



Early Years and Child Care Service Plan

2025-2029

Kawartha Lakes Human Services Department

Kawartha Lakes
Jump In





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Introduction

Message from the Manager of Human Services

On behalf of the City of Kawartha Lakes, Human Services Department, Children's Services Division, I am pleased to share the Child Care and Early Years' Service Plan, 2025-2029. Extensive community engagement with children, parents, early learning professionals, and service providers informed this plan.

This plan is about highlighting our guiding principles, our strategic direction and implementation plan in our ongoing efforts of strengthening child care services across the City of Kawartha Lakes and the County of Haliburton.

As we continue to navigate the implementation of the Canada-wide Child Care Plan (CWELCC), which aims to reduce child care costs, improve access, and ensure quality services, we are working hard to support a robust, equitable, and inclusive child care framework. Our approach focuses on making high-quality care more accessible and affordable for families, while maintaining a keen focus on service excellence.

Excellence in service remains a core pillar of our child care strategy. Our focus over the next five (5) years will be on enhancing our existing services, including supporting licensed centre and home based child care growth, continuing supports for children with specific needs, ongoing efforts to attract and retain a high-quality professional workforce and the delivery of responsive and accessible EarlyON Child and Family Centres' services.

Through continuous collaboration with our local service providers and families and working with our local and provincial governments, we are building a child care system that will have a lasting impact on the future on Ontario's children. This is an exciting time, and we are committed to maintaining the highest standards of care, service and support.

The Plan focuses on four over-arching strategic themes that emerged from the community engagement. Each theme includes a series of proposed activities specifically designed to improve the health and well-being of children and ensure a variety of high quality early years and child care services are available for families.

Successful implementation of this Plan requires continued provincial, federal and municipal funding and a commitment from all our partners to share knowledge, skills, and resources to work together for the benefit of all children and families in the community.

Executive Summary

Designated as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for the City of Kawartha Lakes and County of Haliburton by the Government of Ontario, Kawartha Lakes Children’s Services is responsible for the planning, funding and management, and accountability of the licensed child care and early years system.

The Children’s Services Division is responsible for identifying community needs for licensed child care and EarlyON programming, allocating funding to address child care and early years requirements, and for developing a Service Plan to identify local child care and early years system priorities.

This Service Plan outlines the Children Services’ vision for licensed child care and early years programs and services for children 0 to 12 years, and their families, in Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton for 2025-2029. The plan is reflective of needs identified by families, children, early years agencies and various community stakeholders. Through consultation with these identified stakeholders, the top priorities are:

1. Workforce

Advocating for a system-wide workforce strategy that promotes recruitment, retention, fair compensation and professional development for the early years sector. Champion an early years community that feels valued, empowered and supported in their field.

2. Operations

The early years system is undergoing significant change. Recognizing that change can be challenging, Children’s Services will advance the modernization of the early years system by implementing Provincial legislation and technology, reduce administration time, streamline processes, in a way that works best for our service providers, and that responds to the needs of children and families.

3. System Navigation

Children’s Services continues to focus on making supports and services easier for families to access and making the system as a whole more inclusive of the unique needs of our families.

4. Leadership

Children’s Services will champion the needs of children, families, and the early years workforce. Recognizing that these efforts fit within a broader policy context, we will work with all levels of government and municipal and community partners to enhance the well-being of children and families. Drawing on research and data analysis, we will continue to be leaders in system planning to improve child and family outcomes.

“Educators”

There are many titles for those working in early learning and child care. Kawartha Lakes recognizes the impact all these workers have on the health and development of children. Therefore, throughout this document you will see the word “educator” which encompasses RECE, child care workers, assistants, program facilitators, and support staff.

Vision

Welcoming community where every child belongs, with removed barriers, and families as well as educators receive full support through growth and change.

Mission

Our mission is to collaboratively provide accessible, affordable, and high-quality child care and early years services in partnership with community organizations. We strive to respond to the needs of families, support early learning and development, and build a strong foundation of knowledge for every child to thrive.

What does our
Community look
like in 5 years?

“ Families have access to accessible, affordable, quality, local child care. Adequate pre-school supports/services are accessible to children, families and parents to promote early development, attachment and early intervention. ”

- Community Partner Survey

Programs and Services

As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager, Kawartha Lakes Children's Services is responsible for planning, overseeing, and managing licensed child care and early years programs and services for children aged 0 to 12 years at the local level.



System Management and Planning

The Children's Services Division is responsible for identifying community needs for licensed child care and EarlyON programming, allocating funding to address child care and early years requirements, and for developing a Service Plan to identify local child care and early years system priorities. In accordance with Ministry of Education guidelines, Children's Services is responsible for funding to support the costs of operating licensed child care programs to reduce wait times and fees for services, stabilize service levels, and where funds allow, improve access to high quality affordable early learning and child care services for children and their families.

Community planning and engagement

Ongoing collaboration with community partners and organizations is important to planning for and providing locally responsive early years and child care services. There is regular engagement with community partners to inform local programs and services. Children's Services supports local children and youth planning tables and events such as:

- Community Planning Table for Children, Youth and Families in Haliburton and City of Kawartha Lakes
- Family Gala
- Training opportunities and professional development as identified by the local children and youth community

OneHSN centralized waitlist

Children's Services administers a centralized online child care application through the OneHSN Child Care Waitlist. The OneHSN Waitlist streamlines the process for child care agencies and families seeking licensed child care providing information, transparency, and equitable access to spaces across our service area.

