



Equity & Inclusion Commitment for Child Care Operators and Other Contracted Service Providers

Updated: February 2026

Organization Information

Name of Organization: YMCA of Three Rivers (Mid-Western Ontario)

Commitment Date (Established): February 18, 2026

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Introduction

The YMCA of Three Rivers' purpose as a charity is to make our diverse communities healthier and more vibrant. Grounded in dignity and respect, our programs and services inspire individuals to reach their full potential. As the heartbeat of the communities we serve, we work to break down systemic barriers to potential and belonging, striving to ensure our communities are places where everyone has the potential to shine.

As the Lead Agency for EarlyON | Waterloo Region; one of the largest child care operators in the Regional Municipality of Waterloo, as a child care operator in Stratford-Perth and Guelph-Wellington, and an EarlyON operator in Stratford-Perth, we recognize the responsibility and opportunity we have to positively impact the communities, families, and children we serve.

Since 2020, the YMCA of Three Rivers has rooted itself in the values of JAIDE (Justice, Access, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity) as we work toward becoming an equity-advancing organization. JAIDE is not a project, strategy, or end goal; it is a way of being. It underpins and guides our actions, decisions, and interactions across the organization. At our YMCA, JAIDE is a core commitment we hold for our employees, volunteers, participants, and the broader communities we serve. This commitment sits at the heart of our strategic plan.

In 2025, the YMCA launched the JAIDE in Action Roadmap, informed by data from our JAIDE Survey (completed in November 2023), our Employee Insight Survey, and feedback from employees and community partners. Through a deep review of this data, we identified the need to expand our focus into six interconnected streams. These streams are outlined below and aligned, where appropriate, with the Region of Waterloo's Equity and Inclusion Commitment:



Indigenization and Decolonization (Truth and Reconciliation)
Gender Justice and Pride Inclusion (Diversity)
Disability and Accessibility (Supports for Diverse Abilities)
Racial Equity and Intersectionality Understanding (Equity)
Well-Being Matters (Supporting All Positions)

The YMCA also recognizes that sustainability is a key enabler of long-term relevance and impact. This includes the intentional dismantling of historically exclusive and oppressive constructs through meaningful participation and coordinated impact with the community (Participation). In order to provide a welcoming experience where everyone feels they belong and can actively participate, ongoing acknowledgement of and reduction to barriers to accessing our programs and services is also a key priority. (Access)

While all JAIDE priorities are important, not all streams are active at the same time. We move between them as needed and as capacity allows, ensuring our efforts are thoughtful, intentional, and responsive.

Our Equity and Inclusion Commitment reflects the past, present, and ongoing work within our EarlyON (Early Years) and Child Care departments, aligned with the broader JAIDE work of the YMCA of Three Rivers. This commitment represents our continued (un)learning journey toward equity and inclusion, as we strive to build connected and resilient communities and empower Early Years and Child Care professionals, students, volunteers, children, families, and communities to thrive.



2026 Equity & Inclusion Focus Area

We are committed to the following focus area(s) for 2026:

The YMCA of Three Rivers commits to our JAIDE-in-Action Roadmap and to continuing to provide resources and professional learning to all positions to support unlearning and relearning at the individual, team, department and agency level with respect to each person's individual journey.

The YMCA of Three Rivers is committed to focus on the area of Reconciliation for 2026.

- We commit to learning more on how to work and collaborate with Indigenous organizations, Indigenous Elders, and/or Knowledge Keepers to inform our program practices.

We will review the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action with all levels of our EYCC Teams to create a plan(s) to implement the recommendations relevant to our organization, departments and EYCC sites.



Reconciliation

Our organization defines reconciliation as (Not applicable for Indigenous-led organizations):

Reconciliation in early years and child care programs requires more than acknowledgement. It calls for intentional action! It means recognizing the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples, and working to build respectful, trust based relationships grounded in acknowledgement of truth, and accountability to restoration. It involves creating culturally responsive environments that honour Indigenous languages, traditions, values, and ways of knowing, while actively listening and learning from Indigenous voices. Reconciliation is both a personal and collective responsibility and an ongoing journey that must be rooted in truth, respect, and meaningful action that challenges us to move beyond awareness towards sustainable change. This will ensure Indigenous cultures are not only recognized, but supported, valued, and celebrated within early learning environments and the broader communities we serve.

We are currently doing the following action(s) to advance reconciliation in our organization:

Current Commitments: Reconciliation

Agency Wide

- Continue on our JAIDE-in-Action Roadmap journey. See <https://www.ymcathreerivers.ca/jaide/indigenization-decolonization> for ongoing work related to reconciliation, Indigenization and Decolonization at the YMCA of Three Rivers.
- Staff are provided with opportunities to learn about Indigenous history, culture, and traditions through workshops, professional development, and open dialogue.
- Some programs are beginning to explore age-appropriate ways to teach children about Indigenous peoples and the history of the land they inhabit.
- Celebrating Truth and Reconciliation Day and offering meaningful territory acknowledgements at meetings
- There is a growing recognition of the need to build stronger connections with Indigenous organizations and people and learn and unlearn across our operations.
- Spring Professional Learning Day is welcoming Michael Etherington - Indigenous Relations Consultant who will be facilitating Tipachimowin: Finding Your Voice, Finding Your Story. Tipachimowin means “sharing a story” Michael aims to promote a dialogue on supporting the continued learning in your personal journey of reconciliation.

