

# Northumberland County Early Years Services 2026-2030 Plan



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## “Growing Together in Northumberland”

“Growing together in Northumberland” is the theme of the 2026-2030 Northumberland County Early Years Services (Early Years Services) 5-year plan. This theme reflects the growth in Early Years Services experienced over the last 5 years and looks ahead to the growth needed over the next 5 years to meet the varied and changing needs of children and families living in Northumberland County. With collaborative efforts among our network of community partners, some of the accomplishments of the previous 5-year plan include:

- Growth of affordable and quality child care spaces following Canada-Wide
- Early Learning and Child Care program (CWELCC) initial enrollment – often referred to as “10 dollar-per-day child care” – and further expansion with CWELCC Directed Growth,
- Increases to annual child and parent attendance at EarlyON programming – which is free inquiry and play-based programming available for children aged 0-6 and their families – and the development of the Indigenous space at the 800 Division Street location in Cobourg,
- Developing an online application portal for the Fee Subsidy program – which is a program offering child care subsidy to eligible families in addition to that provided by CWELCC,
- Growth of the Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) workforce and professional development opportunities for all sector employees, and
- Streamlined data processes needed for systems planning, waitlist management, and Ministry reporting.

Northumberland is currently experiencing population growth in the ages eligible for Early Years programs. Overall, Northumberland experienced a population growth of 4.4% over the 2016 to 2021 Census years (2021 = 89,365; 2016 = 85,595), which is marginally lower than the 5.8% population growth experienced by Ontario (2021 = 14,22,945; 2016 = 13,448,495; Statistics Canada, 2022). However, during this time, the population growth in Northumberland was characterized by a 2.6% increase in the 0 to 9 age range (2021 = 7,295; 2016 = 7,110) compared to a 0.4% decrease demonstrated in Ontario (2021 = 1,447,950; 2016 = 1,453,450) in this same category. This growth is likely to continue, as the Ontario Ministry of Finance projects a 20-35% increase in population growth for Northumberland across the years 2024-2051 (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2025).

Early Years Services currently showcases the benefits and obstacles associated with this growth. For example, attendance continues to increase at EarlyON programs as families willingly pursue organized activities outside of the home that are critical for the development of social, cognitive, and physical skills in their children. However, waitlists

persist for CWELCC enrolled child care spaces as parents look for quality and affordable care options while pursuing necessary work and educational opportunities. Waitlists for child care space remains one of the main barriers impacting Northumberland families in 2026. Therefore, “Growing Together in Northumberland” means understanding child and family needs in Northumberland and developing reasonable action goals in efforts toward meeting the demands. Understanding and effectively resolving these needs requires communication with Northumberland families, expanding collaborative networks with community partner agencies, and self-reflection about the effectiveness of internal workflows.

Essential factors mediating service provision over 2026-2030 include funding, time, and space. In working toward the action goals established in this plan, Early Years Services must continue to balance evolving and limited funding allocations, funding guidelines and restrictions, staff turnover, limits to workforce recruitment, and limits to viable spaces available for offering programs. Early Years Services must also balance the greater absolute need for programs and spaces in the urban areas of the County with the need for access and proximity in rural areas.

With this plan, our goals are to:

- Detail the landscape of Early Years programs in Northumberland, as of December 31, 2025, for the purpose of providing the backdrop upon which Early Years Services sets sights for 2026-2030,
- Highlight the regulations within which Early Years Services operates to system plan and distribute Ministry and Levy allocated funding to operators and community partners serving children and families in Northumberland, and
- Discuss current Early Years needs, strengths, and areas for continued work in Northumberland as identified by residents and community partners.

Five pillars are used in this plan to organize how Early Years Services embodies the goals set for 2026-2030 and supports “Growing Together in Northumberland”. These include:

- **Affordable Access** to licensed child care spaces and Early Years programs across Northumberland,
- **Service Access** to support child care centre and EarlyON program viability, expand program service hours where possible, and optimize family resource availability and system navigation to urban and rural areas in Northumberland,

- **Recruitment, Professional Development, and Learning** of the Early Years workforce to maximize the recruitment, retention, and training of RECE and non-RECE staff,
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion** for program design, family access, and educator representation, and
- **Information Sharing and Program Promotion** to inform system planning, create awareness of available resources and supports, and coordinate service access with other Service System Managers at Northumberland County.

## Background

### Early Years in Northumberland County

The Early Years Division at Northumberland County is the Service System Manger (SSM) for Early Learning and Child Care Services for the Northumberland Region. In Ontario, SSMs are designated under the *Child Care and Early Years Act (2014)* to manage child care services and Early Years programming within their area of operation. This includes system planning, funding distribution, and service provision within the funding allocations and operating guidelines provided by the Provincial and Federal governments. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Allocating, monitoring, and reporting on the federal-provincial funding provided to licensed centre- and home-based child care programs enrolled in CWELCC,
- Planning, managing, and reporting on Provincially regulated CWELCC Directed Growth for child care spaces,
- Support for School-Age programs with Local Priorities Funding via general operating grants and Wage Compensation,
- System navigation, determining eligibility, and allocating funding for child care Fee Subsidy,
- Allocating Special Needs Resources to eligible programs and families,
- Planning, directing, and reporting on EarlyON programming,
- RECE recruitment and retention,
- Organizing professional development opportunities for the Early Years workforce, and
- Engaging Northumberland community partners with collaborative programming for the well-being of children and families.

Early Years Services' annual budget operates with 93.1% of funds provided by Provincial and Federal Governments and the remaining 6.9% consisting of Northumberland County Levy.

## Child Care and Early Years Governance

This section offers a summary of the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*. Please see the act (References section) for specific details.

The *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* fosters the learning, development, health and well-being of children to enhance their safety. The act provides a framework for the regulation of:

- The provision of child care, including:
  - The operation of child care and early years programs and services,
  - An established licensing and compliance scheme relating to the provision of child care,
- Requirements in relation to the funding and resourcing of child care and early years programs and services,
- Facilitation and support for the local planning and implementation of child care and early years programs and services by municipalities, district social services administration boards, First Nations, and prescribed local authorities,
- Access to information that:
  - Supports the ability of parents to evaluate and choose child care and early years programs and services,
  - Increases understanding about child development and improves the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the child care and early years programs and services, and
- Facilitates and supports the coordination of provincial planning and policy development.

## How Does Learning Happen?

*How Does Learning Happen?* is the pedagogical framework developed by the Government of Ontario that guides the early learning and development programming offered in Northumberland (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). *How Does Learning Happen?* focuses on learning and development through the relationships developed between children, families, and educators. It outlines goals for children, expectations for programs, and questions for reflection based on the four foundations of belonging, well-being, engagement, and expression. This includes:

- The importance of creating a sense of belonging through fostering relationships and connections,
- How to create environments and experiences to engage children in learning through play and inquiry,
- The importance of supporting children's sense of self, health and well-being, and

- Supporting positive self-expression and communication in all forms.

## Definitions

**Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care program (CWELCC):** the Canada-Ontario agreement to lower parent fees for child care, increase access to spaces, support child care workforces, and support inclusive care for families. CWELCC is planned to reduce parent fees for Infant to Kindergarten (0-5 years) spaces across Ontario by March 2026. The CWELCC agreement is currently extended until December 31, 2026.

### Child care spaces:

- **Infant:**
  - Age range: 0 to younger than 18 months
  - Staff-to-children ratio: 3 to 10
  - Max children per grouping: 10
- **Toddler:**
  - Age range: 18 months to younger than 30 months
  - Staff-to-children ratio: 1 to 5
  - Max children per grouping: 15
- **Preschool:**
  - Age range: 30 months to younger than 6 years, although children typically move to Kindergarten spaces at 3.8-4 years
  - Staff-to-children ratio: 1 to 8
  - Max children per grouping: 24
- **Kindergarten:**
  - Age range: 44 months to younger than 7 years, although children typically move to School-Age programs at 6 years when no longer eligible for CWELCC
  - Staff-to-children ratio: 1 to 13
  - Max children per grouping: 26
- **School-age:** Before/after school and full-day programs (i.e., holidays, summer vacation, and March Break) for children aged 6-12 that are subject to full fees (i.e., no CWELCC fee reduction).
  - Staff-to-children ratio: 1 to 15
  - Max children per grouping: 30
- **Family age grouping:**
  - Age range: 0 to younger than 12 years, with no more than 6 children under the age of 2. Children aged 0-6 are CWELCC eligible.
  - Staff-to-children ratio: 1 to 3 or 8 depending on ages of children enrolled.
  - Max children per grouping: 15

**Community Partners:** Agencies that work in collaboration with Early Years Services to support the well-being of children and families in Northumberland. Current community partner agencies include:

- Brighton Children’s Centre,
- Cobourg Day Care,
- Children’s Mental Health,
- Community Health Centres of Northumberland,
- Community Respite and Living Services,
- Compass Early Learning Centre,
- Cook’s School Daycare,
- Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre,
- Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child and Family Services,
- Five Counties Children’s Centre,
- Ganaraska Child Care Centre,
- Highland Shores Child and Family Services,
- Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board,
- Kinark Child and Family Services,
- Kinderlinx,
- Lakelands Public Health,
- MonAvenir Conseil Scolaire Catholique,
- Nogojiwanong Friendship Centre,
- Northumberland Child Development Centre,
- Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board,
- Rebound Child and Youth Services,
- St. Peter’s Preschool,
- Sunshine Heights Co-op Daycare,
- Wee Watch Northumberland,
- YMCA Northumberland, and
- Northumberland United Way.

**Directed Growth Plan:** Introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2023 to create 86,000 net new CWELCC spaces across Ontario by December 31, 2026. Directed Growth space allocations identify the number of new spaces supported through operating funding up to December 31, 2026. New spaces are considered those not included in the initial CWELCC enrollment of 2022.

**EarlyON:** Free drop-in and pre-registered family programs prenatally and for children up to 6 years old across all lower-tier municipalities in Northumberland. Play- and inquiry-based programs are provided at both indoor and outdoor settings to support child learning, development, and well-being. EarlyON programming allows families to make critical connections to child and family services/support agencies in Northumberland.

**Fee Subsidy:** Ontario Child Care Fee Subsidy helps families offset the cost of licensed child care by offering financial subsidies to eligible families using a sliding scale based on net income. Families can apply for children aged 12 years or under that are enrolled in:

- A CWELCC funded centre/agency serving children aged 0 to 12 years,
- A centre/agency exclusively serving children aged 6 to 12 years,
- An approved camp or recreation program, or
- A before and after school program operated directly by school boards or offered by approved third party programs.

If working, in school, or training, Ontario Works clients may be eligible for full subsidies within unlicensed child care arrangements.

**Functional capacity:** An Early Years Services metric used to assess an operator's ability to fill spaces as they come available. This is determined by license capacity, operating capacity, and waitlist size.

**Funding year:** the period for which allocated funds are provided and must be spent. The funding year for Early Years Services aligns with the calendar year – January to December.

**Indigenous-led Early Years Team:** Two educators/coordinators with experience and knowledge of Indigenous Culture who work under the guidance of the Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child and Family Services. The Indigenous-led team enhances Early Years programming to support Indigenous children and families. This includes working with child care and EarlyON centres in Northumberland to support the planning, ongoing development, and maintenance of culturally intelligent Early Years programming. The Indigenous team also partners with Early Years Services to develop and lead trainings, develop culturally relevant educational resources, and lend support to all educators in the Early Years and child care communities, including non-Indigenous educators.

**Licensed capacity:** The maximum number of children, including the number per age category, permitted to receive child care at one time in a centre/home.

**Licensed centre-based child care:** Child care programs offered in community or school locations that are the holders of child care licenses and can offer any combination of Infant, Toddler, Preschool, Kindergarten, and School-Aged programs.

**Licensed home-based child care:** Child care providers offering care in a home for up to 6 children under the age of 13, including any of their own children under 4 years and up to 3 children under 2 years. Home providers are contracted and overseen by home child care agencies that hold child care licenses.

**Ministry of Education (The Ministry):** the Ontario ministry overseeing the funding and regulation of Early Learning and Child Care Services.

**Mixed-age groups:** With approval by a Ministry director, mixed-age groups allow a certain number of children from one age group to transition into the next older age group even if the child moving rooms is not within the age range specified for the receiving age category. This allows child care centres to maximize enrollment and respond to the changing developmental needs of children. Percentage mix of younger children is 20% for Toddler and Preschool age groupings and 25% for Kindergarten and School-age groupings. Mixed-age grouping does not apply for the Infant age grouping. For example, Toddler age-groupings can include  $15 \times 0.2 = 3$  children under 18 months old.

**Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA):** Supports organization and unified representation for Ontario's 47 Service System Managers. OMSSA strengthens the system by building capacity, connecting leaders, and shaping policy so the experiences of Service System Managers inform provincial and federal decisions and improves outcomes for Ontarians.

**Operating capacity:** The number of spaces that a licensed centre/home child care can serve as per staffing compliment and budget, up to a maximum of the licensed capacity.

**Operators:** Child care and Early Years agencies that have active service agreement(s) with Early Years Services.

**Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE):** A professional registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators that meets the college's requirements to plan and deliver play-based programs from Infant to School-Aged children.

**Special Needs Resourcing (SNR):** Funding used to support the inclusion of children with special needs in eligible licensed centre- and home-based child care settings, camps, and recreation programs at no additional cost to families/caregivers. Under O. Reg. 138/15, a child with special needs means a child whose cognitive, physical, social, emotional or communicative needs, or whose needs relating to overall development, are of such a nature that additional supports are required for the child.

