

Niagara Best Start Network Early Years Niagara Planning Council

TERMS OF REFERENCE Revised June 8, 2007

PREAMBLE

Niagara Best Start Network (the Network) is a public/private collaboration created in 2005 to enhance the lives of children and families within the communities of Niagara region. The Network is comprised of individuals, groups and organizations within the region having an interest in the healthy development of children and the well being of families. As such, any interested person or organization can be a member of the Network.

The Early Years Niagara Planning Council (the Council) is the nucleus of the Niagara Best Start Network. Bringing together parents/guardians, government, schools, community leaders, the private sector, and other stakeholders, the Council provides the leadership, planning and coordination to ensure the Network achieves its vision.

VISION

Niagara – a community that ensures every child will reach optimal potential through cooperative investment in the Early Years.

All children in Niagara region are safe, healthy and respected.

All families in Niagara are supported to provide children with the best possible opportunities early in their lives.

MANDATE

1. To plan for the optimal development of Niagara's children (prenatal to 6 years) in an integrated and holistic manner.
2. To monitor and report developmental outcomes for children in Niagara.
3. To inform, advise and consult the public and government on issues and initiatives in the development and well being of Niagara's integrated service system for early learning and care.

4. To champion both the importance of development in the early years and an environment that supports the best possible start in life for all Niagara's children.

SCOPE

Through the coordination and planning efforts of the Early Years Niagara Planning Council, the Niagara Best Start Network will establish a comprehensive and sustainable integrated system of services that supports families with children from birth through their transition into school. The scope of the initiative is intended to be as broad as possible for this age range, covering the spectrum of health, education, social supports and children's services.

PRINCIPLES

The following principles are fundamental in planning for Best Start in Niagara:

- 1. Family Orientation:** decisions made and plans developed will reflect that all children of Niagara are our priority and focus and parents/guardians are equal and integral partners in both the Council and the Network;
- 2. Integration and Inclusion:** capacity building, shared vision and an easily accessible, universal, high quality, seamless service delivery system result from the combined efforts of all those having an interest in healthy child development. Integration and inclusion will support access for children with special needs. The service system will recognize and be consistent with the principles of Niagara's Children's Charter and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. To that end, we will work toward the integration of services, to the extent that it is both feasible and possible and to the inclusion of all sectors – parents/guardians, governments, schools, community leaders, the private sector, and other stakeholders;
- 3. Value and Respect:** recognizing that members of the Council and Network will come from diverse backgrounds, experiences and disciplines we commit to respecting one another's perspectives, roles and missions and valuing the input offered. We are open to learning about each other's methods and conjointly developing new approaches that support and achieve the vision, goals and objectives. Equally, those for whom the service system is created will represent a diversity of ethno-cultural and linguistic backgrounds that will be valued, respected, considered and involved in the development of the system;
- 4. Creativity and Flexibility:** we acknowledge the challenges inherent in an integration initiative of the magnitude of Best Start given its inter-ministry, and cross-sectoral nature. We accept those challenges and commit to maximum creativity and flexibility in all plans, recommendations, decisions and evaluation

methodologies with Best Start in addition to other opportunities and challenges for our children, as they present themselves; and

5. Integrity: we acknowledge the importance of Best Start and the roles of the Council and the Network and that to ensure success we must operate and conduct business at the table and in the community with integrity.

OBJECTIVES

Consistent with the Best Start Vision of the Government of Ontario, the Early Years Niagara Planning Council's overarching goal is to provide the leadership to give all of Niagara's children the best possible opportunity to reach their full potential and succeed in life. Therefore, Niagara's Best Start Community Plan will be developed and implemented to:

- assist Niagara's children to be prepared to learn and achieve success upon school entry;
- assist parents/guardians to support their children to reach their potential;
- help make the transition to Grade one as smooth, seamless and successful as possible for children and their families through the provision of meaningful supports;
- make high quality early learning and child care accessible to our youngest citizens;
- identify, provide and promote a diverse array of supports for parents/guardians;
- identify and provide support to children who require access to a variety of services including additional supports for special needs; and
- build upon existing strong and functional partnerships within Niagara and with the federal, provincial and municipal governments.