EarlyON

- Indigenous resources and materials are purchased from Indigenous Peoples and/or Indigenous agencies/organizations.



- Intentional learning in smudging was provided to the EarlyON | Roger Street team through Crow Shield Lodge to support the offering of smudging to be available to the public and supported with intention onsite.

Child Care


- Children are learning to value and care for the land through nature walks, gardening, and lessons about climate, animals, and plants at some locations.
- Some programs are inviting Indigenous community members to share stories and experiences with children and families.

The following action(s) to advance reconciliation in our organization have been identified as future actions:

Barriers/Areas of Growth: Reconciliation

Agency Wide

- Ongoing Education: More Indigenous-led training, workshops, and storytelling opportunities are needed for staff. There needs to be more education around reconciliation for staff so they can begin to deliver it within their programming with children. Being in an area where many staff do not see it as directly relating to us and finding ways to bring it into the centre in a positive way.
- Creating environments where staff can ask questions, share perspectives, and learn together without judgment is ongoing work.
- Partnerships: Building long-term relationships with Indigenous communities to guide and co-create programming
- Reflective Practice: Our professionals are all at different points in their Truth and Reconciliation journeys which impacts their ability to reflect on their own understanding, and openness to growth and dialogue.
- Authentic Representation: Programs should include Indigenous voices, foods, languages, and celebrations in meaningful ways. Program staff have limited access to Indigenous perspectives and resources. To align better, we can build stronger connections with Indigenous communities, offer staffing ongoing learning on Indigenous histories and cultures and include more Indigenous practices in our programs via appreciation being mindful of appropriation



Equity

Our organization defines equity as:

Unlike the notion of equality, equity is not about treating everyone the same. Equity acknowledges that individuals require different levels of support to achieve equal outcomes. Equity requires recognizing and addressing barriers to provide individuals with the supports and recourses they need to thrive.

It is the intentional and continual practice of changing policies, practices, systems and structures by prioritizing measurable change in the lives of Black, Indigenous and racially diverse people and other equity deserving groups with the intention to create equity for all.

Believing that every child is unique and that there is no one size fits all approach is at the core of our daily practice. Every part of the day should reflect this understanding. Building strong communication with families is essential, as these relationships help us better support both the children and their families. Ensuring that programs meet each child's individual needs is crucial. It is also important for staff to engage with resource consultants, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and other professionals so that we can provide the highest level of support and create an inclusive environment where all children can thrive.

To be truly equitable, you need to have intersectionality understanding which refers to the way in which we work to learn and understand the intersections of different identities (cultural practices, ideologies, faith-based perspectives, lived experiences) of others and how those identities affect a person's experience. Each intersectional layer of an individual's identity will have influence on the barriers they experience and the equitable supports and resources they need.

The underlying assumption is that different identities can coexist peacefully and enrich our community.

We are currently doing the following action(s) to advance equity in our organization:

Current Commitments: Equity

Agency Wide

- Practices are child and family centered and strive to recognize and respond to each child's unique needs, temperament, and development level
- Offering choices and adapting daily routines to meet individual needs where possible
- Providing sensory-friendly materials, fidget toys, and calming tools
- Supporting emotional regulation by allowing extra time for transitions where possible and modeling this when supporting regulation alongside of parents/caring adults.
- Building relationships with families through regular check-ins and open communication
- Including families in decision-making (e.g., food preferences, cultural practices) where possible.

- Asking families how they'd like to be addressed (e.g., grandparents, non-traditional guardians)
- Offering support within our programs such as coming alongside to clean together or linking to community resources to support or offering strategies for families to use at home if asked.
- Creating physically and emotionally accessible spaces where possible or advocating for these to be in place
- Offering developmentally appropriate materials and planning environments to meet and reflect diverse cultures, needs and identifies and changing needs
- Sourcing and using visuals and alternative communication methods (e.g., ASL, translation tools, story boards)
- Working on acknowledging and understanding bias about family structures and identities
- Opportunities for team professional growth are provided including sharing knowledge, resources, and learning styles and encouraging participation in JAIDE trainings, newsletters, and ongoing professional development
- Acknowledging and supporting some team members or children/families who require additional support to get to the same place with their goals as everyone else.
- Accessing SNAP and Special Needs Resourcing options are available to staff and families.
- Using observation and insight surveys to guide support plans
- Referring families to services that are free or offered at no-cost to reduce barriers.
- Modifying activities for mixed-age groups and diverse abilities
- Beginning to honor cultural events with intention (e.g., Orange Shirt Day, Pride Month)

