



## 2025 annual update: 2023 to 2027 Early Learning and Child Care Service Plan

**The Regional Municipality of Durham Child Care and Early Years Division**

This 2025 annual report outlines initiatives and accomplishments in meeting our Service Plan priorities and highlights the continued commitment to supporting Durham Region children and families, and the child care and early years agencies who provide valuable services.

The Children's Services Division (CSD) underwent a divisional name change in 2025 to become the Child Care and Early Years Division (CCEYD) to better reflect the services offered under the Division. This name change was implemented and updated across all online platforms and communicated widely to ensure a seamless transition.

As the system manager for early learning and child care in Durham Region, The Regional Municipality of Durham CCEYD 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 aligned with relevant strategic goals in the Durham Region Strategic Plan. 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 ELCC community, including Durham Region parents and families, the CCEYD 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.



## 2025 accomplishments

The 2025 report highlights significant accomplishments across the four Service Plan priorities, underscoring the dedication to strengthening Durham Region's ELCC system.

### Supporting expansion and access to child care

Equitable access to high-quality, affordable early learning and child care is a key contributor to local economic growth, including workforce participation, and delivers the greatest benefits for children and families experiencing inequities. In 2025, the CCEYD advanced expansion and access to child care through a co-ordinated focus on strengthening access and inclusion within the CWELCC system, building capacity in the licensed home child care sector, and strategically leveraging funding opportunities to expand programs and services.



Together, these efforts supported increased availability, flexibility and sustainability across the child care system, while responding to community needs and advancing equitable outcomes for families. Some actions that were undertaken in 2025 to strengthen access and expansion within the CWELCC system include:

- Supported 5,433 children with child care fee subsidy. The CCEYD was proud to continue to offer our Fee Subsidy Program without a waitlist for another year, financially supporting families with child care costs as they need it.
- Supported the implementation of the reduction of CWELCC rates to \$22 per day. This included supporting service providers with the new cost-based funding allocation process (determining allocations, providing one-on-one support for service providers to assess budgets, and identifying areas of over/underspending, etc.).
- In 2024, the CCEYD formally requested that the Ministry of Education provide Durham Region with additional CWELCC spaces to address the growing demand for child care. In 2025, the Ministry completed a recalibration exercise and the Region of Durham's space target was increased by 876 spaces, which was successfully met.
- Submitted two responses to the provincial government's budget consultation process on behalf of the Region of Durham and Durham's Best Start Network. These submissions advocated for CWELCC expansion constraints to be addressed and the prioritization of core service delivery such as Fee Subsidy, EarlyON, and Special Needs Resourcing.
- Updated Durham Region's Directed Growth Plan for 2025. This included conducting local analysis to update priority neighbourhoods for the expansion of CWELCC, and making it available publicly online.
- Updated and streamlined service provider service agreements and schedules to support inclusive language and processes.
- Assisted service providers in maximizing licensed capacities by completing reviews of licences/licenced capacities and discussing options around optimizing spaces.
- Maximized the CCEYD's Directly Operated Child Care Centres (DOCs) existing licensed capacity through space reconfiguration and licensing revisions, adding new infant, preschool and school-age program child care spaces.
- Purchased and expanded services in ELCC at 600 Townline Road, in Oshawa:
  - An EarlyON Child and Family Centre has opened and is operating at this location. On the opening day, the centre welcomed 27 adults and 32 children for programming. As of December 2025, there were 1,502 adults and 1,660 children who accessed the centre.
  - A new CWELCC-enrolled child care centre will open at this location by the end of 2026.
  - An Indigenous Resource Library for child care professionals is available to access at this site.
  - Moved the child care simulation room (dedicated, mock child care environment used for training and professional learning) to this location to be ready for use in 2026.

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. The CCEYD supported initiatives to build capacity within the licensed home child care sector:

- Offered 14 professional learning and training opportunities through the GROW (continuous professional learning in Durham) newsletter for home child care providers, in addition to hosting conferences and community engagement events.
- Hosted 66 attendees at the annual Home Child Care Conference to build capacity of LHCC service providers.
- Updated LHCC information on Durham.ca to more accurately represent LHCC educators and programs in Durham Region.
- Updated the measures for the Home Child Care Quality Assessment tool for LHCC programs and supported providers with training on the updates.
- Provided ongoing consultation and support for LHCC providers, supervisors and educators.
- Uploaded the LHCC Roadmap (provided by the LHCC committee) to durham.ca to demonstrate the process of becoming an LHCC service provider.