KEY ACTIVITIES & TIMELINES OF PLANNING COUNCIL AND NETWORK

The successful implementation of Niagara's Best Start Community Plan depends on the following key factors:

- coordinated community planning and sharing of resources across ministries, sectors and service delivery agencies – maintaining children and families as the focus;
- integration of services and supports at the community/neighbourhood level;
- restoration and expansion of services of Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC), Preschool Speech and Language (PSL), and Infant Hearing Programs (IHP), as well as services for children with special needs and their families;
- expansion of high quality child care in integrated settings; and
- availability of funding.

Key activities consistent with the aforementioned factors will be defined annually within a work plan consistent with Niagara's Best Start Community Plan. Broadly stated, the key activities include:

1. To provide input to the annual redevelopment of Niagara's Early Learning and Child Care Plan to reflect Best Start and the increase in licensed child care spaces with priority for children in JK and SK and the gradual expansion of licensed child care for children aged 0-4 years including identification of capital requirements for renovations to accommodate additional licensed child care spaces;
2. To develop Niagara's Best Start Community Plan with accountability for guiding, evaluating and resolving issues related to the implementation of an integrated service system for early learning and care including:
 - description, planning and implementation of early learning and care hubs
 - integration of key early identification and intervention programs; and
3. To create and implement strategies to engage parents/caregivers in Best Start and build strong partnerships that foster inclusion, feedback and the enhancement of community capacity.

ACCOUNTABILITIES

One of the goals of Best Start is to integrate services across ministries, sectors and service provision agencies. As such, there are multiple accountabilities. The Early Years Niagara Children's Planning Council is accountable to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Niagara's Best Start Community Plan. Members of the Council and the Niagara Best Start Network share accountability for the integration of services, educating the community about the plan and the vision and ensuring that they work together to achieve the vision of the Network. Ultimately, the Council and Network are accountable to the broader community to provide an accessible and integrated service delivery system that meets the needs of children and families and is consistent with the vision and mandate of the Council and Network.

The Council is responsible for the development of the work plan in cooperation with the Network based on identified community needs and government priorities. Further, the priorities and deliverables in the work plan will help define participation within the Council.

STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE NIAGARA BEST START NETWORK

The Niagara Best Start Network reflects the unique composition of its committees and the communities of Niagara and enables a broad range of community perspectives to inform decision-making by participants on behalf of individuals, organizations and/or sectors as they are represented. Existing Sectoral Committees, Region-wide Committees and Community/Neighbourhood Networks will provide expertise pertaining to system integration, challenges and opportunities unique to their area, service gaps and needs and other information pertinent to planning.

The Business Education Council of Niagara (BEC) provides the Network with infrastructure support and is a key partner in achieving the vision and mandate of the Council and Network. The service of BEC is retained through a Ministry of Children and Youth Services Best Start Planning allocation flowed on a contract with Children's Services, as a division of the Regional Niagara Community Services Department, and with clearly defined lines of accountability to the Council.

STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP OF EARLY YEARS NIAGARA PLANNING COUNCIL

The Council is a strategic group focused on planning and advocacy for integrated services for children in their "early years" & their families. It will act as 'steering committee' to the Niagara Best Start Network and perform the following functions:

- provide leadership to the development of the Niagara's Best Start Community Plan;
- oversee community planning and review all plans with respect to services for children (prenatal to 6 years);
- develop Best Start implementation plans;
- submit plans to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services;
- implement, monitor and evaluate the "Early Years" service system within Niagara;
- identify opportunities for further enhancement of plans;
- identify challenges and strategies to overcome them;
- develop conflict resolution mechanisms; and
- create, implement, monitor and evaluate a Communication Strategy.

Membership: The Council will be broadly representative of the communities of Niagara, parents/guardians, government, schools, community leaders, the private sector, and other stakeholders.

Core representation will be maintained by:

- Boards of Education (4) – one representative from each of the following:
 - Centre scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud
 - Conseil scolaire de district du Centre Sud-Ouest
 - District School Board of Niagara
 - Niagara Catholic District School Board;
- Brock University (1);
- Consolidated Municipal Services Manager (CMSM) – Regional Niagara Community Services Department – Children’s Services Division (1);
- Child Welfare (1)
- Early Identification and Intervention Services (1);
- Hamilton/Niagara French Language Best Start Network (1);
- Niagara Aboriginal Children’s Planning Council (2);
- Niagara Child Care Sector Executive (1);
- Niagara College (1);
- Ontario Early Years Centres (1)
- Regional Niagara Public Health Department (1).

