

April 14, 2011

The Honourable Laurel Broten
Minister of Children and Youth Services
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Toronto, Ontario M5S 2S3

Dr. Charles Pascal
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Re: Best Start Network of Peel Response To Best Start Child and Family Centres Survey

Dear Minister Broten and Dr. Pascal,

In response to your invitation to complete the Best Start Child and Family Centres Survey, the Best Start Network of Peel initiated community-wide consultations in Peel.

Peel's rich history of collaboration and innovation began in 1998 when leaders from Peel Health and Peel Children's Centre launched the first meeting of stakeholders to create the vision and mandate for service provision for children aged 0 – 6 years.

Together, stakeholders formed Success By 6 Peel with a commitment to building and expanding community support for children by strengthening services for young children and their families.

In 2010, Peel Children and Youth Initiative (PCYI) was established to expand the vision of Success By 6 Peel to strengthen and support services for pre-natal to 24 years.

Why do children need or receive support?

A number of studies (including but not limited to the Committee for Economic Development [CED], Dr. James Heckman, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], Hon. Margaret McCain, J. Fraser Mustard, Dr. Janette Pelletier, and Martha Friendly) clearly show the need for investment in early learning and child care due to the many health, social, developmental, educational, and economic benefits that come as a result. Despite this evidence and research that suggests that early childhood services are a public good, a 2007 OECD study

revealed that Canada spends less on early learning and child care than any other developed country in the world.

Peel's vision is supported and guided by a collective commitment to support children and their families. This commitment is embedded in the foundation provided by Peel's Children's Charter of Rights (see Appendix A).

To give children a voice and raise awareness of children's rights, Success By 6 Peel worked with community representatives, school boards and child care providers to create the Peel Children's Charter of Rights. Children throughout Peel Region were asked to give their thoughts and opinions on what the basic rights of a child are.

In discussion groups, children responded to these rights and statements and had an opportunity to express their thoughts in words and pictures on a "Reflective Paper". More than 4,000 children from across Peel made their mark on the first phase of creating the Charter. Although written by children, the Charter needs the support of adults to make it more than a document hanging on our walls.

The vision behind the Charter is that we are all stewards of the words and that we have an obligation to honour, listen to, and most importantly act on children's rights. Doing so will ensure that the best interests of the child are the primary consideration in everything that we do as a community.

What kinds of supports do children currently receive?

Peel leads early years integrated services through a broad network of organizations who, as community partners (see Appendix B), work collaboratively to integrate early years services that help children reach their full potential. In partnership with these agencies, the Region of Peel oversees the planning and implementation of early learning programs. Programs deliver inclusive and accessible services for children and their families, promoting healthy early development and school readiness.

Programs and services include:

- Early Learning in Peel Homeless Family Shelters;
- Learning in Our Neighbourhood (LION) mobile early learning program;
- St. John Fisher Neighbourhood Learning Place;
- Licensed child care centres;
- Licensed home child care;
- Nursery and play schools;
- Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs);
- Parenting and family literacy centres;
- School-based hubs and readiness centres; and,
- Special needs resourcing.

These diverse early learning services provide the following:

- **Health and safety:** pre-and post-natal support, home-visiting, family planning, nutrition, health and dental care, mental health services
- **Nurturing relationships/community involvement:** parenting/child attachment and bonding, parent participation, information resources, links to community agencies
- **Early intervention services:** early intervention and identification supports for children with special needs
- **Universal opportunities for early learning and development:** parent support, play-based learning, child care, language and literacy, early identification, physical activity and recreation

How do parents and caregivers find out about available services? How do parents and caregivers access these services?

Parents, caregivers, and others have a number of ways to find out about services available for children and families in Peel. Ways of accessing services include but not limited to:

- Informal networking;
- Walk-ins;
- Online resources;
- Print resources;
- Professionals; and,
- Referral Agencies.

What kind of supports do children need? Are children getting support in a timely way? What is considered timely? What stands in the way of getting effective and timely support?

A high quality and widely varied array of early learning and child care programs are offered in Peel. However, timely and equitable access to these services is hampered by inadequate funding levels.

As a result, wait lists in Peel are long and continue to grow at unacceptable levels. Peel ranks low in comparison to other jurisdictions with respect to access to early learning and child care services. This causes children to age-out prior to receiving services and thereby miss key developmental milestones.