EarlyON

- Intentional partnership with SPECTRUM to make accessible SPECTRUM 101 and 201 professional learning for all EarlyON professionals.
- Intentional language built into Best Practices to promote equity in the language utilized when referring to adults attending with children, visitor log practices, and gender roles.
- Advocating with KEyON to adjust language within the KEyON system in 2025 to shift language of "nickname" to "preferred name."
- Co-location of onsite services are sought out to reduce barriers to families in accessing these services. At centre-based locations, childminding is provided for adults wanting to access onsite services.
- All EarlyON sites have been provided with a diverse needs kit to support diverse needs of participants (i.e. headphones).
- Promotions of community programs or services are limited to those offered at no-cost, or with subsidy available.
- Targeted programs are offered to remove barriers (real or perceived) for families (i.e. Kaleidoscope Kids)
- EarlyON Mobile sites are intentionally positioned in locations that are accessible and with intention to avoiding duplication of service.
- Programs and services are offered virtually and in-person where resources permit
- Access to support with registration, asking questions, or giving feedback is available at the site level, via phone, via email, via website chat and over social media.
- Support with KEyON system is provided via social media chat, website chat, email, phone and in-person.

- Participants are able to create KEyON account onsite with side by side support if unable to complete before their visit.
- EarlyON spaces are set up to be child led and attention is paid to having adult seating throughout the space to welcome adults to participate in the play and experiences at their comfort level.
- Providing French/Francophone programming where/when able within existing resources.

Child Care


- Accessing SNAP and Special Needs Resourcing
- Collaborating with community partners to connect families to needed services
- Using observation and insight surveys to guide support plans
- Referring families to services that are free or offered at no-cost to reduce barriers.
- All YMCA Child Cares in Guelph Wellington and Waterloo Region participate in the Access Program which reduces barriers for families to access child care from equity deserving groups and especially those with financial or other barriers.
- In Waterloo Region, the YMCA of Three Rivers reserves limited child care spaces for children whose families are experiencing significant crisis. Referrals are made through local agencies.

The following action(s) to advance equity in our organization have been identified as future actions:

Barriers/Areas of Growth: Equity

Agency Wide

- Opportunities to share and thought-partner to overcome barriers are needed.
- Barriers to equity may not be explored across departments and teams, and thought-partnering across departments on solutions is not readily in place beyond senior-leader level.
- Consistent communication between staff, families, and consultants
- When inviting families to share cultural traditions and participate in social events, bias, cultural conflicts or misinformation can impact how these are received.
- Visuals and multilingual signage to promote belonging are not always available
- Professional learning on equity being available to all professionals.
- Building awareness of available resources to connect with internally, and in the community as referral or resource/information pathways is an ongoing and ever changing process.
- Build awareness of donation programs and no-cost services for families in need to support referrals to these services onsite (where they exist) and in the community. Include families in planning and decision-making processes
- Staff biases, even when recognized, may inadvertently influence interactions with children and families
- Opportunities for staff professional development and JAIDE learning are not always equally accessible
- Not all cultural events or identities are fully reflected in programming, and some children, families and staff may still feel unseen or unheard



EarlyON

- Adults attending EarlyON may not support equity focused work which has lead to harm being caused to and by staff and participants.
- Lack of appreciation and understanding from public that EarlyON professionals are on their own learning journeys and may make mistakes and support and grace in their learning is needed.
- Translation/Interpretation continues to be a large barrier in communications with participants and EarlyON professionals.

Child Care

- Create time for meaningful conversations during drop-off/pick-up or interactions during programs.
- Adapting daily routines and providing individualized support can be challenging due to staffing limits, time constraints, and program resources
- Emotional regulation support, particularly during transitions or mixed-age activities, is not always sufficient for every child
- Family engagement can be uneven, with some families' cultural practices or preferences not fully incorporated into programming
- Access to culturally inclusive materials and visuals varies across programs, limiting consistent representation
- Physical and emotional accessibility in learning environments is not yet fully established
- Limited resources and time make it difficult to provide extra support to children, families, or colleagues to achieve equal outcomes
- Access to community supports and specialized resources is sometimes inconsistent, creating gaps in care
- Funding changes through CWELLC for enhanced staffing is inconsistent and does meet identified needs.



Diversity

Our organization defines diversity as:

Appreciating and embracing differences among people. Organizations benefit from diverse viewpoints, different lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and identities. A diverse workforce and community can inspire creativity, different perspectives, and enriches collective experiences.

Ensuring that all individuals regardless of sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, culture, or religion expression, have the same equitable access to opportunities, rights, and representation in both policy and practice. Our intention is to create spaces, programs, and services where everyone feels genuinely welcomed and included, and where personal rights, visibility, and acceptance are not only affirmed, but actively upheld.

