicate that developmental vulnerability in Windsor-Essex has increased in recent years in ways that are meaningful and measurable at the population level. These findings underscore the importance of continued investment in early years supports, prevention-focused services, and coordinated system planning to address emerging developmental needs across the community.

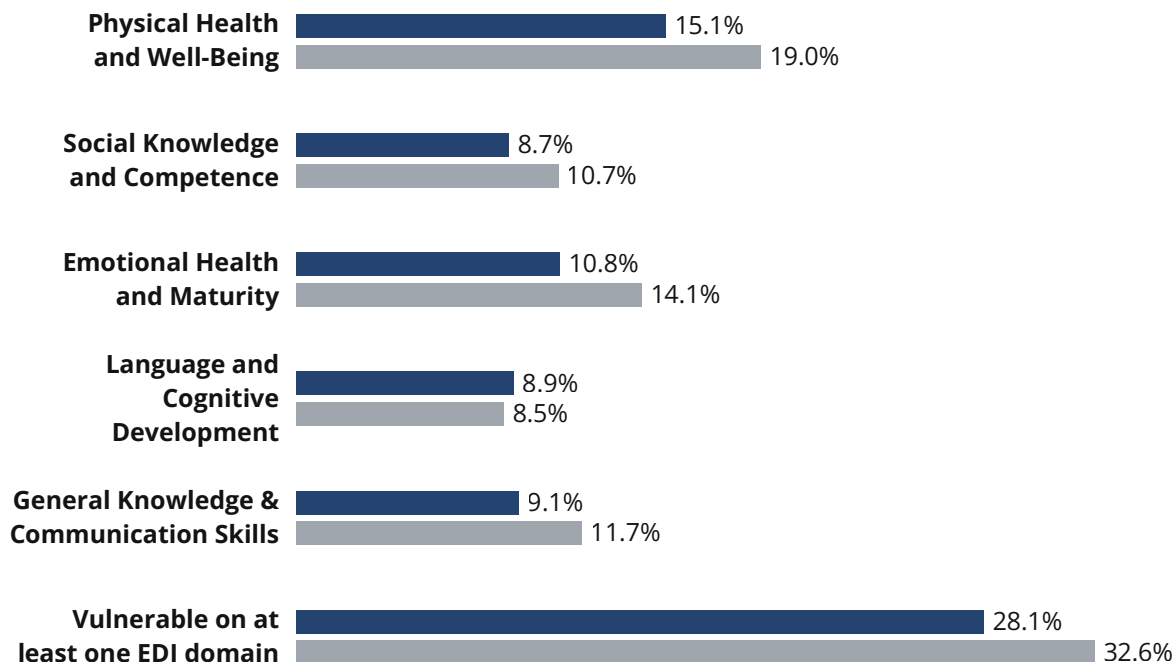
Windsor-Essex County: Six Cycle EDI Results

■ Ontario Baseline (2022-2023) ■ Cycle 6 (2022-2023)



Percentage of Children Vulnerable by EDI Domain

■ Cycle 5 ■ Cycle 6



Child Care Access Rates

National data provides important context for understanding child care access pressures that also affect local systems. According to the 2025 Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 58% of children aged 0 to 5 years in Canada were in child care in 2025, representing a slight increase from 56% in 2023.

While affordability has improved with the implementation of CWELCC, access challenges persist.

Among parents using child care, the proportion reporting difficulty finding care rose from 46% in 2023 to 50% in 2025. The most commonly reported challenge was finding available care in their community (65%), followed by affordability (42%), and access to subsidized child care (35%).

The demand for licensed child care since the implementation of CWELCC has continued to outpace supply and, as a result, communities across Canada are experiencing wait lists for child care. Among parents not currently using child care, 31% reported that their child was on a waitlist in 2025, up from 26% in 2023. These findings underscore that access challenges are driven not only by cost but also by the availability and distribution of licensed spaces, and that these challenges are not unique to Windsor-Essex County.

Windsor-Essex County

has an average access rate of



Age Group	Average (weeks)	Range (weeks)
Infant	13.6	1-58
Toddler	11.5	1-36
Preschool	9.7	1-48
Kindergarten	10.8	1-40
Primary/Junior	10.4	1-60
Junior	7	1-32

Average Length of Wait Lists Across Child Care Centres

In Windsor-Essex County, child care operators report a community-wide average of almost an 11-week wait for care across all age groups, with a range from 1 week to 60 weeks depending on the age group and specific child care centre.

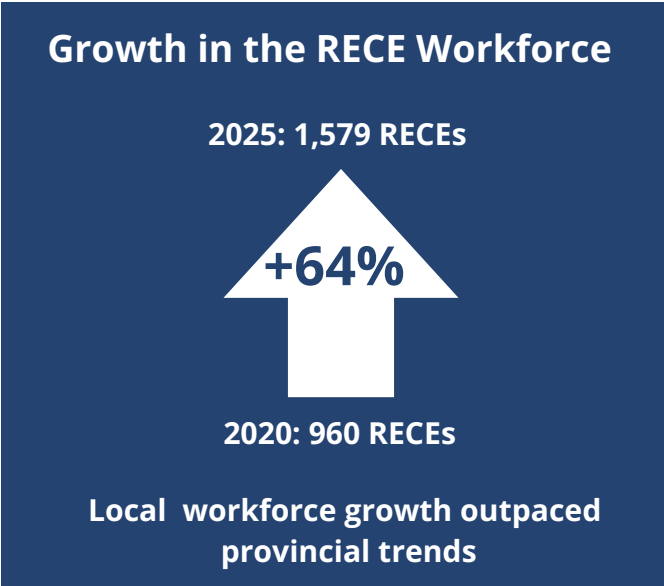
When asked about the barriers impacting their interest in expanding, operators cited challenges with attracting and retaining qualified staff as the greatest barrier.

Expanding access to licensed child care is a central objective of the CWELCC agreement. At the national level, the Government of Canada has set a target of achieving an average access rate of 59% for children under the age of six by 2026, equivalent to 5.9 licensed spaces for every 10 children. While this target establishes a national benchmark, provinces and territories are responsible for determining how access targets are achieved locally through their own planning and expansion strategies. In Ontario, the Access and Inclusion Framework (2023) establishes a provincial target of 37% access to licensed child care spaces for children aged 0 to 5 years, reflecting Ontario’s phased approach to growth, inclusion, and sustainability.

Workforce Development

Between 2020 and 2025, the number of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) in Windsor-Essex increased from **960 to 1,579** representing a **64% increase**—significantly outpacing the **15% growth observed across Ontario** during the same period.

This rapid expansion reflects strong local demand for early childhood educators and sustained growth within the child care and early years sector. As a result, Windsor-Essex has increased its share of the provincial RECE workforce, underscoring the region's growing role in the delivery of early years and child care services.



The composition of the RECE workforce in Windsor-Essex has also shifted notably over this period. Employment in licensed child care settings increased from 470 RECEs (49.5%) in 2020 to 842 RECEs (57.2%) in 2025, reflecting the expansion of regulated child care capacity and increased reliance on licensed programs to meet family demand. While the number of RECEs employed in education settings has continued to grow, their share of the overall workforce has declined, indicating that growth in licensed child care has outpaced growth in school-based roles. Employment in other early years and child-serving settings, such as family support and children’s services, has remained relatively stable but represents a smaller proportion of the workforce over time.

Overall, these trends point to an increasing concentration of RECEs within licensed child care, highlighting both the sector’s rapid growth and the importance of proactive workforce planning.

Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) Workforce Data from the College of Early Childhood Educators:

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Total RECEs in Good Standing in Windsor-Essex	960	1,034	1,126	1,233	1,400	1,579
Total RECEs in Good Standing in Ontario	59,096	58,181	59,929	61,661	64,335	67,816

Despite these gains, continued workforce development will be critical to meet current and future demand driven by population growth, economic expansion, and increased labour force participation among parents, particularly within the context of CWELCC-related access expansion.

