

Five Year Plan for Child Care and Early Years in Huron County

Service System Plan

June 14, 2024



Acknowledgements

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Huron County's Children's Land Acknowledgment

We play today on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Neutral peoples. As we play, we think about how we use the land and water every day to eat, drink, play, learn, and grow. We think about the First Peoples and how they continue to care for the land and water.

We know that there have been wrongs made in the past and that wrongs are still being made today. We promise to learn more about First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples. We will use what we learn to help each other grow. We will share the land, and we will work and play together in peace in the future.



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1.0 A Message from the County

We are pleased to present Huron County's Service System Plan for Child Care and Early Years Services. This comprehensive plan reflects our commitment to fostering an environment where every child can thrive, every family feels supported, and every educator is empowered.

Our vibrant communities, rich in cultural heritage and economic diversity, form the backbone of Huron County. This plan is a strategic guide to ensuring that our child care and early years services are accessible, inclusive, and of the highest quality. The development of this plan involved extensive engagement with parents, caregivers, child care providers, and community partners. We are grateful for the invaluable insights and feedback shared by all stakeholders, which have been instrumental in shaping our vision and priorities.

Key priorities identified in this plan include expanding child care services, improving workforce stability and support, enhancing affordability, boosting service quality and inclusiveness, strengthening community partnerships, and promoting data-driven decision-making. Each of these priorities is supported by specific initiatives aimed at addressing the needs and challenges identified through our community engagements and data analysis.

This plan is not just a roadmap for the future but a commitment to continuous improvement and collaboration. We believe that by working together, we can build a robust, inclusive, and sustainable child care and early years system that meets the diverse needs of our community.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who participated in the development of this plan. Your contributions have been vital to ensuring that the voices of our community are heard and that our strategies are aligned with the needs of children, families, and educators in Huron County.

Together, we look forward to implementing this plan and seeing the positive impacts it will have on our community.



2.0 Executive Summary

This document provides an overview of Huron County's Service System Plan for child care and early years services. It outlines the current landscape of these services, captures key community feedback and insights, and presents strategic priorities and initiatives designed to enhance accessibility, quality, and inclusivity.

Huron County is a vibrant region known for its diverse economy, rich cultural heritage, and strong community spirit. The Service System Plan is a strategic document aimed at guiding the development, implementation, and evaluation of child care and early years services in Huron County. This plan is crucial for addressing the unique needs of children, families, and educators, ensuring services are accessible, inclusive, and aligned with provincial priorities. By systematically identifying gaps, setting measurable goals, and outlining necessary initiatives, the plan provides a clear roadmap for enhancing the overall quality and accessibility of these services.

As Service System Managers, Huron County plays a central role in the planning, funding, administration and operation of early years and licensed child care services through direct service provision and/or third-party service agreements. Early learning and care services include licensed centre-based child care and home child care, EarlyON Child and Family Centres and programs, fee subsidy and preschool special needs resourcing.

Community Feedback

To develop the plan, extensive stakeholder engagement was conducted, gathering insights from parents, caregivers, child care providers, and community partners. Key feedback points include:

- **Accessibility:** A need for more child care spaces, especially for infants and toddlers.
- **Affordability:** Additional support is needed to make child care more affordable for families with school-aged children.
- **Flexibility:** Demand for more variety in child care options, including part-time care and services during atypical hours.
- **Staffing and Retention:** Challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff.
- **Professional Development:** Enhanced training and support opportunities for providers.
- **Inclusive Practices:** Need for more training and resources to support inclusive practices.
- **Collaboration:** Importance of strengthening partnerships and communication between the County and its partners.
- **Data Tools and Analysis:** Improving the usability and transparency of data management tools.

Sector Trends and Transformations

The child care landscape in Ontario has undergone significant reforms, such as the introduction of the Child Care and Early Years Act in 2014, the unification of various programs into EarlyON Centres, and funding initiatives like the Wage Enhancement Grant. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan further influenced service provision, emphasizing the need for a robust, adaptable, and inclusive child care system.