Families

- Search for licensed child care locations in their community based on their needs
- Secure online account
- Apply for multiple child care locations at the same time
- Self-manage their information

Child Care Agencies

- Promote details about their programs and quality
- Trusted online source for parents to learn more about their programs and quality care
- Manage program waitlists and applications and keep parents informed through online communications

Funding and Accountability

Children's Services provides oversight of early years and child care providers by monitoring and holding agencies accountable for their responsibilities to their service agreements. The Division manages local funding and resource allocations that align with system priorities and ensures accountability for public investment through the development and implementation of policies that support provincial and local priorities.

Child Care Fee Subsidy

Managing the Child Care fee Subsidy program to ensure child care access and affordability for families is the responsibility of the Children's Services Division. Child care fee subsidy provides financial assistance to help parents pay for licensed child care so they can go to work or school. Subsidy may also be available to support children and families with specific needs. Financial eligibility is based on household income and the cost of child care.

Capacity Building

Children's Services plays a significant role in supporting capacity building and quality improvement for the early years and child care system by financially supporting the work of the Early Learning Quality Initiative (ELQI). ELQI is a collaborative partnership that promotes professional development and high quality in early learning programs within the City of Kawartha Lakes and the County of Haliburton. The Initiative is intended to build the capacity of licensed child care operators, supervisors, program staff/caregivers, home child care providers and non-profit volunteer board members to support the provision of high quality programs for children 0 to 12.

A quality child care system has significantly greater capacity to meet the needs of children more effectively. High quality child care programs are child-centred and provide environments and experiences to engage children in active, creative, and meaningful exploration and learning.

All Programs in our service area are required to participate in the Early Learning Quality Initiative. This involves a working partnership with Children's Services and with the Early Learning Coordinator (Early Learning Quality Initiative).

Child Care Expansion

Children's Services is committed to providing access to high quality, affordable child care to as many families as possible.

Canada-Wide Early Learning Child Care System (CWELCC)

Children's Services is responsible for the management and implementation of CWELCC.

The CWELCC program intends to:

- Reduce child care fees for eligible families;
- Increase access to high-quality, inclusive, licensed child care programs;
- Invest in the Early Learning and Child Care workforce.

The City of Kawartha Lakes has been allocated provincial funding to support growth by adding 49 school based and 394 community-based licensed child care spaces to our current capacity. These programs must be operational by December 31, 2026. The intent is to create spaces in communities who need them most as guided by Ministry criteria. Both centred based and home based programs are options for the creation of community-based spaces.

Expansion prioritizes communities that aim to serve the following populations:

- Low-income families
- Vulnerable communities
- Diverse communities
- Children with special needs
- Francophone families
- Indigenous families
- Families needing more flexible models of care, including evening, weekend, and overnight care

For this expansion, funding will focus on improving equity of access by working toward a common provincial access ratio of

37% of licensed spaces to children,

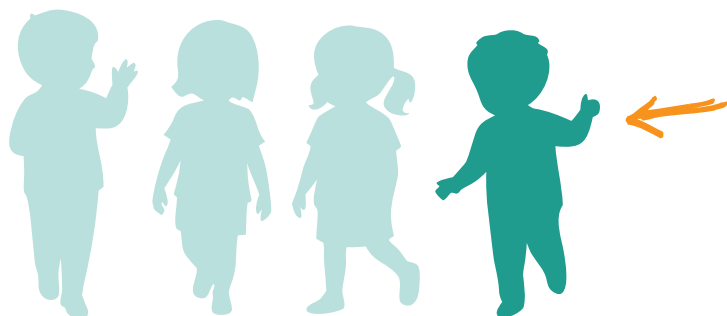
over the phased implementation timeframe.

Total licensed spaces available by age group

| | Infant (age 0 to 17 months) | Toddler (age 18 to 30 months) | Preschool (age 30 to 47 months) | Total (ages 0 to 4 years) |
|---|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Licensed centre-based spaces | 69 | 155 | 377 | 601 |
| Licensed home-based spaces (estimate) ¹ | 29 | 29 | 58 | 116 |
| Total - licensed spaces | 98 | 184 | 435 | 717 |

Percentage of children with access to a space by age group

| | Infant (age 0 to 17 months) | Toddler (age 18 to 30 months) | Preschool (age 30 to 47 months) | Total (ages 0 to 4 years) |
|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Children population | 1,191 | 794 | 928 | 2,913 |
| Percentage of children with access to a space | 8% | 23% | 47% | 25% |



25% licensed space access rate for children aged 0 to 4 years.

2,196 additional spaces required to achieve **37% access rate** for children aged 0 to 4 years.



The parent and guardian survey highlighted significant challenges in accessing child care programs. **80% (205) of respondents reported experiencing issues with the availability of child care spaces**, often finding themselves on waitlists.

¹ Age breakdown is based on the assumption used by the Ministry that active homes serve four children under the age of four on average (Ministry of Education 2025). This is an estimate as home child care spaces and providers can fluctuate over time.

Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) Program

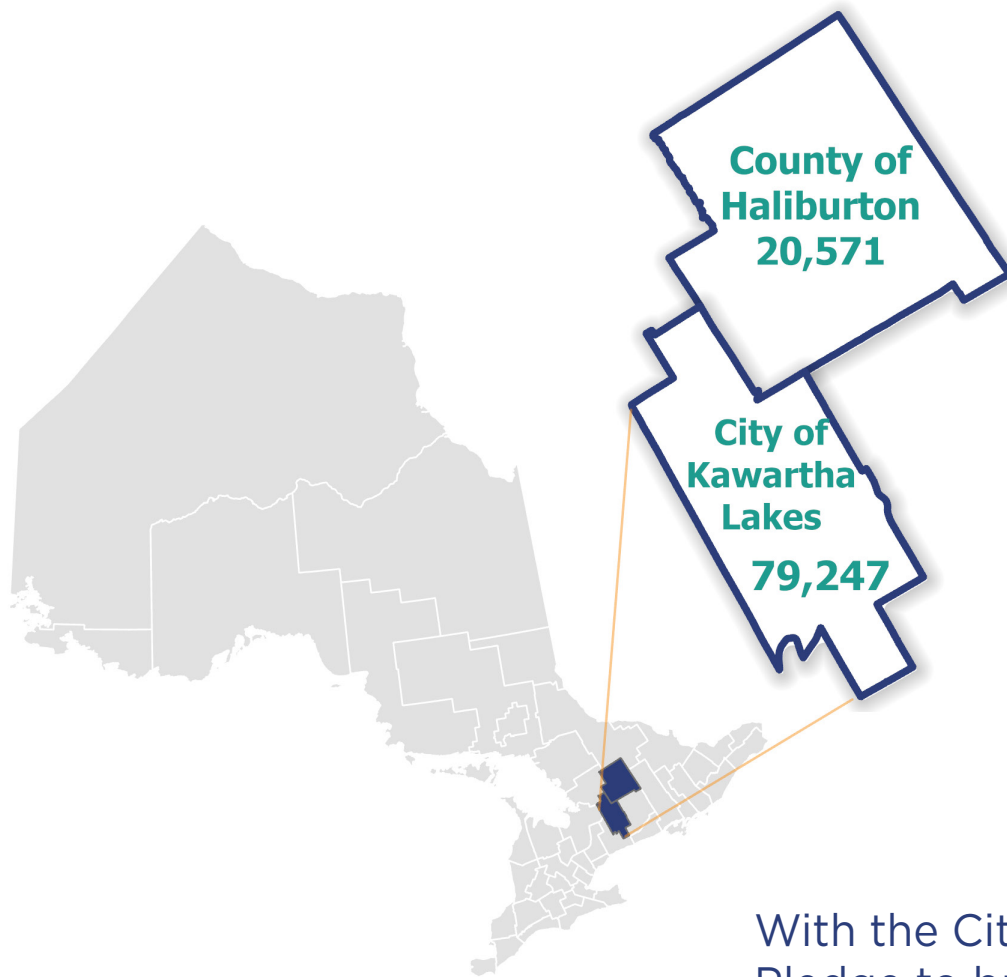
SNR provides services and supports to licensed child care, recreation based, and licensed home child care programs to promote the inclusion of all children.

SNR partners are provided funding for individual and specialized support that enables children with unique needs to be fully included in child care programs. They work collaboratively with licensed child care programs to continually improve the overall quality of care for all children by supporting programs to implement effective practices. Funding is available for staffing, training, and equipment.

EarlyON Child and Family Centre

EarlyON Child and Family Centres are financially supported by Children's Services. They offer free virtual and in-person programs for children from birth to six years of age and their parents, grandparents, or caregivers. EarlyON Centres are places where families engage in play-based learning with their children, learn about child development, access resources and services, and meet other families. Qualified Registered Early Childhood Educators and other professionals are on-site to provide support, advice, information, and helpful resources.

Our Community – Who We Are



Situated in Central Ontario, the City of Kawartha Lakes is the second-largest single-tier municipality in the province by land area, with a relatively low population density of 26 people per square kilometre. Just to the north, the County of Haliburton encompasses four municipalities, with an even lower population density of 5 people per square kilometre. Both regions are within easy driving distance of Toronto, making them popular destinations for cottagers. In recent years, they have also become increasingly appealing to young families seeking a quieter, more affordable lifestyle outside the city. This section provides an overview of local demographics and emerging community trends, which inform the development of the service plan.

Between 2016 and 2021, the population of Kawartha Lakes grew by 5%, while Haliburton saw a larger increase of 14%.

With the City of Kawartha Lakes' Municipal Housing Pledge to build 6,500 new housing units by 2031, the region is expected to keep growing in the future.

Employment and Income

In 2022, the labour force participation rates in both Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton reflect strong workforce engagement, particularly among males, but also highlight a slight gender gap, with male participation rates higher than female participation in both regions. In Kawartha Lakes, the core-working age female participation rate is 84%, while in Haliburton; it is slightly lower at 83%. The data suggests there may be potential for increasing female participation in the workforce, especially in Haliburton. One key factor that could help close this gender gap is improved access to affordable child care. The availability and affordability of child care significantly impact a woman's ability to participate in the labour force. Expanding access to high quality, affordable child care could make it easier for more women to enter or remain in the workforce, potentially boosting overall female labour force participation rates and the local economy.

Two-parent families with children

17,535

Median after-tax income

Kawartha Lakes:

\$113,000

Haliburton:

\$102,000



One-parent families with children

5,885

Median after-tax income

Kawartha Lakes:

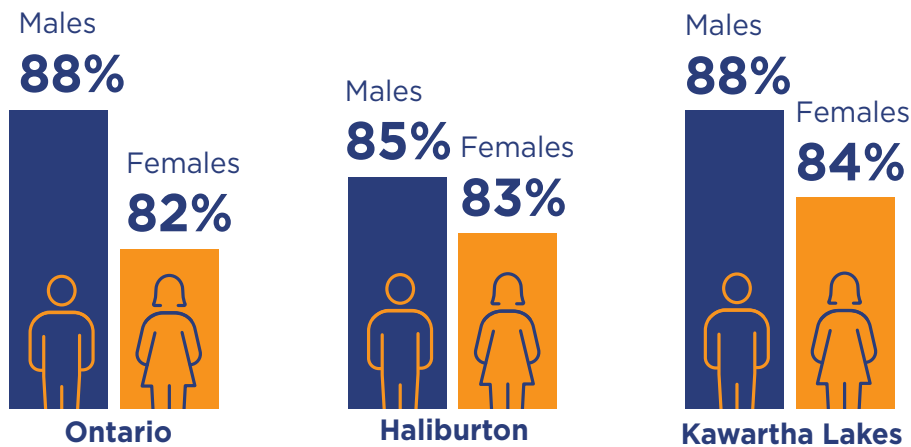
\$63,200

Haliburton:

