



Summer 2006

Child Care Chit Chat

A Newsletter by Family and Children's Services for Child Care Operators



A Time of Change and Growth

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Manager, Child Care Services

Welcome to this first edition of *Chit Chat* for 2006 and my first edition as the Manager of Child Care Services. It has certainly been an exciting five months as I learn all about the child care community in York Region. I have had the good fortune to meet a number of our child care operators at operators meetings, community meetings and at our "hi and bye" for Connie Wilson. I am looking forward to working with all of you in continuing to provide quality services to the children and families of York Region.

Since the last edition of this newsletter, there have been a few staff changes:

- Sheila Ellis accepted a permanent position with Child and Community Programs as Supervisor, Program Administration
- Kelly Clare accepted a permanent position with Child and Community Programs as Tester/Trainer for the Ontario Child Care Management System
- Maria Yarde accepted a permanent position with Child Care Services as a Children's Services Representative with the South Child Care Team
- Diane Burchert accepted a temporary position with Child and Community Programs as a Domiciliary Hostel Worker
- Debbie Wilton is currently filling in as the Administrative Secretary for Child Care Service
- Concy Chan, one of our Intermediate Accounting Clerks, has accepted a position with the York Region Finance Department and we wish her well in her new endeavours

It seems that 2006 has so far been a year of both change and growth for the child care community. We have seen changes in the funding commitments for the Best Start Initiative because of the change in the Federal Government and we have seen changes to the Wage Subsidy Guidelines. We continue to see growth in the York Region child care community, growth in our Early Intervention Services and growth in our Family Strengthening Programs.

This edition of *Chit Chat* provides an overview of the many programs and services under the Family and Children's Services umbrella and gives you a summary of where we are in these times of growth and change. It's both exciting and challenging to continue addressing the needs of the communities in York Region within the limited resources that we have. I am very proud to be working with this child care community and to continue striving for excellence in program and service delivery for York Region residents.

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Enhanced Funding Information Corner

Enhanced Funding enables licensed child care providers to hire additional staff to help include children with exceptional and significant special needs in their child care program.

As of March 31, 2006, the Enhanced Funding program served on average 41 individual children per month, 20 groups of children per month, 110 families per month and 49 child care providers per month.

Enhanced Funding is a limited resource and has a standard funding application process. Funding approvals are limited to a maximum of six hours per day or 30 hours per week. The Enhanced Funding Sub-Committee reviews all applications and works to ensure equitable funding distribution. Current levels of supports for individual children or groups of children are reviewed prior to funding decisions by the Sub-Committee.

Thank you to all operators who completed the 2006 Enhanced Funding Survey. The results of this survey will be reviewed by the Sub-Committee and a training plan will be developed to assist in addressing and strengthening supports to child care operators.

Visit the York Region Web site at www.york.ca and click Services>Children's Services to access individual and group application forms, "How to Complete" guides and the Enhanced Funding Brochure.

For more information about the Enhanced Funding Program, call your Community Program Co-ordinator:

- Monica Bissett at 905-762-1282 or 1-877-464-9675 Ext. 2662
- Willie Dingwall at 905-830-4444 or 1-877-464-9675 Ext. 5762.

From the Desk of the Director

While the provincial funding for Best Start has been reduced, there continues to be growth related to Best Start initiatives. York Region is working closely with school boards and child care operators to ensure that the Best Start target of 988 new spaces is met by September 30, 2006. In addition, over 420 additional children of eligible families are in receipt of fee subsidies and child care operators have received Best Start Wage Improvement funds.

Family and Children's Services was successful in its application to the Ministry of Health Promotion for funding through the Communities in Action Fund. This funding will be used to support the implementation of summer clubs, after school programs, "try it you'll like it" sport opportunities and wellness groups in six social housing sites across York Region. We are pleased to be working with the YMCA in the delivery of this program.

We will be holding a child care operators meeting in the early fall to provide you with a revised Consolidated Agreement, an update concerning Best Start and provincial reporting requirements for Wage Subsidy. In the meantime, I wish you a happy, safe and sunny summer.

Elizabeth Wagle, Director, Family and Children's Services

Regional Schedule of Rates

In January, the Annual Rate Survey was distributed to all head offices of programs that have Purchase of Service Schedules with York Region. This information was analyzed and a recommended rate schedule for 2006 was presented to Council. I am pleased to advise you that the Regional Schedule of Rates 2006 was approved by Council, retroactive to January 1, 2006. A copy of this schedule is included in this edition. Amended Rate Schedules have been processed and were sent to all operators with a Purchase of Service Agreement. Please note, as well as signing the amended copies, operators are required to send York Region a copy of the fee schedule that is provided to parents. Retroactive rate increases will be issued before July 31, 2006 pending the receipt of the signed contract amendments.

A final reminder that mid-year rate increases cannot be approved because recommended rate increases are calculated annually within the approved annual budget.

Family Strengthening Programs

Family Strengthening Programs are a range of programs and services delivered to families at no cost and are designed to support and strengthen families and children in York Region. Programs offer families access to community-based programs by assisting them with barriers such as user fees and transportation, and by helping agencies establish programs in hard to serve or under-serviced communities. Family Strengthening Programs use an outcome-based approach in their design and delivery and focus on increased employment supports for parents, improved social, emotional and educational outcomes for children, and provide for opportunities for families to engage in their communities. Programs are delivered by local municipalities and community agencies and are administered through a Purchase of Service Agreement with York Region. Quality assurance is managed by Regional staff and organizations must meet the Region's operating criteria.