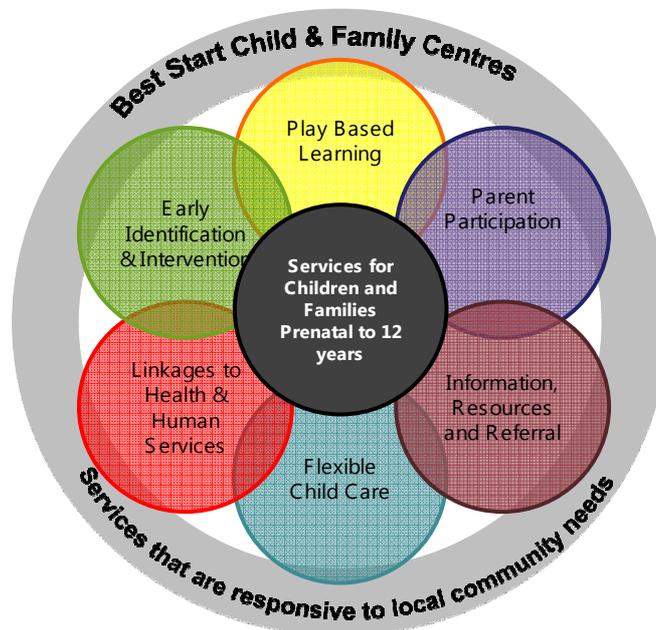
This concerning situation is compounded by Peel's consistently high growth, nearly 90% of which is accounted for by immigration, as well as Peel's young population. Appendix C provides a more detailed overview of these trends.

What would the situation look like if effective support was available? What could improve a child's situation and their family's experience in the community? How can services for families be further improved or integrated in the community?

In 2010, a collaboration of agencies presented to Peel Regional Council on the strengths of services in Peel. Along with agency representatives, a few parents came to share their stories. One particularly touching story was that of Farida.

Farida and her husband Masood moved to Canada with their 4 year old son Jamal. Masood had satisfactory English while Farida knew very little. Masood and Farida's son Jamal faced a difficult transition from their home country of India due to leaving so many friends, family, and caregivers behind. As a result, Jamal began to act out and became aggressive both at home and with other children in the neighbourhood. A neighbour told Farida about a local Ontario Early Years Centre. Farida took Jamal to the centre and after building a relationship with staff was soon able to tell them of her difficulties. Farida was connected with well established services in the community to improve her English and help Jamal with his transition. As Jamal enrolled in half-day kindergarten, Farida became pregnant with her second child. She was connected to prenatal supports through Peel Health and regularly traveled by bus to get the help that her family needed and continued to regularly attend her local OEYC. At school, the teacher met with Farida on a few occasions to discuss Jamal's behavior towards other children. Farida continued to seek help and gradually saw Jamal return to his charming usual self.

Peel is proud of its network of strong services to support families. The next step, however, is to work towards creating an increasingly "one-stop shop" network of seamless services for families. The diagram on page five speaks to what this seamless network would look like.



Peel's Vision

With Peel's new seamless network, we see Farida's family walking to Jamal's school. Jamal greets the principal and then goes off to play with his friends. Farida is making one of her regular visits to the Best Start Child and Family Centre to sign up for the next Family Literacy program and so that she and her daughter Navita can meet with a speech and language pathologist to discuss Navita's delayed speech. Farida's husband Masood is with her today as he recently lost his job and is coming to seek assistance for employment training and job opportunities. Farida now has more confidence in her English and, due to access to subsidy, has taken on a part-time job to assist with the family finances. Navita attends a half-day licensed child care program and Jamal attends the after-school program. Farida picks up her son and daughter after work with Jamal excitedly telling her about his day. Farida came to Regional Council to tell her story as she was so grateful for the help that her family received.

Farida's story in the context of a seamless network was what her story could look like with the implementation of the Best Start Child and Family Centres in Peel. These centres will offer seamless services designed to meet the unique needs of Peel's communities.

In Peel, we have a vision that "All children will thrive". We believe in a seamless service system for families that will provide the best outcomes for our children. With the strong network of services in Peel supporting families, success stories will

continue to be heard. A “Made in Peel” solution that provides seamless services, focuses on the unique needs of local communities, and builds on the great strengths that already exist, will better ensure that families in Peel have their needs met and that their children will indeed thrive.