\$61,200



Labour participation rates (ages 25 to 54)



Children in Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton 0 to 12 years old



Infant:
1,191



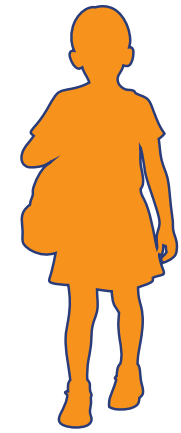
Toddler:
794



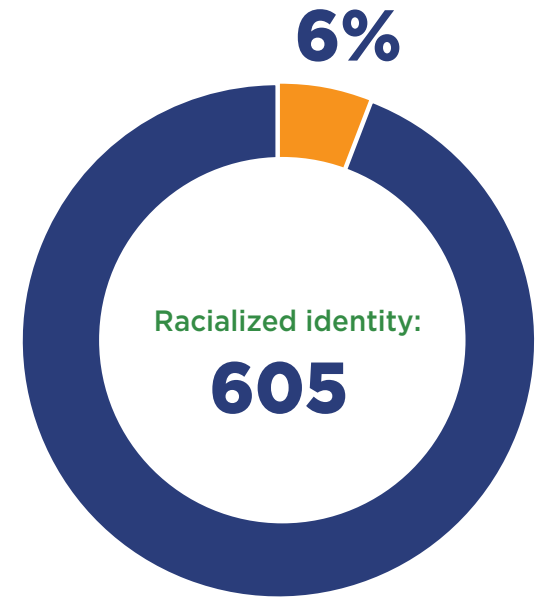
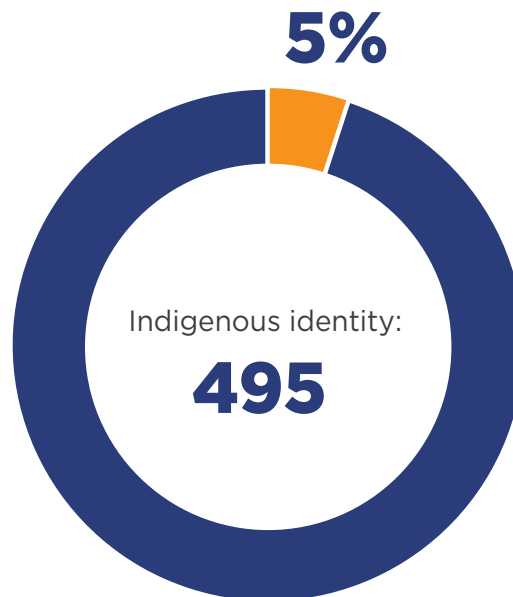
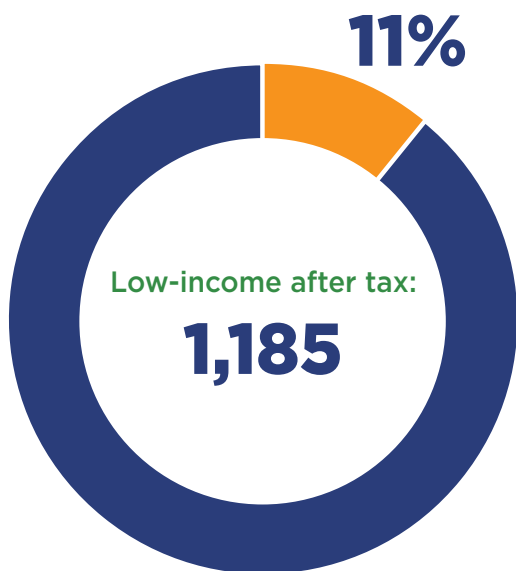
Preschool:
928



Kindergarten:
1,610



School Age:
6,203



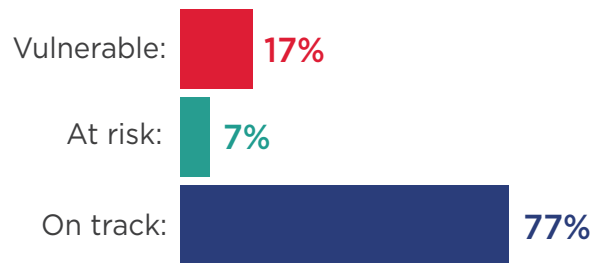
Early Development Instrument

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a tool used to measure how ready children are for school and how they are developing in key areas. The EDI looks at five important aspects of a child’s growth:

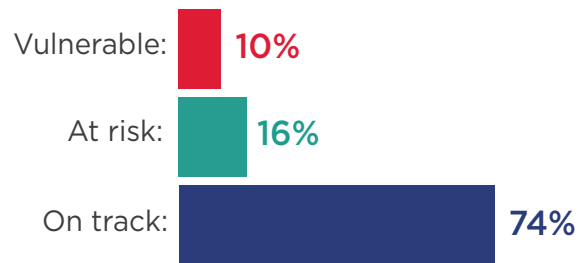
- Physical Health and Well-being
- Social Competence
- Emotional Maturity
- Language and Cognitive Development
- Communication Skills and General Knowledge

In the spring of 2023, data from children in Senior Kindergarten from across the Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton informed the EDI results.² When more children in an area are identified as ‘vulnerable,’ it shows they are struggling. Without early intervention, these children might face school and life challenges. Local organizations use this information to plan programs and services to support children and address developmental gaps.