We are currently doing the following action(s) to advance diversity in our organization:

Current Commitments: Diversity

Agency Wide

- Encouraging staff to communicate with families in their home language where possible.
- Programs participate in cultural and diversity-related events, celebrations, and recognition days (e.g., Pride Month, Orange Shirt Day) to promote inclusion and understanding
- Starting to incorporate cultural holidays and traditions into programming with intention based on the children and families attending (e.g., Diwali, Spirit Week)
- Starting to build understanding of appropriation versus appreciation in regard to toys and materials added to environments or explored in programs
- Encouraging conversations where families share their traditions, music, languages, celebrations and stories
- Providing books, puzzles, and toys that reflect diverse cultures, skin tones, and abilities with intention that reflect the children, families and communities we serve
- Families welcome to bring food from home for their child or themselves at EarlyON and in child care when there is a dietary need or families encouraged to share a list of healthy alternatives for child care to use.
- Using questionnaires at intake (Child Care) or throughout engagement (both) to learn about family culture and preferences
- Creating family walls and displays that reflect diverse family structures
- Inviting family members to participate in activities and share talents or occupations
- Connecting families with similar backgrounds to build community
- Planning activities based on children's interests and cultural backgrounds

- When available, using visuals and photos to support non-verbal communication
- Learning and using simple words from children's home languages
- Advocating for all materials and spaces to be accessible to children
- Respecting children's boundaries and allowing them to express themselves freely
- Striving for diverse representation among staff to support language and cultural needs
- Staff are participating in ongoing JAIDE trainings and other professional development, workshops, and open dialogue

EarlyON

- Providing regular opportunities for families to share information about their home, family, language and experiences within EarlyON.
- Providing maps across EarlyON Centres where families can indicate their location of origin and linking information shared in intentional ways (i.e. books in centre, languages available, recipe books).
- Ensuring books and resources purchased for the centre are diverse and represent diverse cultures, languages, family types etc.
- Providing loose parts fabric in dramatic play in place of cultural clothing to support child-led play in place of appropriation.
- Do Not Sing list has been established and updated regularly to ensure that the songs that we sing within EarlyON environments do not cause harm.
- Utilizing loose parts play where possible.
- Multi-lingual welcome signs at all EarlyON Centres.
- Website and YouTube enable translation.

Child Care

- Offering culturally diverse menus (e.g., Butter Chicken, Lentil Patties)
- Accommodating dietary restrictions and allergies based on cultural or religious needs
- Programs are beginning to integrate age-appropriate lessons and activities that reflect diverse cultures, family structures, and identities
- Opportunities for children to engage with culturally inclusive materials, visuals, and resources, including books, music, and learning tools that represent different communities are encouraged to be available at all sites
- Open conversations about culture, identity, and inclusion are encouraged among staff, families, and children
- Families are engaged in program decisions where possible, including cultural practices, food preferences, and preferred forms of address
- Staff are fostering inclusive and accessible learning environments, using alternative communication methods, sensory supports, and developmentally appropriate adaptations where available
- Ensuring books and resources purchased for the centres are diverse and represent diverse cultures, languages, family types
- Providing regular opportunities for families to share information about their home, family, language and experiences



The following action(s) to advance diversity in our organization have been identified as future actions:

Barriers/Areas of Growth: Diversity

Agency Wide


- Language barriers between educators and families
- Lack of multilingual resources and interpreters
- Discomfort or fear around asking cultural questions
- Staff members with various levels of comfort in supporting families and children requiring translation/interpretation which can lead to inconsistent inclusion.
- No IT system in place to track more information from families and children that will assist staff in gaining more information from families and children so we can better support them in our programs.
- Unconscious bias from personal upbringing or lived experiences or limited understanding of diverse cultures, religions, and traditions
- Educators' own cultural norms influencing interactions
- Scheduling conflicts that limit celebration planning or family engagement
- Budget constraints affecting access to inclusive resources and diverse toys, books, and materials
- No designated space for cultural displays in some programs
- Parental expectations conflicting with child-centered practices
- Staff may struggle to fully integrate children's interests, cultural backgrounds, and family perspectives into programming due to time, resource, or capacity constraints

EarlyON

- Participants not always receptive to staff or other families speaking multiple languages within the space.
- Staff members with various levels of comfort in supporting families requiring translation/interpretation
- Religious and cultural norms of staff members and participants that impact willingness to move forward in JAIDE learning.
- Fear of being wrong or missing a celebration or not accurately capturing information in conversations or documentation onsite.
- High volume of families leading to missed connections

Child Care

- Religious and cultural norms of staff members and participants that impact willingness to move forward in JAIDE learning.
- Fear of being wrong or missing a celebration or not accurately capturing information in conversations or documentation onsite
- Families may be in a rush during drop-off/pick-up, and high program volumes limit opportunities for one-on-one engagement
- Limited understanding and/or willingness to understand diverse cultures, religions, and traditions affects staff ability to integrate them into programming
- Unconscious bias from personal upbringing, lived experiences, or educators' own cultural norms can influence interactions
- Lack of diverse toys, books, visuals, and materials constrains culturally inclusive programming

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- Budget limitations affect the acquisition of inclusive resources
 - Limited support for children with special needs or developmental differences, and inaccessible buildings or environments, restrict equitable participation
 - Families may not open to sharing cultural information, or there is limited connection due to time constraints
 - Parental expectations/beliefs may conflict with child-centered practices, creating tension in program planning
 - Staff often lack sufficient time to connect individually with children or families.
 - Scheduling conflicts can limit planning for celebrations, cultural events, or family engagement activities
 - Opportunities for staff to reflect on personal biases, share cultural knowledge, and develop inclusive practices are not fully embedded across all teams
 - Religious or cultural norms of staff or participants sometimes impact willingness to engage in diversity initiatives
 - Inconsistent implementation of practices to ensure all children, families, and staff feel seen, heard, and valued
 - Limited support for children with special needs or developmental differences
Inaccessible buildings or environments

