



2024 annual update: 2023 to 2027 Early Learning and Child Care Service Plan

The Regional Municipality of Durham Children's Services Division



This 2024 annual report outlines initiatives and accomplishments in meeting our Service Plan priorities and shares the continued commitment to supporting Durham Region children and families.

As the system manager for early learning and child care in Durham Region, The Regional Municipality of Durham Children's Services Division (CSD) is committed to managing a co-ordinated and responsive early learning and child care system that supports local children and families. The 2023 to 2027 Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Service Plan was developed with this focus in conjunction with the Ministry of Education's priorities, and in alignment with various goals in the Durham Region Strategic Plan 2020 to 2024, to create a system that is high quality, accessible, affordable, flexible and inclusive. The plan guides our work and considers the need for flexibility to respond to ongoing changes in the sector.



Durham Region ELCC system priorities

In consultation with the early learning and child care community, including Durham Region parents and families, the CSD identified four priorities during the creation of the 2023 to 2027 Service Plan. The four main priorities are:

1. Support expansion and access to child care.
2. Enhance supportive and inclusive child care.
3. Increase, attract and retain quality Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs).
4. Optimize virtual service delivery and technology.



2024 accomplishments

The 2024 report highlights significant accomplishments across the four Service Plan priorities, underscoring the dedication to strengthening Durham Region's early learning and child care system.

Supporting expansion and access to child care

Equitable access to high-quality, affordable early learning and child care plays an important part in local economic growth, including workforce participation. Additionally, the benefits of quality child care on children's learning, health and social development are greatest for communities experiencing high inequities and families living with low income. To support expansion and access to child care, in 2024, the CSD focused on the following areas:

- a. Strengthening access and inclusion to the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system.
- b. Building capacity within the licensed home child care sector.
- c. Leveraging funding opportunities to expand support programs and services.



a. Strengthening access and inclusion to the CWELCC system.

The CSD took considerable steps to strengthen access to the CWELCC system:

- Continued to demonstrate need for additional CWELCC growth spaces to all levels of government. This included membership on the Ministry of Education Technical Table, helping to ensure that the needs of Durham residents and families were heard as decisions were made through the implementation of the CWELCC system.
- Formally requested additional CWELCC spaces with the Ministry of Education (as of March 2025, the response is pending).
- Submitted two responses to the federal government's CWELCC Consultation request on behalf of the Region of Durham and Durham's Best Start Network.
- Created a user-friendly online application for Durham child care operators to apply for directed growth spaces.
- Durham Region's Directed Growth Plan for licensed child care spaces was made available online.

b. Building capacity within the licensed home child care sector.

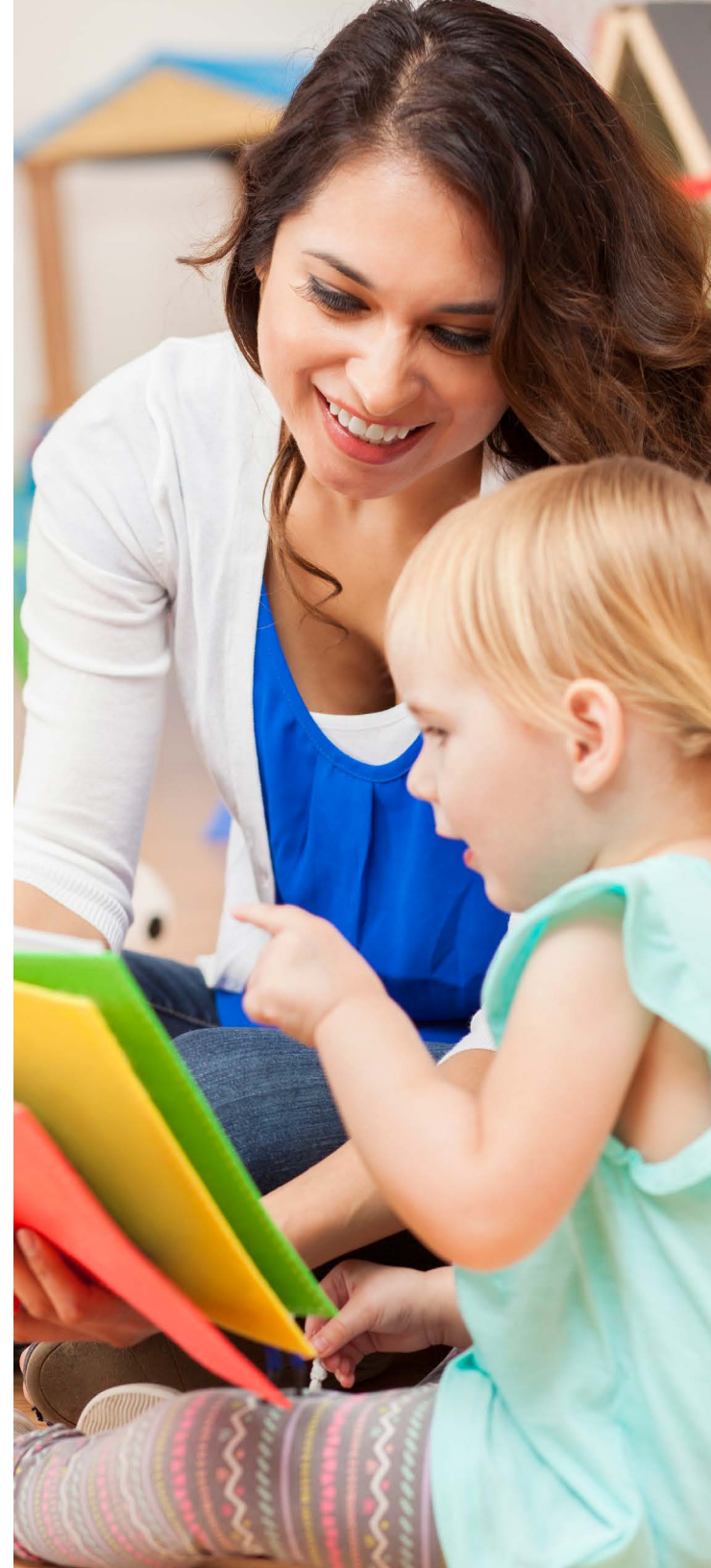
A strong, high-quality, licensed home child care (LHCC) sector is a key component to supporting Durham Region families with accessible, flexible and affordable licensed child care. To further support this priority, the CSD implemented initiatives to build capacity within the licensed home child care sector:

