



**EarlyON**  
Child and Family Centre

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY REPORT

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

EarlyON@york.ca  
york.ca/earlyon

  
**York Region**



**“Thank you to all of the families, stakeholders and community partners who participated in the EarlyON Child and Family Centre community engagements and online survey. Your feedback is valuable in shaping the future of the EarlyON system in York Region. I am confident that this information will enhance the Region’s ability to successfully plan for and implement high-quality EarlyON child and family programs and services that are inclusive, accessible, responsive and welcoming.”**

– Cordelia Abankwa, General Manager,  
Social Services Branch,  
Community and Health Services Department

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The Regional Municipality of York acknowledges the contributions made by the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada. Questions regarding this report can be directed to [EarlyON@york.ca](mailto:EarlyON@york.ca)

Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

# INTRODUCTION

On January 1, 2018, The Regional Municipality of York (York Region) became responsible for the management of the EarlyON Child and Family Centres (previously known as the Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres) in York Region. EarlyON Child and Family Centres (EarlyON centres) bring together three former child and family programs funded by the Ministry of Education:



In December 2017, York Region launched a comprehensive community engagement initiative consisting of three stakeholder meetings, six public pop-up sessions and a multilingual one-month online survey. This community engagement provided an opportunity to share information with families and stakeholders about the transition and to collect valuable feedback for future planning.

## Families and stakeholders provided feedback on:

- Planning for EarlyON centres and delivery of core services that best meet community needs
- Strengths, barriers or gaps in current child and family programs regarding:
  - Meeting demand
  - Inclusivity and diversity
  - Supporting children with special needs and their families
  - Staff capacity
  - Meeting unique needs of the community served
- Creation of a consistent, integrated and collaborative EarlyON system

## This report summarizes the feedback received through the EarlyON community engagement and includes:

- A summary of the consultation activities used to engage community members and stakeholders
- What we heard through the online survey and stakeholder meetings
- Next steps

“GOOD LEARNING AND INTERACTION EXPERIENCE FOR BABY, GREAT CONNECTION WITH OTHER MOMS IN THE AREA. GREAT PARENTING TIPS AND ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITY RESOURCES.”

- Caregiver



# EarlyON Child and Family Centres Community Engagement

DECEMBER 2017 TO APRIL 2018



## 3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

One for early years stakeholders  
One for child and family program managers  
One for child and family program staff

**86** STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED AT SESSIONS 

## 6 POP-UP SESSIONS ACROSS YORK REGION



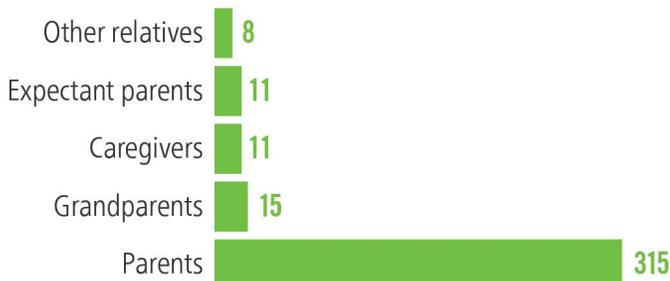
**199** PEOPLE ENGAGED AT SESSIONS 



## 405 SURVEY RESPONDENTS



Respondents who have/take care of children 0 - 6 years



THE SURVEY WAS AVAILABLE IN FIVE DIFFERENT LANGUAGES   
ENGLISH, FRENCH, SIMPLIFIED CHINESE, TRADITIONAL CHINESE AND RUSSIAN

## FACEBOOK ENGAGEMENTS



## 6,988

people saw our Facebook posts

**130** ENGAGED USERS   
CLICKS, LIKES, COMMENTS OR SHARES

## TWITTER ENGAGEMENTS

## 15,997

people saw our Tweets



 **172** ENGAGED USERS  
CLICKS, RETWEETS, FAVOURITES OR REPLIES

## WEBSITE CAMPAIGN PAGE VIEWS



JANUARY 1 TO APRIL 8, 2018

**956**

DURING SURVEY  
MARCH 6 TO APRIL 8, 2018

**640**

**67%** OF PAGE VIEWS WERE DURING THE SURVEY

# SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

## STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

Each stakeholder meeting engaged a different stakeholder group to ensure that a wide range of perspectives was gathered. The goals for each meeting and the questions posed to participants varied by stakeholder group. Each meeting included a brief overview presentation followed by questions and small-group facilitated discussions. Stakeholders and community partners included:



## POP-UP SESSIONS

To encourage community participation in the online survey, York Region set up six public pop-up sessions in March 2018. The six pop-up locations were selected to provide a broad geographic representation of York Region. At these sessions, staff shared EarlyON program and service information with parents and caregivers, as well as encouraged them to fill out the survey onsite or online within the month.