Participation

Our organization defines participation as:

Participation in Early Years and Child Care programs means intentionally creating inclusive, respectful and responsive environments where children, families, educators, and community partners are meaningfully engaged and feel genuinely valued. It requires recognizing and honouring individual needs, interests, identities, and lived experiences, while offering diverse, developmentally appropriate opportunities for involvement and actively removing barriers to equitable access. Participation is guided by the values of autonomy, collaboration, and belonging where individuals feel safe, represented, and empowered to contribute, observe, or lead in ways that reflect their strengths and experiences. Our programming is informed by what we observe children doing in their play, allowing their interests, choices and ideas to shape planning and learning experiences and actively engaging their parents and caring adults in experiences and reflective conversations as the experts of their own child. Staff participation includes being supported by one another and working within a culture where they feel trusted, resourced, and confident that leadership will provide support and accountability. We also believe families play a vital role in participation and should be meaningfully involved wherever and whenever possible, serving as active partners in the EarlyON and Child Care experience and strengthening the sense of connection and community we aim to build together.

We are currently doing the following action(s) to advance participation in our organization:




Current Commitments: Participation

Agency Wide

- Activities are based on children's interests and developmental needs.
- Children / Adults are given choices and autonomy in how they participate.
- Materials are regularly rotated and adapted to ensure accessibility and engagement for all.
- Families are invited to share cultural traditions, photos, recipes, and celebrations
- Open houses, surveys, and hallway boards encourage family input and connection.
- Communication with families is consistent, respectful, and responsive to their needs.
- Educators reflect on engagement levels and biases to better support participation.
- Programs are designed to represent the diversity of children and families.
- JAIDE principles are actively explored and integrated into daily practices.
- We observe the children closely and support them throughout their learning by responding to their interests, needs, and developmental stages.
- We listen to families when they share concerns and work collaboratively with them to support their child's growth.
- We also recognize the importance of giving staff the time they need to complete their programming responsibilities and being available to listen when they need to talk or seek support
- Activities and materials are modified to support all children's needs where possible.
- Environments are set up intentionally to promote inclusion and representation.
- Staff collaborate to scaffold learning and ensure everyone feels welcome.
- Staff support one another through shared planning, check-ins, and celebrations

EarlyON

- Annual surveys to participants to gather feedback to inform operations.
- Multiple avenues for families to share feedback and suggestions (Google, Surveys, Easels, in-person, social media, website, email, etc.)
- Environments intentionally set up to support adult and child interactions and differing abilities.
- EarlyON professionals record weekly reflections of observations in EarlyON and those reflections are utilized at the team/site level to inform environmental changes. This ensures that all team members have a say in environmental changes and changes made represent interests of those attending.
- EarlyON closes at 12:00pm on Fridays to prioritize team reflection, environment set up, professional learning and co-learning across all sites.
- Diverse needs materials are readily available within spaces without families having to ask for them (i.e. headphones)
- Patterns of monthly calendars and registration days are predictable and communicated in advance to families with reminders available via our newsletter. Online/phone support is available as needed.
- Weekly/Monthly meetings and team-building activities foster a sense of belonging and shared purpose.



Child Care

- Multiple avenues for families to share feedback and suggestions (Annual Family Surveys, in-person, email, etc.)
- Leadership provides clear communication, resources, and opportunities for feedback
- Monthly meetings and team-building activities foster a sense of belonging and shared purpose
- Children's interests, developmental stages, and family perspectives guide programming
- Staff take time to listen to families and support children collaboratively
- Staff are supported to complete responsibilities and access guidance when needed, promoting a strong, inclusive team culture
- JAIDE principles are actively explored and integrated into daily practices (Registration, Recruitment, Programming etc.)
- Environments are intentionally set up to promote inclusion and representation
- Monthly meetings and team-building activities foster a sense of belonging and shared purpose.



The following action(s) to advance participation in our organization have been identified as future actions:

Barriers/Areas of Growth: Participation

Agency Wide

- Perceived or actual limited time for meaningful engagement with children and families
- Language barriers between staff, children, and families
- Cultural differences and varying parenting styles
- Communication gaps among staff and leadership
- Educators lacking experience or training in inclusive practices
- Uncertainty around how to support children with diverse learning styles or special needs
- Need for more education on cultural beliefs, risky play, and developmental approaches
- Educators feeling confident and competent in engaging with parents and caring adults as co-learners and collaborators

EarlyON


- Space capacities sometimes mean that we need to turn families away from popular programs or sites as we are above fire plan capacity or above the threshold in place to ensure that we offer a quality program.
- Response rates for families are low to surveys. Although opportunities to share feedback are given, families may not give feedback when invited.
- RECE workforce is not readily interested in working extended hours including evenings or weekends. The challenges in staffing these hours of operation mean that they are reduced, and opportunities for families to attend hours outside of normal work hours are limited.
- Language barriers can impact the ability to receive, understand, reflect on and respond to feedback given in a meaningful way.