- Hosted a Home Child Care Conference. The sessions offered at the conference were developed based on feedback from the home child care community. Professional development opportunities specific to the licensed home child care community were developed and offered.
- Licensed home child care agencies were added to the Child Care Directory on Durham.ca.
- Four new home child care agencies were added in Durham Region and received child care fee subsidy agreements.
- Implemented the Durham Region Quality Measures for Home Child Care (DRQMHCC) and began quality assessments with licensed home child care programs.



c. Leveraging funding opportunities to expand support programs and services.

- The CSD continues to maximize financial support for the ELCC sector by supporting the efficient distribution of various funding streams and promoting fiscally responsible practices, even through significant funding changes as CWELCC implementation progresses. In 2024:
- Took steps to maximize existing child care spaces. With restricted room to grow licensed child care spaces within the CWELCC system due to Durham-specific space allocations from the Ministry of Education, the CSD worked with operators to maximize licensed capacity by adjusting existing spaces to support the needs of the community. This process is ongoing into 2025.
- Supported operators to maximize startup grant funding.
- Began work with Durham College on a grant application (to be submitted in 2025). The goal of the funding grant application is to prioritize professional development/educational training to support educators and early years professionals, enhance children's social skills, reduce behavioural challenges, and foster an environment conducive to learning and growth.
- Calculated and completed 2025 CWELCC funding allocations with the new funding formula for more than 300 child care sites and home child care agencies. This included:
 - Determining new funding allocations.
 - Working with operators to review financial data.
 - Developing tools to support operators with financial calculations.
- Disseminated 2024 professional learning funding to operators.
- Supported eligible operators with emerging issues funding.



Enhancing supportive and inclusive child care

Whether it is child care staff, children or families attending programming, all individuals should feel welcomed, respected and valued in the ELCC community. The CSD is committed to enhancing strategies to create supportive and inclusive ELCC environments for all. In 2024, strategies included working to:

- a. Provide mental health and well-being supports for ELCC staff.
- b. Bolster diverse, equitable and inclusive (DEI) practices.
- c. Strengthen strategies to support children with special needs.
- d. Improve wraparound services for children and families.



a. Providing mental health and well-being supports for ELCC staff.

Community consultations highlighted the importance of continuing to enhance supportive and inclusive child care in Durham Region. In response to this identified need, the CSD:

- Hired a mental health training specialist for a one-year position with temporary funding received from the Ministry of Education. Through this role, new mental health resources and support were provided to the ELCC.
- Secured guest speakers at various events, including Dr. Robyn Hanley-Dafoe, to facilitate a session on resiliency for early learning leaders.
- Provided mental health training to the ELCC.
- Supported one of the Best Start Network's quarterly meetings focused on mental health supports for the ELCC.
- Collaborated with Family Services Durham to support the ELCC sector with the development of new resources and materials, and to enhance and create new professional development opportunities.

b. Bolstering diverse, equitable and inclusive (DEI) practices.