Vision and Strategic Priorities

Huron County’s vision for its child care and early years system focuses on creating an accessible and inclusive environment where every child can thrive, every family feels supported, and every educator is empowered.

To achieve this vision, the plan is structured around six key priorities, each with specific initiatives aimed at addressing identified needs and challenges. The table below outlines the priorities and the initiatives within them.

Priorities	Initiatives	Initiative Description
1. Expanding Early Learning and Child Care Services: This priority revolves around addressing the high demand from families in Huron County, aligning with Ontario's CWELCC goal to increase licensed child care spaces.	Expand Home Child care	Increase the number of licensed home child care providers to achieve the licensed capacity of 22 providers, then increase the licensed capacity as needed.
	Expand EarlyON Services	The addition of an EarlyON Child and Family Centre in South Huron to enhance the accessibility and inclusiveness of EarlyON services
	Encourage Flexibility in Timing	Offer services during atypical hours, including weekends, to accommodate parents with non-traditional work schedules.
	Public Awareness Campaigns	Launch a campaign to educate families with children on the available child care options in the county as well as how to navigate the child care system.
	Identify Barriers to Expansion	Conduct a needs assessment to identify and address barriers to expanding child care, focusing on space and staffing, and making the information publicly available to child care providers to keep them well-informed and supportive of planning efforts.

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Priorities	Initiatives	Initiative Description
	Partner for Expansion	Partner with organizations to identify potential new child care spaces.
	Collaboration with Employers	Partner with local employers to explore solutions that support working parents looking for child care options.
2. Improving Workforce Stability and Support: This priority addresses recruitment and retention issues, aligning with Ontario's CCEYA amendments to enhance workforce stability and the ministry's priorities for professional development.	Promote Child care and Early Years Career paths	Enhance communication, while working with colleges and schools to highlight the importance of the profession, the current increase in wages, and available career paths, aiming to create a workforce with a focus on education, skills, and experience.
	Monitor and Track Recruitment and Retention Trends	Design and implement a systematic approach to monitor and analyze trends affecting the recruitment and retention of child care and early years educators and staff.
	Enhance Professional Development (also see Section 4.3 below for more detail on the Ministry's professional development priorities)	Provide comprehensive professional development activities aligned with the ministry's priorities, focused on mental health, emotional regulation, and consistent implementation of "How Does Learning Happen?".
	Create Mentorship Initiatives	Establish mentorship and coaching programs to provide career growth and skill development opportunities.
3. Enhancing Affordability: This priority focuses on increasing the affordability of child care in alignment with Ontario's CWELCC initiatives to reduce fees and improve financial accessibility.	Increase Home Child care Providers Participation in CWELCC	Promote and then assist more home child care providers to join the CWELCC agreement.
	Promote School-Age Financial Supports	Promote financial subsidies and other affordability initiatives for school-age children, including summer camp support and initiatives that support a fee reduction.

Priorities	Initiatives	Initiative Description
<p>4. Boosting Service Quality and Inclusiveness: This priority ensures high-quality, inclusive services for all children, reflecting Ontario's "How Does Learning Happen?" framework, which emphasizes well-being and engagement.</p>	Emphasize the Implementation of "How Does Learning Happen?"	Continue a consistent focus on using "How Does Learning Happen?" as the central curriculum for child care.
	Expand Inclusive Practices	Provide more support and resources for children with special needs by enhancing partnerships with a range of social services and health agencies to increase access to more support workers in a range of disciplines.
	Enhance Inclusivity Training	Provide education and training to ensure that parents and educators in child care and EarlyON centres are equipped to effectively recognize and support diverse needs.
<p>5. Strengthening Community Partnerships: This priority focuses on enhancing collaboration with community and sector partners to enhance child care services, aligning with Ontario's guidelines for broader community engagement and resource integration.</p>	Engage Community Partners	Foster joint initiatives focused on shared training, resources, and best practices with existing and new community and sector partners.
	Support Expansion Efforts	Collaborate with sector organizations to support the expansion of child care spaces and EarlyON services (see priority 1).
	Leverage Community Engagement Forums	Leverage existing regular forums (such as Kids First and regional tables) to enhance local partnerships with sector peers, providers, educators, families, and community organizations to achieve the county's child care and early years services goals.
	Collect and Analyze Feedback from Families	Standardize feedback collection and analysis from families with children receiving child care and early years services in the County through surveys in collaboration with child care and early years service providers.
<p>6. Promoting Data-Driven Decision-Making: This priority focuses on improving data collection and reporting to better assess and adapt child care strategies, aligning with</p>	Improve Data Tools and Analysis Capacity	Enhance data tools to better support system functionality and transparency. In addition, explore the possibility of adding data analysis expertise to the team (e.g., Data Analysis Coordinator (DAC)) on a contract or permanent basis.