Child Care

- High child-to-staff ratios and staffing shortages combined with increased needs of children and families requiring a higher level of staffing support
- Frequent transitions and rushed routines reduce opportunities for deep participation
- Lack of time for collaboration among educators and with families
- Inadequate materials, especially for children with special needs as a result of funding constraints and unique needs of children entering care
- Shared spaces (e.g., playgrounds) limiting individualized support
- Inconsistent program planning requirements
- Limited accessibility (e.g., transportation, wheelchair access)
- Full programs preventing new families from joining
- Limited access to professional development and training
- Staff anxiety, burnout, bias and perception of leadership

Access

Our organization defines access as:



Dismantling barriers and providing equitable access so that all people, regardless of their identity, ability, or language can obtain resources and assistance. It is about creating environments that are inclusive and actively working to remove inequities so that you can create better accessibility.

We are currently doing the following action(s) to advance access in our organization:

Current Commitments: Access

Agency Wide

- Learning and using children’s home languages, body language, and emotional cues
- Creating accessible environments with adaptive furniture and calming spaces
- Using visual aids (e.g., picture cards, daily schedules, stop signs) to support non-verbal communication
- Offering fidget toys and quiet spaces for emotional regulation
- Building relationships with families to understand their culture, background, and support systems
- When staff members speak the language, they welcome families in their home language.
- Translation tools and resources are beginning to be used such as interpreters or translation tools (e.g., Google Translate)
- Inviting families to share recipes, music, traditions, and cultural items
- Creating family walls and maps to reflect diversity and promote belonging
- Providing resources and articles to support parenting (e.g., toilet training, self-regulation)
- Including multicultural books, dolls, and materials in classrooms with intention based on the children and families accessing the early years and child care environment.
- Providing professional development through JAIDE newsletters and mentoring RECE students
- Providing the opportunity for staff name tags to include pronouns and preferred names
- When available, utilizing funding to improve accessibility of spaces (i.e. YMCA Hub door)
- Using EYCC Navigators and community partners to connect families to services
- Advocating to make physical spaces accessible (e.g., ramps, wheelchair parking)
- Emphasis on creating welcoming, engaging environments that foster trust and belonging
- Adapting furniture and tools to meet developmental needs (e.g., modified chairs, accessible classroom layouts)
- Using visuals to support non-verbal children and those with language barriers
- Planning activities based on children’s developmental levels and accessibility needs
- Sharing pamphlets and resources with families (e.g., family and children services)
- Building understanding of bias and promoting equity through inclusive materials and interactions



- Removing physical barriers in classrooms and program spaces
- Ensuring and advocating for wide doorways and accessible spaces for mobility aids like wheelchairs

EarlyON

- EarlyON locations are all offered in buildings and spaces that are accessible.
- EarlyON mobile sites are offered in areas that are intentionally chosen to reduce accessibility challenges for families, are not in close proximity to EarlyON centres, and are intentionally chosen to avoid duplication of service with other early years programs.
- Where possible within available resources, extended hours are offered, with a focus on Saturday programming to reduce barriers for families unable to attend during the work day week.
- Regular communication about changes to locations or hours of operation are communicated via multiple avenues including KEyON, website, in-person promotions, social media etc.
- Where possible, community partners are co-located within EarlyON Centres or in collaboration with mobile sites to support families.

Child Care

- Modifying routines and expectations for children with special needs or health conditions
- Offering diverse menus that reflect home meals and accommodate dietary needs
- Offering crisis and subsidized spaces for families in need
- Adjusting outdoor time and clothing availability to meet individual health and mobility needs
- We accommodate dietary restrictions and allergies, with a well rounded menu where food is provided in programs· Fostering classrooms with intentional, respectful communication among staff

The following action(s) to advance access in our organization have been identified as future actions:

Barriers/Areas of Growth: Access

Agency Wide

- Funding & Resource Limitations for inclusive materials, adaptive equipment, and staffing
- Limited access to diverse materials, toys, and classroom tools
- Language barriers between educators and families
- Lack of translated documentation and multilingual support
- Difficulty navigating cultural differences and unfamiliar beliefs



- Educators feeling unequipped or fearful of saying the wrong thing
- Unconscious bias and discrimination affecting interactions
- Inexperience or discomfort discussing race, religion, or cultural practices
- Assumptions about families' needs or values without open dialogue
- Parents not always receptive to support or differing approaches and cultural differences in parenting styles and expectations
- Perceived or actual limited time for face-to-face conversations and relationship building
- Liability or operational concerns that limit some opportunities for engagement
- Lack of knowledge of accommodation processes for staff with learning or language challenges
- **Gaps in understanding of the supports, resources and partnership opportunities between EarlyON and child care services**
- Staff retention issues impacting consistency and care

EarlyON

- Purpose built centres can be impacted by school closure periods which blocks access or adds barriers (i.e. costs) during days/times that may be of interest to families.
- Mobile sites often rely on free locations. These can be impacted by paid services at those locations (i.e. camp) which results in locations being unavailable at periods during the year.
- Interest in RECE workforce to work extended hours (evenings, weekends) can be a barrier to offering extended hours to families who are not able to attend during the regular work day.
- Many EarlyON Centres are not accessible via public transit. This makes accessing these centres challenging.