**Triple-P Program:** Parenting/family support programs designed to engage parents/caregivers and help children realize their potential. Triple-P programs guide

parents to understand the confidence and skills they need to build strong family relationships, manage behavioural and emotional problems, prevent problems, and navigate local service resources.

**Unlicensed/informal child care:** Care provided (typically at the child’s home or a provider’s home) without a license and not required to meet Provincially regulated child care standards, licensing, operating, inspection, and funding requirements. In Ontario, unlicensed child care operators are not allowed to care for more than 5 children. This includes the provider’s own children under the age of 4 and no more than three children under the age of 2. Unlicensed providers may not operate at multiple premises and must disclose to parents/caregivers that they are not licensed.

## Child Care

As of December 31, 2025, Northumberland County has signed service agreements with 9 child care agencies that are licensed to operate 37 total sites enrolled in CWELCC. These sites account for 65 Infant spaces, 239 Toddler spaces, 448 Preschool spaces, 561 Kindergarten spaces, 884 School-Aged spaces, and 30 Family Age spaces across Northumberland. The County also has signed service agreements with 2 home child care agencies that are licensed to operate a combined 24 homes offering 144 spaces in Northumberland. Of these 10 unique agencies, 9 operate as Non-Profit and 1 operates as For-Profit. Within the Cost-Based Funding guidelines released in 2025, there are limits to the profit/surplus that agencies can retain across funding years (see CWELCC section).

### Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care program (CWELCC)

As of January 1, 2025, the Ministry of Education implemented a cost-based model to replace the previous cost replacement model for how Ontario SSMs allocate funding to child care programs enrolled in CWELCC. With the model, the Ministry calculates financial allocations per child care site based on current economic factors and child care sector data.

Since the initial release of the cost-based guidelines on August 15, 2024, implementation of the new funding model by Early Years Services has involved:

- Understanding and interpreting revised details of the model across multiple versions,
- Tabulating funding allocations individually for the 37 Northumberland child care sites enrolled in CWELCC for 2025 and 2026,
- Monthly-bimonthly financial planning and data reporting meetings with the agencies operating these programs,

- Releasing and monitoring quarterly funds to agencies according to their tabulated allocations, and
- Adjusting funding allocations according to ad hoc and unanticipated guideline updates from the Ministry.

Transitioning to the cost-based model has incurred extensive administrative workloads for Early Years Services and child care operators since the Fall of 2024. This workload will likely remain throughout 2026 as we continue to reconcile finances with operators, develop data collection protocols required for new reporting metrics, and implement guideline adjustments. Financial reconciliations are carried out every quarter to ensure operators are provided with adequate funding and accrue eligible expenses within their allocations. Operator funding allocations are expected to stabilize in 2026 lending to more routine financial management of annual funding within this model.

The shift to the Cost-Based Funding model (from what was previously a cost-replacement model) means that Ministry defined eligible expenses for child care sites enrolled in CWELCC are funded up to a maximum amount that is determined in advance by Ministry formulas. These formulas tabulate:

- **Program costs:** typical costs associated with operating a child care that includes staffing, supervisors, accommodations (e.g., rent, mortgage, taxes, maintenance, equipment), and operations (e.g., staff salaries and benefits, overhead, food, cleaning, equipment and supplies, utilities, and insurance),
- **In lieu of profit/surplus:** maximum amount of unspent Ministry allocated funds that a child care site can carry-over across funding years, and
- **Base fee revenues:** funds anticipated to be provided by parent fees – this is the daily rate paid by parents not covered by CWELCC. CWELCC rates in Northumberland vary by site and by age group. Parent fee rates were frozen as of January 1, 2025 and cannot exceed \$22 per day.

The cost-based formula considers several factors in tabulating annual allocations for child care sites. These include age groupings offered by the sites, base parent fees, service days, hours of operation, operating capacity, licensed capacity, auspice type (not-for-profit or for-profit), license setting (community or publicly funded school), and regional adjustment and growth factors determined by the Ministry. These variables are updated at year-end for tabulations used for the next funding year.

At year end, unused funds that exceed the In Lieu of Profit/Surplus are recovered by the Ministry. Overage and non-eligible expenses accrued by child care sites are to be funded by child care agencies. The Ministry defines reasonable expenses as costs that are

attributable (directly or indirectly related to providing child care) and appropriate (necessary, sound, and practical for operation of the centre). Primary roles for Early Years Services are allocating funds, reconciling revenues and expenses, and guiding child care agencies to maximize allocated funding without exceeding cost-based allocations.

For “Growing Together in Northumberland”, an **action item** is for Early Years Services to advocate to County Council and the Ministry for the continuation of CWELCC beyond 2026. Ontario families rely on the subsidies offered by CWELCC for access to affordable child care.

**Table 1. Licensed centre- and home-based child care agencies/spaces as of December 31, 2025.**

**Licensed Child Care Centres**

Agency	Site	Auspice Type	Address	Licensed Spaces						TOTAL SPACES	CWELCC SPACES
				Infant	Toddler	Preschool	Kindergarten	School-Aged	Family Aged		
Brighton Children's Centre	Brighton Children's Centre	Non-Profit	24 Elizabeth St, Brighton, ON, K0K 1H0	10	15	24	26	30	0	105	75
Cobourg Day Care	Cobourg Day Care	Non-Profit	325 Alexandria Drive, Cobourg, ON, K9A 5B2	10	30	32	33	15	0	120	105
Compass Early Learning & Care	Beehive	Non-Profit	35 Centre St, Campbellford, ON K0L 1L0	5	30	24	0	0	0	59	59
Compass Early Learning & Care	Cobourg	Non-Profit	1333 Ontario St, Cobourg, ON K9A 0N3	10	15	45	26	30	0	126	96
Compass Early Learning & Care	Hillcrest	Non-Profit	55 Elmore St, Campbellford, ON K0L 1L0	0	0	0	0	60	0	60	0
Compass Early Learning & Care	St. Michael's	Non-Profit	23 University Ave W, Cobourg, ON K9A 2G6	0	0	0	13	30	0	43	13
Cook's School Day Care	Cook's School Day Care	Non-Profit	172 Queen Street, Cobourg, ON, K9A 5P6	0	15	24	26	15	0	80	65
Ganaraska Child Care Centre	Port Hope High School	Non-Profit	130 Highland Drive, Port Hope, ON, L1A 2A3	10	15	39	26	44	0	134	90
Ganaraska Child Care Centre	Riverside	Non-Profit	81 Mill Street South, Port Hope, ON, L1A 2S8	0	30	40	0	0	0	70	70
Kinderlinx Child Care Centre	Kinderlinx Child Care Centre	For-Profit	115 Toronto Rd, Port Hope, L1A 3V7	0	15	20	0	25	0	60	35
St.Peter's Preschool	St.Peter's Preschool	Non-Profit	240 College Street, Cobourg, ON, K9A 3V2	0	0	24	0	0	0	24	24
Sunshine Heights	Sunshine Heights	Non-Profit	40 Ward St, Port Hope, ON, L1A 1L5	10	15	48	0	0	0	73	73
YMCA	Baltimore	Non-Profit	9320 Burwash Rd, Baltimore, ON, K0K 1C0	0	0	0	20	30	0	50	20
YMCA	Beatrice	Non-Profit	90 Rose Glen Rd, Port Hope, ON, L1A 3V6	0	15	24	26	30	0	95	65
YMCA	Burnham	Non-Profit	614 Burnham St, Cobourg, ON, K9A 2X1	0	0	0	20	30	0	50	20
YMCA	Camborne	Non-Profit	3546 Kennedy Rd, RR 4, Cobourg, ON, K9A 4J7	0	0	0	20	30	0	50	20
YMCA	Canton	Non-Profit	5325 County Rd 10, Port Hope, ON, L1A 3V5	10	14	24	0	0	0	48	48
YMCA	Cobourg East	Non-Profit	780 D'Arcy St, Cobourg, ON, K9A 4B3	0	0	0	0	0	15	15	15
YMCA	Cobourg	Non-Profit	339 Elgin St, Cobourg, ON, K9A 4X5	0	0	24	0	15	0	39	24
YMCA	Colborne	Non-Profit	8 Alfred St., Colborne, ON, K0K 1S0	0	0	0	26	30	0	56	26
YMCA	Grafton Family	Non-Profit	718 Station Rd, Grafton, ON, K0K 2G0	0	0	0	0	0	15	15	15
YMCA	Grafton Public	Non-Profit	654 Station Rd, Grafton, ON, K0K 2G0	0	0	0	26	30	0	56	26
YMCA	CR Gummow	Non-Profit	311 Cottesmore Ave, Cobourg, ON, K9A 4E3	0	0	0	26	60	0	86	26
YMCA	Hastings	Non-Profit	25 Albert Street West, Hastings, ON, K0L 0B1	0	0	0	20	30	0	50	20
YMCA	Kent	Non-Profit	150 Kent St, Box 1090, Campbellford, ON, K0L 1L0	0	0	0	20	30	0	50	20
YMCA	Merwin Greer	Non-Profit	457 King St E, Cobourg, ON, K9A 1M7	0	0	0	0	30	0	30	0
YMCA	North Hope	Non-Profit	3278 Ganaraska Rd RR 1, Campbellcroft, ON, L0A 1B0	0	0	0	20	24	0	44	20
YMCA	Northumberland Hills	Non-Profit	2246 Spring St, Castleton, ON, K0K 1M0	0	0	0	26	30	0	56	26
YMCA	Percy	Non-Profit	129 Church St, Warkworth, ON, K0K 3K0	0	0	0	26	30	0	56	26
YMCA	Plainville	Non-Profit	4877 Burnham St N, Gores Landing, ON, K0K 2E0	0	0	0	20	30	0	50	20
YMCA	Roseneath	Non-Profit	9047 County Rd. 45, Roseneath, ON, K0K 2X0	0	0	0	26	30	0	56	26
YMCA	Smithfield	Non-Profit	241 Drewery St, Brighton, ON, K0K 1H0	0	0	0	26	30	0	56	26
YMCA	Spring Valley	Non-Profit	212 County Road 26, RR7, Brighton, ON, K0K 1H0	0	0	0	11	30	0	41	11
YMCA	St. Anthony's	Non-Profit	74 Toronto Rd, Port Hope, ON, L1A 3R9	0	0	0	26	30	0	56	26
YMCA	St. Joseph's	Non-Profit	919 D'Arcy St. Cobourg, ON, K9A 4B4	0	0	0	0	26	0	26	0
YMCA	Terry Fox	Non-Profit	1065 Riddel Ave, Cobourg, ON, K9A 5N4	0	15	24	26	30	0	95	65
YMCA	Warkworth	Non-Profit	161 Old Hastings Rd., Warkworth, ON, K0K 3K0	0	15	32	0	0	0	47	47

**SUBTOTAL**      65      239      448      561      884      30

**Licensed Home Child Care Agencies**

Agency	Auspice Type	Address	Licensed Homes in Northumberland	Licensed Spaces in Northumberland	TOTAL SPACES	CWELCC SPACES
Compass	Non-Profit	553 Bonaccord Street, Peterborough, ON, K9H 0K2	10	60	60	40
Wee Watch	Non-Profit	243 Hunter St. W, Peterborough, ON, K9H 2L4	14	84	84	56

**GRAND TOTAL**      **2,371**      **1,439**  
**March 2026 Directed Growth CWELCC Space Target**      **1,480**  
**CWELCC Spaces to be created by December 31, 2026**      **41**

## CWELCC Directed Growth

The Directed Growth Plan was introduced by the Ministry in 2023 to create 86,000 net new CWELCC spaces across Ontario by December 31, 2026. Directed Growth space allocations identify the number of new spaces that the Ministry will support through operating funding up to December 31, 2026. Within the original plan, Northumberland County was allocated funding to create 404 net new spaces toward this targeted growth. Since then, the Ministry has undergone several Directed Growth space and funding recalibrations to allow the province to better realize their target of 86,000 without going over. These recalibrations were as follows:

- **March 2025 - adjusted to 245 spaces** (including 2022 growth),
- **November 2025 – adjusted to 274 spaces.** This reflected the difference of Northumberland’s new target final CWELCC space count of 1,459 and the 2023 baseline count of 1,185 (tabulated in 2023 following initial CWELCC enrollment), and
- **March 2026 – adjusted to 295 spaces.** This reflected the difference of an updated final CWELCC space count of 1,480 to the 1,185 baseline.

### Prioritized Growth across Northumberland’s Lower-Tier Municipalities

The Directed Growth Plan is meant to prioritize spaces to areas that have traditionally been underserved and/or have high populations of Ministry directed groups. Northumberland’s Directed Growth Plan identified priority municipalities for targeted child care expansion in January 2023 as per Ministry direction. The lower-tier municipal rankings for Northumberland County from highest-to-lowest priority at this time were:

1. Cobourg
2. Trent Hills
3. Port Hope
4. Brighton
5. Alnwick/Haldimand
6. Cramahe
7. Hamilton

## Determining Directed Growth Priority Municipalities

Priority municipalities were determined in January 2023 using the following data:

- EarlyON attendance in 2022,
- Number of Ontario Works recipients – adults and dependents as of December 2022,
- 2017-2018 Early Development Instrument – number of children vulnerable in at least 1/5 developmental domains (emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, social competence, physical health and well-being, and communication skills and general knowledge),
- Number of children waitlisted for Infant, Toddler, and Preschool care as of March 31, 2022,
- Number of Fee Subsidy recipients as of December 2022,
- Indigenous population according to 2021 Census data,
- Number of children receiving Special Needs Resourcing in 2022, and
- Child care licensed capacity as of December 2022.