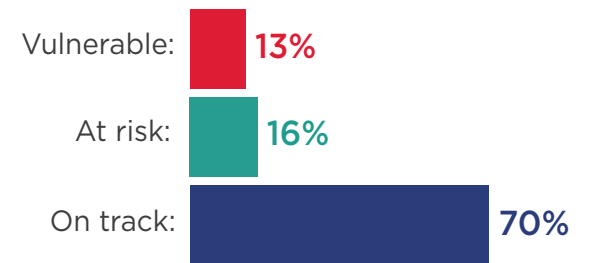
Physical Health and Well-Being



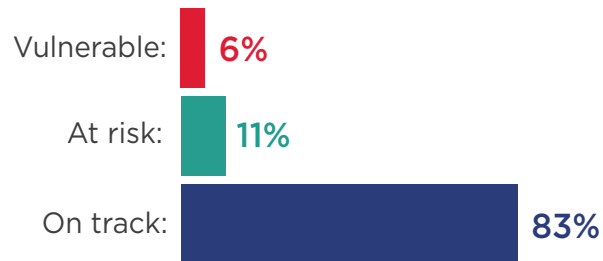
Social Competence



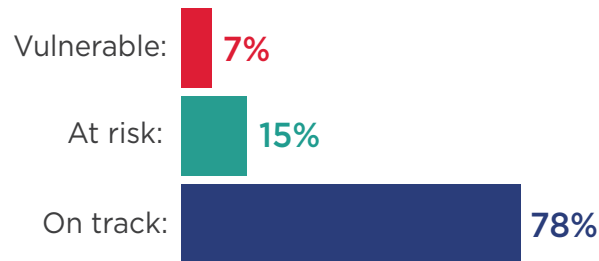
Emotional Maturity



Language and Cognitive Development



Communication Skills and General Knowledge



*Vulnerable includes the children who score below the 10th percentile cut-off on the Ontario baseline population.

² EDI raw data is provided by the Ministry of Education and the Offord Centre for Child Studies. Data analysis and views expressed are not necessarily those of the Ministry of Education or the Offord Centre.

The Child Care and Early Years System

Licensed Child Care Programs

Licensed child care programs are offered in homes and in centres. The Ministry of Education licenses and monitors the programs that must meet specific provincial standards providing for the health, safety, and developmental needs of children. There are currently six licensed centre-based child care agencies operating 23 child care sites in schools and the community. Home child care is another option for families that may suit their child care requirements. There are two licensed child care agencies offering home child care throughout the service area.

Authorized Recreation

Authorized recreation programs provide another option for families requiring child care for children aged 4 to 12 years. Local authorized recreation programs offer before and afterschool care and camps. Programs provide a range of social, educational, and skill development opportunities that appeal to children of all interests.