Child Care

- Waitlist policies and lack of tech access or knowledge of supports available to get online access preventing registration for child care services.
- Insufficient funding for accommodations (e.g., wheelchair ramps, adaptive equipment)
- Budget constraints affecting staffing, program hours, and resource availability
- Prioritizing the purchasing of diverse materials, toys and classroom tools, so they are accessible with accountability taken towards the intentional sourcing of materials and appreciation versus appropriation.
- Ratios in infant rooms making it hard to support all children equally
- Consultant/diverse needs supports do not align with or meet needs of all individual sites.



Supports for Diverse Abilities

Our organization defines supports for diverse abilities as:

We define special needs or special rights as a potential need for support based on any condition of the body or mind that makes it more difficult for a person to do certain activities and interact with the world around them in the way it is currently structured. This acknowledges that people's abilities vary and may not be seen by the individual as need for individual supports but a different way of doing or knowing.

Supporting people with special needs or special rights in early years programs means recognizing and respecting each person's unique abilities, challenges, and cultural background. It involves creating inclusive, accessible environments where all children, youth and adults feel seen, valued, and supported. This includes building trusting relationships, adapting materials and routines to individual needs, collaborating with families and community partners, and fostering emotional and developmental growth through consistent, compassionate care. The goal is to ensure every child has equal opportunities to participate, explore, and thrive—regardless of ability, behavior, or circumstance

We are currently doing the following action(s) to support diverse abilities in our organization:

Current Commitments: Supports for Diverse Abilities

Agency Wide

- All staff receive AODA training annually.
- Accommodation processes for staff
- Program rooms/Classrooms are thoughtfully set up to be accessible, calming, and reflective of children's identities and abilities.
- Materials, books, and visuals represent diverse needs, cultures, and family structures.
- Sensory tools and open-ended activities support varied developmental levels.
- Educators build trust by welcoming families warmly and getting to know their unique needs.
- Activities are adapted to meet individual skill sets and learning styles.
- Children are treated with respect and equity, with a focus on belonging and emotional support.
- Diverse staff and inclusive programming foster a sense of community and acceptance.
- Staff are beginning to include the voices of families in adding cultural celebrations and information to their environments.
- Educators are building their knowledge on existing tools, actively listening to and acting on the voices of families and community, and third-party trusted resources to better support children and families.

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- Ongoing professional learning (e.g., JAIDE) helps teams stay aligned and informed.

EarlyON

- Spaces are intentionally set up to reflect diverse needs and abilities.
- On site services are offered in collaboration with Waterloo Region Family Network, Special Needs Resourcing, KidsAbility and Monarch House to provide resources, information and support to families/professionals.
- Aids such as fidget seats, headphones etc. in a kit have been provided to each EarlyON Centre and all have been encouraged to ensure items are readily available for families to access.
- Toys, resources and materials selected for EarlyON learning environments represent diverse abilities.
- Targeted programming is provided to support families who do not feel comfortable attending open EarlyON Centres, or who would appreciate a quieter and focused EarlyON experience.

Child Care

- Children are encouraged to bring elements of home into the classroom (e.g., photos, music, food).
- Families are involved in creating individualized plans and sharing cultural traditions.
- Enhanced staffing is available at some locations to provide one-on-one support when needed.



The following action(s) to advance supporting those with diverse abilities in our organization have been identified as future actions:

Barriers/Areas of Growth: Supporting those with diverse abilities

Agency Wide

- Time & Staffing Constraints
- Funding & Resource Limitations
- Limited access to resource consultants and community agencies
- Language barriers between staff and families
- Families not having time or willingness to engage in dialogue
- Communication gaps among staff due to inconsistent training or experience on inclusion, disabilities, and cultural sensitivity
- Inexperience in handling emotional or behavioral challenges
- Personal biases and assumptions affecting equitable care
- Lack of knowledge in teams about referral pathways available
- Families in denial about their child's needs or resistant to program policies
- Cultural differences in parenting styles, values, and expectations
- Difficulty building trust and relationships with families over time

EarlyON


- Participants attending EarlyON can make other families feel watched or judged when attending with a family member with diverse abilities.
- RECE professionals often have limited education or experience in supporting those with diverse abilities.
- Participating adults may not be receptive to conversations about the unique needs of their child or the observations of EarlyON professionals. Supporting educators in coming alongside of families at the speed of the parent/caring adult is a learning journey.