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Priorities	Initiatives	Initiative Description
Ontario's focus on accurate and timely data for informed decision-making.	Integrate Data into Planning	Work with the school boards, the Huron County planning department, and other departments in the County to include child care needs data in broader community planning and advocate for future demand planning for child care services.
	Conduct Regular Needs Assessments	Regularly obtain and examine data to maintain an up-to-date understanding of gaps and trends in child care services.

3.0 Introduction

A Service System Plan is a strategic document designed to guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of child care and early years services within Huron County. It addresses the unique needs of children, families, and educators, ensuring that services are accessible, inclusive, and aligned with provincial priorities. The process of developing this plan systematically identifies gaps in service provision, sets measurable goals, and outlines the necessary initiatives to enhance the overall quality and accessibility of child care and early years services in Huron County.

Since 2013, the Ministry of Education has required Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) to submit Service System Plans. These plans ensure that the County and its stakeholders, including families, child care providers, educators, and community organizations, have a clear roadmap for addressing the Ministry's priorities. The Service System Plan serves as a comprehensive guide for various stakeholders, offering a framework for collaboration, resource allocation, and policy implementation. It enables stakeholders to understand their roles, contribute to the County's shared vision, and work together to achieve a high-quality, sustainable, and inclusive child care and early years system in Huron County.

The plan outlines the current landscape of child care and early years services in Huron County, includes insights from a wide range of stakeholder engagements that were conducted in the process of developing the plan, and details the county's vision and strategic priorities. This document also presents a comprehensive plan with specific initiatives to address each priority area.



4.0 Child Care and Early Years Landscape in Huron County

4.1 Introduction to the County

Huron County, located in southwestern Ontario, is known for its vibrant communities, rich agricultural heritage, and scenic landscapes along the shores of Lake Huron. The county comprises several towns, villages, and rural areas, each offering a unique blend of cultural and recreational opportunities. The county's economy is diverse, with significant contributions from agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and services sectors. This diversity provides a strong foundation for the community, supporting both urban and rural lifestyles.

Huron County is committed to fostering a supportive environment for its residents, particularly children and families. The community values collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement, which are integral to enhancing the well-being and development of all children. The county's strategic location, combined with its strong sense of community and commitment to quality of life, makes it an ideal place for families to live and thrive.

4.2 Key Demographics of Huron County

Huron County's demographic landscape is diverse and continually evolving. These demographic trends underscore the importance of developing a responsive, inclusive, and well-supported child care and early years' service system to meet the diverse and changing needs of Huron County's population.

Key demographic trends include:



Population Growth

The County population was reported to be 61,366 individuals in 2021 and is projected to experience an annual population increase of 1.3% between 2022 and 2046, with children under 19 consistently representing 22-23% of the population. This growth highlights the need for sustained investment in child-focused services. The birth rate in the Huron and Perth Public Health coverage area was approximately 9.5 births per 1,000 residents in 2022. However, inter-provincial migration and immigration are expected to drive population growth.



Ethnic and Cultural Diversity

Immigrants make up a growing population that currently represent 8% of the population. In addition, the County has small communities of French-speaking and Indigenous residents, comprising 330 and 1,140 individuals respectively.



Household Structure and Income

The 2016 census revealed a variety of family configurations, including 8,190 households with children, 1,880 lone-parent families (predominantly female-led), and a significant number of single-person households. The median household income after-tax is lower than the Ontario average, typically \$16,000 less, impacting community planning and service provision.