Raw data for these variables were tabulated for each lower-tier municipality and adjusted to the municipality's population of 0- to 5-year-olds (according to 2021 Census data). Municipalities were ranked 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest) within each variable and ranked values for each municipality were summed across the 8 variables to yield a final Child Care Needs score. Ordering the highest-to-lowest Child Care Needs scores determined the priority areas listed in the section above.

Priority municipalities will have first consideration for Directed Growth spaces. Operators with active service agreements with Early Years Services will be the first considered for operating these spaces, after which new not-for-profit operators will be prioritized. New for-profit operators may be considered if they fit within the established Ministry auspice targets. Operators must be operating to at least 90% of their functional capacities across all age groupings to be considered. Early Years Services considers functional capacity as an operator's ability to fill spaces as they come available and is determined by license capacity, operating capacity, and waitlist size.

Early Years Services recognizes that communities have unique child care needs and offer varying opportunities for expansion. Creating child care spaces is subject to the availability of existing buildings that meet the requirements of a licensed child care program (see *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*), municipal by-laws, public health mandates, and building and fire codes. Successfully expanding child care spaces also requires an available RECE workforce and meeting the Special Needs Resourcing requests of enrolled families.

Therefore, all areas that propose suitable space for renovation will be investigated for economic feasibility of expansion. Some municipalities will likely present greater opportunities to expand within Northumberland’s allocated CWELCC Directed Growth.

Early Years Services works closely with our early learning and child care operators, Northumberland County’s Director of Health and Human Services, and Northumberland County’s CAO on implementing the Directed Growth Plan. This involves ongoing community consultations and surveys, targeted focus groups, one-on-one discussions, and reports to County Council. Early Years Services also seeks guidance with members of the Planning and Economic Development team, Public Works team, and Legal Counsel at Northumberland County regarding renovation, construction, and lease negotiations. Early Years Services and community partners regularly engage lower-tier municipalities, public agencies, and private companies regarding space and funding supports. An **action item** for “Growing Together in Northumberland” is to continue collaborating with all partners, in particular Economic Development, to expand CWELCC child care spaces to all lower-tier municipalities when opportunities are made available by the Ministry.

#### Directed Growth Space Allocation and Total CWELCC Spaces - as of December 31, 2025

Table 2 shows the allocation of Northumberland County’s Directed Growth spaces across lower-tier municipalities as of December 31, 2025. Table 3 shows Directed Growth allocations according to site. Table 1 (far right red column) shows total Northumberland CWELCC spaces by operator, as School-Age spaces do not receive CWELCC fee reduction.

The Ministry directed priority groups for Directed Growth include children living in low-income families, children with special needs, children needing enhanced or individual supports, Indigenous children, Black and other racialized children, children of newcomers to Canada, and official language minorities. To reach as many of these populations as possible:

- Early Years Services caseworkers engage with families applying to or enrolled in Fee Subsidy to assist with system navigation,
- Special Needs Resourcing is available for children with special needs to support their inclusion in child care, and
- The lower-tier municipalities that received Directed Growth spaces (see Table 2) account for large proportions of Northumberland's racialized (73%), newcomer (85%), Indigenous (74%), and language minority (76%) populations.

**Table 2.** Directed Growth spaces completed as of December 31, 2025 by lower-tier municipality.

Lower-Tier Municipality	Directed Growth spaces completed by December 31, 2025
Port Hope	154
Trent Hills	47
Cobourg	15
Brighton	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>226</b>

**Table 3.** County’s Directed Growth spaces by site and by year.

CWELCC Expansion Spaces - Completed and Operating					
Year	Spaces	License Setting	Municipality	Project Name	Operator
2023	10	School-based	Brighton	Brighton Public School	Brighton Children's Centre
2024	70	Community	Port Hope	Riverside (Ruth Clarke)	Ganarska Child Care Centre
	47	Community	Trent Hills	Warkworth	YMCA
	15	Community *	Cobourg	Cobourg East	YMCA
2025	35	Community	Port Hope	Officelinx	Kinderlinx
	49	Community	Port Hope	Canton Hub	YMCA

CWELCC Expansion Spaces Remaining				
Year	Spaces	Project Possibilities		Operator
2026	41	<p><b>Spaces available:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 41 remaining from Directed Growth</li> <li>▪ 11 redistributed under-utilized CWELCC spaces **</li> </ul> <p><b>Project options include any combination of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Family age group centres</li> <li>▪ Agencies accommodating new spaces at current site(s)</li> <li>▪ 49 space child care centre</li> <li>▪ Licensed home child care spaces</li> </ul> <p><b>License setting and municipality to be determined</b></p>		To be determined

\* In a school but not school-board led

\*\* Required as a direct consequence of the March 2025 Directed Growth space reallocation

## Directed Growth Funding

Start-Up Grant and Infrastructure Funding may be available to support the expansion of Infant, Toddler, and Preschool CWELCC spaces that are in alignment with Northumberland County's Directed Growth Plan. These funding categories are described in more detail in the Early Years and Child Care Funding section below. Start-up Grant funding supports facilities creating, retrofitting, renovating, and/or expanding to accommodate maximum sizes for each age grouping of eligible children. Infrastructure Funding complements Start-Up Grant funding to support child care projects for underserved communities through the creation of new, not-for-profit, licensed child care spaces. Start-Up Grants and Infrastructure Funds are bound to specific conditions and restrictions established in the Ministry Funding Guidelines.

## CWELCC Space Redistribution – Improving Access Beyond Directed Growth

Early Years Services is exploring all opportunities to promote growth and maximize the operating capacities of all licensed CWELCC spaces. Within this plan, we are undergoing a process for selecting and redistributing current CWELCC spaces that are regularly under-utilized at some child care locations. Redistributing spaces does not contribute to Directed Growth, as the spaces being redistributed are those that were established at the initial enrollment of the CWELCC agreement and are not considered “net new”. Space redistribution serves to maximize operating capacity by reallocating licensed CWELCC spaces to operators and municipalities that can provide the requisite workforce. Operators must approve before their licensed CWELCC spaces are reallocated. Early Years Services regularly engages in recruitment and retention strategies to bolster the RECE workforce in Northumberland and maximize the operating capacities at all CWELCC child care sites.

## Possibilities for Future Directed Growth

Northumberland County is currently engaging with child care operators to complete the 41 remaining Directed Growth spaces by December 31, 2026. The Ministry has no current space and funding allocations for CWELCC child care expansion beyond 2026. For Northumberland, this means no net new CWELCC expansion beyond the Ministry allocated target of 1,480 total CWELCC spaces. Regardless, an **action item** for Early Years Services is to remain aware of expansion opportunities in the event the Ministry makes funding available. Opportunities can range in development stage and include (but are not limited to) vacant municipal units zoned for child care and economically feasible for renovation, local school boards with new school builds or renovations/additions, current operators expressing interest in expanding, non-CWELCC operators interested in joining their current programs with CWELCC, and non-CWELCC operators independently planning/completing space renovations or new builds.

If more CWELCC Directed Growth opportunities become available after December 31, 2026, an **action item** for the Early Years team is to recalculate Northumberland priority areas using updated metrics.

## Fee Subsidy

Ontario Child Care Fee Subsidy helps families offset the cost of licensed child care by offering subsidies to eligible families using a sliding scale based on net income. Families can apply for children aged 12 years or under that are enrolled in:

- A CWELCC funded centre/agency serving children aged 0 to 12 years,
- A centre/agency exclusively serving children aged 6 to 12 years,
- An approved camp or recreation program, or
- A before and after school program operated directly by school boards or offered by approved third party programs.

To be eligible for Fee Subsidy in Northumberland, household family income must fall below the provincially established income threshold and the family must have a confirmed space for their child(ren) within an enrolled licensed centre- or home-based child care. Ontario Works clients may be eligible for full subsidies within unlicensed child care arrangements in certain circumstances, such as if they are working, in school, or training. Currently, only one summer camp in Northumberland is eligible for Fee Subsidy. This camp is offered across four YMCA locations, is not CWELCC eligible, and only enrolls School-Aged children (i.e., children going into grade 1 and beyond). These locations include Cobourg, Colborne, Brighton, and Campbellford.

Early Years Caseworkers engage with Northumberland families applying to or enrolled in Fee Subsidy to help with system navigation and achieve affordable child care options. Applications for Fee Subsidy are completed online via the Northumberland County Fee Subsidy portal – [Northumberland County Fee Subsidy Portal](#). Applicants can contact or visit the Northumberland County Community and Social Services office or the Help Centre for assistance.

## EarlyON

EarlyON programs offer free family programs prenatally and for children up to 6 years old across all lower-tier municipalities in Northumberland. These are play- and inquiry-based programs that support child learning, development, and well-being within indoor and outdoor settings. EarlyON programs are offered at a mix of permanent dedicated spaces and occasional outreach locations, and vary between drop-in style and pre-registered sign-up. EarlyON enables families to make critical connections to child and family services,

support agencies, and other community-based programming critical for child development. In addition to offering play-based activities for children, they provide parents with both resources and social networking opportunities.

EarlyON programs are mandated to:

- Offer core programs throughout the year and at least 5 days of the week, including either Saturday or Sunday,
- Collaborate with support programs in the local community to offer parents/caregivers access to high-quality services to support their roles as educators,
- Engage with parents/caregivers with informative conversation and by sharing information,
- Offer culturally responsive programs for Indigenous families and possibilities for other identified needs,
- Provide timely and updated information about community and specialized services,
- Reflect children and parents/caregivers as competent, capable, curious, and rich in potential and experience,
- Facilitate strong relationships in the community and support the unique needs of families, and
- Build relationships with community partners and provide families with in-depth knowledge of community resources.

In 2025, Early Years Services offered 2,235 total programs over 289 days across all lower-tier municipalities. Programs were offered Monday to Saturday at 7 permanent, dedicated spaces (see Table 4) and 40 outreach locations (see Table 5). Table 6 shows that EarlyON visits have increased annually since 2023. Steady increases in attendance show that programs meet many needs and interests of Northumberland families and are effectively engaging new families as older families age out of programming. Seasonal fluctuations in attendance sometimes occur due to unpredictable factors such as weather, available opportunities for program planning, community interest, and EarlyON workforce.

New to 2026 is the EarlyON Infant Massage program for parents/caregivers at all permanent locations. This is a 5-week course led by one of our 8 EarlyON educator staff members. This program guides parents through gentle, hands-on techniques to soothe, bond, and support baby development. Pre-registration is required for this program.

**Table 4.** EarlyON dedicated space locations as of December 31, 2025.

EarlyON Dedicated Space Location	Address
Brighton	71 Dundas Street, RR#3 Brighton, Ontario, K0K 1H0
Campbellford	179 Saskatoon Avenue, Campbellford, Ontario, K0L 1L0
Cobourg - 800 Division	800 Division Street, Cobourg, Ontario, K9A 5V2
Cobourg - St. Joseph's School	919 D'Arcy Street, Cobourg, Ontario, K9A 4B4
Grafton	718 Station Street, Grafton, Ontario, K0K 2G0
Hastings	6 Albert Street East, Hastings, Ontario, K0L 0B1
Port Hope	90 Rose Glen Road North, Port Hope, Ontario, L1A 3V6

**Table 5.** EarlyON outreach locations in 2025.

2025 EarlyON Outreach Locations				
Applefest Lodge	Burnham Farms	Coverdale Park Cobourg	Hastings Library	Presqu'ile Park
Baltimore Fire Station	Buttersfield Park Cobourg	Cricklewood Farms	Hastings Soccer Fields	Roseneath Carousel
Baltimore Recreation Centre and Park	Campbellford Fire Station	Donegan Park	Haute Goat	Roseneath Civic Centre
Barrett's Tree Farm	Carstairs Trail	East Northumberland Secondary School	Jack Burger Pool	Roseneath Public Library
Bewdley Community Centre	Centennial Pool	Golden Plough Lodge	Keeler Centre Colborne	Sandy Flat Sugar Bush
Bewdley Library	Cobourg Farmer's Market	Goodrich Loomis	Mary J. Benson Library	Victoria Park Bandshell
Brighton Fire Station	Codrington Community Centre	Grafton Fire Station	Northumberland Forest	Waldyka Park
Brighton Library	Colborne Fire Station	Hastings Field House	Port Hope Bandshell	Wicklow Beach

**Table 6.** EarlyON annual attendance with child and parent/caregiver visits pooled together.

Year	Attendance	% change
2023	26,546	-
2024	30,708	15.7%
2025	32,618	6.2%

Offering EarlyON programs in some rural areas of Northumberland remains an intricate process for Early Years Services. EarlyON programming requires a balance between available funding, affordable space, and hours of work availability of the educators. Specifically, EarlyON funding has remained static for nearly a decade, finding reasonably priced available space remains a challenge in rural areas, educators needed for operating programs are often shared between sites, and minimum attendance numbers are required to justify per capita costs. In 2025, some rural EarlyON programs closed because of ongoing poor attendance.

