



Committee Report

CEYD-24-03

To: Chair and Members of the Joint Social Services and Land Ambulance Committee
From: Mandy Koroniak, Director of the Children's Early Years Division
Date: Wednesday, May 08, 2024
Subject: **Infant and Early Years Mental Health: Resources for Early Childhood Education Project**

Background:

It has been recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on families, negatively impacting the mental health of children, families and caregivers. Early identification of mental health challenges and providing supports as early as possible is critical and can lead to improved achievement in school and better health outcomes in life.

To support this work, additional funding toward mental health supports for the early years and child care sector has been allocated to Service System Managers for enhanced mental health services to families and their children. This funding will continue for three years, from 2023-2025, through the 100% provincially-funded EarlyON Child and Family Centres allocation. The County of Wellington received \$39,244 under this allocation in 2023 and in 2024 for a total of \$78,488. The 2025 allocation is unknown at this time.

Update:

The Infant and Early Years Mental Health: Resources for Early Childhood Education Project began development in 2023 under the leadership of Dr. Jean Clinton, Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences at McMaster University, in the division of Child Psychiatry. The project team additionally includes Lorrie McGee Baird and Lois Saunders, who are both Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs). The collective vision and goal for the project is that:

"In communities across Ontario, early years and child care programs will create and nurture conditions where all experience foundational conditions for healthy social emotional development and recognize when there are challenges to that healthy development."

- Infant and Early Years Mental Health Project Team

The project involves the development of resources that aim to contribute to and enhance existing professional learning for RECEs, and the on-going community strategies to promote, study and respond to Infant and Early Years Mental Health. The approach is strength-based with primary focus on healthy social end emotional development, which is mental well-being for children. In addition to aligning their knowledge of Infant Mental Health to pedagogical practice, connections are made to adult well-being. Educators will be grounded in the valuable role they play in nurturing Infant Mental Health and will understand when to connect families to primary care for more support.

Features of the resources being developed include:

- A series of five video modules called “Big Ideas for the Care of Tiny Humans” that introduce the core concepts for Infant and early Years Mental Health, and connects them to the pedagogical practice of Early Childhood Education and others working in EarlyON and licensed child care. In each video Dr. Clinton presents a key concept for Early Years and Infant Mental. Together Dr. Clinton, and Pedagogical Leader, Lorrie McGee Baird connects the concept to [How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years](#). Appearing in each segment are guest contributors, all of whom are RECEs who bring the diverse perspective from their lived experience (i.e. Indigenous, black, LBGTQ2+).
- A community launch of resources will occur through an in-person Deep Dive Learning Day. Keynote segments by Dr. Jean Clinton and Lorrie McGee Baird move through the science of social-emotional development to exploring core concepts of mental health and well-being. The Deep Dive Day follows the model of facilitated discussion with 1-2 trained facilitators at each table. Preparatory facilitator training, led by Lorrie McGee Baird is offered in advance and aims to strengthen capacity for ongoing learning in communities of practice around infant mental health and social-emotional development.
- A reflective practice guide accompanies “Big ideas for the Care of Tiny Humans”. The guide will include reflective questions and discussions to support professional learning related to infant mental health and well-being, as well as to generate actionable ideas for practice.

The Children’s Early Years Division identified that, building upon existing professional learning and other resources, the Infant and Early Years Mental Health: Resources for Early Childhood Education Project will provide valuable supports to our community of early years educators. As an early-stage contributor to this project, Wellington is leveraging its 2023 and 2024 EarlyON mental health allocation, supporting the development and implementation of the above resources.

Wellington’s Infant and Early Years Mental Health Deep Dive Learning Day has been scheduled for October 24, 2024 with facilitator training being held on October 23, 2024. This will provide for participation by approximately 150 educators in this professional learning programme. The resources will be made available online for continued use to sustain and grow this knowledge for child care and early years educators in Wellington and other participating communities.

Financial Implications:

The provincial funding allocation to support mental health forms part of the 2024 Children’s Early Years budget. Allocation of this funding to support the project will fit within that budget and there will be no impact the municipal tax levy.

Strategic Action Plan:

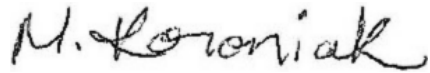
This report relates to the following objectives and priorities in the County’s Strategic Action Plan:

- Doing What the County Does Best – Providing Critical Daily Services for Your Residents
- Making the Best Decisions for the Betterment of the Community

Recommendation:

That the Joint Social Services and Land Ambulance Committee recommend to County Council that the report, Infant and Early Years Mental Health: Resources for Early Childhood Education Project, be received for information.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Koroniak". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'k'.

Mandy Koroniak
Director of Children's Early Years Division