Pop-up at Cornell Community Centre - City of Markham

Pop-up at Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum and Community Centre - Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville

Pop-up at The Roc - Town of Georgina

## ELECTRONIC MARKETING CAMPAIGN (SOCIAL MEDIA, WEBSITE, E-BLASTS)

In addition to the pop-ups, the following were used to promote the survey:

- York Region's social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter)
- Social media accounts of community partners (Facebook)
- EarlyON postcards with information about the online survey
- Email blasts from the York Region District School Board, the York Catholic District School Board, the Conseil scolaire catholique MonAvenir, the Conseil scolaire Viamonde and the Association des Francophones de la région de York (AFRY)

The survey was accessible online from March 6 to April 8, 2018, and was available in five languages including English, French, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese and Russian. Feedback gathered through the survey included the level of awareness of and participation in existing programs, barriers to participation, diverse community needs and parent/caregiver preferences.

# WHAT WE HEARD

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## Parent and caregiver survey

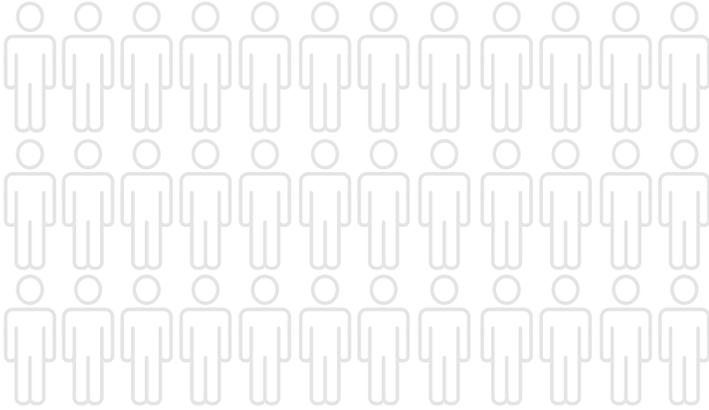
"IT'S A GREAT PLACE FOR MY CHILD TO LEARN AND A GREAT PLACE AS A PARENT TO INTERACT WITH OTHER FAMILIES. IT'S ALSO WONDERFUL THAT IT IS FREE."

- Caregiver



# Parent and caregiver demographics

**405** SURVEY  
RESPONDENTS



**BETWEEN MARCH 6 AND APRIL 8, 2018**



Of the total surveys completed:

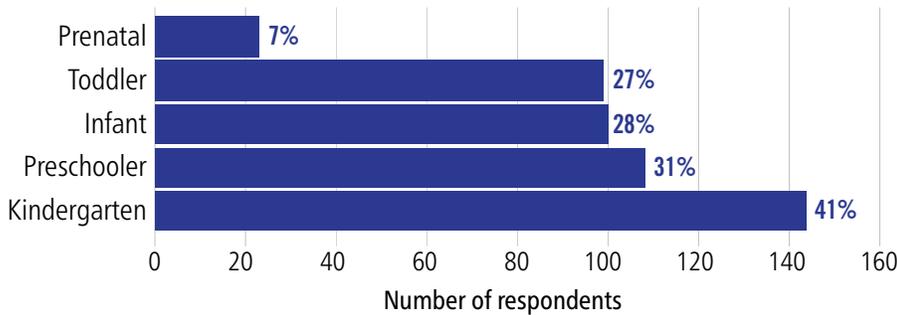
- 88 per cent of respondents lived in York Region
- Of respondents that provided postal codes, the highest number came from the City of Markham (34 per cent)



Of the respondents having or taking care of children aged zero to six years:

- 88 per cent were parents
- 23 per cent were not aware of EarlyON
- 39 per cent have not attended an EarlyON Centre.