An **action item** for this 5-year plan is to advocate to Northumberland County Council to offer free or discounted municipal spaces in their constituent lower-tier municipalities. EarlyON relies on community partnerships to find cost-effective program spaces with the understanding that EarlyON provides the free programs (including the educator and a snack) and municipal partners provide the space. Our expectation is for lower-tier officials to work with Early Years Services to find cost-effective spaces for EarlyON programs in their municipalities knowing that in turn, it is primarily members of their municipalities benefiting from the programs that EarlyON provides.

“Growing Together in Northumberland” also **action items** collaborating with the ArcGIS department at Northumberland County to develop an interactive map on the County website that displays up-to-date EarlyON and child care location information. Increasing visibility in this manner will hopefully increase service access to rural EarlyON programs.

## **Other Early Years Programs and Initiatives**

### **Special Needs Resourcing**

Special Needs Resourcing supports the inclusion of children with special needs in eligible licensed centre- and home-based child care settings, camps, and recreation programs at no additional cost to families/caregivers. Under O. Reg. 138/15, a child with special needs means a child whose cognitive, physical, social, emotional or communicative needs, or whose needs relating to overall development, are of such a nature that additional supports are required for the child. Special Needs Resourcing in Northumberland is provided by Five Counties Children’s Centre. Five Counties and Early Years Services support a community space partnership at 800 Division Street in Cobourg and engage in partnered programming at all EarlyON and child care centres in Northumberland. This partnership includes interagency program referrals, shared use of the backyard space, program promotion, and funding for an Early Learning Capacity Building and Workforce Mentor. Early Years Services meets quarterly with Five Counties Children’s Centre and resource consultants to support in maintaining program quality and aligning ongoing objectives. Early Years Services

understands the increasing and changing needs for Special Needs Resourcing in Northumberland (see 2025 Community Partner Engagement Sessions section) and **action items** remaining current with these needs.

### Triple P - Positive Parenting Program<sup>®</sup>

Triple P Parenting Programs are parenting and family support programs designed to help children realize their potential. Triple P is provided by Rebound and Positive Parenting Northumberland and supports the EarlyON program mandate to engage parents/caregivers by:

- Inviting conversations and information about sharing their children's interests, development, parenting, nutrition, learning, and other topics that support the relationship with their child, and
- Collaborating with other support programs to enhance parent/caregiver well-being, enrich adult-child relationships, and to support parent/caregivers in their role(s).

The Triple P program guides parents to understand the confidence and skills they need to build strong family relationships, manage behavioural and emotional problems, prevent problems, and navigate local service capacity. This includes but is not limited to handling temper tantrums, sleeping patterns, parent-child and parent-parent conflict, and children with additional needs including mental health. Triple P is available to all parents in Northumberland, free of charge, as part of the Positive Parenting Northumberland Network. Triple P programs support parents of children from 0 to 16 years through the following courses:

- **Triple P** is for parents/caregivers of children up to 12 years old,
- **Teen Triple P** is for parents/caregivers of children aged 12 to 16 years,
- **Triple P for Baby** helps parents/caregivers prepare for a newborn or infant,
- **Stepping Stones** is for parents/caregivers of children with a disability,
- **Family Transitions** is for parents/caregivers going through separation or divorce,
- **Lifestyle** is for parents/caregivers of children who are overweight,
- **Triple P for First Nations Families** is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/caregivers or parents/caregivers of First Nations children, and
- **Fear-Less Triple P** is for helping parents/caregivers manage their child's anxiety and develop emotional resilience.

In 2025, Triple P programs supported 108 unique parents/caregivers who attended 311 total sessions.

### Early Years Employment Initiative (EYEI)

The Early Years Employment Initiative (EYEI) is an OMSSA award winning collaboration between Early Years Services, the Ontario Works (OW) Division at Northumberland County, Fleming College, Watton Employment Services, Northumberland YMCA, and Five Counties Children's Centre. This program creates opportunities for OW clients and students to start/re-start careers in the Early Years sector. The 6-week duration of the EYEI program is divided into 2-weeks of in-class learning followed by 4-weeks of field experience. The in-class sessions provide participants with opportunities to acquire certificates relevant to employment both within and outside of the Early Years sector. These include WHIMIS, Safe Food Handlers, First-Aid/CPR, resume writing skills, Occupational Health and Safety training, Foundations to Play (*How Does Learning Happen?*), and Self-Regulation training (Merhit Centre). Field experience opportunities are offered at local child care centres where participants offer support roles for child care staff. These placement opportunities allow participants to observe the many different employment pathways in the child care sector, such as Dietary Staff, Early Childhood Assistants, and Early Childhood Educators.

The EYEI program fosters participation by offering above minimum wage pay across all 6-weeks and provides child care opportunities for participants with School-Aged children. Offering the EYEI program in the summer months allows flexibility for child care arrangements.

The success of the EYEI program prompted a showcase at OMSSAs annual conference, with the Early Years and Ontario Works team winning the 2025 Local Municipal Champion Award. It also resulted in collaborations with other Ontario SSMs starting similar programs in their communities.

### Child Care and Early Years IT Modernization Initiative

The IT Modernization Initiative is a new, integrated, and modern IT solution for the child care and Early Years sector in Ontario being developed by the Ministry of Education. This project intends to transform the current IT landscape from one that is disjointed and inconsistent across SSMs into a singular and secure system integrated across the province. This solution will be critical for coordinating service access for SSMs, service providers, and families that are currently navigating multiple software systems to access information and applications for different branches of the Early Year Sector. In Northumberland, these software systems include KEyON for EarlyON, Ontario Child Care Management System

(OCCMS) for Fee Subsidy, and individual agency websites for child care waitlist enrollment. The IT Modernization Initiative plans to:

- Improve waitlist registration processes by offering centralized waitlist enrollment and delisting for all child care sites licensed within an SSM,
- Allow for searching, pre-registering, and checking in/out for EarlyON programs,
- Improve data collection and analytics processes for system planning and reporting by managing program calendars and tracking service usage using family profiles,
- Manage serious incident reports, and
- Add more standardization to Fee Subsidy applications across SSMs while allowing for local flexibility.

Northumberland is one of 10 SSMs supporting the new system design as a member of the Service System Manager Advisory Committee (SSMAC). Within this capacity, Northumberland is piloting the roll-out of the EarlyON features of the IT Modernization project prior to its scheduled release. The Ministry will be releasing the IT Modernization solution to all families, operators, and SSMs in the following phases:

- Release 1: EarlyON and parent dashboard,
  - Starting in Fall 2026 - ~ 9 months duration,
- Release 2: child care search and application,
  - Starting in Fall 2027 - ~ 9 months duration,
- Release 3: child care Fee Subsidy,
  - Starting in Fall 2028 - ~ 9 months duration, and
- Release 4: contract and funding management,
  - Starting in Summer 2029 - ~ 9 months duration.

An **action item** for “Growing Together in Northumberland” is to continue participating in IT Modernization system improvements by participating in the SSMAAC working group, any associated subcommittees, and piloting opportunities. Another **action item** is to implement use of IT Modernization features in Northumberland as the live versions are made available by the Ministry according to the release schedule.

### Children’s Voices in Early Years Pedagogy Project

This project is a collaboration with Dr. Beverly Deitz (early childhood education consultant, researcher, and author) and EarlyON partners that reimagines pedagogical documentation in early years education as a process that meaningfully includes children’s voices. This project aims to design and implement strategies that enable children to actively participate in documenting their own learning journeys through a variety of media. Centering programs on children’s perspectives strengthens democratic practices and agency in learning and

creates authentic narratives that respect children as capable and competent co-constructors of knowledge and experiences. This project is currently in phase 1 of 4, which involves engaging professional learning on pedagogical documentation, identifying documentation tools with input from children, educators, and families, and piloting materials in small groups to test accessibility and relevance. An **action item** for this project is to continue with phase 1 roll-out and plan for implementations of phases 2-4 as they approach.

## Early Years and Child Care Funding

### Ministry Funding

Early Years Services Ministry funding allocation for 2026 is \$22,411,486. This is subdivided according to the following categories (see Table 7), with each category consisting of detailed Ministry guidelines for how the allocations are to be administered to operators and community partners:

**Cost-Based Allocation:** Supports the staffing, operating, and accommodation costs for CWELCC licensees. Allocated annual amounts for licensees are determined using standardized formulas compiled by The Ministry that use data collected from the Ontario early years sector.

**Local Priorities Allocation:** Flexible support for operating costs that are typically non-CWELCC. These include general operating expenses (repairs/maintenance, play-based materials/equipment, licensed home child care base funding, and pay equity), wage enhancements for staff, professional learning, Fee Subsidy, Special Needs Resourcing, capacity building, and claims-based funding. Local Priorities is not applicable for School-Age programs with operators not enrolled in CWELCC and that offer Infant, Toddler, Preschool, and/or Kindergarten programs.

**EarlyON:** Funding for EarlyON programs – free drop-in and pre-registered family programs prenatally and for children up to 6 years old across all lower-tier municipalities in Northumberland.

**Indigenous-Led Child Care and Child and Family Programs Allocation:** Indigenous-led programs are developed and delivered by Indigenous partnership organizations to support Indigenous families accessing child care and Early Years programming.

**Innovation Fund:** Time-limited funding to support collaboration with local community partners in developing, enhancing, and/or implementing innovative strategies to support the recruitment and retention of the child care and Early Years workforce. The Ministry has approved the projects listed in Table 8 for Early Years Services 2026 Innovation Funds. This

funding is critical for realizing our plans for ECE training, recruitment, and retention. Additional funding is required for 2027 and beyond to provide long-term stability for these workforce improvement initiatives. An **action item** for Early Years Services is to advocate for continued Innovation Funds by successfully implementing these programs and demonstrating their value to the community.

**ECE Promotional Fund:** Funding to promote/market the need, value, and impact of Early Childhood Educators in collaboration with local community partners. This includes raising awareness about the ECE profession, encouraging entry/return to the sector, and supporting development of a more inclusive ECE workforce. Early Years Services is collaborating with OMSSA and other SSM partners for a province-wide campaign recognizing the importance of the RECE profession. Approximately 50% of Northumberland's ECE Promotional Fund is being contributed to this project. An **action item** for "Growing Together in Northumberland" is to contribute to project working groups, continue allocating funding, and report back on outcomes.

**Administration:** Supports administrative capacity for implementing Cost-Based Funding and Local Priorities.

**Start-Up Grants:** Supports capital costs for creating Infant, Toddler, and Preschool spaces in neighbourhoods with historically low rates of space availability and with licensees that prioritize vulnerable children and diverse populations. No new Start-Up Grant funding is committed for 2026. However, the funds allocated in 2025 can result in net new CWELCC spaces created by December 31, 2026.

**ELCC Infrastructure Fund:** Supports infrastructure projects that create Infant, Toddler, and Preschool child care spaces for underserved communities. These projects must support licensed spaces that are not-for-profit, community-based, centre-based, and inclusive of an underserved community (including but not limited to rural, low income, and Francophone families). No new ELCC Infrastructure funding is provided for 2026. However, the funds allocated in 2025 can result in net new CWELCC spaces created by December 31, 2026.

Early Years Services completes mandated annual year-end Ministry reporting to detail how much funding was allocated to operators and community partners per category in the funding year, and service data points outlining the number of children and/or parents/caregivers supported by funded programs in the funding year. Future funding depends on the amount of allocated funding used per category and whether respective service data fall within  $\pm 10\%$  of Ministry targets set before the funding year. Unused funding is returned to the Ministry following their financial reconciliations of the funding year.

**Table 7.** Early Years and Child Care allocations per funding category for 2025 and 2026.

Category	2026	2025
Cost-Based Allocation	\$17,392,338	\$15,321,774 *
Start-Up Grants	<i>Projects using 2025 funds can be completed by December 31, 2026. No new funding committed.</i>	\$322,487
ELCC Infrastructure Fund	<i>Projects using 2025 funds can be completed by December 31, 2026. No new funding committed.</i>	\$1,743,343
Local Priorities Allocation	\$3,065,169	\$3,039,965
Administration	\$388,237	\$380,239
EarlyON	\$970,536	\$987,197 **
Indigenous-Led Child Care and Child and Family Programs	\$167,818	\$167,818
Innovation Fund	\$118,634	n/a
ECE Promotional Fund	\$8,754	n/a
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$22,111,486</b>	<b>\$20,975,626</b>

\* plus holdback

\*\* planning and analytics included

**Table 8.** Ministry approved projects for 2026 Innovation Funding.

Project Name	Project Description	Project Collaborators
ECE Placement Transit Program	Fleming College struggles finding placements for 160 students. Students and child care agencies that have successful experiences with placements tend to result in student hires. The program goal is to promote RECEs settling and working in Northumberland following their placements. Program will provide weekday morning and evening busing for ~48 students between Fleming College and Northumberland child cares for placement duration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Years Services</li> <li>• Fleming College</li> </ul>
EYEI+	Program will foster continuing education for individuals who complete Northumberland's OMSSA award winning Early Years Employment Initiative (EYEI) program. EYEI+ offers first year of tuition for ECE education and mentoring with Five Counties Children's Centre. Program could enroll approximately 5 individuals per year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Years Services</li> <li>• Five Counties Children's Centre</li> </ul>
EYEI - High School Focus	High school cooperative version of EYEI program but with a grant offered for ECE program tuition in lieu of paid placements. Student mentoring will be provided by Five Counties Children's Centre.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Years Services</li> <li>• KPR and PVNC school-boards</li> <li>• Five Counties Children's Centre</li> </ul>
Day in the Life Program	Provides 2 opportunities (1 per semester) for Fleming ECE students to see programs and possible avenues for future careers in Northumberland. Goal is to attract new educators by highlighting the benefits of living and working in Northumberland. Program will be offered in partnership with Fleming college and Northumberland child care operators. Total cost for the day includes lunch, swag, and bus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Years Services</li> <li>• Fleming College</li> <li>• Five Counties Children's Centre</li> </ul>
Mental Health Initiative for Educators	Program will cover costs for online courses (e.g., HR downloads, Mehrit Centre, ECCDC, How To Talk To Parents) to support continued education in current child care operators in Northumberland.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Years Services</li> </ul>

## Alternative Sources of Funding

An **action item** for “Growing Together in Northumberland” is to continue collaborating with the Communications department at Northumberland County and community partners to apply for monetary grants and funding streams to further enhance the programs and projects offered by Early Years Services.