All Our Kids (AOK) Early Child and Development and Parenting Programs

AOK are accessible drop-in programs for parents and caregivers and their children, birth to six years of age. Across York Region, 17 activity-based programs and three parent-child Mother Goose programs offer parenting supports and resources that are intended to promote readiness to learn. AOK programs served 3,934 children in 2005.

Recreation and Sport

Research indicates that participation in recreation and sport helps children to improve physical and emotional health, develop psychosocial skills, improve self esteem, increase their capacity to learn, find their talents, gain positive role models and have fun! These programs are available to eligible low income families currently receiving social assistance, fee assistance and/or residing in social housing communities. Summer Camp served 525 children in 2005 and provides children aged 4 to 12 years with access to summer recreation programs offered by local municipal Parks and Recreation Departments. Positive Leisure Activities for Youth (PLAY) served 838 children in 2005 and provides access to seasonal recreation programs such as swimming, sports, art and dance. Children of eligible families may participate in one program per session. After school programs served 241 children in 2005 and offer a variety of activities including art, drama, sports and homework supports. Programs are located on site in five social housing communities. Youth Leadership Camp served 75 youth in 2005 and provides a one week overnight camp experience for youth aged 13 to 16. Camps focuses include relationships, trust, problem solving and personal challenge.

York Region remains committed to working in collaboration with the community to ensure that Family Strengthening Programs meet the needs of the residents that we all serve. The Community Services and Housing Department recognizes the importance of family structure to the economic and social well being of parents and to the development of a child's full potential.

Web Record of Attendance

Tired of all the paper that comes across your desk? Why not try York Region's answer to your need for a faster, friendlier and paperless Fee Subsidy payment process? Web Record of Attendance is quick and simple to use. Join the more than half of all York Region child care operators who are currently using Web Record of Attendance. All you need is a PC with an internet connection.

To preview the process or to get more information about taking advantage of this option, contact Debbie Wilton at 905-830-4444 or 1-877-464-9675 Ext. 2040. Debbie will pass along your request to our OCCMS team. A member of the team will contact you directly to help you through the process.

Health and Safety Funding 2006

The Health and Safety Funding Annual Survey Requests were sent out in April to all operators with a Consolidated Purchase of Service Agreement. An overwhelming number of requests for funding were received. Unfortunately, not all requests were approved because the requested dollars far exceeded the funds available. Critical health and safety issues relating to licensing, food safety and some playground issues received funding approval. Due to limited funding, many requests were not approved at this time. Funding requests which were not approved will be put on a wait list which will be addressed if funding becomes available later in 2006. Health and Safety Contracts are being processed for all operators who received a funding approval letter. These contracts are expected to be sent out to operators by the end of July. As in past years, operators who are receiving funding will be required to make the approved repairs/purchases, submit the invoice to the Region by September 30, 2006 in order to receive payment.

Wage Subsidy

Wage Subsidy is the combination of several provincial funding initiatives introduced in 1987 and 1993 intended to enhance the salaries of staff working in licensed child care programs. Wage Subsidy funding was also intended to address the issues of affordability and stability in the child care service sector. Child care operators are responsible for the distribution of Wage Subsidy funding to their staff and are required to meet all reporting requirements concerning the utilization of this funding.

Wage Subsidy is calculated annually and is based on levels of service, enrolment and staffing full time equivalents. Permanent program staff who work directly with the children, full or part time, are eligible to receive the Direct Operating Grant and the Wage Enhancement Grant. Non-program staff such as supervisors, cooks or janitors, full or part time are eligible to receive the Wage Enhancement Grant only.

There are new provincial requirements for agencies concerning the communication of Wage Subsidy to their staff. Agencies are required to tell each staff what portion of their pay is funded by Wage Subsidy. Agencies are also required to give York Region a copy of the written communication given to staff that explains the distribution of Wage Subsidy funding received. This written communication must be submitted with the submission of the annual Reconciliation Statement.

Agencies are required to document and maintain accurate records on the distribution of Wage Subsidy funding to ensure accountability. These records may be part of a reconciliation and audit process. There continues to be a significant provincial funding shortfall of over \$5 million to bring all operators to the level of Wage Subsidy for which they are eligible under the Ministry 2000 Guidelines.

There have been a number of service priorities addressed by York Region. The reallocation of unspent base wage subsidy brought all existing operators, serving children aged 0 to 12 years, that currently have a Wage Subsidy Agreement with York Region up to the Direct Operating Grant level for which they are eligible under the Ministry 1995 Guideline. Subject to provincial approval, Best Start Wage Subsidy for 2006 will be allocated to new licensed spaces, for children 5 years of age and under, that were implemented after April 1, 2005. Ongoing Wage Subsidy is conditional upon continued provincial funding. Amendments to the Wage Subsidy Budget Schedule of the Consolidated Agreement will be processed once provincial approval has been received.

If you have any questions regarding your Wage Subsidy Contract, contact Sandra Edgar at 905-830-4444 or 1-877-464-9675 Ext. 2028 or Sheila Ellis at 905-830-4444 or 1-877-464-9675 Ext. 2070.

Child Care Chit Chat is produced by the Community Services and Housing Department's Family and Children's Services Branch. For more information about any of the articles within, or about any issues relating to Child Care Fee Assistance, call Cathy Elliott, Manager of Child Care Services at 905-830-4444 or 1-877-464-9675, Ext. 2145. You can also access more information about York Region's children's services at our web site:

Go to www.york.ca and click Services > Children's Services