What are some ways to measure whether services have improved?

There are a number of ways to measure whether services have improved, including but not limited to:

- Reduced waitlists;
- Increased Early Development Instrument (EDI) scores;
- Increased high school graduation rates;
- Reduced need for specialized services; and,
- Increased public confidence in the early learning system.

In addition, the Peel Best Start Research and Evaluation Project, led by Dr. Janette Pelletier, Director of the Institute of Child Study at the University of Toronto, analyzed integration, communication, successes, barriers and outcomes of the Peel Best Start initiative.

The success of the Best Start research project has led to a research extension agreement with Peel’s English Public and Catholic school boards. The extension will incorporate the measurement of six Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK) program schools into the existing research model. This project is innovative and respected, as Dr. Pelletier’s research has been recognized by the Provincial implementation team as a best practice.

The Best Start Network of Peel thanks you for the invitation to provide input. We look forward to future opportunities to inform the Best Start Child and Family Centres development process. We, once again, extend a sincere invitation to you to visit Peel to see further first-hand evidence of our strong collaborative network of services for children and families.

Sincerely,

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APPENDIX A: PEEL CHILDREN'S CHARTER OF RIGHTS

IN THE WORDS OF THE CHILDREN...

1. The Right to Basic Needs Every child has the right to have clean water, good food, proper clothes, a home and be happy. **2. The Right to Make Friends and Freely Meet in Groups** Every child has the right to play together, have fun, make friends. The way to have a friend is to be one! **3. The Right to Religion, Culture and Beliefs** Every child has the right to be treated the same way in every country and not be treated differently because of the colour of their skin. Every child has the right to choose their own faith. **4. The Right to Privacy** Every child has the right to peace and quiet and have their own privacy from different people who bother you or from the internet. **5. The Right to Justice, Protection and Treatment** Every child has the right to have a safe place to live. They need to be able to live without fear. **6. The Right to Education** Every child has the right to learn even if it is in a special class. **7. The Right to a Caring Home Environment** Every child has the right to love. **8. The Right to Be Heard** Every child has the right to be respected, speak freely or give an honest opinion. **9. The Right to an Identity** Every child has the right to have their own name and nationality. Every child can show who they are. **10. The Right to Peace** Every child has the right to have a happy life where they can live in peace. **11. The Right to Equal Access** Every child has the right to have special care and training because it doesn't matter what skin colour or race or if they have any sickness or disability. **12. The Right to Play** Every child has the right to play and have fun. To have dancing flowers and magic mud.



APPENDIX B: NETWORK OF ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN PEEL

More than forty community and early learning organizations in Peel work collaboratively to build and expand capacity in neighbourhoods where young children and their families live. These community partners lead the way in closing gaps in services and supports in early childhood development through research and advocacy.

Community Partners

Associated Youth Services of Peel	Le Cercle de L'Amitie
Association of Daycare Operators	Malton Neighbourhood Services
Best Start Health Coalition in Peel	Métis Nation of Ontario
Brampton/Caledon Community Living	Mississauga Parent Child Resource Centre
Brampton Library	Mississauga Recreation and Parks
Brampton Neighbourhood Resource Centre	Mississauga Life Centre
Brampton Multicultural Community Centre	Multicultural Inter-Agency Group of Peel
Brampton Parks and Recreation	Ontario Cultural Society of the Deaf
Caledon Parent Child Centre	Ontario Early Years Centres
Caring for Kids	Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services
Catholic Cross Cultural Services	Ontario Ministry of Education
Catholic Family Services – Peel Dufferin	Peel Aboriginal Network & Credit River Métis Council
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health	Peel Children and Youth Initiative
Child Development Resource Connection Peel	Peel Children's Centre
Children's Aid Society of Peel	Peel Committee Against Woman Abuse
City of Brampton	Peel District School Board
City of Mississauga	Peel Infant Development
Community Action Program for Children	Peel Lunch and After School Program (PLASP)
Community Care Access Centre of Peel	Peel Multicultural Council
Community Living, Mississauga	Peel Regional Police
Conseil scolaire de district Catholique Centre-Sud	Peel Youth Violence Prevention Initiative
Conseil scolaire Viamonde	Punjabi Community Health Centre
Credit Valley Hospital	Regional Municipality of Peel
Dixie Bloor Resource Centre	Saldanha Health Centre
Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board	Sheridan College
Erinoakids	Silent Voice
Family Day Care Services	Social Planning Council of Peel
Family Education Centre	Student Support Lead Initiative
Family Life Resource Centre	Trillium Health Centre
Family Services of Peel	Town of Caledon
Gateway Centre for New Canadians	United Way of Peel Region
Halton-Peel Presch Speech & Language Program	William Osler Health Centre
Humber College Institutes of Technology and Advanced Learning	Vita Centre
Infant and Child Development Services Peel	YMCA of Greater Toronto
Inter-cultural Neighbourhood Social Services	