174
Home licensed
child care spaces

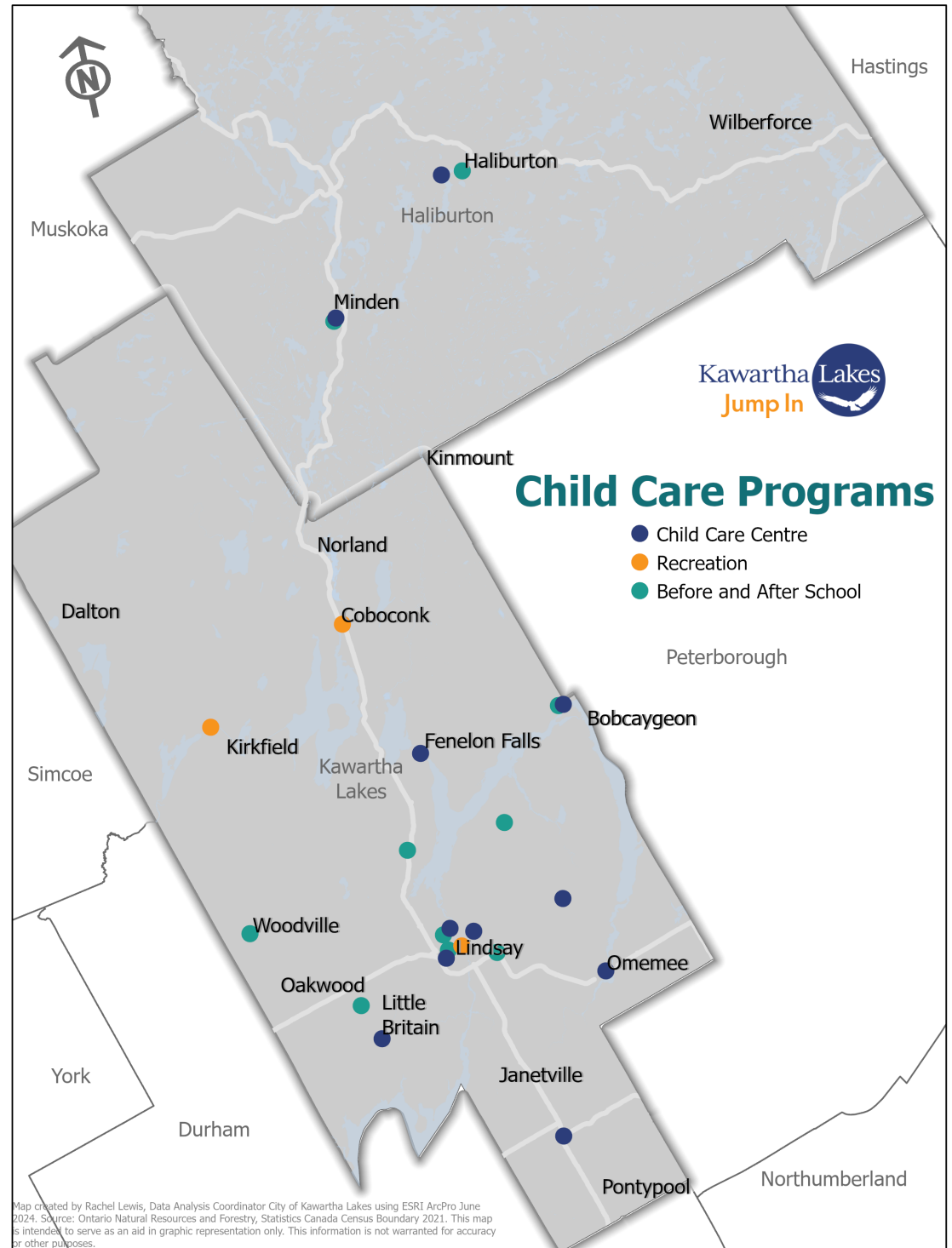


1,741
Centre licensed
child care spaces



3
Recreation
programs

Child Care Programs

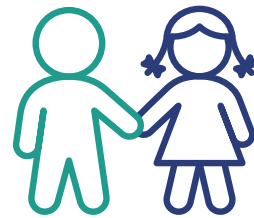


EarlyON Child and Family Centres

Children's Services is responsible for the planning and funding of EarlyON programs operated by the Ontario Early Years Centre Haliburton Victoria Brock. EarlyON offers free, high-quality programs for children and families from 0 to 6 years. These programs are very valuable to communities throughout Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton as they offer a safe, fun environment for children to play and learn while parents and caregivers have access to community services and advice from professionals in child development. There are 8 program locations in the County of Haliburton and 28 locations in Kawartha Lakes. The map below shows the approximate locations of EarlyON centres and mobile sites that may include libraries, schools, parks, and community centres.



37 Locations
5 centres and
32 mobile locations

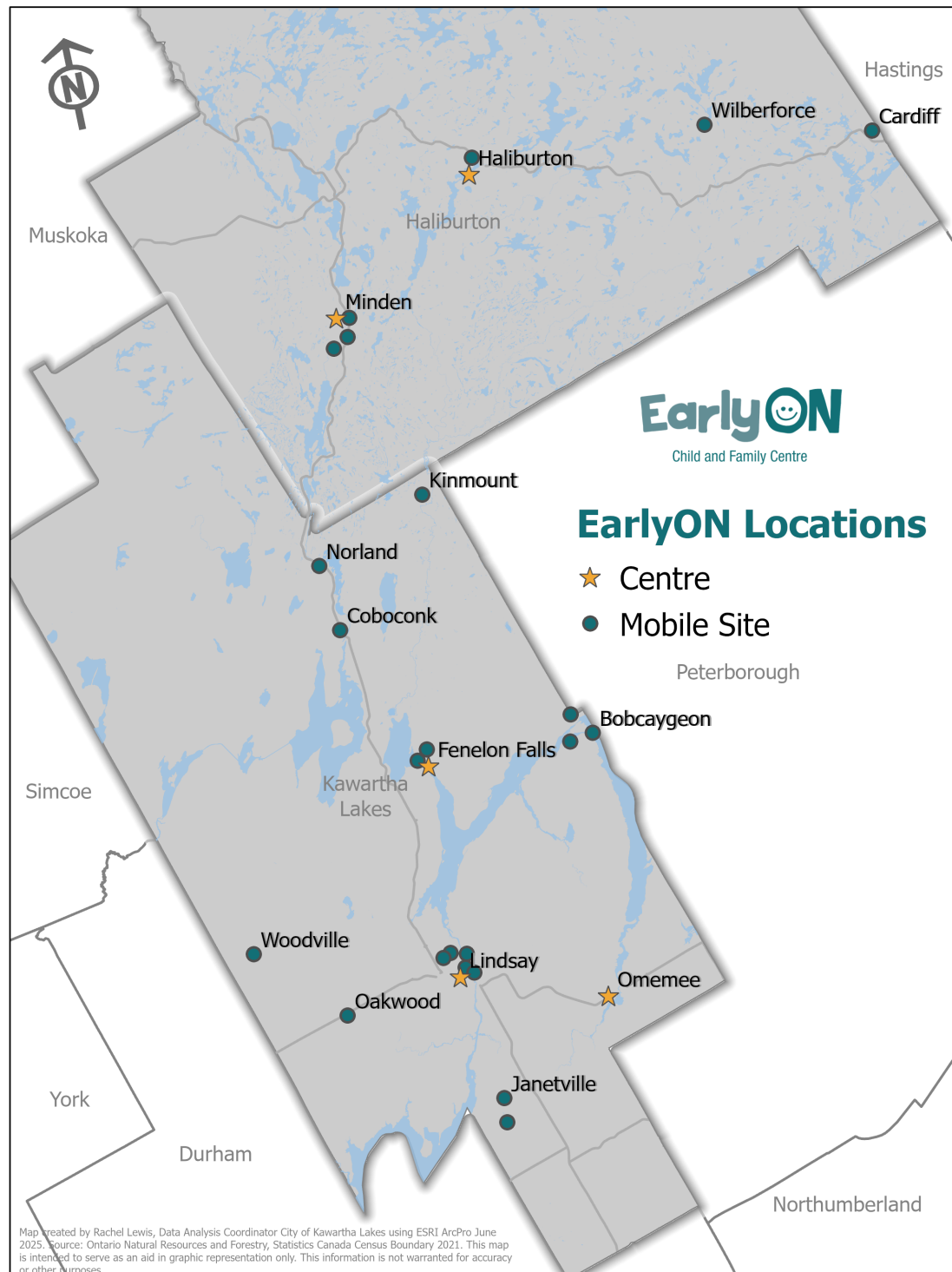


15,859
Visits by children



3,543
Children and
families served

EarlyON Locations



Engagement to Inform the Service Plan

Consultations with the Early Learning and Child Care community, and Kawartha Lakes and County of Haliburton families support the development of this service plan. Feedback received through surveys ensures that the priorities of the service plan align with the priorities of community partners and families.