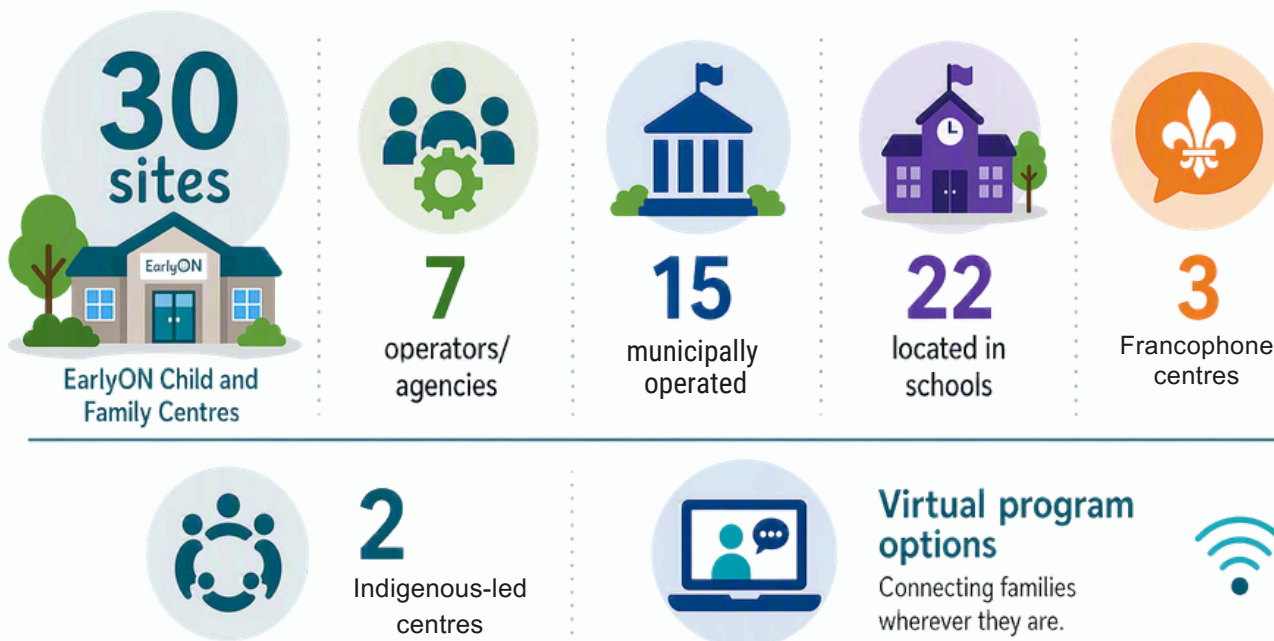
CURRENT STATE REVIEW

The following section provides a concise, data-informed snapshot of the local child care and early years system. It highlights key information on service availability, access, affordability, workforce, and community needs, identifying strengths, gaps, and emerging trends. This section establishes a common understanding of the system today and forms the foundation for future planning and decision-making.



EarlyON Child and Family Centres

Building connections. Supporting families. Together.



EarlyON Child and Family Centres (CFC) offer free high-quality programming for parents and caregivers with children ages birth to 6 years old. All programming aims to foster a sense of belonging, well-being, engagement and expression while meeting the following core services:

- Supporting early learning and development by offering programming to encourage children's learning through play, and to build positive child-adult relationships;
- Engaging parents and caregivers through information sharing about child development, parenting, play, and inquiry-based learning;
- Offering pre- and post-natal support; and
- Connecting families to the community by responding to parents and caregivers inquiring about their child's development. This can include offering screening, making referrals to health professionals or other specialized community services.