In 2024, the CSD created initiatives to incorporate DEI practices and values into our early learning and child care system:

- Offered DEI educational sessions to the ELCC community.
- Hired a consulting agency to conduct a review on the special needs resourcing model in Durham Region.
- Conducted a policy analysis to ensure program policies align with Durham Region's DEI values and strategies. (e.g., the Child Care Fee Subsidy Program's proof of immigration status policy updated to reduce documentation required to be submitted by clients to determine their eligibility).
- Developed and implemented a diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) policy for Durham Region's directly operated child care centres.





c. Strengthening strategies to support children with special needs.

The CSD recognized the need to strengthen and streamline the process for identifying special needs, and how supports are requested and delivered in a timely manner.

The CSD retained the services of Toronto Metropolitan University to conduct a review of Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) services in Durham Region. This review will provide analysis and recommendations to strengthen SNR activities. Additionally, the Children’s Developmental and Behavioural Supports (CDBS) team within the CSD established a new consultation model in 2024 to better meet the needs of their families. The changes to the behaviour consultation model were based on feedback from educators, SNR partners and consultants. The updated model focuses on collaboration, modelling and coaching to enhance early learning programs, educators and children. Key updates include enhanced collaboration through the joint development of a coaching plan with input from educators, behaviour consultants and resource consultants, in addition to streamlining intake processes, room and individual consultation models, and simplified referral processes.

d. Improving wraparound services for children and families.

The CSD is continuously working to improve how children and families access services and supports across the Social Services department and through our community partners. In 2024, the CSD:

- Partnered with Ontario Tech University’s Capstone Program to offer a free volunteer tax filing service to eligible fee subsidy clients.
- Implemented a shared Social Services client consent form to streamline access to services for clients.
- Hosted presentations from various organizations for the Best Start Network community to promote knowledge mobilization of services available to support the ELCC community, including families.
- Transferred/integrated service to 311 to streamline points of contact for residents.



Increasing, attracting and retaining RECEs

RECEs play an integral role in helping to create a high-quality early learning and child care system that is inclusive for all families in Durham Region. With an increasing population and decline in the proportion of qualified RECEs working in the child care sector, strategies to support the child care workforce are imperative. In 2024, CSD:

- Became a participating community for Mentoring Pairs for Child Care, powered by the Early Childhood Community Development Centre. This program matches experienced individuals working in management with less experienced supervisors, to build the capacity of leadership staff within the early learning and child care community in Durham Region.
- Advocated to both the provincial and federal governments to improve wages and benefits for child care professionals to support attraction and retention in the profession.
- Hosted the CSD's annual Early Learning Leadership Event, including a facilitated panel of early learning senior managers from child care organizations across Durham. The panel shared their workforce recruitment and retention strategies.
- Updated Durham.ca web pages with education programs and funding available to support community members in becoming an early learning professional.
- Funded an 18-week child care program assistant training program at Archbishop Anthony Meagher Catholic Continuing Education Centre.
- Collaborated with Ontario Tech University to support Early Development Instrument (EDI) knowledge mobilization. Students learned about the EDI, including areas of vulnerabilities in Durham children, and developed research-informed products that can be used by early learning professionals and families to support the developmental health of Durham Region across five EDI domains.
- Provided funding and guidance to Durham College to:
 - Create Supervision and Leadership in Early Education micro-credentials.
 - Support the implementation of the child care worker stream.
 - Develop training and material to embed Non-violent Crisis Intervention, Mental Health First Aid, and Reaching In and Reaching Out trainings into the Early Childhood Education curriculum.