## Early Years needs, strengths, and areas for continued growth in 2026-2030: Data supported actions

Early Years Services organized two data collection projects in 2025 to understand community needs and develop actions for 2026-2030. These data collection projects included an online needs assessment survey for Northumberland families and three in-person open-response engagement sessions for operators/agencies that offer services to Northumberland children and families. These data collection materials were designed to:

- Examine the strengths and successes of ongoing programs and partnerships,
- Understand how Early Years programs in Northumberland can offer better support for families, operators, the community, and community partners,
- Identify emerging needs within the Northumberland Early Years community, and
- Determine reasonable action items to guide programming throughout 2026-2030.

Other data sources used to support the understanding of needs and actions include EarlyON program and attendance data captured by KEyON software, Early Developmental Index data provided by the Offord Centre at McMaster University, survey response data collected from the Early Years workforce about professional development opportunities, and program data provided by our own internal data collection processes.

## 2025 Needs Assessment Survey

From February 24 to April 14, 2025, Early Years Services opened a community needs assessment survey via Survey Monkey to understand Northumberland family experiences with child care services, EarlyON programming, Fee Subsidy applications, and of families planning or expecting a first child (at the time of survey completion). The survey collected basic family demographics for all respondents and used response-based logic to make questions available for the services that respondents acknowledged to have accessed since January 2022. A link and/or QR code to the survey was available on the Northumberland County website and on postcards distributed to several CWELCC child care centres, EarlyON locations, community partners, and child-focused businesses in Northumberland.

## General Survey Demographics

The survey received 177 respondents, all of which provided basic family demographics. Of these respondents, 114 completed the child care section, 35 completed the Fee Subsidy section, 109 completed the EarlyON section, and 13 completed the section for families planning or expecting their first child. The location of residence for survey respondents is presented in Table 9.

**Table 9.** Location of residence for respondents of the 2025 Needs Assessment Survey.

Municipality	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Alderville First Nation	2	1.1%
Alnwick/Haldimand Township	10	5.6%
Brighton Township	15	8.5%
Cramahe Township	14	7.9%
Hamilton Township	20	11.3%
Port Hope Township	20	11.3%
Town of Cobourg	46	26.0%
Town of Port Hope	15	8.5%
Trent Hills Township	33	18.6%
Prefer not to say	2	1.1%

Approximately 86% of the survey respondents (n = 152) consisted of two parent/caregiver households and 11.3% (n = 20) consisted of one-parent/caregiver households. This corresponds to a response rate 7.6 times higher in two parent/caregiver households. According to 2021 Census data, the number of Northumberland households with children led by a married or common-law couple (n = 8,200) is 2.9 times greater than those led by one parent/caregiver (n = 2,795; Statistics Canada, 2023). As such, these survey data underreport the experiences and needs of one-parent/caregiver households in terms of both absolute and relative representation within the community. Where applicable, results specific to one-parent/caregiver households will be offered to provide insight into any specific needs identified by these households.

The following data shows the ages of children living or cared for in the respondent's household at the time of survey completion. The totals according to age category are:

- 0-18 months = 65 children
- 19-30 months = 31 children
- 2.5-3 years = 63 children
- 4-5 years = 61 children
- 6-12 years = 78 children
- 13-18 years = 13 children

These results show survey response representation for the child ages involved with EarlyON programming, centre- and home-based child care, before-and after-school care, and camps and recreation programs. On average, respondents reported 1.8 children living or receiving care in the household. This aligns with the 2021 Census value of 1.7 for the average number of children in families with children (Statistics Canada, 2023). As such, the survey results reflect the experiences of typically sized families with children in Northumberland County.

The community needs assessment survey asked respondents to rate statements about their general experiences with Early Years programming in Northumberland. This included child care programs, EarlyON programs, and any other programs offered to children. The results are presented in Table 10. For statements about safety of programs and respect for children as competent learners, results show most respondents as agreeing that Early Years programs in Northumberland effectively achieve these goals. A larger proportion of respondents (18.6%) indicated that they are unable easily attend program hours of operation and almost half of respondents (45.8%) agreed that there are times they do not participate in family programs because of the cost. These findings are elaborated in further detail in the subsections below.

**Table 10.** Child care needs assessment survey responses to “To what extent do you agree with the following statements about programs and supports offered to children in Northumberland County?”.

Response Type	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Response	% Agree	% Disagree
I can easily attend program hours of operation	19	96	28	27	6	1	65.0%	18.6%
Programs and services respect my family's culture and language	57	84	30	2	2	2	79.7%	2.3%
There are times that I do not participate in children's programs because of the cost	14	67	22	51	22	1	45.8%	41.2%
Children/family programs in my community are safe	57	96	20	1	2	1	86.4%	1.7%
Children/family programs in my community respect children as competent, capable, and curious	52	103	18	1	2	1	87.6%	1.7%

## 2025 Community Partner Engagement sessions

In the Spring of 2025, three in-person engagement sessions were attended by 28 representatives from Northumberland United Way, Rebound Child and Youth Services, Lakelands Public Health (represented as Haliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge District Health Unit at the time of data collection), Five Counties Children’s Centre, Northumberland Child Development Centre, Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board, Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre, Community Respite and Living Services, Community Health Centres of Northumberland, and the 10 CWELCC child care agencies with active service agreements with Early Years Services. Respondents indicated that their agencies connect with Early Years Services in delivering CWELCC child care, EarlyON programs, capital projects, system planning, programming for children with special needs, parenting programs (including those specific to youth-age parents), professional development, informing the community of family supports, advocacy for the sector, maintaining financial stability, supporting programs for youth experiencing homelessness, and as school-board representatives.

Engagement questions examined our community partner’s top 3 identified needs (at the time of data collection) of Northumberland children and families, perceived strengths of their partnerships with Early Years Services, and perceived limitations of this partnership and paths forward. Qualitative responses were collected using Mentimeter and relevant points from follow-up discussions were manually captured and added for analysis. Thematic analyses were carried out to determine common responses as well as unique perspectives on the delivery of Early Years programs in Northumberland.

Table 11 shows response frequencies of our community partner’s identified needs of children and families in Northumberland. The most frequently identified response is the need for licensed child care spaces. This finding is supported by our community needs assessment survey, which demonstrated the top 2 barriers faced by families engaged with child care is length of time on waitlists (n = 90; 114 respondents) and availability of licensed child care programs (n = 64; of 114 respondents). Early Years Services understands this need and realizes that parents/caregivers require quality and affordable licensed child care programs to pursue careers and educational opportunities. Among other constraints, families are faced with employment demands to meet current costs-of-living. Our partner agencies further indicated that seemingly more parents/caregivers are returning to work before the end of parental leaves and that more grandparents are assuming child care responsibilities to gap-fill child care needs until licensed space becomes available or until children age into Kindergarten. For many families, before-

and/or after-school care is required during the primary school years for parents/caregivers to continue working and/or attend school.

Addressing the identified need for more child care space remains an **action item** for “Growing Together in Northumberland”. The number of CWELCC child care spaces that Early Years Services can fund and create is regulated by the Ministry. However, to assist Northumberland families in accessing CWELCC child care spaces, we will continuously engage with Northumberland CWELCC child care operators to:

- Achieve operating capacities that meet licensed capacities – among other components, this requires recruiting full staffing compliments (see Table 8 for Innovation Funding projects) and regular waitlist monitoring, and
- Grow CWELCC child care spaces within Ministry allocations according to our Directed Growth Plan.

Engagement sessions with community partners revealed the following themes (counts of responses provided in brackets) indicating what the agencies viewed as the strengths of their partnerships with Early Years services. These include:

- Being supportive (n = 9), collaborative (n = 8), reliable (n = 1), and responsive to questions (n = 2),
- Having knowledge of the Early Years sector (n = 1) and promoting programs (n = 1),
- Developing close relationships (n = 3) rooted in open communication (n = 6),
- Providing/connecting families (n = 7) and children/youth (n = 2) to Early Years programs and resources,
- Offering quality professional development opportunities (n = 5) and maintaining the job board on the Northumberland County website (n = 1),
- Offering guidance (n = 3), advocacy for the sector (n = 2), and adhering to a community focus (n = 2),
- EarlyON programs (n = 2),
- Funding (n = 2) and timeliness of funding (n = 1), and
- Data sharing and data collection processes (n = 2).

Community partners also indicated limitations in their partnerships with Early Years Services that impacts their pursuits of intended goals. Themed responses include (counts of responses provided in brackets):

- Funding (including CWELCC funding; n = 10) and funding restrictions (n = 1),

- Child care space availability (n = 3), waitlists (n = 1), lack of a centralized child care waitlist (n = 1), child care spaces for new Canadians (n = 1), and limits to CWELCC expansion (n = 6),
- Practitioner availability (n = 1), staff/volunteer shortages and turnover (n = 4), lack of parent/family resources (n = 2),
- Targeting families that need support (n = 4), population growth in Northumberland (n = 1), programming limits in rural communities (n = 1), families missing appointments (n = 1), and cost-of-living increases (n = 1), and
- Competing priorities (n = 1) and duplication in data reporting (n = 1).

Community partners indicated that ongoing work needed to address these limitations includes advocacy (for services, funding, workforce wages, CWELCC expansion opportunities, and children with special needs); access to CWELCC child care space expansion opportunities; continued inter-organizational system planning, advertising and referrals; creative solutions for funding restrictions and space use; supporting youth and seniors as primary care providers; continued offering of professional development; youth mental health supports; and understanding community lived experiences.

The results of the community partner engagement sessions contribute to the philosophy of “Growing Together in Northumberland” by highlighting the collective efforts of the Early Years community in providing positive outcomes for individual children and families. These systems-based outcomes were realized by nurturing communicative relationships among service providers. However, within these relationships is a constructive **action item** for further strategic use of limited funding, time, and space resources to meet the growing and varied needs of families in Northumberland. The sections below detail action items themed according to the five pillars of “Growing Together in Northumberland” that are planned to foster positive outcomes for more Northumberland children and families.

**Table 11.** Top agency identified child and family needs in the 2025 community partner engagement sessions.

Theme	Count
Child care access/spaces	16
<i>Full-day School-Age programming on non-school days</i>	
<i>More Infant spaces</i>	1
<i>Part-time care options</i>	
Children with special needs and Special Needs Resourcing	5
Affordable housing	
Child/youth mental health support	4
Food insecurity	
Postpartum/parent mental health support	3
Fewer parents able to take full parental leave	
System/service navigation support	2
Affordable mental health assessment/care	
Child development support	
Child protection support	
Child skill development	
Children not well-rested	
Complex families	
Sufficient programming in rural areas	
Need for family therapy/counselling	
Need for child care Fee Subsidy	
Grandparents providing child care	1
Keeping families engaged in programs	
Paediatricians	
Respite funding and providers	
Staff dropout/turnover	
Stronger family/social connections to services	
Transportation to services	
Trauma support for families	
Youth homelessness prevention	
Youth parenting	

## Affordable Access

Nearly half of the respondents (45.8%, n = 81) of the community needs assessment survey agreed that there are times when they do not participate in family programs because of the costs. This finding prompted an examination into community experiences with Early Years program affordability.

### Child care

Of the 114 families that responded to questions about their experiences searching for child care programs in Northumberland, 20.2% (n = 23) identified affordability as a barrier whereas 25.4% (n = 29) identified affordability as a strength. Considering that CWELCC emphasizes the delivery of affordable, accessible, inclusive, and high-quality child care for families, an **action item** for “Growing Together in Northumberland” is to understand how child care presents an affordability barrier for some Northumberland families.

One insight from the current data set is that child care affordability may depend, in part, on the number of parent/caregivers in the household. Of the 114 survey respondents who indicated having accessed Northumberland child care programs, most were two-parent/caregiver households (n = 99; 86.8%) and smaller proportions were one-parent/caregiver households with either shared (n = 4; 3.5%) or sole custody (n = 11; 9.7%) of children. All 29 respondents indicating child care affordability as a strength in Northumberland were two-parent/caregiver households. Of those who indicated affordability as a barrier, 16 were two-parent/caregiver households, 2 were one-parent/caregiver households with shared custody, and 5 were one-parent/caregiver households with sole custody. This means that approximately half of these one-parent/caregiver survey respondents identified affordability as a barrier compared to 16% of the two-parent/caregiver households.

Albeit with small and unequal sample sizes, this finding indicates the disproportionate views of child care affordability among household types in Northumberland. An **action item** for this 5-year plan is to more rigorously examine child care affordability barriers in Northumberland households, including one- versus two-parent/caregiver households. Understanding these barriers is critical for system planning and advocacy to the Ministry.