EarlyON
Child and Family Centre
ON y va
Centre pour l'enfant et la famille

15,888
Children
Served

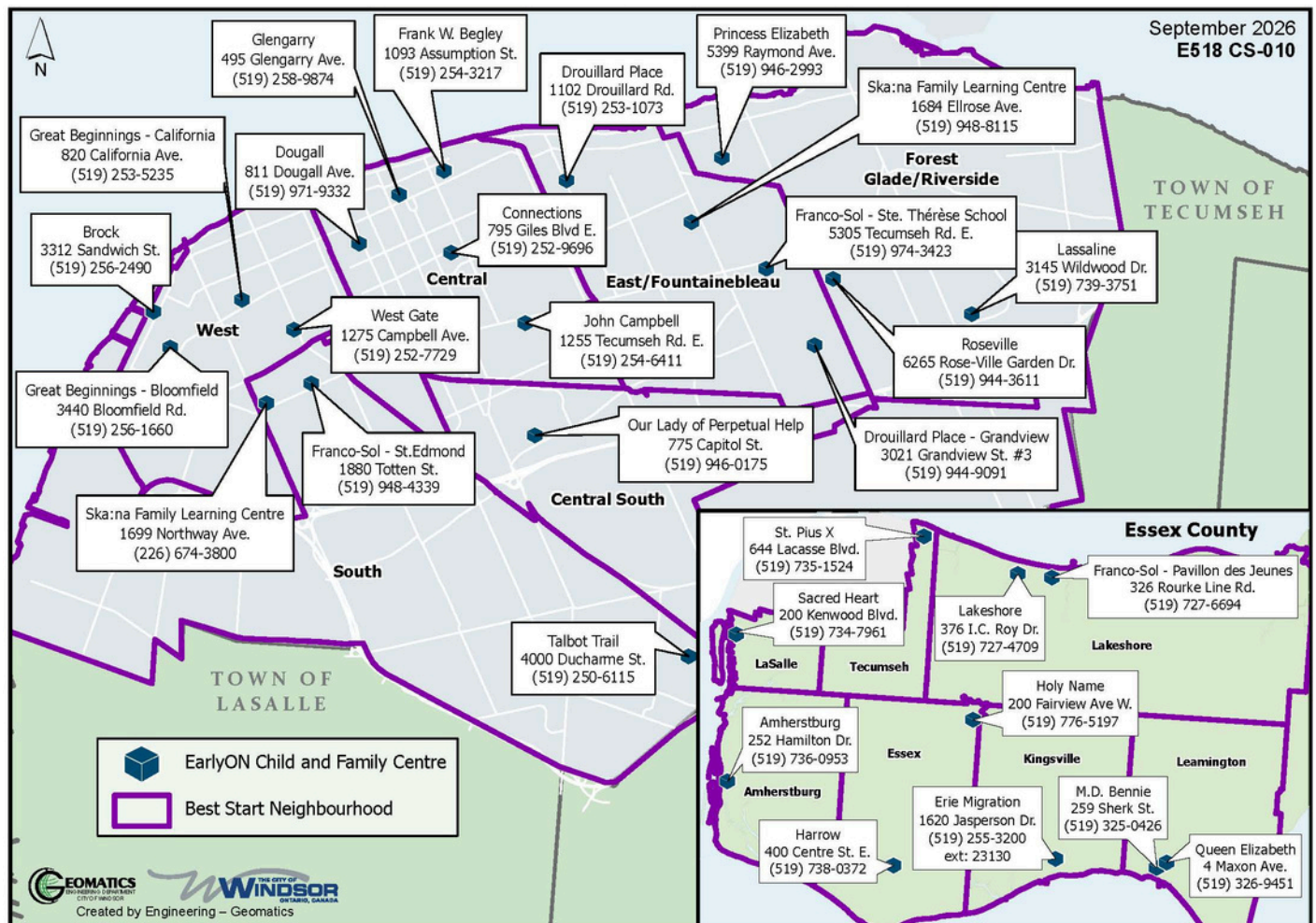
3,535
Referrals
Made

14,845
Parents/Caregivers
Served

79,017
Child
Visits

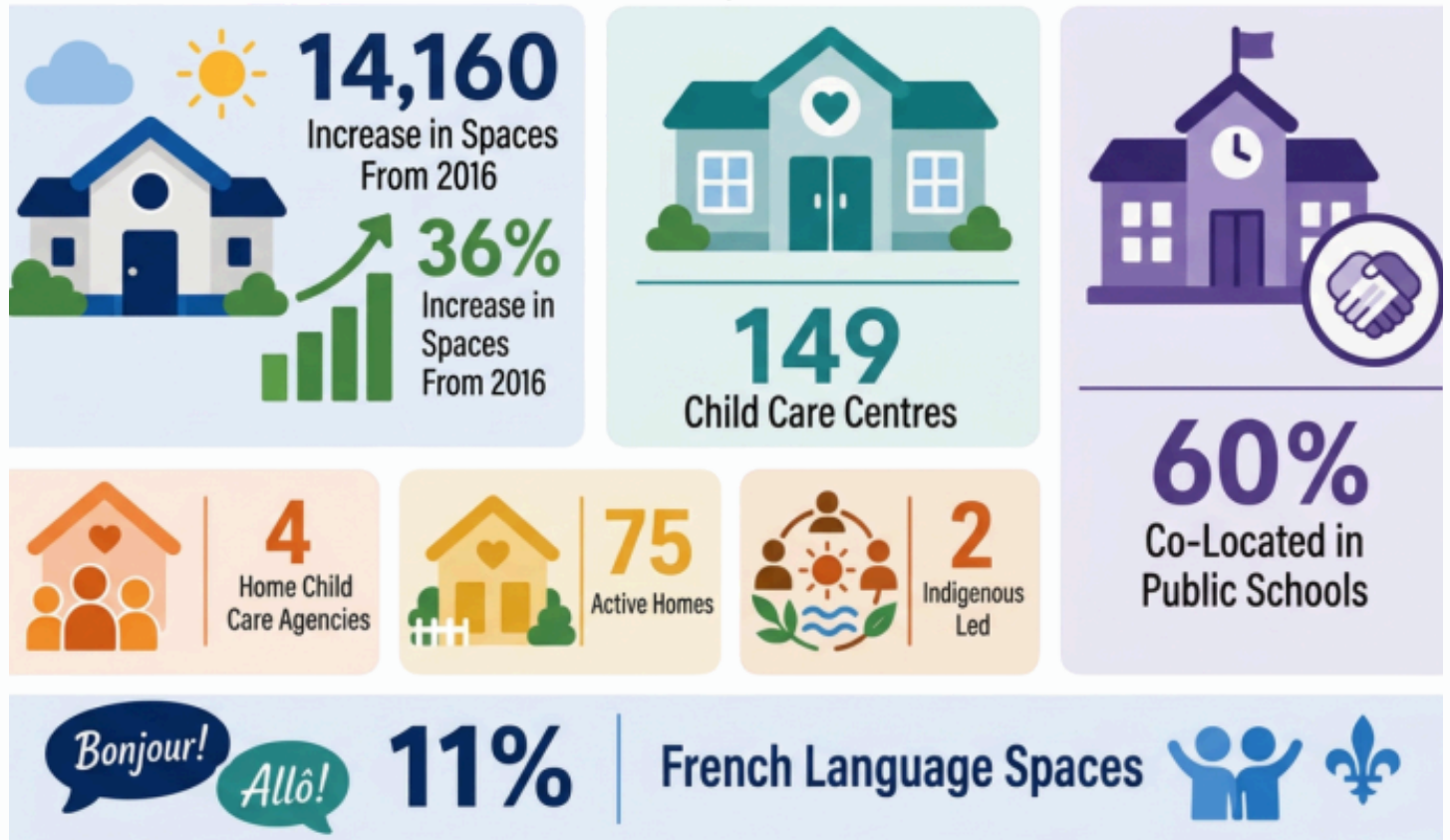
70,459
Parents/Caregiver
Visits

EarlyON Child and Family Centre Locations Across Windsor-Essex County



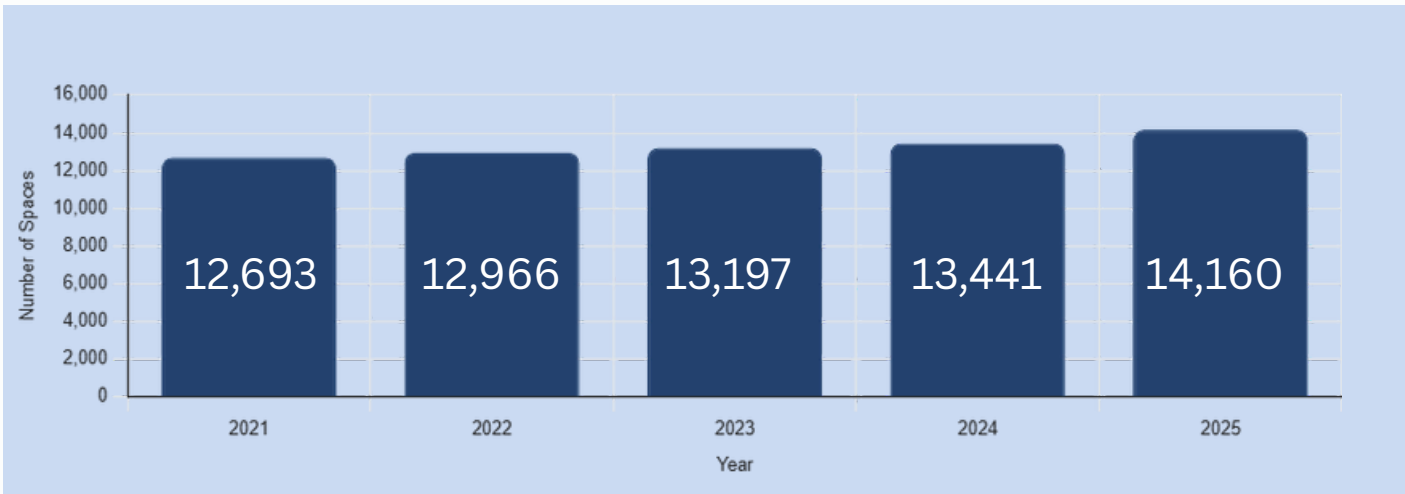
Licensed Child Care

LICENSED CHILD CARE IN WINDSOR-ESSEX COUNTY

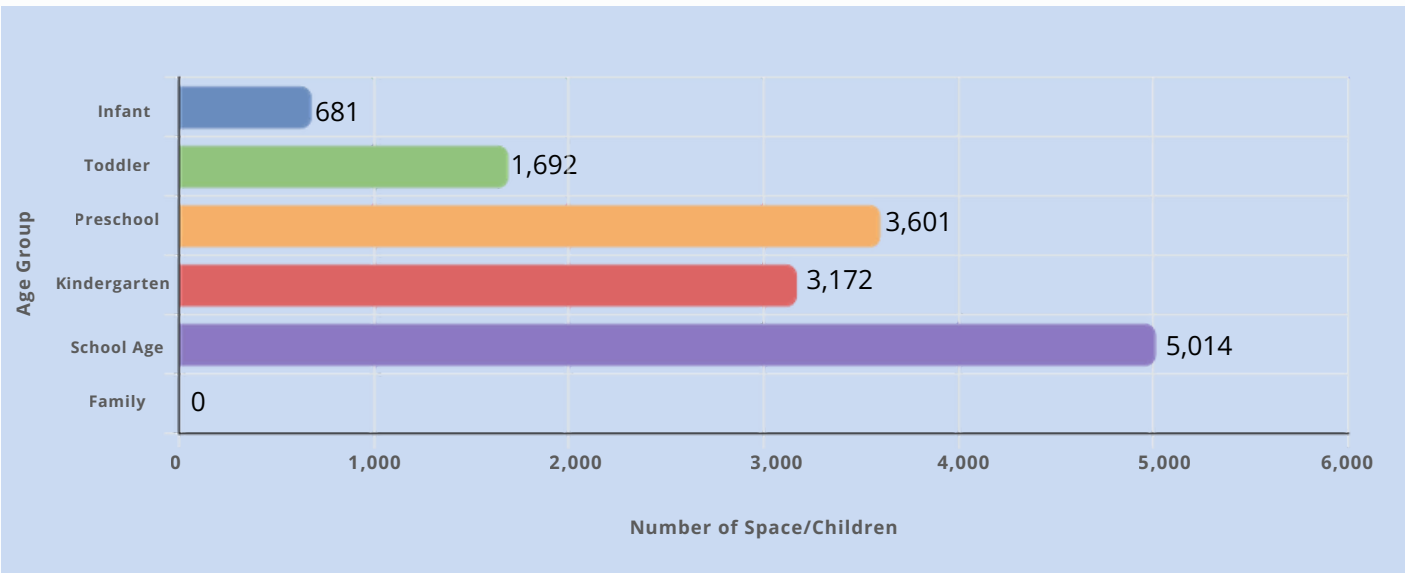


In Ontario, licensed child care refers to child care programs that are regulated under the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 (CCEYA) and overseen by the Ministry of Education. Licensed child care includes centre-based programs and licensed home child care. These programs must meet provincial requirements related to health and safety, staff qualifications, adult-to-child ratios, group sizes, program standards, and oversight, and are subject to regular monitoring and inspection by the Ministry of Education.