4.3 Role of Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM)

Huron County provides child care and early years services under its role as a Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM). As mandated by the Ministry of Education, the CMSM is responsible for ensuring that services align with provincial priorities and local needs. The CMSM acts as a central point of accountability, overseeing the allocation of funding, the administration of programs, and the overall quality and accessibility of child care services.

The CMSM's responsibilities include assessing the community's needs, planning for service delivery, and collaborating with various stakeholders, including child care providers, families, and community organizations. By facilitating partnerships and fostering collaboration, the CMSM ensures that services are integrated and responsive to the needs of all children and families in the county.

In addition to strategic planning and coordination, the CMSM is tasked with monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of child care and early years services. This includes collecting and analyzing data to inform decision-making, identifying areas for improvement, and implementing best practices. The CMSM also facilitates provider relationships, administers funding, coordinates local services, and advocates for solutions that address issues and challenges within the system. Through its comprehensive and collaborative approach, the CMSM ensures that Huron County's child care and early years system is robust, inclusive, and capable of meeting the diverse needs of the community.

The County also provides professional development activities that are aligned with the ministry's priorities, including:

- Mental health and resilience training for staff;
- Early years and child care pedagogical practices aligned with How Does Learning Happen?
- Anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion practices;
- Incorporating Indigenous perspectives and pedagogies;
- Supporting educators in building capacity to support children with special needs through inclusive practices;
- Equity-based Communities of Practices (for Francophone and Indigenous communities); and
- Strengthening management/administration skills for those in director/supervisory roles as well as those considering moving into these roles.

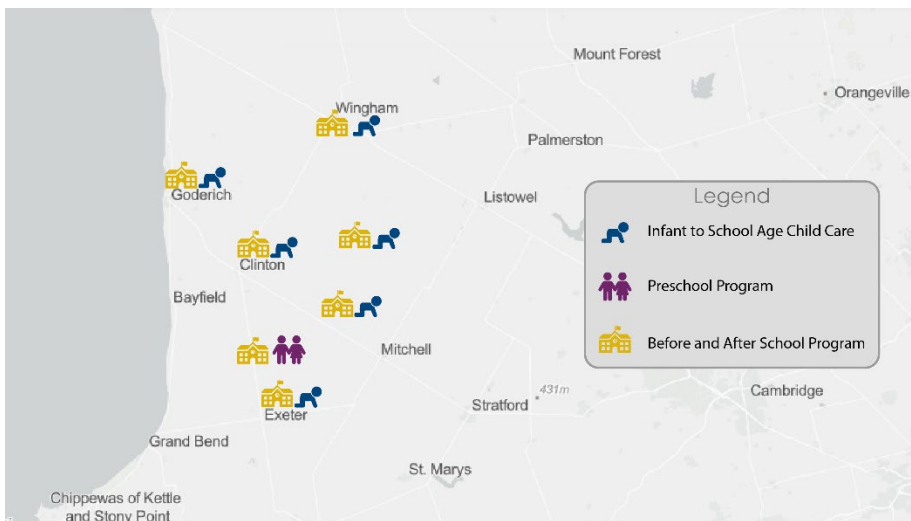
4.4 Child Care and Early Years Services and Programs in Huron County

Huron County's child care and early years services are comprehensive and designed to meet the varied needs of its residents. This holistic approach is evident through several key programs:

Child Care:

There are two types of Licensed child care in Huron County:

- Licensed Centre-Based Child Care: These are facilities that cater to various age groups from infants to school-aged children, offering various programs like nursery schools, full-day care, and before-and-after-school care. They are inspected annually by the Ministry of Education to ensure they meet health, safety, and developmental standards. Huron County has 18 child care centres as seen in the map below:



- Licensed Home Child Care: These are homes that cater to various age groups from infants to school-aged children. The Home Child Care Program can provide approved in-home child care in a family-like setting, ensuring that children from the same family can be cared for together by screened providers. They are inspected annually by the Ministry of Education to ensure they meet health, safety, and developmental standards.