### Fee Subsidy

Among all respondents of the needs assessment survey, 26.6% (n = 47) reported to have never heard of Fee Subsidy. Of these individuals, 20 indicated that there were times they did not participate in children’s programs because of the cost. These findings are important considering that:

- Fee Subsidy reduces child care parent fees *in addition* to the cost offset provided by CWELCC (for Infant, Toddler, Preschool, and Kindergarten programs), meaning that further fee reductions are possible for families struggling with meeting children’s program costs. An **action item** for Growing Together in Northumberland is ensuring that Early Years educators and parents understand the difference between CWELCC and Fee Subsidy financial assistance and that families can receive both, and
- Net household income and the number of children in the household are two criteria (among others) used to determine Fee Subsidy eligibility and the size of subsidy received. Thus, Fee Subsidy can benefit families across all income brackets.

Other Fee Subsidy **action items** for “Growing Together in Northumberland” are to strategically advertise and increase the visibility of Fee Subsidy in the community. This advertising can include:

- Permanent posters in child care and EarlyON centres,
- Advertising on child care centre websites and in child care registration packages,
- Advertising on the Northumberland County website, in hospital packages, and on community social media channels,
- Developing a Fee Subsidy calculator for the Northumberland County website. This is intended to allow families to approximate their eligibility for Fee Subsidy and, if applicable, their expected financial subsidy received. Determining these variables before contacting an Early Years Services Caseworker or applying online could promote cost-savings to families without them undergoing the full application process,
- Engaging with parents/caregivers at child care centre evening pick-ups, EarlyON programs, and community events, and
- Promotional inserts in the Community and Social Services office cheque runs.

Another 21 families who indicated as sometimes not participating in children’s programs because of the costs also indicated as not intending on applying for Fee Subsidy. Reasons for not applying can vary, including the family not having access to an eligible child care space. However, one interpretation of this result is that a stigma may exist among some community members about receiving social assistance. A product of a focused advertising campaign is an **action item** to promote positive awareness of Fee Subsidy and work toward reducing associated stigmas.

Table 12 also shows that 7 respondents who reported to sometimes not participate in children’s programs because of the costs indicated as having applied for Fee Subsidy but were deemed not eligible. Many factors contribute to a family not being eligible for Fee

Subsidy, one of which is total household income. The current income thresholds for Fee Subsidy eligibility were established in 2007 and predate increases to inflation and the costs of living characteristic of 2026. Should the Ministry raise Fee Subsidy income thresholds (that is, increase the income amount for a household to fall below and still be eligible) to accommodate greater net household incomes, more families could receive Fee Subsidy and offset their costs of licensed child care. “Growing Together in Northumberland” **action items** advocacy for Fee Subsidy system change. Advocacy will start in 2026 at regional and Provincial working groups, including the Ministry-led IT Modernization project and SSMAC working group at which Early Years Services is actively involved.

“Growing Together in Northumberland” also **action items** the development of more detailed Fee Subsidy analytics to enhance our understanding of the households in Northumberland that are accessing the program. These analyses will help to inform advertising efforts. Some metrics to consider are household descriptive statistics (e.g., average parent/caregiver age, family size), household lower-tier municipality (i.e., urban versus rural), CWELCC versus School-Age program enrollment, family reasons for using child care, and therapeutic referrals. Analyses can also examine the families deemed not financially eligible for Fee Subsidy to determine their relative proximity to the cut-off threshold. This analysis would be helpful for advocacy efforts by projecting how many more families could be assisted by Fee Subsidy by raising the eligibility cut-off threshold different percentages.

**Table 12.** Community needs assessment survey responses to Fee Subsidy application question according to how respondents are impacted by child programming costs.

There are times that I do not participate in children's programs because of the cost	Have you applied for the Fee Subsidy program?							TOTAL
	I am receiving or have received fee subsidy	Yes, but I am not eligible	Intend on applying	Do not intend on applying	I have never heard of fee subsidy	Prefer not to answer	No Response	
Agree	12	7	15	21	20	3	3	81
Disagree	6	5	11	24	24	2	1	73
Unsure	3	2	2	10	3	0	2	22
No Response	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>177</b>

## EarlyON

The Young Parent Family Market is new to EarlyON in 2026 and assists family access to affordable items for daily living. It is a collaboration with Rebound Child and Youth Services, Youth Wellness Hub, Lakeridge Public Health, and Northumberland Child Development Centre that offers a variety of hygiene items for children under the age of 2 (including diapers and wipes), a selection of donated clothing items, and lunch. The market will be delivered bi-monthly at different locations throughout Northumberland.

## Service Access

The Service Access pillar sets actions to support child care and EarlyON program viability, expand program service hours where needed and where possible, optimize resources and supports available to families, and assist with system navigation for programs across the Early Years network. This section outlines our community and community partner perceptions of service access for Early Years programs and offers perspective on the additional needs required by children and families in Northumberland.

## Child Care

The community needs assessment survey asked respondents to indicate whether their household “can easily attend program hours of operation”. Of the 177 survey respondents, 65.0% (n = 115) indicated that Northumberland Early Years programs can easily be attended while 18.6% (n = 33) indicated that they cannot (see Table 10).

Survey questions focusing on access to child care services show that workable hours of operation ranked as a top 3 priority by 39.5% (n = 45) of the respondent families having accessed child care. This received marginally higher consideration than requirements for child care programs to be licensed (n = 40; 35.1%). Respondents also indicated that licensed center- (94.1%; n = 96) and home-based (81.3%; n = 26) child cares in Northumberland meet their family hours of care needs (see Table 13). A lower percentage of respondents reported that unlicensed/informal care (62.8%; n = 27) meets their family hours of care needs.

Meeting the hours of care needs for a high percentage of survey respondents reflects positively on the service availability standard achieved by Northumberland child care programs. In Northumberland, licensed centre-based child care programs operate on weekdays and within Ministry regulated hours of operation. These hours vary by site but typically range between 6:00-7:00am opening and 5:30-6:00pm closing. Licensed home-based child care may be an option for families requiring atypical times of care, as individual home sites can more flexibly offer care during non-standard hours and on weekends.

Some Northumberland families are required to coordinate care for multiple children falling within different age groupings. This can present a considerable barrier for families when local child care sites do not offer the range of age groupings needed to accommodate their children's ages. This is especially problematic for rural families, where distances to and between local child care options are typically greater. Family age groupings offer a unique solution, as they are licensed for 15 spaces and can enroll children aged Infant to Kindergarten. In Northumberland, Family age groupings prioritize families with multiple children and/or families with parents/caregivers pursuing educational opportunities. As of December 31, 2025, there are two Family age groupings in Northumberland offering a total of 30 spaces. An **action item** for "Growing Together in Northumberland" is to create more Family age groupings (where viable) with future expansion projects.

### EarlyON

The community needs assessment survey received answers from 109 respondents about their reasons for attending EarlyON programs. The top 4 reasons were:

- Wanting their children to interact with other children (n = 86),
- Interest in the programs, events, and/or activities (n = 69),
- Opportunity to spend time with their child(ren) outside of the home (n = 68), and
- Wanting to meet other parents (n = 56).

These reasons align with the EarlyON program mandates to support early learning and development, engage parents/caregivers, and offer connections for families. When asked to rate statements about how EarlyON meets their service expectations (Table 15), most respondents agreed that EarlyON programs:

- Meet their family's needs for space cleanliness and set-up,
- Offer relationship building,
- Meet child interests,
- Provide awareness of community resources and supports, and
- Are generally convenient.

However, a comparatively high percentage of the 109 respondents indicated that EarlyON program hours do not fit within their schedules (17.4%; 71.6% indicated that EarlyON programs fit their schedules and 11.0% were unsure or did not respond). Table 14 and Figure 1 show that Northumberland EarlyON programs in 2025 were offered across a variety of weekdays, some Saturdays, and most often before noon. Although these evening and weekend program numbers meet Ministry mandates, these program slots are not offered in the same volumes as weekday and morning programming. Morning and weekday programs are purposely offered to better coincide with typical child nap schedules and to

avoid conflict with other family and community engagements that occur during evenings and weekends. These include older sibling school bell times, community recreation schedules, and household evening/weekend chores and activities.

The 2025 data show that not all lower-tier municipalities were served across all weekdays and that, when available, weekend programming was concentrated in Cobourg and Trent Hills. This prompts an **action item** for Early Years Services to remain aware of opportunities to:

- Offer more afternoon, evening, and weekend programming spread across the 7 permanent EarlyON sites (see Table 14),
- Offer more weekday program options in Cramahe and Hamilton Townships, where programming is concentrated across fewer days, and
- Improve advertising communications for rural programs and evening events that offer hot meals.

A limitation of the community needs assessment survey is that its design created a possible underestimation of the number of families for whom EarlyON program hours do not fit their schedules. The survey was intentionally designed to understand the service experiences of EarlyON users based on program access. However, by only offering EarlyON questions to the respondents that have accessed programs, responses to the question about scheduling conflicts would have excluded families that have never attended EarlyON programs explicitly due to schedule conflicts. This does not pose serious consequences to our interpretation because:

- Enough respondents indicated program time and schedule conflicts to the extent that they flagged an action item,
- Early Years Services is aware of the disproportions of when and where EarlyON programs are offered, and
- We are currently operating within Ministry mandates, at the limit of our operational EarlyON budget, and at the limits of our educator staff contractual hours of work. This means that there is currently limited capacity to add programs to new evening and weekend time slots. For such programs to be offered, programs that are currently scheduled would need to be replaced. Situations sometimes arise where programs are removed because of low attendance, space unavailability, and/or escalating space expenses. Should this occur in 2026, an **action item** for Early Years Services is to look for opportunities to offer new evening and weekend programs.

A comparatively high percentage of respondents (15.6%) of the community needs assessment survey indicated EarlyON programs as not creating awareness of screenings and interventions for child development. One reason for this response rate could be that EarlyON educators connect families with resource consultants only if the parent/caregiver expresses concerns about their child’s developmental milestones. Regardless, an **action item** for “Growing Together in Northumberland” is to continue prompting EarlyON educators to connect families to community partners.

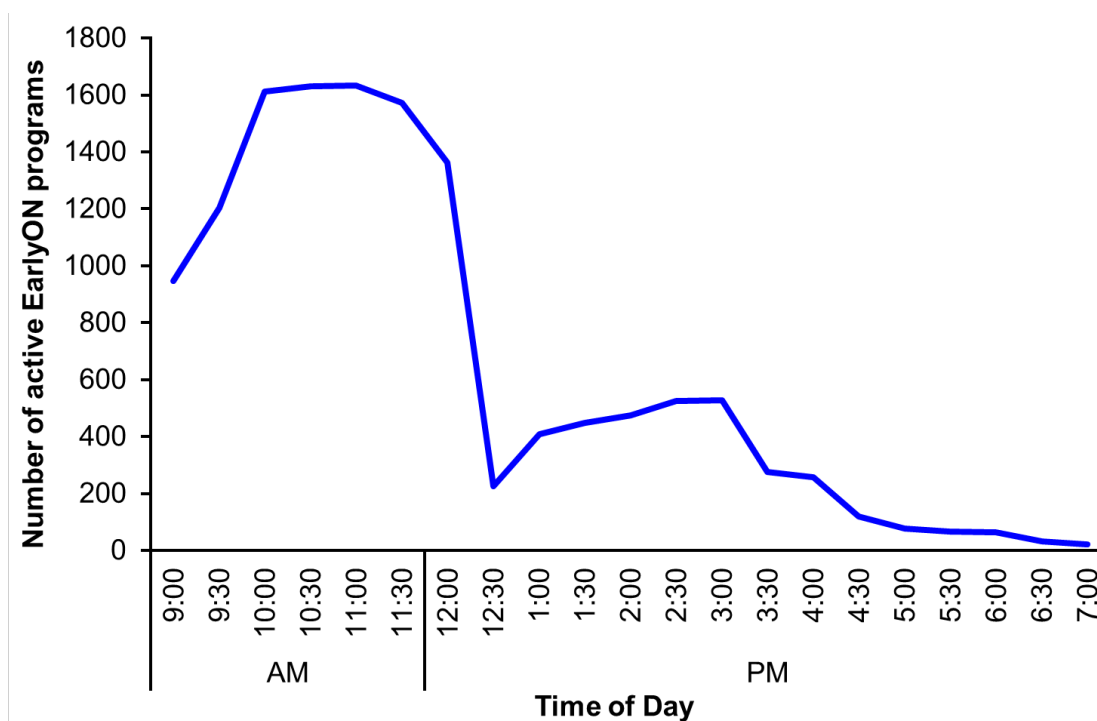
**Table 13.** Community needs assessment survey results for respondents experiences with the different types of child care meeting their hours of care needs.

Care hours meet my needs	Type of Care		
	Licensed Centre	Licensed Home	Unlicensed/Informal
# respondents	102	32	43
Agree	96	26	27
Disagree	3	4	12

**Table 14.** EarlyON programs offered by weekday and lower-tier municipality in 2025.

Day of Program	Lower-Tier Municipality							TOTAL
	Alnwick/Haldimand	Brighton	Cobourg	Cramahe	Hamilton	Port Hope	Trent Hills	
Monday	42	40	76	1	46	44	78	327
Tuesday	56	75	122	36	15	50	131	485
Wednesday	78	80	195	0	1	60	158	572
Thursday	142	46	91	9	7	74	77	446
Friday	21	46	97	16	9	41	97	327
Saturday	8	7	41	3	0	0	19	78
Sunday	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>622</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>560</b>	<b>2235</b>

**Figure 1.** Number of EarlyON programs offered according to time of day in 2025.



**Table 15.** Percentages of respondents that agreed or disagreed with statements about EarlyON programming in Northumberland County.