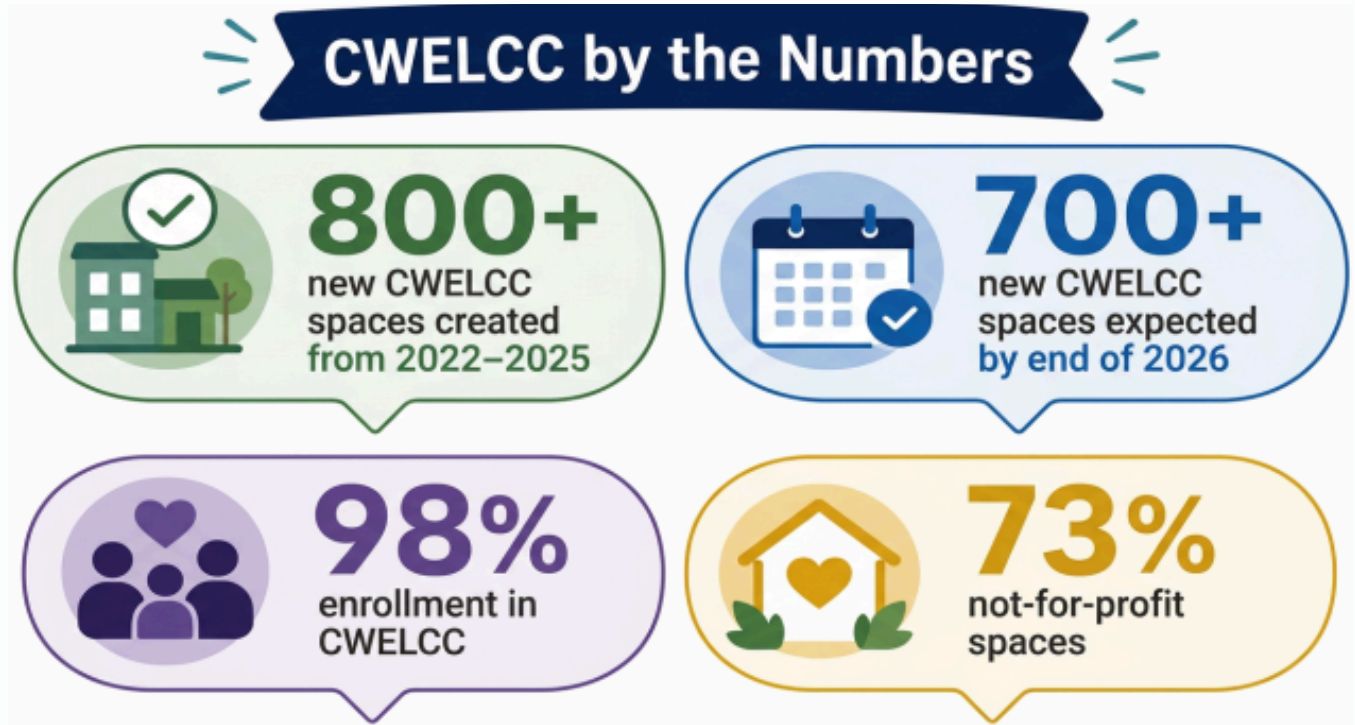
Spaces in Licensed Child Care in Windsor-Essex County (CWELCC and School Age) 2021-2025



Child Care Spaces by Age Group in Windsor-Essex, 2024-25 (from Ministry of Education)



Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) System



The 2023 Amendment to the Child Care and Early Years System Plan outlined Windsor-Essex's Directed Growth Expansion Plan under the new CWELCC system. Ontario aimed to create 86,000 new high quality, affordable licensed child care spaces (relative to 2019 levels) across the province predominantly through not-for-profit licensed child care providers. The City of Windsor was allocated 1,587 CWELCC expansion spaces through this plan. It is important to note that only spaces for children 0-5 years (infant, toddler, preschool, kindergarten) are considered CWELCC spaces (i.e., eligible for enrollment in CWELCC and subject to fee reductions).

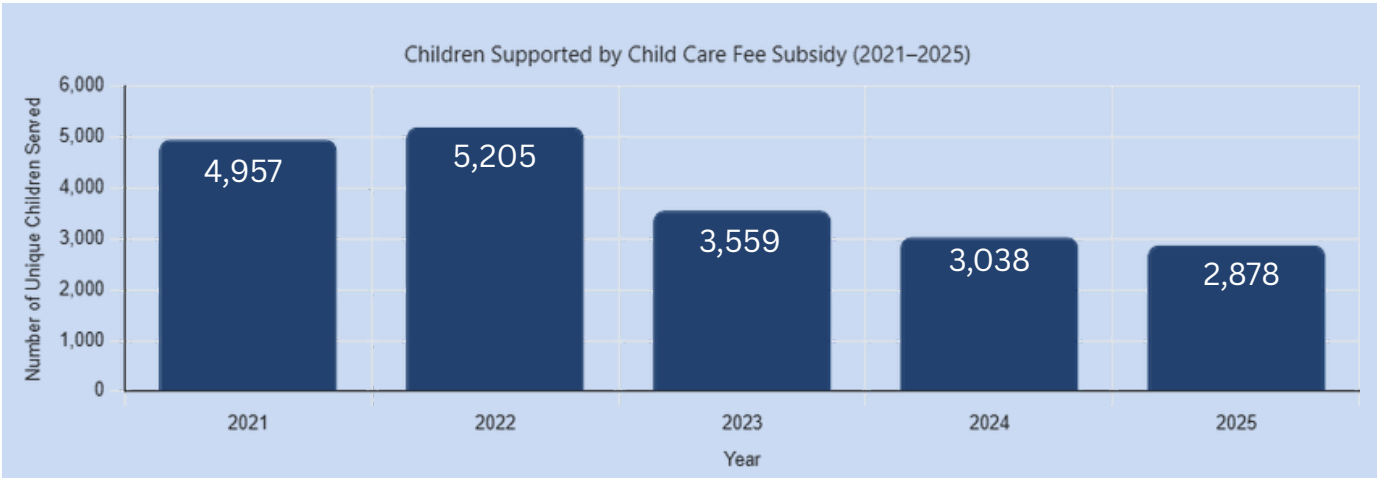
Since that plan was published, the City of Windsor's Children's Services division:

- Reduced parent fees for children 0-5 years of age by over 50%.
- Sustained a 98% enrollment rate for centres in the local CWELCC system.
- Implemented the mandatory fee cap of \$22 per day for CWELCC enrolled centres.
- Maintained an average parent fee across Windsor-Essex of approximately \$17 per day.
- Maintained a proportion of 73% not-for-profit CWELCC spaces within the local system.
- Implemented expansion plans to create over 1,500 new CWELCC spaces expected to be operational by the end of 2026.



Child Care Fee Subsidy

Child care subsidies are provided to help families with their child care costs for children 0-12 years of age in licensed child care programs. Subsidized care is available in Centre-Based, School-Based, and Home Child Care Programs, or Accredited Recreation Programs and Camps for school-aged children 6 to 12 years of age. Subsidies are approved based on financial need and are designed to further reduce or eliminate costs to parents (this includes additional reductions beyond the CWELCC rate caps).



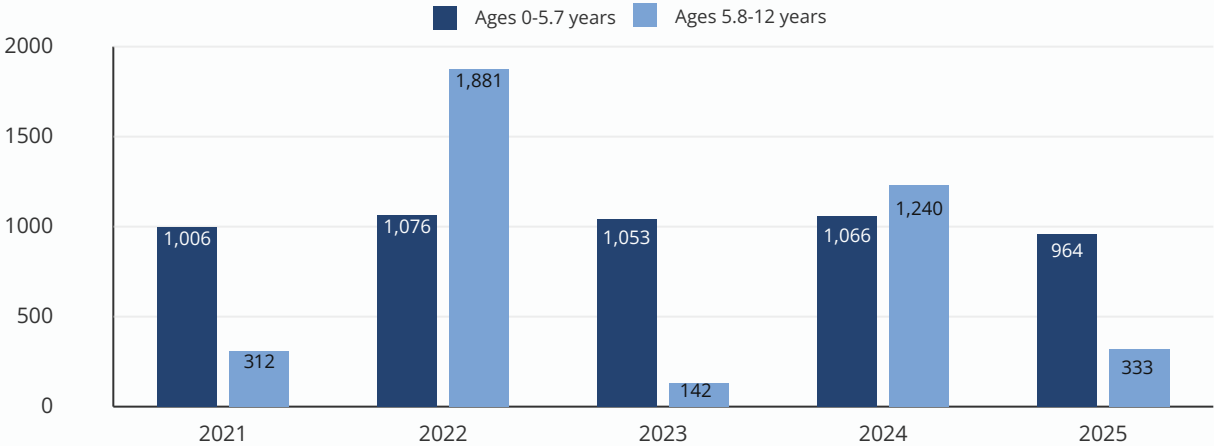
Special Needs Resourcing and Program Support

A key component of the child care and early years system is the delivery of Special Needs Resourcing, which helps support the inclusion of children with exceptional or additional needs in licensed child care settings, including licensed Home Child Care, in EarlyON Child and Family Centres, and in Accredited Recreation Programs and Camps. These supports are available at no additional cost to parents.

The Ministry of Education defines a “child with special needs” as a child whose cognitive, physical, social, emotional, or communicative needs, or needs relating to overall development require additional supports in a licensed child care or early years setting. A formal medical diagnosis is not required to receive supportive services, as the focus in these settings is ensuring all children with varying abilities can fully participate in child care programs alongside their peers.

Special Needs Resourcing includes the services of a Resource Teacher/Consultant to support the inclusion of children in early learning environments; specialized equipment and supplies for children with additional needs; professional learning opportunities for educators and others who work with children with additional needs; and funding for supplementary staffing to reduce child-to-staff ratios and support inclusive, high-quality service delivery.