Children's Services invited the following groups to share their valuable feedback on the service plan:

- Early Learning and Care Network
- Community Planning Table for Children and Youth
- Early Learning Sub-Committee
- Early Years Agencies
- Early Learning Quality Initiative
- Local school boards
- Families in receipt of fee subsidy
- Centralized wait list families

Survey results were analyzed and summarized into common themes and priorities as described in the following section.

“ I believe that because of child care [my children] have learned many valuable life skills. I have felt supported and able to get help whenever I need it from the centre. ”

- Survey respondent

“ There is a desperate need for more spaces overall, but especially care centres in Haliburton County. If we want women to contribute to the local economy, we need childcare! ”

- Survey respondent

Guiding Principles

The plan is organized according to five guiding principles that are needed in a strong early years and child care system — accessible, affordable, responsive, high quality, and building knowledge. These principles are closely connected to Ontario’s vision for early years and child care.

Accessible

Early learning services:

- Are easily accessed
- Are inclusive of all
- Are available to all who need or want service
- Meet family needs in terms of days, hours, and locations
- Provide enough choice and flexibility for families

Affordable

Early learning services:

- Are affordable for all families
- Ensure fee subsidies are available to support families
- Use a funding approach that supports improved affordability

Responsive

Early learning services:

- Are adaptable and respond to family needs
- Reflect diverse needs
- Address changing demands and service

High Quality

Early learning services:

- Promote child belonging, well-being, engagement, and expression
- Align with “How Does Learning Happen?”
- Employ a highly-skilled and fairly-compensated workforce that engage in ongoing professional development and learning
- Support high-quality early learning and care environments

Building Knowledge

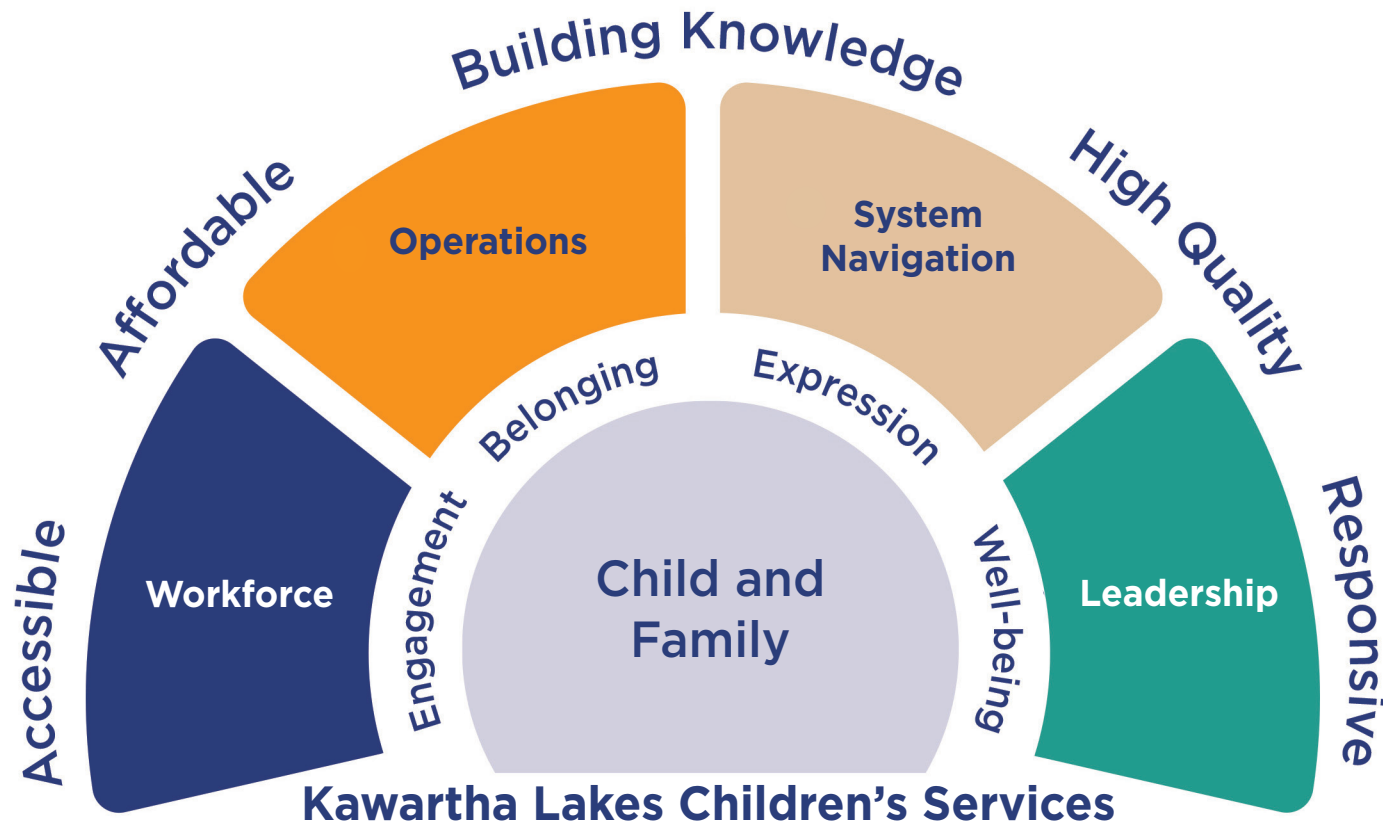
Early learning services:

- Promote rewarding career opportunities
- Educate the public on the long-term impacts of positive early learning experiences
- Use evidence-based service planning

Strategic Directions and Actions

Children's Services has developed the following strategic priorities and goals based on community consultations and surveys with families and Early Years partners. The strategic goals will guide initiatives to support identified needs within the service area and will inform policy funding, projects, and program service decisions over the next five years.