## Age category of children



Of the respondents having or taking care of children aged zero to six years, 41 per cent indicated that the children were of kindergarten age.

357 respondents (multiple responses possible, percentages based on number of respondents)  
Note: Age categories are defined here as: Prenatal (before birth), Infant (younger than 12 months), Toddler (12 months to younger than 24 months), Preschooler (24 months to younger than three and a half years), Kindergarten (three and a half years to younger than six years)



# Participant feedback on EarlyON child and family programs (key responses)

## Why respondents attend or have attended EarlyON child and family programs

- For socialization and interaction with others
- For child and/or parent/caregiver learning opportunities
- To support their child's development
- For high-quality programs, staff, environments
- To get information about other services/supports
- Programs are free

## What is working well or has worked well in EarlyON child and family programs

- Programs offer parents/caregivers and children quality learning and networking opportunities, support child development, are age-appropriate, engaging and provide a variety of activities
- Programs provide opportunities for socialization and interaction with other parents/caregivers and children
- Qualified, engaged, knowledgeable and supportive staff
- Flexible and convenient hours of operation
- Variety of and convenient locations
- Inclusive and welcoming environments
- Programs are free

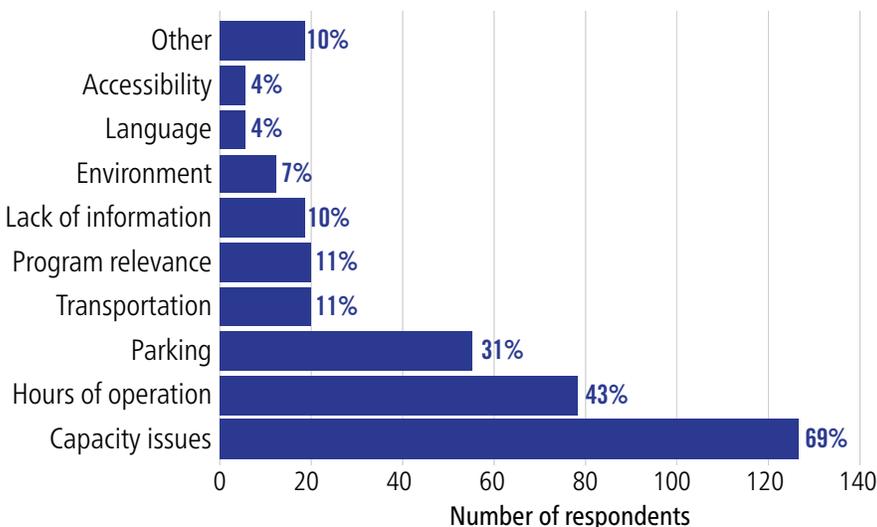
## What can be done differently in EarlyON child and family programs

- More program offerings in general
- Increased variety in program offerings
- Additional program sites/locations
- Increased program capacity (room sizes, number of participants)
- Longer and more convenient hours of operation
- Improved registration procedures (where applicable)
- Better communication of information (calendars, website, promotion)

## If respondents have stopped attending EarlyON child and family programs, why?

- Programs no longer required (parent/caregiver returned to work, child/children now in child care or attending school)
- Inconvenient hours of operation (programs offered during nap time, limited weekend/evening hours)
- Limited program capacity (programs full/too crowded, program spaces too small)
- Program-related concerns (target age group of program not appropriate for age of the child, programs offered are not suitable)
- Inconvenient locations

## Barriers to participation in EarlyON child and family programs



180 respondents (multiple responses possible, percentages based on number of respondents)



When asked if respondents had experienced any barriers when going to EarlyON child and family programs, capacity issues were the primary concern followed by concerns regarding hours of operation and parking limitations.