EarlyON Programs:

EarlyON programs offer play-based learning for children and their parents or caregivers through various activities like play, song, games,



sensory, and creative experiences. EarlyON centres offer early learning and literacy programs, support for all aspects of early child development, and programs on pregnancy and parenting.

The EarlyON program in the County offers over 25 programs per week across the county. These services are available at various locations in Huron County, including community spaces like libraries and schools, ensuring accessibility to a wide range of families.

The following charts show the approximate locations and number of EarlyON centres throughout Huron County, along with a calendar of events that will occur at the various EarlyON centres over a two-week period.



EarlyON Programs in Huron County

Location	Centres
Central Huron	3
Goderich	1
North Huron	3
Bluewater	3
South Huron	5
Huron East	7
Mun. of Morris-Turnberry	1
Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh	1
Township of Howick	1



Fee Subsidy Program:

This program assists families with the costs associated with child care. The program supported 200-260 children and families each month in 2023, highlighting its critical function in making child care services accessible to families needing financial assistance.

Growing Together Program:

A special needs resourcing program that supports children aged 0-12 with developmental or special needs, offering services such as individualized learning plans, coordination with professionals, and support in child care and EarlyON settings. It promotes inclusive environments, assists with school transitions, and is available for free to eligible children in Huron County. The program serves infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-aged children in a comprehensive approach to early years services.

OneHSN Registry:

Serves as an online, centralized child care registry and information service, simplifying the process for families to apply for child care. It provides a platform where parents and caregivers can apply to multiple child care programs without the need to contact them individually. (Weblink: [Apply with OneHSN](#))

4.5 What We Heard from the Community

To develop a comprehensive 5-Year Service System Plan for child care and early years in Huron County, we engaged a wide range of stakeholders, including parents and caregivers, child care providers, community partners, and home child care providers. Through focus groups, interviews, surveys, and data reviews, we collected valuable insights that have shaped the priorities and initiatives in our plan. Here is a summary of the key feedback points as provided by our community:

- **Accessibility:** Parents and caregivers highlighted a significant need to enhance accessibility to child care spaces. Many indicated the need for more child care spots, especially for infants and toddlers.
- **Affordability:** While the affordability of child care for preschool-aged children is supported by the CWELCC agreement, stakeholder engagement highlighted a clear need for more supports to make child care more accessible for families with school-aged children.
- **Flexibility:** There is a demand for more variety in child care options, including part-time care and services during atypical hours to accommodate various work schedules and family needs.
- **Staffing and Retention:** Child care providers identified a need to enhance and increase the recruitment and retention of qualified staff.

- **Professional Development:** Providers expressed a need for enhanced professional development opportunities. Stakeholder engagement emphasized the need for ongoing training and support to improve service quality and staff retention.
- **Inclusive Practices:** There is a demand for more training and resources to support inclusive practices among parents and providers, ensuring that all children receive the support they need to thrive.
- **Collaboration:** Community partners emphasized the importance of enhancing partnerships and improving communication between the County and its partners. Opportunities for joint training and joint endeavours were highlighted as ways to strengthen child care and early years services in the County.
- **Data Tools and Analysis:** Stakeholder engagement highlighted the need to enhance the usability and transparency of data tools in the County, particularly regarding waitlist data management.

These insights guided the development of our vision and priorities, ensuring our plan is responsive to the community's needs and aligned with best practices in child care and early years service provision.



4.6 Historical Context and Key Transformations in the Child care and Early Years Landscape in Ontario

Ontario's child care sector has seen significant reforms to improve accessibility, affordability, and quality. Key changes include the 2014 Child Care and Early Years Act and the "How Does Learning Happen?" framework, the unification of programs into EarlyON Child and Family Centres, and funding initiatives like the 2015 Wage Enhancement Grant. The 2021 CWELCC Plan aimed to reduce fees and increase spaces. Funding structures shifted in 2019, and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic prompted emergency child care for essential workers. The 2024 Value for Money Audits ensure efficient fund use and explore third-party service provision. These trends impact the landscape of child care and early years in the Province and thus need to be considered in Huron County's service system planning.