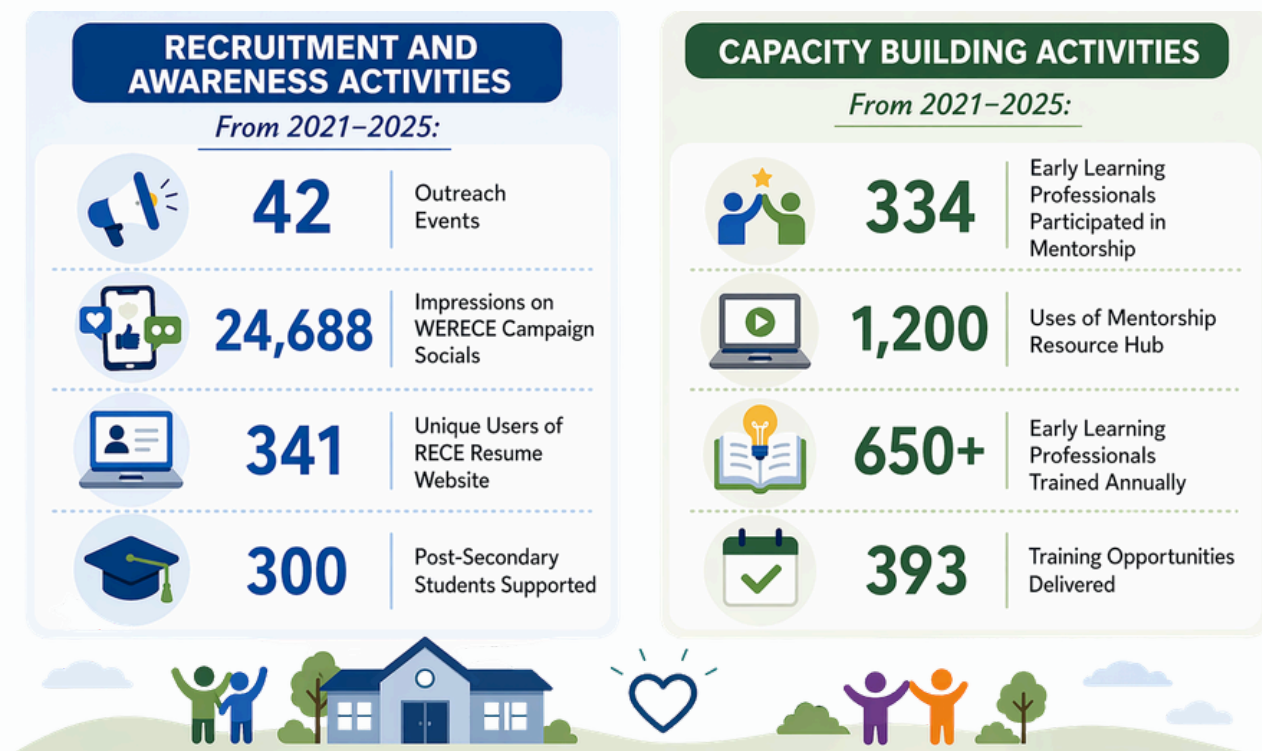
Children Supported in Licensed Child Care with Special Needs Resourcing Funds (2021-2025)



Early Years Workforce Development

Across Ontario, the recruitment and retention of high-quality professionals in the child care and early years sector has become a key focus for SSMS. Since 2022, the province has invested in locally developed community initiatives aimed at sustaining the current workforce, improving access to professional development, and attracting new recruits to the field.

Since the previous system plan, Windsor-Essex County implemented a comprehensive, community-driven workforce development strategy designed to achieve long-term impact and meet the evolving needs of our region.



Local initiatives delivered by the City of Windsor's Children's Services division include:

- Established a strong and consistent brand to build community recognition and engagement through the WE-R-ECE (Windsor-Essex Registered Early Childhood Educators) logo.
- Delivered the WE-R-ECE campaign to raise visibility and highlight the value of the profession through branded apparel, promotional merchandise, bilingual media campaign (TV, radio, cinema, social media, and community events), a print campaign (billboards, bus wraps, banners, and signage across the community), and common signage outside all licensed child care centres and EarlyON CFC 's
- Launched the WE-R-ECE Ambassadors program to actively promote the profession through partnerships with school boards, colleges, and employment agencies.
- Developed a structured mentorship program for RECEs and operation of a mentorship hub to support educators with tools, equipment, and resources to support their professional development and service delivery.
- Offered paid professional learning opportunities throughout each year for early years professionals.
- Collaborated with local colleges to increase enrollment in the ECE program and to support new graduates in securing employment in the field (includes scholarship programs, collaborative classrooms for hands-on learning, resource kits, and a lending library).
- Launched WE-R-ECE Resumes, a local resume repository and job search portal that allows early learning professionals to share resumes to local child care operators.



3

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

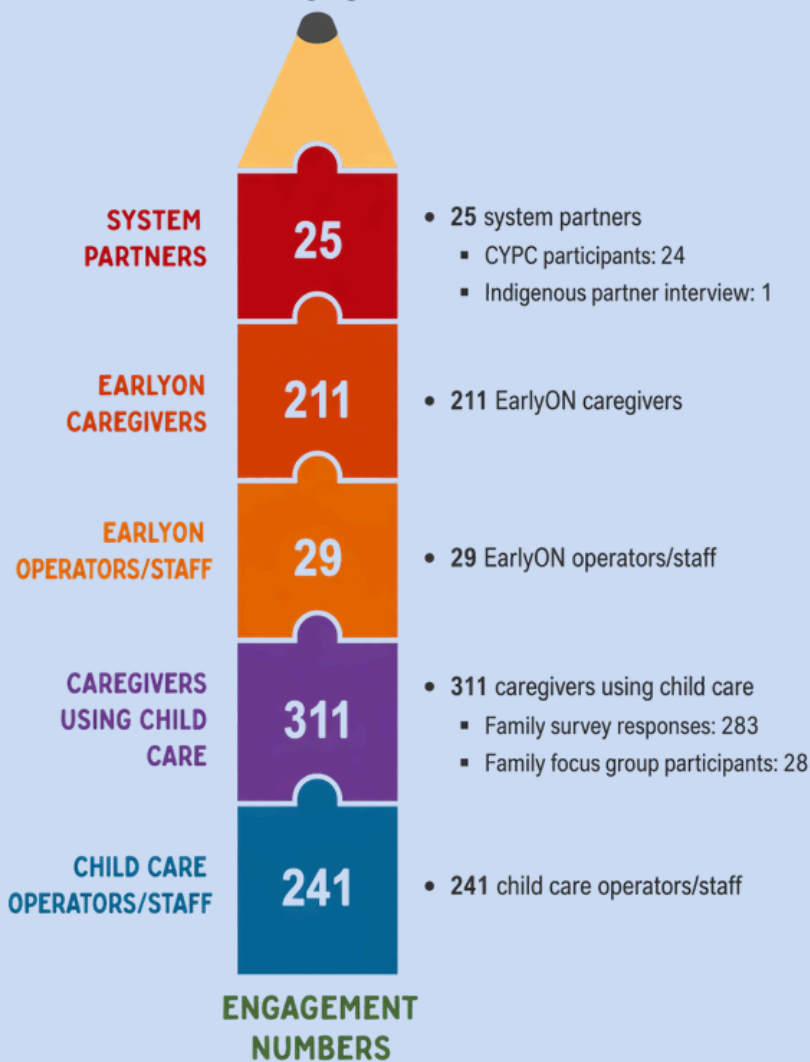
- Synopsis
- Child Care Engagement Findings
- EarlyON Child and Family Centre Engagement Findings
- System Partners Engagement Findings
- Voice of the Child

SYNOPSIS

A comprehensive, mixed-methods engagement process was undertaken in 2025 to inform the development of the 2026–2030 Child Care and Early Years System Plan. Engagement was designed to capture perspectives from families, child care operators, EarlyON Child and Family Centre (CFC) operators, system partners, and Indigenous partners across Windsor-Essex County.



817
Total Engagements



Engagement methods:

- Online surveys for child care operators, EarlyON CFC operators, and parents and caregivers.
- Targeted family focus groups, including families receiving child care fee subsidy, families with children with special needs, and culturally diverse families.
- A key-informant interview providing an Indigenous perspective.
- Facilitated sessions with the Child Care Network and the EarlyON CFC Network.
- Sector partner engagement through the Children and Youth Planning Committee.

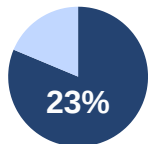


Child Care Engagement Findings

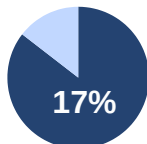
Child Care Parent Survey Highlights

A total of 283 parents and caregivers completed the family survey, with 224 respondents (83%) indicating they are currently using child care. Additionally, focus groups were held with 28 caregivers, gaining further insight into several key aspects of the child care system: special needs resourcing, child care fee subsidy, and meeting diverse family needs.