APPENDIX C: OVERVIEW OF FUNDING INEQUITIES IN PEEL

As of July 2010, Peel residents make up 10.1% of Ontario's population, yet receive only 4.4% of funding allocated for social services. This funding inequity exists as Ontario continues to use the 1980 funding formula to fund social services, despite the fact that Peel's population has more than doubled since 1980 and continues to absorb a large number of immigrants. Areas in particular need of additional funding are early learning and child care, children and family services, and developmental services, as these services receive less than 50% of the provincial per capita.

As of March 2011, there are approximately 24,900 child care spaces in Peel. Based on current funding levels, Peel provides child care subsidies to approximately 20% of children. A child care subsidy wait list, 3,030 as of March 2011, has been managed over many years. In the absence of adequate funding support, wait times continue to grow at an unacceptable level: approximately 230 new applications monthly. As Best Start funding is depleted, the wait list is set to increase further. Children currently on waitlists "age out" prior to receiving services and miss key developmental milestones. Future implementation of Child and Family Centres will help to alleviate such pressures as early identification and referral become a primary focus.

In addition, as Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten (FDELK) Program implementation results in the loss of four- and five-year olds and associated revenue, child care programs will no longer be able to offset the costs of operating for infant and toddlers. Statistics clearly demonstrate the need to increase investment in programs and services for infants and toddlers. Presently, the availability of child care spaces for infants and toddlers is limited. This is made evident by the fact that infants and toddlers comprise the majority of the child care fee subsidy wait list and that there is an unequal distribution of spaces for these age groups in child care (when comparing number of spaces per age group vs. number of children per age group).

Funding inequities hamper Peel's performance in early learning and child care, as evident in the 2010 Ontario Municipal CAO's Benchmarking Initiative (OMBI) child care measures. In these measures, Peel continues to rank lower than the OMBI median and below 13 other reporting municipalities. Cumulatively, indicators reflect capacity shortfalls in Peel and point to a correlation between municipal ranking and lack of sufficient funding for early learning and child care. Therefore, Peel's poor performance in these measures is not reflective of Peel's high-quality services and collaboration in early learning and child care but rather points to poor access to and timeliness in the delivery of these services as a result of longstanding funding inequities.

Peel is a fast growing municipality, having recorded the 2nd-largest growth rate between 2001 and 2006 among large municipalities in Ontario (17.2%, behind York Region). Statistics Canada recently reported that Peel continues to record consistently high growth rates, growing by an estimated 22.4% between July 2009 and June 2010 (the 3rd-largest growth rate in Ontario, behind Halton Region and York Region).

In addition, Peel continues to receive high levels of immigration; with approximately 25,000 immigrants arriving each year since 2003 (the 2nd-largest figure in Ontario, behind Toronto). Immigration is a growing contributor to Peel's continued population growth. Over two-thirds (69%) of Peel's population growth between 2001 and 2006 was accounted for by recent immigrants. Between July 2009 and June 2010, however, international migration accounted for nearly 90% of Peel's growth.

Lastly, Peel has one of the youngest populations in Ontario. In 2006, Peel had the youngest median age of all municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area and the 2nd-youngest median age of all large municipalities in Ontario (behind Kenora). In July 2010, Statistics Canada reported that Peel had one of the youngest median ages in Ontario and was the only municipality in the Greater Toronto Area where seniors accounted for less than 10% of the population.

Therefore, as a young and fast-growing municipality with high levels of immigration, Peel is increasingly vulnerable to longstanding financial inequities. Inadequate funding poses significant risk to access to early learning and child care as children and families will face increasing wait times and limited access to services.

Sources:

2001 and 2006 Statistics Canada Censuses

Statistics Canada 2009-2010 Annual Demographic Estimates: Subprovincial Areas
Region of Peel