5.0 Service System Plan

This section presents the service system plan for child care and early years services in Huron County, structured around key priorities. Each priority includes specific initiatives, anticipated outcomes, rationales, and timelines to address the diverse needs of families and children in the community.

5.1 Overview of the County's vision and priorities

The vision for Huron County's child care and early years services system is a commitment to creating an environment where accessibility and inclusivity are the cornerstones. This vision means that every child, regardless of background or ability, will have the opportunity to grow and thrive in a nurturing and high-quality child care setting. Families will find the support they need to balance work and life while knowing their children are in safe and enriching environments. Educators will feel valued and empowered through professional development and supportive working conditions.

Vision Statement:

Huron County envisions a future where its child care and early years system is accessible and inclusive, fostering a supportive and thriving environment where every child has the opportunity to flourish, every family feels supported, and every educator is empowered.

To achieve this vision, the Service System Plan is structured around six key priorities:

1. **Expanding Child Care Services:** Addressing the high demand from families in Huron County, aligning with Ontario's CWELCC goal to increase licensed child care spaces.
 - o **Improving Workforce Stability and Support:** Addressing recruitment and retention issues, aligning with Ontario's CCEYA amendments to enhance workforce stability and the ministry's priorities for professional development.
2. **Enhancing Affordability:** Increasing the affordability of child care in alignment with Ontario's CWELCC initiatives to reduce fees and improve financial accessibility.
3. **Boosting Service Quality and Inclusiveness:** Ensuring high-quality, inclusive services for all children, reflecting Ontario's "How Does Learning Happen?" framework, which emphasizes well-being and engagement.
4. **Strengthening Community Partnerships:** Enhancing collaboration with community and sector partners to enhance child care services, supporting Ontario's guidelines for broader community engagement and resource integration.
5. **Promoting Data-Driven Decision Making:** Improving data collection and reporting to better assess and adapt child care strategies, aligning with Ontario's focus on accurate and timely data for informed decision-making.

These priorities are designed to address the needs and challenges identified through community engagement and data analysis, ensuring a comprehensive and targeted approach to improving child care and early years services in the county. Each of these priorities will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

5.2 Priority#1: Expanding Early Learning and Child Care Services

5.2.1 Description

This priority revolves around addressing the high demand from families in Huron County, aligning with Ontario's CWELCC goal to increase licensed child care spaces. This expansion aims to enhance the access of families in the County to reliable and quality child care.

5.2.2 Rationale

The stakeholder engagement and data show a need to enhance service availability in the County, especially for infants and toddlers. Expanding the number of available spaces addresses these gaps and responds to the high demand. This priority area also aligns with Ontario's focus on increasing licensed child care spaces as stated in the CWELCC, which targets the creation of new spaces.

5.2.3 Initiatives

The table below shows the initiatives planned under this priority, including:

Initiative	Definition	Rationale
1. Expand Home Child care	Increase the number of licensed home child care providers to achieve the licensed capacity of 22 providers, then increase the licensed capacity as needed.	Addressing the high demand for flexible child care options, especially for infants and toddlers, ensuring availability across the County.
2. Expand EarlyON Services	The addition of an EarlyON Child and Family Centre in South Huron to enhance the accessibility and inclusiveness of EarlyON services	Providing families with accessible and inclusive early years services, particularly in underserved areas.
3. Enhance Flexibility in Timing	Offer services during atypical hours, including weekends, to accommodate parents with non-traditional work schedules.	Supporting parents with non-traditional work hours, increasing their access to reliable child care.

Initiative	Definition	Rationale
4. Public Awareness Campaigns	Launch a campaign to educate families with children on the available child care options in the county as well as how to navigate the child care system.	Raising awareness among families about available services and enhancing utilization of child care resources.
5. Identify Barriers to Expansion	Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to identify and address barriers to expanding child care, focusing on space and staffing, and making the information publicly available to child care providers to keep them well-informed and supportive of planning efforts.	Identifying and addressing barriers to expansion will help target resources effectively and support growth in child care spaces.
6. Partner for Expansion	Partner with organizations to identify potential new child care spaces.	Leveraging community partnerships to increase the number of child care spaces, ensuring a collaborative approach to expansion.