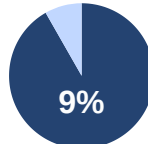
Demographic Insights:



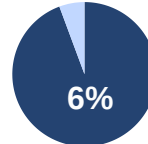
Identified as visibly diverse



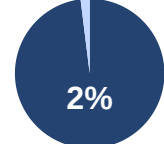
Identified as newcomers to Canada



Included a family member with a disability



Identified as LGBTQ2S+



Identified as Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit or Métis

- **46 languages** were spoken at home beyond English and French, most commonly Arabic and Spanish.
- Families reported an **average of two children**, with the largest number of children in care in the **toddler and school-age groups**.
- The vast majority used licensed child care centres, though many also relied on before-and-after-school care and informal arrangements.
- **41%** of respondents reported after tax family income **below the regional Market Basket Measure threshold of \$54,000**, indicating a significant proportion of families experiencing financial vulnerability.



Child Care Parent Survey Highlights

What Is Working Well?

Parents and caregivers told us:

- They are aware of the CWELCC system.
- They are aware of the availability of fee subsidies.
- They feel CWELCC and fee subsidies support employment and stability.
- Overall, satisfaction with their child care experience is high.
- They feel Windsor–Essex child care centres excel in being welcoming spaces.

What Do Parents Value?

Parents and caregivers told us:

- Parents associate quality with stable, caring, and communicative staff.
- Parents value strong, trusting relationships with staff and clean, safe environments.
- Cultural responsiveness and language access were important to engagement.
- Families wanted clearer communication, transparency, and meaningful opportunities to provide feedback.

What Needs Attention?

Parents and caregivers told us:

- They are concerned about waitlists for child care spaces.
- The fee subsidy program is challenging due to its limited flexibility in eligibility and the burden in meeting application requirements.
- They are concerned about affordability for school-age child care spaces.
- There are challenges finding care that aligns with work hours, especially for shift workers.
- They experience a strong emotional toll navigating supports for their children with special needs.



Child Care Operator Insights

Child care operators across Windsor-Essex provided detailed feedback through surveys and facilitated discussions, highlighting both the strengths of the local system and the pressures facing the sector. In total, 174 staff members of licensed child care centres submitted survey responses representing 80% of centres across the region, and 67 staff members participated in focus groups.

Overall, operators expressed a strong commitment to quality early learning and to supporting families, while emphasizing that the system is under increasing strain due to workforce, funding, and access challenges.

What Is Working Well?

Operators told us:

- CWELCC has improved affordability for families and increased demand for licensed child care.
- Engagement opportunities through networks and committees are frequent and valuable.
- They appreciate opportunities to collaborate, share feedback, and contribute to system planning.
- They are committed partners in delivering high-quality early learning and child care services.

What Do Operators Value?

Operators told us:

- They strive to provide inclusive support that meets diverse needs of children and families.
- They want professional learning opportunities focused on supporting children with special needs, trauma-informed care, self-regulation, and having difficult conversations.
- They recognize the importance of consistent, system-wide approaches to special needs resourcing and strong coordination with community partners.
- They value improved guidance, shared tools, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities to help address the growing administrative and reporting requirements associated with CWELCC funding.
- They want meaningful involvement in planning decisions related to CWELCC implementation, workforce strategies, and service expansion.

What Needs Attention?

Operators told us:

- Staffing shortages act as a major barrier to expanding licensed spaces, even where physical space exists, and disproportionately affect rural areas.
- They are concerned about rising operating costs and uncertainty about long-term funding stability.
- They are challenged by balancing affordability goals with the need to remain viable employers and maintain quality.
- Demand often exceeds supply, especially for infant, toddler, and before-and-after-school care.
- Children's needs are becoming increasingly complex, including developmental, behavioural, and mental health concerns.

EarlyON Child and Family Centre Engagement Findings

EarlyON CFC Parent & Caregiver Survey Highlights

A total of 211 families submitted survey feedback regarding their experiences with EarlyON Child and Family Centres (CFCs) programming. Overall, parents and caregivers expressed strong appreciation for EarlyON CFCs, describing them as welcoming, high-quality, and essential community resources that support both children's development and family well-being. Satisfaction with EarlyON CFCs was high, with families emphasizing the importance of relationships, accessibility, and inclusive, play-based programming.

"I like that the staff are patient and understanding, and the environment feels welcoming."

What Is Working Well?

- Staff are kind, welcoming, professional, and deeply committed to children and families.
- Environments feel warm, inclusive, and non-judgemental.
- Parents enjoy play-based programming and report positive impacts on children's social skills, language development, confidence, independence, and school readiness.
- Learning is embedded naturally through routines such as circle time, songs, and sensory play.
- Families report forming strong social connections with other parents, fostering a sense of belonging. They view this as particularly important for newcomers, first-time parents, and families with limited social supports.
- Centres are generally viewed as inclusive, with diverse materials, celebrations, and supports for children with additional developmental needs, including connections to services such as speech and language supports.

What Do Parents Value?

- Free, accessible programming close to home.
- A sense of community and peer support.
- Opportunities for social connection for both children and adults.
- Skilled, welcoming staff who play a key role in creating a positive EarlyON CFCs experience.
- Flexible program models, including drop-in participation, multiple locations, and varied times of day.
- Practical considerations such as transportation, parking, proximity, and ease of entry that influence attendance.

"The fact that there are many people who attend this location from a variety of ethnicities, cultures and family structures speaks to the fact that this center includes diverse programming."

What Needs Attention?

- Expanded afternoon, evening, and weekend programming to better support working families and those with school-aged children.
- Enhanced inclusion supports for children with special needs, including sensory-friendly and quieter spaces.
- More consistent cultural and linguistic representation across centres, including clearer and more consistent French-language programming.
- Improved communication and outreach to families who could benefit from EarlyON CFCs but are not currently attending.
- Addressing space limitations in smaller, highly utilized centres.

EarlyON CFCs Operator/Staff Insights

A total of 29 completed surveys were received from EarlyON CFCs operators, representing 27 of 30 sites (86%), with an additional 7 EarlyON CFCs staff participating in a focus group. Overall, EarlyON CFCs operators expressed strong pride in the role EarlyON Child and Family Centres play in supporting families and strengthening communities. They see the program as an essential foundation of the early years system and are deeply committed to its success.

What Is Working Well?

- High-quality, relationship-based programming within trusted spaces that support children's development, parenting confidence, and family well-being.
- Dedicated support helps reduce isolation, promotes the early identification of needs, and connects families to a wider range of community services.
- Flexibility in service delivery (including drop-in models, outreach, pop-up programs, and co-located services).
- Collaboration across the EarlyON CFCs network.

What Do Operators Value?

- EarlyON CFC's free, inclusive model and its ability to serve families regardless of income, immigration status, or service involvement.
- Strong commitment to creating welcoming environments for diverse families, including children with additional needs, newcomers, and equity-deserving communities.
- Being part of a coordinated early years system, where EarlyON CFCs can be integrated with child care, health, education, and social services.
- Opportunities for joint training, peer-to-peer learning, and shared tools to maintain quality and consistency across sites.
- Meaningful engagement where their input informs decisions, priorities, and system-level change.

What Needs Attention?

- Workforce capacity and sustainability, including challenges with recruitment, retention, and workload.
- Skills and resources required to address increasing complexity of family needs among those who use EarlyON CFCs programs.
- Resources to address requests for evening and weekend programming, transportation barriers, rural access challenges, and space constraints limiting participation for some families.
- Reducing duplication and improving integration with other early years services.

System Partners

Engagement Findings

Children and Youth Planning Committee (CYPC) Insights



What Is Working Well?

CYPC partners told us:

- Strong collaboration and information sharing among CYPC members.
- Creativity and resourcefulness in responding to emerging needs and system pressures.
- Ongoing trust-building between families and service-providing agencies.

What Do CYPC Partners Value?

CYPC partners told us:

- The CYPC as a forum for cross-sector collaboration and shared problem-solving.
- Opportunities to leverage collective expertise across agencies.
- The potential of CYPC to support shared learning, professional development, and coordinated action.