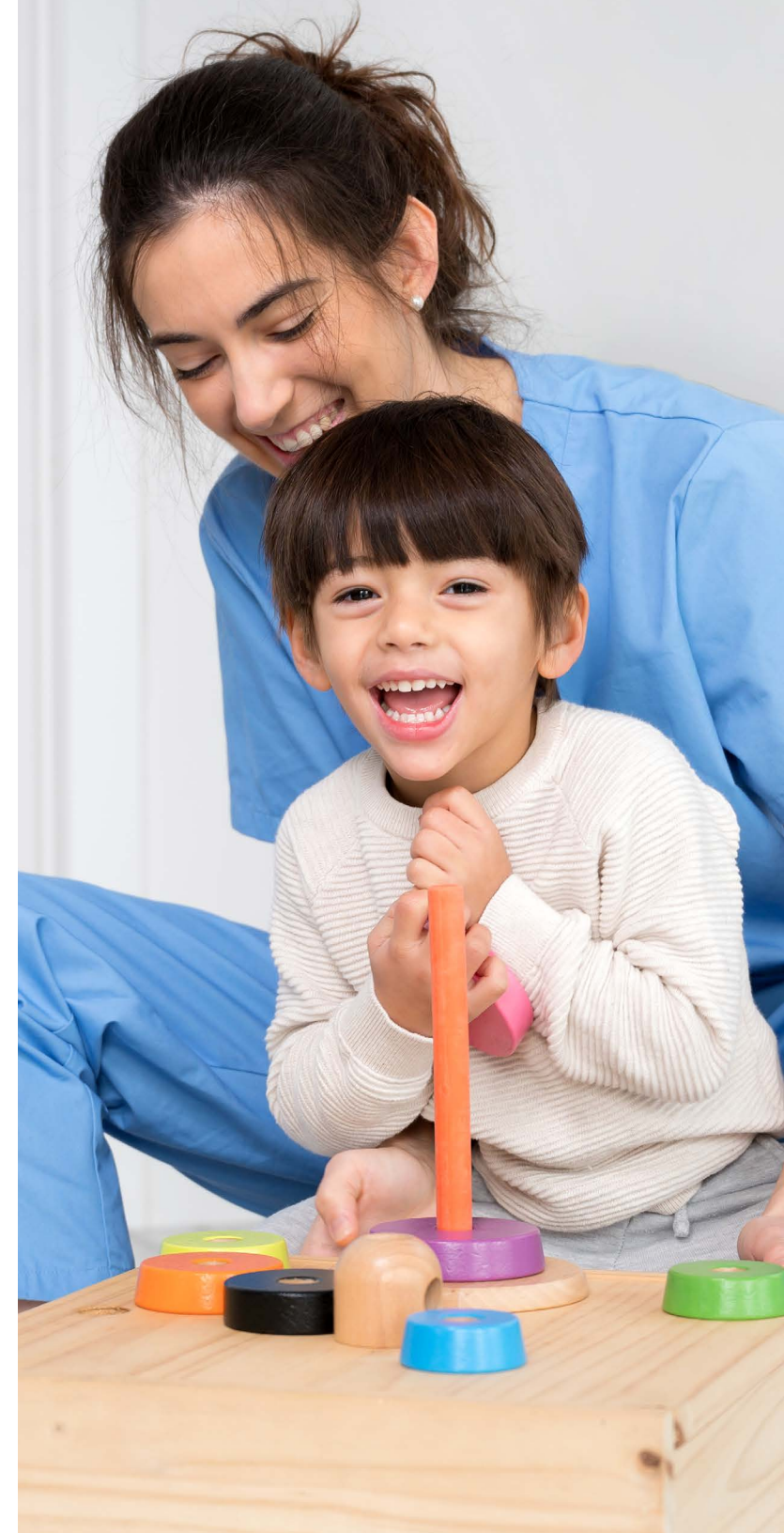
Optimizing virtual service delivery and technology

To enhance virtual service delivery and technology, in 2024, the CSD identified opportunities for efficiencies in processes and opportunities to expand available services:

- Pre-recorded training offered to the ELCC community were made available through the Durham.ca website.
- Professional development and information sessions offered by the CSD were offered in-person and virtually to better support the needs of the community and to support their operational needs.
- Various applications were made available online (e.g., CWELCC expansion, enhanced staffing).
- Implemented the Ontario Child Care Management System (OCCMS) Parent Portal to streamline services to families in receipt of child care fee subsidy.
- Consulted with child care operators through a SharePoint Child Care Operator Portal survey to seek feedback and opportunities for improvement.

By maximizing the use of technology and access to information through a variety of methods, the CSD continues to work to ensure that valuable, pertinent information is readily accessible to families and operators when they need it. In 2024, the CSD posted important updates related to the ELCC community to the Durham.ca website. This includes:

- The quarterly GROW Newsletter for ELCC professionals.
- Changes and updates related to CWLECC and child care services via the Early Learning Update Newsletter.
- 2023 to 2027 Early Learning and Child Care Service Plan.
- Durham Region's Directed Growth Plan (details that inform planning and approvals of CWELCC space expansion for Durham Region).



Conclusion

The CSD shares a continued commitment to the Service Plan and achieving our four priorities. The CSD will continue to demonstrate our annual progress and communicate results throughout the duration of the Service Plan. The CSD looks forward to recognizing the achievements, initiatives and milestones of the division while continuing to build an ELCC system that is responsive to the needs of all children, families and residents of Durham Region.