5.3 Priority#2: Improving Workforce Stability and Support

5.3.1 Description

This priority addresses recruitment and retention issues, aligning with Ontario's CCEYA amendments to enhance workforce stability and the ministry's priorities for professional development. The goal is to improve workforce stability and ensure that early childhood educators are well-supported and recognized.

5.3.2 Rationale

Enhancing support and professional development aligns with the need for increased access to child care, while also supporting service quality and staff retention. This initiative aligns with Ontario's new amendments under the CCEYA, which focus on workforce stability through updated qualification requirements and additional supports. Furthermore, it aligns with the Ministry of Education's professional development guidelines and strategic approach.

5.3.3 Initiatives

The table below outlines the initiatives planned under this priority, including:

Initiative	Definition	Rationale
1. Promote Child care and Early Years Career paths	Enhance communication, while working with colleges and schools to highlight the importance of the profession, the current increase in wages, and available career paths, aiming to create a workforce with a focus on education, skills, and experience.	Increasing awareness and attractiveness of the profession will support recruitment and build a more skilled workforce.
2. Monitor and Track Recruitment and Retention Trends	Design and implement a systematic approach to monitor and analyze trends affecting the recruitment and retention of child care and early years educators and staff.	Keeping track of trends helps in making informed decisions to enhance workforce stability and address emerging issues.
3. Enhance Professional Development	Provide comprehensive professional development activities aligned with the ministry's priorities, focused on mental health, emotional regulation, and consistent implementation of "How Does Learning Happen?".	Professional development supports educator well-being and skill enhancement, leading to better service quality and staff retention.
4. Create Mentorship Programs	Establish mentorship and coaching programs to provide career growth and skill development opportunities.	Mentorship programs support career progression and skill development, helping to retain and motivate staff.

5.4 Priority#3: Enhancing Affordability

5.4.1 Description

This priority focuses on increasing the affordability of child care in alignment with Ontario's CWELCC initiatives to reduce fees and improve financial accessibility. It aims to enhance the accessibility of child care for both early years and school-aged children.

5.4.2 Rationale

The data collected and the stakeholder engagement held during the planning shows that the affordability of child care, particularly for school-age children, is a persistent challenge for many families in the County. This priority also supports Ontario's initiatives under CWELCC to reduce fees and improve financial accessibility for families through the \$10/day CWELCC agreement in the County.

5.4.3 Initiatives

The table below highlights the initiatives planned under this priority, including:

Initiative	Definition	Rationale
1. Increase Home Child care Providers Participation in CWELCC	Promote and then assist more home child care providers to join the CWELCC agreement.	Increasing provider participation in CWELCC expands affordable child care options for families.
2. Promote School-Age Financial Supports	Promote financial subsidies and other affordability initiatives for school-age children, including summer camp support and 'Free September' in the fall.	Financial supports help reduce child care costs for families, making it more accessible.
3. Collaboration with Employers	Partner with local employers to explore solutions that support working parents looking for child care options.	Employer collaborations can provide additional support and resources for working parents, enhancing affordability.

5.5 Priority#4: Boosting Service Quality and Inclusiveness

5.5.1 Description

This priority ensures high-quality, inclusive services for all children, reflecting Ontario's "How Does Learning Happen?" framework, which emphasizes well-being and engagement. The aim is to implement and expand inclusive practices through education, training, and expanded supports.

5.5.2 Rationale

Engagement with parents and caregivers shows high levels of satisfaction with the quality of various aspects of child care services in the County. The County is committed to continue providing high-quality, inclusive services, particularly for families and children with special needs. This aligns with the principles of Ontario's pedagogical framework "How Does Learning Happen?" which emphasizes well-being, engagement, and inclusive practices.