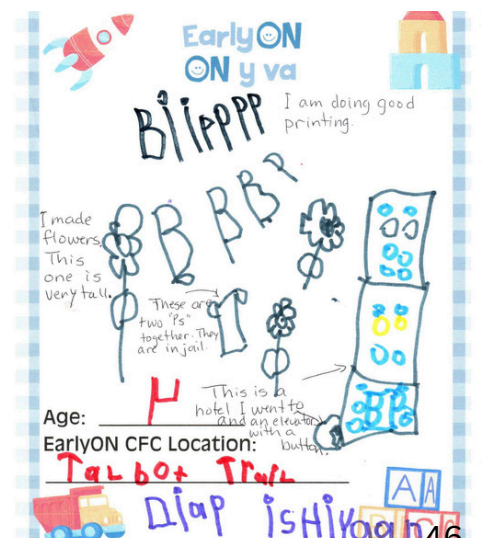
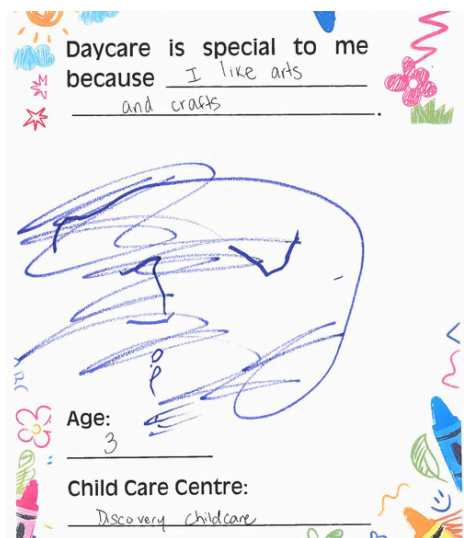
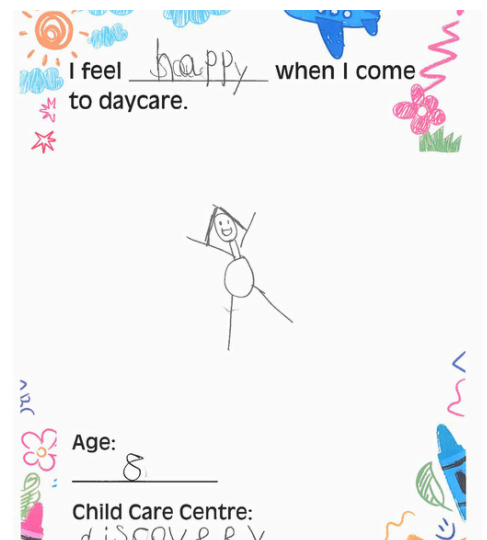
What Needs Attention?

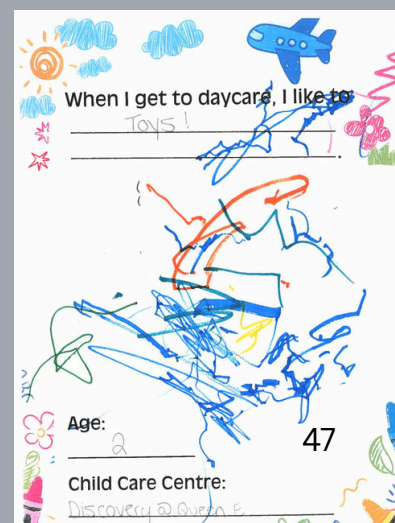
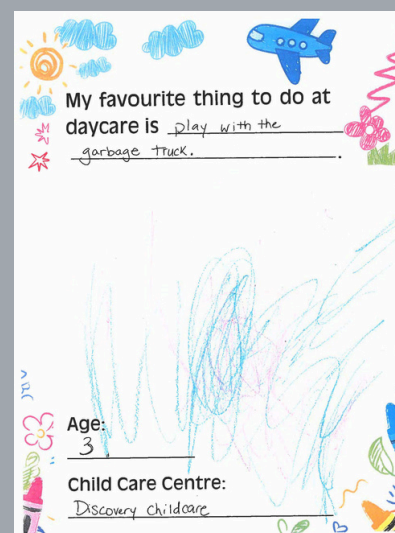
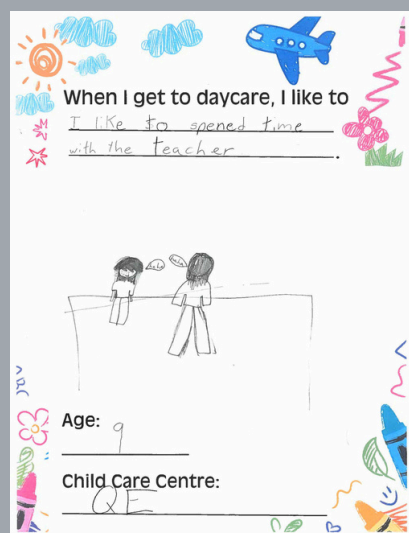
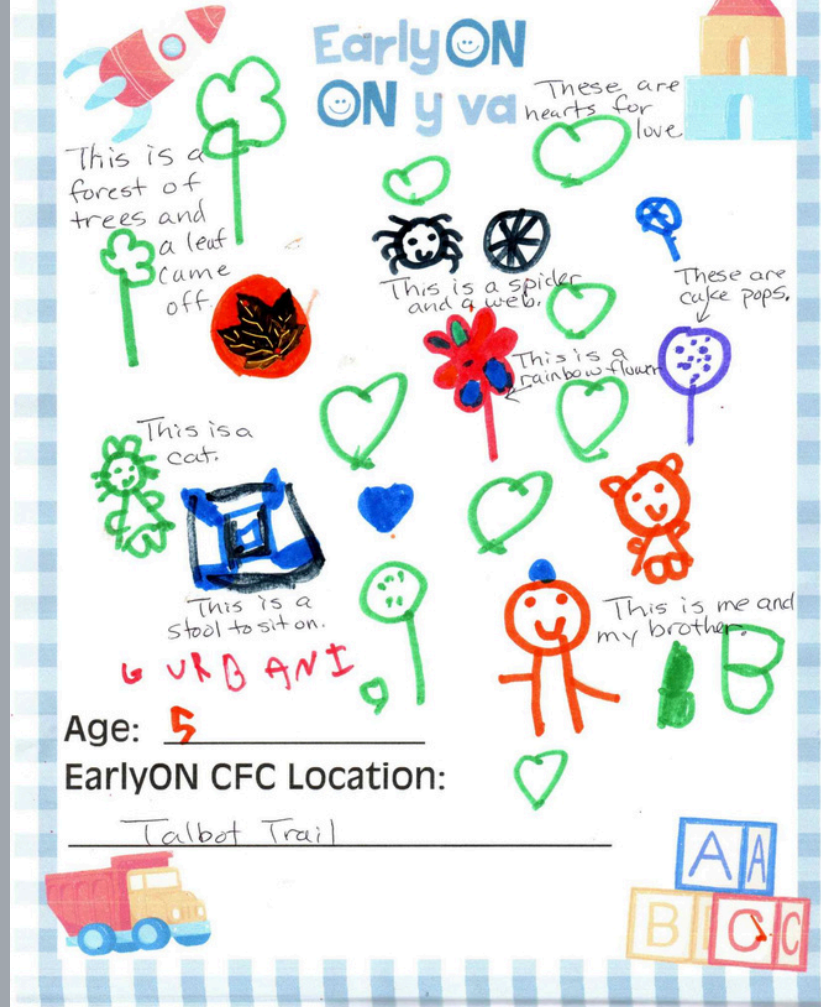
CYPC partners told us:

- Limited availability of services and capacity constraints across the broader children and youth system.
- Geographic disparities in access to services across Windsor-Essex.
- Fragmentation of services and lack of seamless coordination across the broader system.
- Gaps in formal communication, including uneven access to translation and language supports.
- Limited access to timely, relevant data and lack of clarity on how data should inform planning and decision-making.
- Increasing prevalence and complexity of exceptionalities, behavioural challenges, and family needs across the broader system.
- Need for stronger leadership and modernized structure for the CYPC.
- Opportunities to better use the CYPC as a platform for improved information flow, resource sharing and co-location, as well as joint professional development.
- Need to enhance alignment and reduce duplication across system partners.

VOICE OF THE CHILD

The Voice of the Child shares what children think and feel about their time in child care and EarlyON CFCs. Using their drawings and quotes, it gives a simple, authentic look at what matters most to them and helps make sure their voices are part of how services are shaped.







2026-2030 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

- Vision and Values
- Strategic Pillars
- Looking Ahead

VISION AND VALUES

Vision

A coordinated, inclusive, high-quality child care and early years system where all children and families in Windsor-Essex County thrive.

Pillar 1

System
Coordination
and
Data-Informed
Planning

Pillar 2

Workforce
and
Sector Capacity
Building

Pillar 3

Inclusion,
Belonging,
and
Family-Centred
Practice

Pillar 4

Integrated
Supports for
Children with
Exceptional
Needs

Values

Equity • Inclusion • Quality • Family Voice • Accountability • Collaboration

Equity: We work to ensure all children and families have fair access to child care and early years services by addressing barriers and directing supports where they are needed most.

Inclusion: We foster welcoming, culturally safe, and accessible early years environments where all children and families can fully participate and belong.

Quality: We support and deliver high-quality early learning and care through skilled educators, nurturing relationships, and continuous improvement.

Family Voice: We value families as partners and actively incorporate parent and caregiver perspectives into program design, service delivery, and system planning.

Accountability: We responsibly steward public resources by setting clear goals, using data to guide decisions, and transparently reporting on progress and outcomes.

Collaboration: We work together across sectors and communities to align efforts, share expertise, and build a coordinated early years and child care system.