The CCEYD continues to maximize financial support for the ELCC community by supporting the efficient distribution of various funding streams and promoting fiscally responsible practices, even through significant funding changes as CWELCC implementation progresses. In 2025:

- The CCEYD supported child care operators to optimize cost-based funding allocations.
- Developed and implemented online funding applications including Emergency, Infrastructure and Professional Learning Funding.
- Conducted budget reviews, and mid-year reconciliations to support operators in maximizing their funding and operating capacities.
- Advocated to all levels of government to support the increase to the Fee Subsidy income test threshold for eligibility. This would expand financial support to more families and update the program to better reflect current financial realities.
- Completed CWELCC audits to ensure Workforce Compensation Funding was accurately paid out.
- CCEYD staff provided ongoing financial consultation, guidance and support to child care operators to build capacity across the system.

## Enhancing supportive and inclusive child care

Creating supportive and inclusive ELCC environments requires intentional strategies that ensure staff, children and families feel welcomed, respected and valued. In 2025, the CCEYD advanced this commitment by enhancing mental health and well-being supports for ELCC staff, strengthening diverse, equitable and inclusive practices across programs, and reinforcing strategies to better support children with special needs. In addition, efforts were made to improve wraparound services for children and families, recognizing the importance of co-ordinated, holistic supports in promoting positive outcomes and fostering inclusive participation throughout the ELCC system.



The following highlights actions taken in 2025 to enhance supportive and inclusive early learning and child care environments:

- Provided mental health training to the ELCC community. Mental health-related training offered in 2025 saw almost 400 educators participate across seven topics. Examples of mental health topics included: School-Age Anxiety, Promoting Positive Mental Health, Trauma-Informed Practices, and Window of Tolerance (for supervisors and educators), among others.
- Introduced a new mental health initiatives page in the GROW Newsletter to support educators in continuing to access valuable resources, information and training opportunities seasonally.
- Embedded learning materials into kits in the Resource Library that support and promote positive mental health.
- Hosted a mental health guest speaker (Matthew Rico from the Mental Health Coalition of Canada) at a Supervisors Network meeting.
- Raising Resilient Families: Empowering Parents with Cognitive Challenges training was completed by two CCEYD staff to provide a model of support to parents of children who experience cognitive challenges.
- In partnership with Durham Region's Family Services Division, a series of topic-focused binders were developed to support educators' knowledge and practices, along with practical activities and resources to support children's social and emotional development. Topics include coping with loss and transitions, identifying and expressing feelings, regulating and coping with feelings, understanding and addressing anger, and understanding and addressing anxiety. These binders are available for educators to explore in the Resource Library. Educators are encouraged to take copies of articles, resources, materials and activities to incorporate into their programs.



In 2025, the CCEYD supported initiatives to ensure diversity is embraced and each person is valued and included in the early learning and child care community:

- Provided onsite professional development opportunities and training for educators on various topics (e.g., mindfulness; autism spectrum disorder; diversity, equity and inclusion, etc.).
- Updated guidelines, documentation, and handbooks to include inclusive language and practices.
- Updated the Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Durham Region's Child Care Quality Assessment Tool, to embed diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) principles, ensuring quality standards reflect the diversity of the communities served.
- Delivered 85 professional learning sessions and six community events, including opportunities to help educators deepen their understanding, build confidence and strengthen inclusive practices.
- Integrated access and inclusion framework indicators (e.g., percentage of child population served, percentage of newcomers, percentage of non-English speaking individuals, percentage of children in households with low income, etc.) into decision-making processes for CWELCC application approvals to support more equitable access to services, particularly for vulnerable populations.
- Modeled and coached educators to support families in inclusive programming.



The CCEYD recognized the need to strengthen and streamline the process for identifying special needs, and how supports are requested and delivered in a timely manner. In 2025, the CCEYD developed updated Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) resources for educators and families in collaboration with the SNR committee.