# Travelling to activities

## Form of transportation



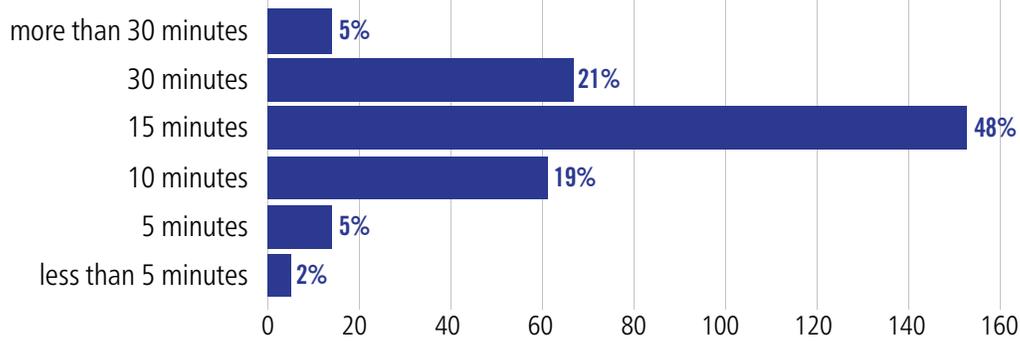
345 respondents (multiple responses possible, percentages based on number of respondents)



When asked how respondents usually get to activities, the form of transportation selected most often was by car.

## Travel time to activities

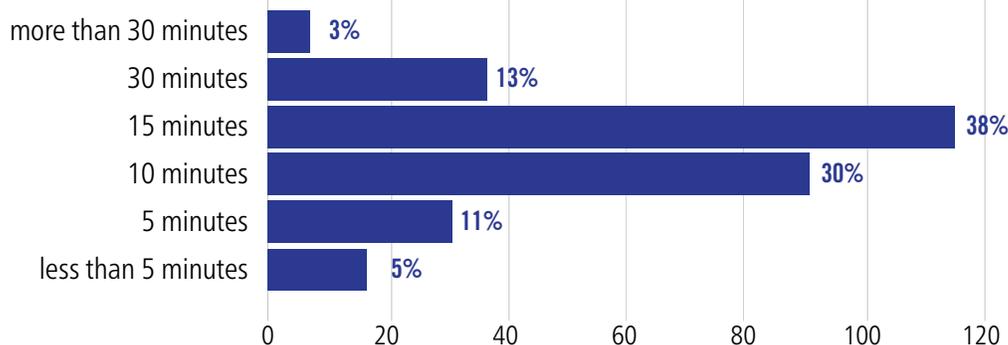
### DRIVING



Number of respondents

326 respondents (respondents could only select one option for drive time)

### WALKING



Number of respondents

300 respondents (respondents could only select one option for walk time)



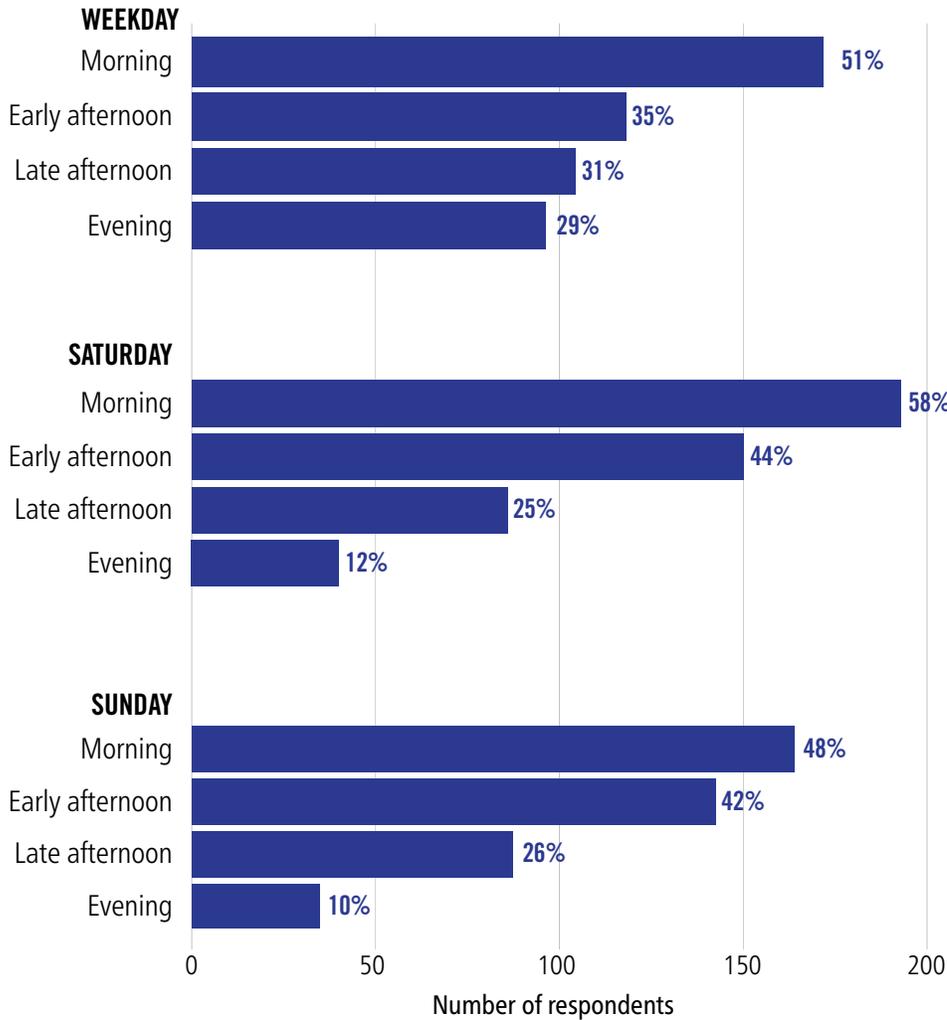
When asked how far respondents would be willing to travel to get to activities, 15 minutes, either by walking or by car, was selected most often.