Pillar 1:

System Coordination and Data-Informed Planning

Goal: A transparent, accountable system with strong leadership, shared planning, consistent communication, and integrated data to guide decisions and meet Ministry reporting requirements.

Objectives:

1. Increase data sharing and knowledge dissemination across child care and early years system partners.
2. Strengthen shared accountability through coordinated, cross-sector planning tables.
3. Improve system navigation for families through consistent communication and common tools.

Key Activities

1. Engage with sector partners to identify data and information needs.
2. Create data dashboards available for public use with relevant data to inform community planning.
3. Update the Terms of Reference and structure of the Children and Youth Planning Committee and associated sub-committees.
4. Implement local child care expansion plans across Windsor-Essex County, using data-informed decision making in alignment with the Ministry's CWELCC goals and the Ontario Access and Inclusion Framework.
5. Strengthen sustainability of EarlyON CFC network through enhanced data collection and collaborative operational planning.
6. Provide annual updates to stakeholders and the community on Service Plan implementation.

Sample Indicators

- Attendance rates at CYPC and system-planning meetings.
- Percentage of partners reporting improved access to timely information.
- Availability of key system information in multiple languages.
- Partner satisfaction with communication and information flow.
- Development and use of a system-level data dashboard.
- Frequency of data reporting to inform planning and decision-making.
- Partner satisfaction with system transparency and accountability.

Pillar 2:

Workforce and Sector Capacity Building

Goal: Strong recruitment, retention, and professional learning to support a stable workforce equipped to deliver high-quality, inclusive child care and early years programs.

Objectives:

1. Enhance the local sector's ability to attract and retain qualified educators and child care workers.
2. Adopt a shared definition of high-quality programs and services across child care and early years programs.
3. Increase access to foundational and specialized training opportunities for local educators and child care workers.

Key Activities

1. Deliver an updated and enhanced WE-R-ECE marketing campaign across Windsor and Essex County.
2. Support and amplify workforce development advocacy efforts across the province for enhanced wages and benefits for RECEs.
3. Strengthen partnerships with local post-secondary institutions and operators to support ECE training pathways.
4. Create consistent and standardized onboarding practices across the local child care and early years sector.
5. Collaborate with operators to create a shared definition of quality and a corresponding Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) framework for both child care and EarlyON CFCs networks.
6. Create a shared professional learning framework and align professional development offerings to meet sector needs for both child care and EarlyON CFCs networks.

Sample Indicators

- Number of impressions, engagements, or visits generated by the WE-R-ECE campaign across Windsor-Essex annually.
- Annual increase in RECEs in good standing in Windsor-Essex County.
- Annual increase in RECEs working in licensed child care in Windsor-Essex County.
- Percentage of participating child care and EarlyON CFCs operators implementing standardized onboarding tools or practices.
- Shared definition of quality and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) framework developed and adopted across child care and EarlyON CFCs networks.
- Number of professional development offerings aligned with the shared professional learning framework and number of individuals trained.

Pillar 3:

Inclusion, Belonging and Family-Centred Practice

Goal: Welcoming, respectful, and culturally responsive programs that reflect the diversity and strengths of all families.

Objectives:

1. Increase awareness of where and how to access information about child care and early years programs across Windsor-Essex County.
2. Enhance service options to meet diverse family needs across child care and early years settings.
3. Strengthen family leadership and voice through the ongoing collection and use of feedback in service planning activities.

Key Activities

1. Develop a communication plan that focuses on both general and targeted promotion of child care and early years programs and services.
2. Improve the website experience for families.
3. Expand EarlyON CFCs program offerings through evening and weekend program hours and pop-up sites.
4. Support Indigenous and Francophone agencies to provide tailored programming for the communities they serve.
5. Provide meaningful engagement for Indigenous and Francophone partners in system-wide program planning.
6. Create a page for caregiver feedback submission and have feedback posters available in all programs/centres.
7. Expand use of multilingual resources in all child care and early years locations.

Sample Indicators

- Increase in website traffic, time on key pages, or completed actions (e.g., service searches, referrals) following website improvements.
- Number of EarlyON CFCs programs offered during evenings, weekends, or through pop-up locations.
- Attendance or participation rates in non-traditional EarlyON CFCs program offerings (evenings, weekends, pop-ups).
- Number of Indigenous-led and Francophone-led early years programs or initiatives supported annually.
- Adoption of caregiver feedback tools across all child care and EarlyON CFCs locations.

Pillar 4:

Integrated Supports for Children with Exceptional Needs

Goal: Timely, coordinated, and equitable access to special needs supports across child care and early years program settings.

Objectives:

1. Increase utilization of available system navigation and community connection services across the sector.
2. Increase capacity of child care system to support early identification and proactive information sharing for families.
3. Improve transitions between programs and into school.

Key Activities

1. Promote Windsor-Essex County's SmartStart Hub across child care and early years settings.
2. Collaborate with partners to develop shared Inclusive Program Standards for the local sector.
3. Develop capacity for implementation of a standardized developmental screening tool across program settings.
4. Update Terms of Reference for the Inclusion Network and develop a new work plan in alignment with the System Plan and Ministry goals.
5. Collaborate with partners to update a shared Transition Protocol for Children with Special Needs to Elementary School.
6. Support and amplify advocacy efforts across the province for enhanced Special Needs Resourcing funding.

Sample Indicators

- Shared Inclusive Program Standards developed collaboratively with partners and formally endorsed.
- Percentage of child care and EarlyON CFCs programs implementing or aligning practices with the shared Inclusive Program Standards.
- Number or percentage of programs trained and supported to implement the standardized developmental screening tool.
- Updated Terms of Reference and multi-year work plan for the Inclusion Network approved and aligned with the System Plan and Ministry priorities.
- Updated Transition Protocol for Children with Special Needs implemented across child care, EarlyON CFCs , and school board partners.

LOOKING AHEAD



The 2026–2030 Windsor-Essex Early Years and Child Care System Plan is grounded in provincial direction and fully aligned with the Ministry of Education’s expectations for Consolidated Municipal Service Managers, including the Child Care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres Service System Management Guidelines and the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) Agreement. As the designated Service System Manager, the City of Windsor has a responsibility to plan, manage, and evaluate a coordinated early years and child care system that advances affordability, accessibility, inclusion, quality, workforce stability, and long-term sustainability.

This plan provides a clear and forward-looking framework to guide action over the next five years. It reflects the voices of families, educators, operators, and community partners, and outlines how Windsor-Essex will steward provincial and federal investments to strengthen services and improve outcomes for children and families. By aligning local priorities with provincial goals, the Plan supports a system that is responsive, equitable, and resilient.

Implementation of this Plan will require continued collaboration, shared accountability, and a commitment to learning and improvement. The City of Windsor’s Children’s Services Division is committed to monitoring progress, using data to inform decision-making, and sharing updates with the community. Together, we will continue to build a strong, inclusive early years and child care system that supports children’s development, family well-being, and community prosperity across Windsor-Essex.

“Your patience, passion, and dedication plant seeds of curiosity, confidence, and kindness. With every story you read, question you answer, and smile you share, you help children discover their unique potential. The impact you make today echoes through a lifetime – shaping not just learners, but compassionate, capable individuals.”



Lisa

11 years in the ECE Field

“Build strong relationships first. Children thrive when they feel safe and connected.

Take time to build trust with each child, relationships are the foundation of learning.

Be patient with children and yourself. Not every day will go as planned, and that's okay.

Growth takes time, for both you and the children in your care. Never stop learning. Attend workshops, read about child development and stay curious.

Every child and situation will teach you something new. Stay open.”



Marie

20 Years in the ECE Field

“Relationships are the curriculum: Before letters and numbers, there's trust, connection, and belonging. Build those first.

See the child, not just the behaviour. Every tantrum, giggle, or quiet moment is telling you something. Listen deeply.

Patience isn't passive: It's an active choice to meet children where they are and guide them forward at their pace.”



Claudia

7 years in the ECE Field

“Every moment with a child is a chance to inspire growth. Be present, be patient, and follow their lead with curiosity and care. Your impact lasts far beyond the classroom.”



Razan

1 year in the ECE Field

“Set aside the pressure on yourself as an Educator to “teach”—instead, focus on what really matters, what will really make a difference in the lives of children—RELATIONSHIPS!

Help children feel secure, feel loved, learn to trust the adults that care for them and to know that they are capable. The rest will come.

Help them to learn that the world is a wonderful place, and that you ENJOY them just for who they are!”



Gina

38 years in the ECE Field

“In Early Childhood Education, success isn't measured by test scores, but by smiles, curiosity and the safe space you create for children to grow.

We are not just teaching children, we are shaping the foundation of society. Nurture wisely, and always lead with empathy.”



Althea

10+ years in the ECE Field



CHILDREN'S SERVICES
Supporting Learning in the Early Years