5.5.3 Initiatives

The table below describes the initiatives planned under this priority, including:

Initiative	Definition	Rationale
1. Emphasize the Implementation of "How Does Learning Happen?"	Continue a consistent focus on using "How Does Learning Happen?" as the central curriculum for child care.	Ensuring consistent implementation enhances service quality and aligns with provincial guidelines.
2. Expand Inclusive Practices	Provide more support and resources for children with special needs by enhancing partnerships with a range of social services and health agencies to increase access to more support workers in a range of disciplines.	Expanding inclusive practices ensures all children receive the support they need to thrive.
3. Enhance Inclusivity Training	Provide education and training to ensure that parents and educators in child care and EarlyON centres are equipped to effectively recognize and support diverse needs.	Training enhances the capacity of educators and parents to support diverse needs, promoting inclusivity.

5.6 Priority#5: Strengthening Community Partnerships

5.6.1 Description

This priority focuses on enhancing collaboration with community and sector partners to enhance child care services, aligning with Ontario's guidelines for broader community engagement and resource integration. The focus is on fostering partnerships and collaborations with sector partners, families, providers, and educators.

5.6.2 Rationale

Engagement with partners and providers highlights opportunities for more collaboration to enhance partnerships that can support the County's effort to address community needs. This supports the broader community engagement and resource integration as outlined in the provincial guidelines for child care.

5.6.3 Initiatives

The table below presents the initiatives planned under this priority, including:

Initiative	Definition	Rationale
1. Engage Community Partners	Foster joint initiatives focused on shared training, resources, and best practices with existing and new community and sector partners.	Collaborating with partners leverages shared resources and knowledge, enhancing service delivery.
2. Support Expansion Efforts	Collaborate with sector organizations to support the expansion of child care spaces and EarlyON services (see priority 1).	Partnering with organizations helps to identify and develop new child care spaces, addressing community needs.
3. Leverage Community Engagement Forums	Leverage existing regular forums (such as Kids First and regional tables) to enhance local partnerships with sector peers, providers, educators, families, and community organizations to achieve the county's child care and early years services goals.	Using established forums facilitates regular stakeholder engagement and collaboration, driving community-centered goals.
4. Collect and Analyze Feedback from Families	Standardize feedback collection and analysis from families with children receiving child care and early years services in the County through surveys in collaboration with child care and early years service providers.	Collecting and analyzing feedback helps to understand community needs and improve service quality.

5.7 Priority#6: Promoting Data-Driven Decision Making

5.7.1 Description

This priority focuses on improving data collection and reporting to better assess and adapt child care strategies, aligning with Ontario's focus on accurate and timely data for informed decision-making. The objective is to ensure accurate, standardized processes and tools are in place to gather and analyze data to utilize in planning for the future of child care in the County.

5.7.2 Rationale

Accurate and timely data is important for efficient planning practices to address current and future child care and early years services across Huron County. This also enhances

the County’s work to align with Ontario’s focus on data and reporting to assess and adapt child care strategies effectively.

5.7.3 Initiatives

The table below shows the initiatives planned under this priority, including:

Initiative	Definition	Rationale
1. Improve Data Tools and Analysis Capacity	Enhance data tools to better support system functionality and transparency. In addition, explore the possibility of adding data analysis expertise to the team (e.g., Data Analysis Coordinator (DAC)) on a contract or permanent basis.	Improved data tools and expertise enable better decision-making and strategic planning.
2. Integrate Data into Planning	Work with the school boards, the Huron County planning department, and other departments in the County to include child care needs data in broader community planning and advocate for future demand planning for child care services.	Integrating data into planning ensures child care needs are considered in broader community development efforts.
3. Conduct Regular Needs Assessments	Regularly obtain and examine data to maintain an up-to-date understanding of gaps and trends in child care services.	Ongoing needs assessments provide current insights for effective planning and adaptation of services.

6.0 Conclusion

Huron County is dedicated to fostering strong partnerships in the implementation of this Service System Plan for Child Care and Early Years Services. This plan highlights our commitment to creating an accessible, inclusive, and high-quality child care system. We recognize that collaboration with families, educators, providers, and community partners is crucial to the success of our initiatives. Our commitment to these partnerships ensures that we will continuously improve and adapt our services to meet the evolving needs of our community. Together, we can create a supportive, inclusive, and high-quality child care and early years system that benefits all children and families in Huron County. Thank you for your ongoing support and engagement as we move forward in this important endeavor.