# Hours and days of operation

Regarding program schedules, respondents noted that program times often conflicted with nap times of younger children. They also noted that it would be beneficial to have more programs offered in the mornings, on weekends, during the summer and on holidays.

## Preferred times to attend programs



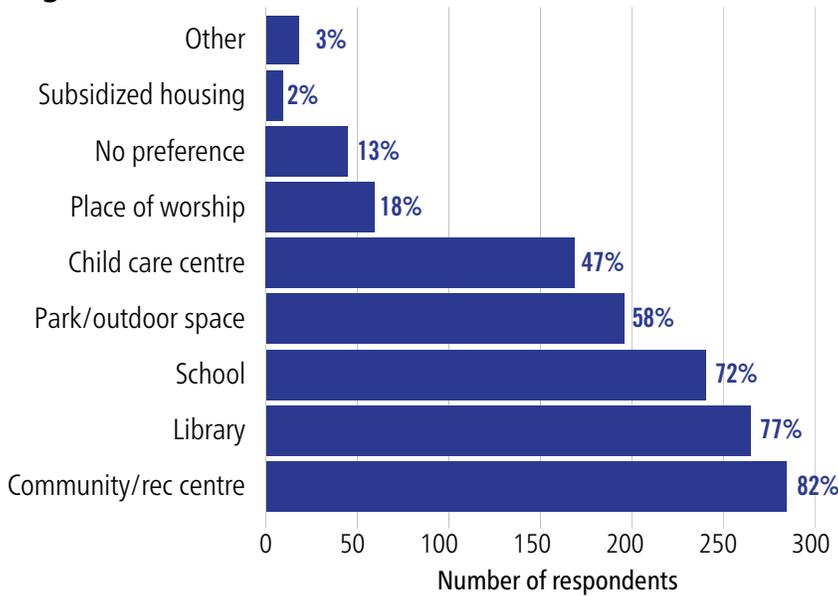
When asked what the best times and days are to go to programs, weekday and weekend mornings were selected most often. Higher percentages of respondents selected early afternoon hours on weekends than other times on weekdays. This suggests there is a demand for increased program hours on weekends.

341 respondents (multiple responses possible, percentages based on number of respondents)

Note: Time categories are defined as: Morning (8 a.m. to 12 p.m.), Early afternoon (12 p.m. to 3 p.m.), Late afternoon (3 p.m. to 5 p.m.), Evening (5 p.m. to 9 p.m.)