In 2024, the CCEYD retained the services of Toronto Metropolitan University to conduct a review of SNR services in Durham Region. This review of SNR services engaged university researchers, community partners, and families to better understand the inclusivity and accessibility of services across Durham. Findings from this review have informed a refreshed service model, updated resources for educators and supported stronger partnerships with community agencies in 2025. Further implementation of recommendations will continue into 2026.

The CCEYD strengthened processes around Individual Support Plans (ISPs) for use in classrooms to increase supports for families and children.

The CCEYD also developed and implemented two new Assessment Quality Indicator (AQI) tools to assess and enhance quality within child care settings: the Home Child Care Quality Assessment Tool and a recreation assessment for the Boys and Girls Club of Durham. The recreation assessment was piloted in December 2025, with findings from the pilot anticipated in 2026. The home child care assessment includes a comprehensive quality rubric designed to support licensed home child care providers in strengthening program quality. Metrics related to the implementation of this tool and its impact on provider support are expected to be available in 2026.

Additionally, ongoing training and resources were created and updated. The Red Flags document – a guide for professionals and families to identify when additional support may be required – was updated in partnership with the ELCC community. Children’s Developmental and Behavioural Supports (CDBS) updated resources and training for educators and families on strategies for interfering behaviours and supporting improved skill-building.



CDBS updated its service model in 2025 to a brief behaviour caregiver-mediated consultation to include more coaching in real situations, which led to an increase in capacity and lower waitlist times. For example:

- Developmental delay service waitlists decreased from 20 months to 16 months for service; there are no waitlist times for other services.
- CDBS saw an increase in clients served in SNR from 238 in 2024 to 277 in 2025. 100 per cent of SNR client survey respondents thought all aspects of service were highly valuable and would recommend CDBS.
- There was an increase in clients served who are working with Durham Children's Aid Society, from 28 in 2024 to 29 in 2025, but there were 59 more appointments scheduled in 2025 (this program was the last to transition into the new model).





The CCEYD is continuously working to improve how children and families access services and supports across the Social Services department and community partners. In 2025, the CCEYD:

- Partnered with Ontario Tech University's Capstone Program to offer a free volunteer tax filing service to eligible child care Fee Subsidy clients. This service resulted in a total income tax refund and benefit entitlement of \$949,606 for Durham families.
- Strengthened child care operator agreements, policies and processes to outline expectations for inclusion.
- Supported and advocated for families with concerns around inclusion and child eviction.
- Connected and informed families of other supports and resources that may be available to them (e.g., financial and program supports).
- Conducted the annual child care Fee Subsidy satisfaction survey for active Fee Subsidy families. This year, questions were customized to identify different needs and expectations of clients based on their length of service (e.g., in receipt of Fee Subsidy under and over 11 months).
- Leveraged technology for rapport building when in-person options were not available (e.g., scheduled Teams calls with child care providers instead of emailing to improve communication and provide better clarity).
- Developed a new process for Enhanced Staffing requests (additional support to child care service providers to support children with special concerns and needs) to optimize the funding allocation.
- Completed revisions to the How Does Learning Happen? (HDLH) pedagogical inquiry tool to provide the information in both accessible and virtual formats.
- Completed a review of all resource kits in the Resource Library. Resource Library kits are curriculum and inquiry-based resources available to educators on various topics related to child care. All kits were replenished and updated.
- Removed barriers to access service for child care Fee Subsidy clients. For example, the redundancy of requiring ID for Fee Subsidy applicants was removed, which has previously been a barrier for more vulnerable clients.
- Added Early Development Instrument (EDI) Ready for School Toolkit activities and resources to durham.ca. The toolkit is a resource that gives information on EDI and provides simple fun activities to support children's development across the five EDI domains.