Themes and Principles



Workforce

Advocating for a system-wide workforce strategy that promotes recruitment, retention, fair compensation and professional development for the early years sector. Champion an early years community that feels valued, empowered and supported in their field.

Actions

- 1 Development of a system-wide communication plan to promote the Early Childhood Education (ECE) profession
 - Implement an annual ECE day of recognition to raise public awareness of the profession
 - Partner with employment organizations and City departments to promote a career in ECE through career ladders and job fairs.
- 2 Implement the “Quality Tool for Programs and Educators” to inform about Special Needs Resourcing and the Early Learning Quality Initiative to all educators.
- 3 Develop a diverse range of professional development and mentoring opportunities that help educators to remain current with skills and best practices through the Early Learning Quality Initiative.
- 4 Work with child care partners, Municipal partners and community stakeholders to develop solutions and strategies to build and strengthen the local child care and early years workforce.

Operations

The early years system is undergoing significant change. Recognizing that change can be challenging, Children’s Services will advance the modernization of the early years system by implementing Provincial legislation and technology in a way that works best for our service providers, and that responds to the needs of children and families.

Actions

- 1 Providing online resources to support early years agencies such as annual funding calendar and quarterly newsletter.
- 2 Streamline internal fee subsidy policies and procedures to reduce administration time, improve processes, and provide service excellence.
- 3 Support early years agencies through business changes such as funding models, audit requirements, reporting, wait list management, and program expansion. We are a resource for agencies in operating their business.
- 4 Streamline and continue automating Children’s Services’ administrative and reporting requirements of service providers to address efficiencies in the system while maintaining accountability.
- 5 Support the community through the transition to the new provincial child care and early years IT system.

System Navigation

Children's Services continues to focus on making supports and services easier for families to access and making the system as a whole more inclusive of the unique needs of our families.

Actions

- 1 Develop and implement comprehensive communications, public education, and engagement strategy for service providers, families, and the broader public, including:
 - Reviewing, adapting, and enhancing existing communications channels for service providers
 - Implementing initiatives to receive input from families and raise public awareness of the early years system
 - Mindful approaches for new families' diverse social, physical, cultural, and economic experiences
- 2 Consider transportation barriers and accessibility by providing services in locations across Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton.
- 3 Improve customer service to make sure families have access to the right services at the right time to support smooth transitions for children and families.
- 4 Prioritize professional development opportunities that address barriers experienced by the early learning profession, and families we serve.
- 5 Streamline City of Kawartha Lakes Children's Services Website to communicate up to date and relevant information to families, services providers, and community partners
- 6 Work with our local school boards to collaborate on:
 - Joint Service Planning
 - Capital planning and development
 - A high quality seamless service system

Leadership

Children's Services will champion the needs of children, families, and the early years workforce. Recognizing that these efforts fit within a broader policy context, we will work with all levels of government and municipal and community partners to enhance the well-being of children and families. Drawing on research and data analysis, we will continue to be leaders in system planning to improve child and family outcomes.

Actions

- 1 Develop strategies to strengthen relationships, engagement, and planning to support the needs of early years workforce and families in our community.
- 2 Develop proactive expansion strategies based on research and data to promote inclusivity and address changing needs and pressures.
- 3 Collaborate with CMSMs and the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) to advocate for:
 - Increases to fee subsidy thresholds to support more families
 - The early years workforce to be recognized as a respectable profession that is equitably compensated
- 4 Facilitate data sharing practices among early years agencies to support better service system planning, policy development, and quality.
- 5 Support and strengthen the leadership role of the Community Planning Table in planning and coordinating the system of services for children, and families.

Implementation

Over the next five years Children's Services will oversee the application of the Service Plan and its priorities through the development of an Implementation Plan. The Implementation Plan will be reviewed annually, and will identify the steps Children's Services will take to support the achievement of the identified priorities and goals. Achievement of these priorities and goals requires a commitment from all partners.

Ongoing Assessment and Evaluation

Ongoing engagement with families, the child care and early years community, key stakeholders, members of the public and Children's Services staff will continue as an important part of service system planning, review and assessment. Ongoing analysis to identify and strategically respond to changing needs of the child care and early years community, as well as the needs of families within Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton, is a vital component of service system planning and to the success of the 2025-2029 Service Plan.



Terms and Definitions

Early Years Agency — Child care programs, EarlyON, and early years community partners

Service Area — City of Kawartha Lakes and County of Haliburton

Service Manager — Designated as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for the City of Kawartha Lakes and County of Haliburton by the Government of Ontario, Kawartha Lakes Children's Services is responsible for the planning, funding and management, and accountability of the licensed child care and early years system.

CKL Haliburton Early Learning and Care Network — Leaders, educators and mentors within our early learning community

CPT — Community Planning Table for Children, Youth and Families in Haliburton and City of Kawartha Lakes

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For more information, please contact:

Children's Services • PO Box 2600, 68 Lindsay Street North, Lindsay ON K9V 4S7

www.kawarthalakes.ca