Individuals and organizations involved in the Niagara Best Start Network, and critical to its success, are invited to join the Council as representatives of the following broad categories:

- Parents/Guardians;
- Parenting Programs;
- School Programs;
- Public Libraries;
- Health and Specialized Services;
- Income and Security Programs;
- Population-Specific Services;
- Community Services;
- Policy Makers/Funders, including the Ministry of Children and Youth Services; Ministry of Education;
- Early Learning & Care Programs; and
- Other children/family focused services/programs as required.

Co-Chairs/Vice-Chair: Two Co-Chairs and one Vice-Chair will be selected from among the members of the Council in September of each year. These positions may be held by the incumbents for the duration of their tenure on the Council so long as the Council confirms their appointments annually.

Frequency of Meetings: The Council meets monthly, September to June, based on an agenda established by the Co-Chairs and/or Vice-Chair, to conduct business consistent with the vision and mandate of the Council and Network. Additional meetings may be called at the discretion of the Co-Chairs/Vice-Chair.

Council Quorum: To proceed with a Council meeting, thirteen (13) members must be present. Of the thirteen members, one must be a Co-Chair or Vice-Chair.

Standing Committees: The Council will establish permanent committees, with specific terms of reference, to support the work of the Network and Council and bring recommendations forward to the Council for consideration and approval.

Working Groups: As required, the Council will establish ad hoc groups, with a clearly defined purpose and timeline, to carry out specific tasks or projects.

MEMBERSHIP TRANSITIONS

Conditions of membership on the Council, including but not limited to the term of office and timing of rotation will be developed by the Council. Such considerations will be consistent with the vision, mandate and principles of the Council and ensure continuity from year-to-year.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Pivotal to the functioning and communication of the Council and Network is clear understanding of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities by all parties. The essential elements of those roles and responsibilities, not to be construed as exhaustive, are described below.

Ministry of Children and Youth Services

The MCYS Hamilton Regional Office will:

- participate in planning and implementing Best Start through the Niagara Best Start Network and Early Years Niagara Planning Council as an **ex-officio** member;
- champion Best Start and interpret ministry policy for Early Years Niagara Planning Council;
- review and approve community plans, including capital plans, and make recommendations and provide feedback to ministry corporate offices;
- liaise with other ministries at regional level;
- license child care programs in Niagara region; and
- monitor implementation of Best Start.

Consolidated Municipal Services Manager

The Consolidated Municipal Services Manager (CMSM) is the child care service system manager and is responsible for coordinating municipal services, and for planning and funding child care and other services for children and youth (e.g., recreation programs) in Niagara region. The Regional Municipality of Niagara

provides funding for a number of programs and services for young children and their families, including child care services, services for children with special needs, public health programs and recreation programs.

Through the Children's Services Division of the Regional Niagara Community Services Department, the CMSM will:

- provide leadership within Niagara region for Best Start – particularly during Phase One during which it will play the lead role in planning and implementing the expansion of child care services;
- participate in planning and implementing Best Start through the Niagara Best Start Network and Early Years Niagara Planning Council as a **core** member;
- ensure that Best Start investments in child care are consistent with Regional child care plans;
- facilitate links to other child and youth services in the community, such as recreation programs;
- be accountable for the child care services in the region, and for coordinating and integrating other Regionally funded services for young children and families, i.e. special needs resourcing;
- develop and implement the Early Learning and Child Care Plans, and corresponding child care infrastructure plans, based on local community need following a planning process that engages the Niagara Best Start Network and Early Years Niagara Planning Council building on existing plans; and
- integrate the Early Learning and Child Care Plans into Niagara's Best Start Community Plan.

School Boards

School Boards are responsible for implementing provincial education policies and curriculum and for providing education programs for children beginning in junior kindergarten.