## Increasing, attracting and retaining RECEs

Registered Early Childhood Educators (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 2025, CCEYD:

- Implemented mentoring programs, coaching models and leadership consultations to support RECEs.
- Conducted stay interviews, acknowledged staff contributions and made changes based on feedback to improve retention within the DOCs.
- Hosted appreciation events, team socials and recognition days for educators.
- Maintained and updated Durham.ca with accurate information on pathways to becoming an RECE.
- Facilitated the annual Early Learning Showcase, the French Language and North Durham conferences, and career panels to promote RECE as a profession. Attendees of these events were able to learn about employment opportunities, post-secondary education programs, services that support early learning professionals, and chat with members of the local child care and early learning community about their profession.
- Collaborated with local colleges (e.g., Durham College, Fleming College) for student placements, mentoring and career opportunity discussions.
- Participated in the Program Advisory Committee (PAC) supporting Early Childhood Educator (ECE) students at Durham College. This committee provides real-world feedback from ECEs so the college can create more practical and efficient programs to support students' transition to the workforce.
- Supported post-secondary micro-credential courses to encourage the professional development of educators who are interested in leadership roles.
- Hosted job fairs, placement opportunities and summer student employment programs.
- Participated in before and after school Community of Practices (COP) to create networking opportunities with educators.
- Offered centre-specific training, Resource Library resources, and COP sessions for networking and skill development in the field.
- Facilitated and supported the Mentoring Pairs for Child Care program 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 ELCC.
- Ensured operators adhered to workforce compensation and wage enhancement guidelines.
- Attended a Durham College career class discussion to speak about behaviour consultation as a career path for students.
- Hosted the ECE appreciation event with 257 attendees registered.
- 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.

## Optimizing virtual service delivery and technology

To enhance virtual service delivery and technology, in 2025, the CCEYD identified opportunities for efficiencies in processes and opportunities to expand available services:

- Developed and delivered virtual training materials, pre-recorded workshops, and online resources for educators and families on the [durham.ca/ChildCareandEarlyYears](https://durham.ca/ChildCareandEarlyYears) website. These trainings and resources were accessible in multiple formats (e.g., online, pre-recorded, self-guided, in French, etc.).
- Hosted virtual meetings, hybrid meetings and focus groups to improve collaboration and accessibility.
- Offered virtual consultations, coaching, and planning meetings for staff and families.
- Responded to community feedback by scheduling virtual trainings at varying times to consider the need for flexibility.
- Implemented the use of online platforms such as Lillio for daily activity sharing, waitlist management and staff qualifications (tracking in the DOCs).
- Used Teams channels, iPads, laptops and dashboards to support internal communication between staff, parents and management.
- Utilized electronic letters, notifications, reminders, and resources for families and centres.
- Promoted online transparency by providing the DOC value for money audit, Service Plan and Directed Growth Plan on [durham.ca](https://durham.ca).
- Promoted the use of social media and websites for advertising ELCC trainings and resources for staff.
- Updated and standardized application forms, registration forms and reporting processes to electronic, user-friendly options.
- Used Microsoft Forms, QR codes, and online surveys for parent and staff feedback, enrolment and communications.
- Created and disseminated video vignettes for CDBS clients to describe services for the Ontario Autism Project (OAP) and Play Project.
- Transitioned from paper to digital documentation for tools, including compliance checklists.
- Developed a PowerBI dashboard to share QIET assessment (EarlyON quality measures tool) data with EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs.
- Completed a full review of the child care program locator on [durham.ca](https://durham.ca) to streamline options for easier use. Summer camps were also added to the database to support family access.
- Provided technology support and training for staff and operators to use new technologies effectively.
- Created opportunities for families and service providers to participate virtually in meetings and service planning.
- Continued to integrate service to 311 to streamline points of contact for residents.
- Various applications were made available online (e.g., CWELCC expansion, Professional Learning Funding, Infrastructure Funding, Emergency Funding, Enhanced Staffing).
- Developed and implemented new processes for the SharePoint Child Care Operator Portal to streamline services.
- Provided resources to obtain the Looksee Checklist (developmental tool) for families in multiple languages.

By maximizing the use of technology and access to information through a variety of methods, the CCEYD continues to work to ensure that valuable, pertinent information is readily accessible to families and operators when they need it. In 2025, the CCEYD posted important updates related to the ELCC community to [durham.ca](https://durham.ca). This includes:

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



## Conclusion

The CCEYD shares a continued commitment to the Service Plan and achieving our four priorities. The CCEYD will continue to demonstrate our annual progress and communicate results throughout the duration of the Service Plan. The CCEYD 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.