Response Type	% Agree	% Disagree	Unsure/No response
Space is clean and well maintained	92.7%	1.8%	5.5%
Programs meet cultural needs	77.1%	2.8%	20.2%
Programs provide active play	91.7%	0.0%	8.3%
Programs help me connect with other families	85.3%	3.7%	11.0%
Children are provided opportunities to follow interests	88.1%	1.8%	10.1%
Toys, equipment, and supplies are appropriate and engaging	94.5%	0.9%	4.6%
I feel supported as a parent	89.9%	3.7%	6.4%
Programs are in convenient locations	90.8%	3.7%	5.5%
Program hours fit my schedule	71.6%	17.4%	11.0%
I see positive interactions between educators and children	90.8%	2.8%	6.4%
Programs offer awareness of child/family programs, services, and resources	88.1%	1.8%	10.1%
Programs offer awareness of screening and interventions for my child's development	71.6%	9.2%	19.3%

## Other considerations for Service Access in Northumberland

Consistent with “Growing Together in Northumberland”, the community needs assessment survey and community partner engagement sessions highlight the growing social, cognitive, and physical developmental needs of children and families in Northumberland. Of the 177 survey respondents, 19.2% (n = 34) reported that at least 1 child in their household required unique health and/or educational needs. These include speech and language services (n = 27), behaviour-based services (n = 21), learning support (n = 17), mental health services (n = 15), physical/occupational therapy (n = 11), nutrition services (n = 9), dental services beyond regular dental care (n = 4), hearing/vision services (n = 3), and services for delayed development (n = 1). Table 11 shows additional child and family needs identified by our community partners, including supports for child development, children with special needs, mental health support, and food insecurity.

The Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University provided information following the 2023 iteration of their Early Development Instrument data collection. This project began in 2006 and collects data every 2-3 years assessing Ontario Senior Kindergarten student’s readiness to enter the school system. These data capture children’s ability to meet age-appropriate developmental expectations in emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, social competence, physical health and well-being, and communication skills and general knowledge. Three results from the 2023 data collection identify the growing need for child and family service access in Northumberland:

- 31% of Senior Kindergarten children in Northumberland are vulnerable in at least 1 domain. Vulnerable means that they fall below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of the baseline data established in 2006,
- Northumberland children show more vulnerability in physical health and well-being compared to the provincial average, and
- The development of gross and fine motor skills is the area of greatest developmental concern.

## Recruitment, Professional Development, and Learning

The Early Years workforce in Northumberland grew by 38 members across 2025, reaching a total of 352 (123 RECE staff) as of December 31, 2025. RECEs are Early Years professionals registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators and are specifically trained to plan and deliver play-based programs for all age-groupings ranging from Infant to School-Aged. Non-RECE staff hold the necessary skillsets for executing planned programs and are Ministry approved to support child care ratios. **Action items** for “Growing Together in Northumberland” are to recruit and retain RECE staff in Northumberland and to offer rich

professional development opportunities to support the continued learning of all Early Years staff.

### Recruitment and Retention

An **action item** for the Early Years Services RECE recruitment strategy is to branch off the success established by the EYEI program. The demonstrated success of the EYEI program is that 50% of participants over the last 3 years have accepted employment opportunities or chose to pursue post-secondary education in the Early Years Sector. The plan for fostering this success is to offer the projects approved by the Ministry for our Innovation Funding. These include (see Table 8 for more details):

- EYEI+: offers first year ECE program tuition for those who complete the EYEI program and decide to pursue formal education,
- EYEI High School Focus: offers in-class EYEI content for high school students and a tuition grant in-lieu of paid placements,
- ECE Transit Program: finds placements at Northumberland child care centres for Fleming College ECE students and provides bus transport to the placements, and
- A Day in the Life: Fleming College ECE students spend a day in Northumberland visiting different child care centres, an EarlyON centre, as well as various landmarks within Northumberland County. The day also provides the opportunity for students to learn of the benefits of living in Northumberland.

Since the Fall of 2025, Early Years Services has collaborated with Passage to recruit ECE program graduates from George Brown College. Passage is a Toronto-based organization that funds international students to study in Canada and partners with employers to help students find employment. This collaboration resulted in 2 ECE program recruitment fairs hosted by Early Years Services in 2026 that were attended by 5 Passage recruits. This led to 11 total interviews with Northumberland child care agencies and 1 hire. To continue growing the RECE workforce in Northumberland, an **action item** for Early Years Services is to continue this collaboration with Passage and be cognizant of other organizations that may promote RECE recruitment.

Other **action items** to recruit and retain RECEs in Northumberland are:

- Promote Canada Student Loan Forgiveness to recruit and retain RECEs - [Canada Student Loan Forgiveness - Canada.ca](#),
- Work toward standardizing RECE pay at CWELCC child care sites in Northumberland. While CWELCC Workforce Compensation has improved wages for the RECE sector, pay discrepancies remain between sites that make it challenging

for some child care agencies to offer competitive salaries and keep RECE staff from leaving to work at other agencies or municipalities.

### Professional Development

In 2025, Early Years services offered 26 professional development opportunities for the Northumberland Early Years workforce. These sessions included topics about stress, anxiety, trauma, behavioural strategies, team building, outdoor workshops, child care cooks, networking, Indigenous teachings and practices, self-regulation, supervisor development, Board of Directors information, and Ministry liaison. These events attracted 335 unique individuals, with individuals attending a median number of 2 events.

A survey was offered to all Early Years staff in the late fall of 2025 to gather educator feedback about these professional development events. Responses from 107 educators show that for each event, 90% of attendees indicated that expectations were met or exceeded. The only exception is one event for which 79.4% of responding attendees indicated that the event met or exceeded expectations. Educators indicate self-care, mental health, difficult conversations, and outdoor play as their preferences for future professional development. An **action item** for “Growing Together in Northumberland” is to continue offering a diverse spread of yearly professional development events that reflects emerging trends in the sector, workforce preferences, and Ministry mandates.

### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

#### Child Care

CWELCC Directed Growth identifies children living in low-income families, children with special needs, children needing enhanced or individual supports, Indigenous children, Black and other racialized children, children of newcomers to Canada, and official language minorities as priority areas for CWELCC space expansion. To reach as many of these populations as possible:

- Early Years Services caseworkers assist families applying to or enrolled in Fee Subsidy with system navigation,
- Early Years Services caseworkers connect with caseworkers of other SSM divisions at Northumberland County head offices (i.e., Housing Services, Homelessness Services, and Ontario Works) to, where possible, coordinate access for eligible families to a broader scope of inter-Ministry resources and supports (see Collaboration with other Community and Social Services Divisions section below),
- Allocate funding to Special Needs Resourcing for children with special needs to support their inclusion in child care, and

- Continue reflecting Northumberland's racialized, newcomer, Indigenous, language minority, and other minority populations in CWELCC Directed Growth.

There is identified need among Northumberland residents for Francophone child care programs. The community needs assessment survey shows that 21 respondents indicated their family would have enrolled children in a Francophone child care had it been an available option. Additionally, 68 Junior Kindergarten to Grade 2 students are enrolled in French Immersion programs at Northumberland schools in the PVNC Catholic District school board for the 2025-2026 school year. Despite some likely overlap of families across these two data sources, the results show community interest in and the pursuit of Francophone programming in Northumberland. An **action item** for “Growing Together in Northumberland” is to continue tracking these data sources to remain aware of this evolving need. Northumberland is projected to receive a Francophone school in Fall 2027 that will offer 49 Francophone licensed Infant, Toddler, and Preschool spaces and a School-Age program. Early Years Services will collaborate with this project but are waiting for operating funding guidance from the Ministry.

Indigenous-led practices are fundamental to Early Years programming in Northumberland. Our provincially mandated Indigenous-led team is once again serving the community after having been inactive since mid-2024 during the search for a new Indigenous service provider. Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child and Family Services signed on as the new Indigenous service provider in December 2025 following discussions beginning in August 2025. They will offer a full scope of programming starting in January 2026, including:

- Indigenous programming across Northumberland and specifically at the Indigenous space at the 800 Division Street EarlyON location in Cobourg,
- Supporting child care programs with Indigenous cultural program kits. This program started in collaboration with Nogojiwanong Friendship Centre as part of the Journey Together funding received in 2016. The Indigenous-led team will support educators in how to appropriately use items in the cultural kits,
- Drop-in visits to regularly scheduled Northumberland child care centres and EarlyON programs,
- Recognizing and honouring Truth and Reconciliation Indigenous practices in Northumberland,
- Understanding urban Indigenous practices, and
- Connecting the community with necessary services, such as obtaining status cards.

An **action item** for Early Years Services is to actively promote and reintegrate these Indigenous-led programs across all lower-tier municipalities. Early Years Services also

**action items** continued collaboration with Nogojiwanong Friendship Centre in offering Language of the Land to all child and parent/caregiver participants in Early Years programs in Northumberland. Language of the Land – [Home - Language on the Land](#) – is a learner friendly online interface for all ages that helps contribute to the preservation, protection, and revitalization of Indigenous languages in Ontario.

Indigenous practices are also fundamental to the professional development opportunities offered by Early Years Services to the Early Years workforce in Northumberland. This includes training on the 94 calls to action, which is a program giving children their first steps into Indigenous practices. For the two Indigenous professional development opportunities offered in 2025:

- 317 Early Years educators attended Indigenous Learning Professional Development Day, which offered specific training for Indigenous practices. Following this training session, educators committed to being engaged with Indigenous, Inuit, and Metis practices, and
- 12 Early Years educators completed a 6-session Indigenous Outdoor Learning course that offered land-based learning.

An **action item** for Early Years Services is to continue offering culturally intelligent, varied, and up-to-date Indigenous professional development opportunities. Another **action item** is to annually renew and assess the Early Years educator’s commitment to being engaged with Indigenous, Inuit, and Metis practices.

### EarlyON

On the community needs assessment survey, 79.7% of the 177 respondents agreed that Early Years programs and services in Northumberland respect their family language and culture (2.3% disagreed). Of these 177 respondents, 24 identified as being new to Canada, Indigenous, Francophone, Racialized, Disabled, a Permanent resident, and/or an Immigrant. Of this subset of respondents, 20 agreed that Early Years programs and services in Northumberland respected their family language and culture, 1 disagreed, 2 were unsure, and 1 did not respond. Despite the overall agreement that Early Years programs in Northumberland are culturally responsive, some open-ended survey responses indicate the need for more multicultural (n = 2) and Francophone (n = 1) EarlyON programs. Although these identified needs are low in absolute frequency, they reflect important perspectives about the cultural needs of the community.

These open-ended responses are particularly relevant considering the relatively small population of visible minority groups in Northumberland. Census 2021 data show that 95.5% of Northumberland residents are not of a visible minority population and 98.5%

speak English as their first official language (Statistics Canada, 2023). These demographics will be interesting to track should the Northumberland population continue to increase by 20-35% across the years 2024-2051 as is projected by the Ontario Ministry of Finance (2025). “Growing Together in Northumberland” means adapting to the cultural programming needs brought about by this anticipated population growth.

To meet the cultural programming demand of Northumberland’s growing population, an **action item** for Early Years Services is to offer cultural programs according to community identified need and to make these programs accessible for all residents. Understanding cultural programming needs requires more targeted data collection than is offered by the community needs assessment survey. Thus, another **action item** for “Growing Together in Northumberland” is to reach out to families that request more multicultural programming via focus groups and ask about how programs can be offered within the funding, space, and time constraints currently mediating Early Years program provision. Possible strategies for offering new cultural programming are to segment on to an already scheduled program and/or to inquire our multicultural families about their desires to lead these programs. The latter has previously been used by Early Years Services and is a temporary solution to an inability to find culturally-based educators in Northumberland for specific types of multicultural programs.

## Information Sharing and Program Promotion

### Collaboration with other Community and Social Services Divisions

Early Years Services operates early learning and child care programs according to the funding allocations and restrictions provided by the Ministry of Education. Early Years Services is a unique team within the Community and Social Services Division at Northumberland County head offices (555 Courthouse Road, Cobourg, Ontario) that also encompasses services for Homelessness, Housing, and Ontario Works. Caseworkers on these other teams assist eligible families experiencing financial and social hardships by operating within the funding allocations and restrictions of their specific provincial Ministries. It is common for families to access services from more than one team in Community and Social Services depending on their household need. However, other families are less aware of the multitude of supports and resources collectively offered by the Community and Social Services division. An **action item** for “Growing Together in Northumberland” is to prioritize in-office collaborations when Early Years Services caseworkers recognize that clients accessing our services may be eligible for the services provided by another team. This action item includes regular meetings between teams to remain informed about each other’s services and supports.