The **four** school boards in Niagara will:

- participate in planning and implementing Best Start through the Niagara Best Start Network and Early Years Niagara Planning Council as **core** members;
- identify issues and opportunities in developing early learning and care hubs and linking relevant school-based programs;
- assist in planning early learning and care hubs, child care programs located in schools and help to coordinate these programs with the kindergarten programs;
- identify issues that must be addressed to help children with special needs make a successful transition to school in conjunction with existing transition to school initiatives;
- seek opportunities for expertise/resources to be shared with early learning and child care programs;
- provide sites/space for Best Start neighbourhood learning and care hubs (when

appropriate);

- identify issues related to the hub model in their districts (e.g., transportation); and
- provide sites/spaces for expansion of child care.

Public Health Units

Among many other mandated programs, Public Health Units are responsible for delivering Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC), Prenatal, Parent and Child Programs, Infant Education and Parent Teaching (IEPT), and other early years services, such as immunization programs and school-based health programs.

The Regional Niagara Public Health Department will:

- participate in planning and implementing Best Start through the Niagara Best Start Network and Early Years Niagara Planning Council as a **core** member;
- provide information on child, family and population health and well being of the community that can be used to guide planning, development, monitoring and evaluation of Best Start programs, using services of the Data Analysis Coordinator (DAC);
- identify ways to integrate health unit programs into Best Start.

Parents/Guardians

Parents/guardians will:

- help identify the strengths and needs of Niagara's children and families;
- participate in planning and implementing Best Start programming; and
- provide advice about service integration and organization as they would best work for Niagara's families as active participants of the Niagara Best Start Network and, when possible, the Niagara Children's Planning Council.

Other members of the Niagara Best Start Network are responsible for the delivery of services within their sector and/or represent the interests of their constituents relative to the Best Start initiative.

Of these, **Brock University, Early Identification and Intervention Services; Hamilton/Niagara French Language Best Start Network; Niagara Aboriginal Children's Planning Council; Niagara Child Care Sector; Niagara College; Ontario Early Years Centres** will:

- participate in planning and implementing Best Start through the Niagara Best Start Network and Early Years Niagara Planning Council as **core** members.

Along with these core members, parents/guardians and other members of the Network will:

- participate in planning and implementing Best Start through the Niagara Best Start Network and Early Years Niagara Planning Council;
- identify issues and opportunities of integrating the sector represented (business, mental health, child protection, population specific, etc.) into Niagara's Best Start vision and provide input to creative service system development and delivery strategies;
- provide representation for a broadly defined service sector; and
- liaise with Community/Neighbourhood Networks to ensure implementation of plans and strategies as defined by the Niagara Children's Planning Council.

NEIGHBOURHOOD NETWORKS

Neighbourhood networks are cross-sectoral groups, the members of which share a common geography – neighbourhood or community. As such, their issues and interests with respect to children and families will share common elements that will be different than those of other parts of Niagara region. Such Networks will be key to the Niagara Best Start Network and Early Years Niagara Planning Council to ensure that the programs and services developed are responsive both to needs and issues at the neighbourhood level.

The role of the Neighbourhood Network and its members is to:

- provide the Niagara Best Start Network and Early Years Niagara Planning Council with information and advice as to best practices that will support service delivery in their local community;
- provide a forum for communication between the local communities and the Niagara Best Start Network and Early Years Niagara Planning Council; and
- implement plans and strategies as developed by the Niagara Children's Planning Council once approved.

Neighbourhood Networks will operate under Terms of Reference that mirror the Niagara Best Start Network Terms of Reference and be recognized by the Early Years Niagara Children's Planning Council as formal members.

DECISION-MAKING, CONFLICT OF INTEREST, AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION – COUNCIL & NETWORKS

Decision Making: Decisions will be achieved by consensus of the members present at the Early Years Niagara Planning Council meeting.

Conflict of Interest: A conflict of interest is any situation in which a member of the Early Years Niagara Planning Council, either for himself/herself or some other person(s), attempts to promote a private or personal interest that results or appears to result in the following:

- interference with the objective exercise of his/her duties as a member of the Council;
- a gain or advantage by virtue of his/her position on the Council; and/or
- some advantage for an organization with which the member is directly involved as a director, member, partner, shareholder, staff member, or has a financial interest .

Dispute Resolution: In the event that a dispute arises the members will attempt to negotiate the matter including involvement from other Network members or a skilled facilitator/mediator as appropriate.