Child Care

- Limited time in the day to provide individualized support
- Lack of enhanced staffing to meet diverse needs
- Inadequate staffing levels to follow the child's lead or offer one-on-one care
- Insufficient funding for accommodations and support services
- Rigid schedules that don't allow flexibility for individual needs
- Long waitlists and limited access to child care spaces
- Physical barriers in the environment (e.g., inaccessible play areas)
- Lack of continuity between child care and school system
- Shortage of inclusive materials, tools, and adaptive equipment at some sites with higher needs

Supporting All Positions

Our organization defines supporting all positions as:




Supporting all positions in EarlyON and Child Care programs means creating an accountable, inclusive, and respectful environment where everyone feels valued, heard, and empowered. It involves fostering trust, open communication, and wellbeing through consistent check-ins, shared decision-making, and opportunities for learning and growth. Support includes equitable access to tools, training, mentorship, and time for planning and reflection. It also means recognizing individual strengths, accommodating personal needs, and advocating for fair treatment and professional recognition. Ultimately, supporting all positions is about building a culture of empathy, collaboration, and belonging, —where everyone, both as individuals and as a team, are supported to do their best work and thrive together.

We are currently doing the following action(s) to support all positions in our organization:

Current Commitments: Supporting All Positions

Agency Wide

- Leaders are encouraged to utilize an open door policy to encourage honest dialogue.
- Best Practices are updated annually to ensure shared understanding of expectations.
- Regular opportunities for ongoing professional learning and in-service information are arranged via the Quality and Training Specialists for EarlyON individuals, teams and system level professional learning.
- Opportunities for intentional reflection and documentation time and paid planning time are provided to all EarlyON educators within their work hours.
- Time Away From Work Policies (i.e. vacation and wellbeing days)
- Regular check-ins (formal and informal), including well-being conversations and one-on-one meetings
- Open-door policies that encourage honest dialogue without fear of judgment
- Insight surveys and feedback loops that lead to real action and change
- Encouraging staff to share ideas, concerns, and experiences
- Access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) and mental health resources
- Support during personal crises and flexibility for cultural holidays or celebrations
- Activities to build Team Culture and staff walks to boost morale and connection
- Creating accountable, inclusive spaces where staff feel seen, heard, and supported
- Wellbeing Check-Ins
- Shadowing shifts for new staff and supply staff “playlists” or tips to ease transitions
- Time allocated for programming, planning, and professional development
- Clear communication tools (e.g., team chats, fireside chats, staff meetings)
- Providing resources, mentorship, and guidance for navigating challenges
- Working on respecting cultural differences and individual needs (e.g., medical accommodations)
- Building diverse teams that bring unique perspectives and strengths

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- Encouraging cultural representation in programming and team dynamics
 - Peer support and willingness to step in for one another
 - Leadership that is present, approachable, and actively involved in daily operations
 - Recognition of staff contributions and service
 - Emphasis on collaboration across programs and age groups
 - Pay inequities between long-term and new staff and across Regions and departments.
 - Feedback not always received positively or when not acted upon communication on reasoning is not clearly shared
 - Challenges understanding and respecting diverse values, beliefs, and traditions and overcoming language barriers
 - Burnout, stress, and personal health issues affecting team dynamics
 - Limited emotional capacity to support others while managing personal challenges
 - Building staff and leader knowledge about available mental health resources and safe spaces to share vulnerabilities within and outside of the association.
 - Lack of alignment between child care and EarlyON programs

EarlyON

- Regular 1:1 check ins with all team members and their lead happens on a regular and consistent basis (i.e. monthly at most)
- A leadership rotation is established to support with onsite and/or on call leadership support during all hours of operation.
- Site based teams have created shared agreements to support in accountability, communication, co-learning, and conflict resolution at the site level.
- Weekly email is shared with all EarlyON professionals to provide regular updates and information.
- EarlyON closes at 12:00pm every Friday to prioritize professional learning, reflection, environmental set up and team conversations.
- EarlyON leadership team meets weekly to share celebrations, successes, and challenges and to thought-partner.

Child Care

- Child Care leadership team meets monthly to share celebrations, successes, challenges and to thought-partner.
- Inconsistent resources across locations and programs
- Limited time for meaningful team connection, reflection, or planning



The following action(s) to advance supporting all positions in our organization have been identified as future actions:

Barriers/Areas of Growth: Supporting All Positions

- Busy schedules and high demands make staff feel like they don't have opportunities for collaboration at some sites/programs.
- Insufficient time for paperwork, programming, and crisis support
- Lack of designated support staff or supervisors available during critical moments
- Budget constraints affecting staffing levels, and access to tools
- Limited access to enhanced staffing and professional development
- Lack of trust due to past experiences or unclear expectations
- Legislation and regulations limiting flexibility and autonomy
- Inconsistent onboarding and training for new or supply staff.

Accountability Measures for Staff and Families

Outline of external measures and procedures that support staff and families:

Accountability measures for staff:

- JAIDE in Action Roadmap
- JAIDE Commitment Document is made available to all families
- JAIDE SharePoint – Resources, Toolkits, Learning Opportunities
- Staff Insights Surveys (Twice per year) & JAIDE Surveys (every two years)
- Accountable Spaces
- Handling Harm Toolkits
- Wellbeing Check-ins
- Time Away from Work
- Accommodation trainings and supports
- Ongoing professional learning
- Best Practices at the department level that link to Ministry Expectations.

Accountability Measures for Families

- JAIDE Commitment to Families
- Accountable Spaces posters
- Conflict Resolution Processes
- Physical or electronic parent/caregiver handbooks in child care
- Electronic version of experience expectations available on website (EarlyON).