Early Years Services will also:

- Attend annual community barbecues hosted by the Housing team to promote Fee Subsidy and EarlyON,
- Attend and direct clients to ID clinics hosted by the Ontario Works team. These clinics assist Northumberland residents with:
  - Service Ontario:
    - Health Card applications, address updates, and Ontario Photo Card applications,
  - Northumberland County:
    - OW information and application assistance,
    - Outreach information,
    - Financial support for ID retrieval,
  - Northumberland County Legal Centre:
    - Program information,
    - Birth certificate applications, and
    - Fee waiver program,
  - Fleming College:
    - Academic upgrading,
  - Central East Cancer Unit:
    - Information about cancer screening,
- Promote Better Jobs Ontario with families. Better Jobs Ontario is a program hosted by the Ontario Provincial Government that provides eligible applicants with skills training for in-demand jobs and financial support for training programs - [Better Jobs Ontario | ontario.ca](#),
- Continue to train EarlyON educators about the Ontario Works and Homelessness Services resources available at Northumberland County, and
- Continue to inform Ontario Works and Homelessness Services caseworkers about the Indigenous-led team's ability to assist clients with acquiring status cards.

#### Data for systems planning, evaluation, and review

Early Years Services is actively involved in data collection, processing, analysis, and interpretation for programs funded with our Ministry allocations. This includes capturing metrics for all child care centre programs, EarlyON programs, Special Needs Resourcing, and Triple P Parenting Programs. The data collected serves year-end and ad hoc Ministry reporting, Early Years systems planning, program evaluation, and Council reports. Early Years Services also creates custom data collection templates to improve the reporting efficiency of our service providers. This is especially important considering the regular frequency with which data requests are received from the Ministry, Northumberland

County Council, community agencies, and/or community members to provide systems outcomes, program accountability, and needs assessments. With more frequent requests comes more frequent demands on providers to engage in data processes with which they are not formally trained. As such, an **action item** for “Growing Together in Northumberland” is streamlining data reporting processes for and growing the data literacy of our service providers and community partners. This includes offering Excel training and reducing the duplication of data reporting across collection templates.

To enhance data literacy across Early Years programs, Early Years Services also **action items**:

- Establishing a coordinated waitlist analysis process among our CWELCC child care sites to implement until the Ministry’s IT Modernization project makes a centralized waitlist software publicly available,
- Working with child care operators to develop standardized policies, in particular waitlist and health and safety policies,
- Using data to advocate for system improvements at invited tables, Northumberland County Council, and to the Ministry,
- Using the Learning Quality Reflection tool to generate introspective and systematic improvements to child care and EarlyON programs in Northumberland, and
- Updating all plans with 2026 Census data when they become available.

## 2026-2030 Guiding Pillar Action Items and Outcome Measures of Success

**Figure 2.** Action items, projected timeline for completion, and example outcome measures for Affordable Access pillar.

Affordable Access	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Outcome Measures
<b>Affordable Access</b> to licensed child care spaces and Early Years programs across Northumberland.						
Early Years Services to advocate to Northumberland County Council and the Ministry for the continuation of CWELCC beyond 2026.						List and summarize advocacy efforts. Advocacy plans for 2027 depend on outcomes of 2026.
Continue collaborating with all partners, in particular Economic Development, to expand CWELCC child care spaces across lower-tier municipalities when opportunities are made available by the Ministry.						Update Directed Growth Plan as expansion projects are started and completed. This includes detailing collaborations and the number of spaces expanded per lower-tier municipality. Opportunities for 2027-2030 depend on the extension of CWELCC beyond 2026.
Remain aware of expansion opportunities should the Ministry make funding available.						Annually update the number of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child care centres inquiring about joining CWELCC</li> <li>Viable expansion locations offered by lower-tier municipalities.</li> </ul> Reassess if CWELCC is extended beyond 2026.
Understand how child care presents/remains an affordability barrier for some Northumberland families.						Conduct survey(s) and present results. Reassess action item for 2029-2030 according to the results.
Examine child care affordability barriers in Northumberland households, including one- versus two-parent/caregiver households. Understanding these barriers is critical for system planning and advocacy to the Ministry.						Conduct survey(s), present results, and summarize advocacy efforts. Reassess action item for 2029-2030 according to results.
Create awareness among Early Years educators and parents about the difference between CWELCC and Fee Subsidy financial assistance, with the understanding that eligible families can receive both.						List and summarize awareness efforts.
Strategically advertise and increase the visibility of Fee Subsidy in the community.						List and summarize advertising efforts. Report on the number of applications and number of Fee Subsidies provided. Reassess focus of advertising efforts in 2028.
Promote positive awareness of Fee Subsidy and work toward reducing associated stigmas.						List and summarize awareness efforts. Conduct survey(s) and present results relevant to understanding reasons for families opting not to apply for Fee Subsidy. Reassess in 2028.
Advocate for Fee Subsidy system change to raise Fee Subsidy income thresholds. This would accommodate greater net household incomes and allow more families to receive Fee Subsidy and lower their costs of licensed child care in addition to the financial subsidy provided by CWELCC.						List and summarize outcomes of advocacy efforts. Reassess need for advocacy in 2028.
Develop more detailed Fee Subsidy analytics to support the focus of Fee Subsidy advertising and advocacy efforts.						Provide general results of Fee Subsidy analyses.

**Figure 3.** Action items, projected timeline for completion, and example outcome measures for Service Access pillar.

Service Access	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Outcome Measures
<b>Service Access</b> to support child care centre and EarlyON program viability, expand program service hours where possible, and optimize family resource availability and system navigation to urban and rural areas in Northumberland.						
Recalculate Northumberland priority areas using updated metrics if more CWELCC Directed Growth opportunities become available after December 31, 2026.						To be determined, but likely similar to the metrics presented in the Directed Growth Plan on page 17.
Advocate to County Council to offer free or discounted municipal spaces in their constituent lower-tier municipalities for EarlyON programming. Our expectation is for lower-tier officials to work with Early Years Services to find cost-effective spaces for EarlyON programs in their municipalities knowing that in turn, their municipalities will benefit from the free programs provided.						List and summarize advocacy efforts. This includes a list of continuing and new municipal spaces used for EarlyON programming.
Collaborate with the ArcGIS department at Northumberland County to develop an interactive map on the County website that displays up-to-date EarlyON and child care location information.						Availability of interactive map on the Northumberland County website.
Continue collaborating with the Communications department at Northumberland County and community partners to apply for monetary grants and funding streams to further enhance the programs and projects offered by Early Years Services.						List and summarize grants and funding streams applied for and the amounts received (if successful).
Create more Family age groupings (where viable) with future expansion projects to accommodate rural families, families with children spanning multiple age groupings, and/or families with parent/caregivers pursuing educational opportunities.		Pending available Ministry funding				Number of Family age groupings created with CWELCC Directed Growth if available in 2027 and beyond.
Remain aware of opportunities to offer more afternoon, evening, and weekend programming spread across the 7 permanent EarlyON sites (see Table 4) and lower-tier municipalities (see Table 14).						Report an updated Table 14 showing annual changes to the lower-tier municipality versus day of the week program profiles. Outcomes of this analysis will determine action item updates for 2028-2030.
Remain aware of opportunities to offer more weekday program options in Cramahe and Hamilton Townships, where programming is concentrated across fewer days (see Table 14).						
Remain aware of opportunities to improve advertising communications for EarlyON rural programs and evening events that offer hot meals.						List and summarize advertising efforts. Attendance at these programs will inform action item for 2028-2030.
Connect EarlyON families to community partners if parent/caregivers express concerns about child developmental milestones.						No metric. Will remain as a quarterly item for EarlyON educator team meetings

**Figure 4.** Action items, projected timeline for completion, and example outcome measures for Recruitment, Professional Development, and Learning pillar.

Recruitment, Professional Development, and Learning	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Outcome Measures
<b>Recruitment, Professional Development, and Learning</b> of the Early Years workforce to maximize the recruitment, retention, and training of RECE and non-RECE staff.						
Continue collaborating with OMSSA and other SSM partners in the province-wide campaign recognizing the importance of the RECE profession. This involves contributions to project working groups, continued funding allocations, and reporting back on outcomes.	■	■				List and summarize project directives, actions, and outcomes.
Implement the Ministry approved Innovation Funding projects to optimize the recruitment and retention of RECEs and advocate for more Innovation Funding.	■					Update Table 8 with an Outcomes column. Include the number of program participants and, for the employment initiatives, the number of program participants employed in Northumberland after program completion. Contrast these numbers to annual changes in the total Early Years workforce in Northumberland. Action item for 2027 and beyond will depend on continued funding.
Use the award winning success of the EYEI program to offer program adaptations for recruiting and retaining RECE staff in Northumberland.	■	Pending available Ministry funding				
Offer rich professional development opportunities to support the continued learning of all Early Years staff. Base opportunities on emerging trends in the sector, workforce preferences, and Ministry mandates.	■	■	■	■	■	List and summarize the professional development opportunities provided each year. Provide the number of attendees per program and disseminate survey results of attendee feedback.
Continue collaborating with Passage and other organizations that promote RECE recruitment, hiring, and retention.	■	■	■	■	■	List and summarize recruitment/retention collaborations and update the numbers presented on page 51. This includes number of job fairs, number of interviews held by child care agencies, and number of RECE hires. Process will continue until all child care centres are at 90% operating capacity.
Promote Canada Student Loan Forgiveness to recruit and retain RECEs.	■	■	■	■	■	No metric. This will remain a regular agenda item for recruitment/retention events, including those presented in Table 8.
Work toward standardizing RECE pay at CWELCC child care sites in Northumberland.	■	■	■			Annually compile and monitor a wage grid for CWELCC child care agencies. Reassess for 2029-2030.

**Figure 5.** Action items, projected timeline for completion, and example outcome measures for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion pillar.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Outcome Measures
<b>Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion</b> for program design, family access, and educator representation.						
Remain current with the increasing and changing needs for Special Needs Resourcing in Northumberland.						List and summarize SNR program responses to increasing and changing family needs in Northumberland.
Continue tracking community interest (via survey) and French Immersion/Francophone school student enrollment to remain aware of the evolving need of Francophone Early Years programming in Northumberland.						Conduct and report survey(s). Track annual enrollment in Kindergarten to Grade 2 French Immersion programs at KPR/PVNCCDSB schools and in the planned Francophone school at MonAvenir Conseil Scolaire Catholique. Assess program need versus number of programs offered in 2029.
Actively promote and reintegrate Indigenous-led programs offered by the Indigenous-led team of Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child and Family Services.						Track number of programs offered, number of program attendees, and number of visits to child care centres. The goal is for active reintegration to lead to sustained programming throughout 2027-2030.
Offer culturally intelligent, varied, and up-to-date Indigenous professional development opportunities.						List and summarize Indigenous professional development opportunities offered and the attendance at each program.
Continue collaborating with Nogojiwanong Friendship Centre by offering Language of the Land to all child and parent/caregiver participants in Early Years programs in Northumberland. Language of the Land is a learner friendly online interface for all ages that helps contribute to the preservation, protection, and revitalization of Indigenous languages in Ontario.						List key milestones of collaborations and available metrics of website use.
Annually renew and assess the Early Years educators commitment to being engaged with the Indigenous, Inuit, and Metis practices.						No metric. Will remain a standing agenda item for the annual Professional Learning Day hosted by Early Years Services.
Offer cultural programs according to identified need and have these programs accessible for all residents.						
Examine the needs of families requesting more multicultural programming via focus groups and determine how programs can be offered within the funding, space, and time constraints mediating EarlyON scheduling and program provision.						Conduct and report survey(s)/focus group(s) identifying cultural needs and annually report the number of cultural programs offered. Continually assess identified need versus number/types of programs offered.

**Figure 6.** Action items, projected timeline for completion, and example outcome measures for Information Sharing and Program Promotion pillar.

Information Sharing and Program Promotion	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Outcome Measures
<b>Information Sharing and Program Promotion</b> to inform system planning, create awareness of available resources and supports, and coordinate service access with other Service System Managers at Northumberland County.						
Continue participating in IT Modernization system improvements by participating in the SSMAC working group, any associated subcommittees, and piloting opportunities.						List and summarize participation activities. IT Modernization roll-out expected to be completed by early 2030.
Implement IT Modernization features as they are made available by the Ministry according to the release schedule.						
Continue with phase 1 roll-out of the Children's Voices in the Early Years Pedagogy Project and plan for phases 2-4 as they approach.						Update outcomes following phase 1 roll-out.
Prioritize in-office collaborations when clients accessing Early Years services may be eligible for the services provided by another division of Community and Social Services. This will include regular meetings between divisions to remain informed about available services and supports.						Tracking the number of in-office collaborations is a challenge, as service collaborations are point-in-time and dynamic aspects of casework in Community and Social Services. This action item will be tracked by annually highlighting outcome stories of our in-office collaborations.
Streamline/deduplicate data collection processes and grow the data literacy of our community partners by offering Excel training sessions.						Summarize data service improvements and report the number of Excel training sessions offered to community partners.
Establish a coordinated waitlist analysis process among our CWELCC child care sites and implement until the Ministry's IT Modernization project makes a centralized waitlist software publicly available.						Report on system implementation and provide regular updates to waitlist analyses. This internal waitlist process will be replaced by the IT Modernization solution when available.
Work with child care operators to develop standardized policies, in particular waitlist and health and safety policies.						List policies completed, including date enacted, and those in-draft.
Use data to advocate for system improvements at invited tables, Northumberland County Council, and the Ministry.						List and summarize advocacy efforts.
Use the Learning Quality Reflection (LQR) tool to generate introspective and systematic improvements to child care and EarlyON programs.						Collect, analyze, and report LQR data. Reassess LQR implementation process for 2028-2030.
Update all plans with 2026 Census data when available.						Report updated plans when completed.

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