# Preferences

## Program locations

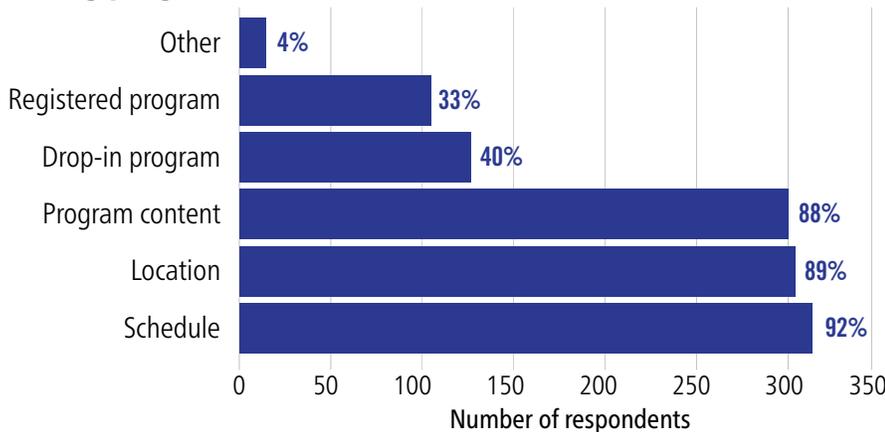


342 respondents (multiple responses possible, percentages based on number of respondents)



Respondents were asked which locations they preferred for programs. Community and recreation centres, libraries and schools were the locations selected most often.

## Choosing programs

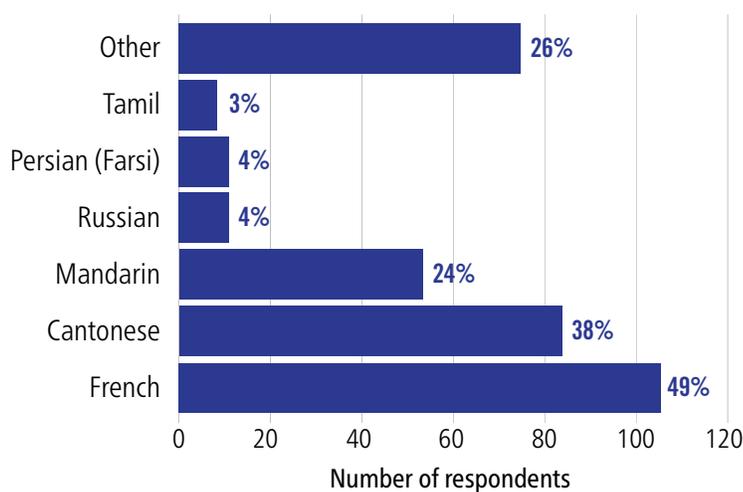


341 respondents (multiple responses possible, percentages based on number of respondents)



Survey respondents were asked what they look for when deciding if a program is right for them. Program schedule, location and content were selected most often.

## Programs in languages other than English



218 respondents (multiple responses possible, percentages based on number of respondents)

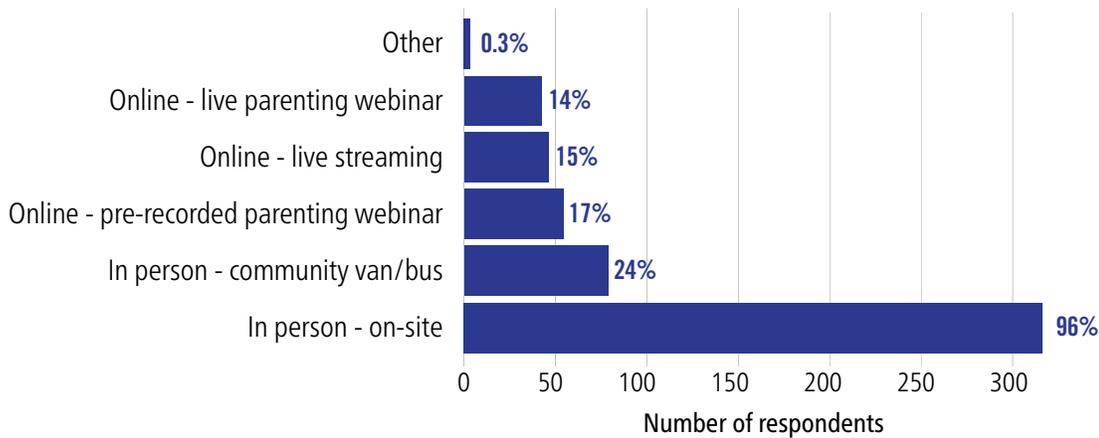


Survey respondents were asked if they were interested in programs being offered in a language other than English. French, Cantonese and Mandarin were the languages selected most often.

Note: Other includes (but is not limited to): Spanish, Korean, Hindi, Italian, Urdu, Arabic, Tagalog, Greek and Gujarati

# Feedback specific to child and family programs

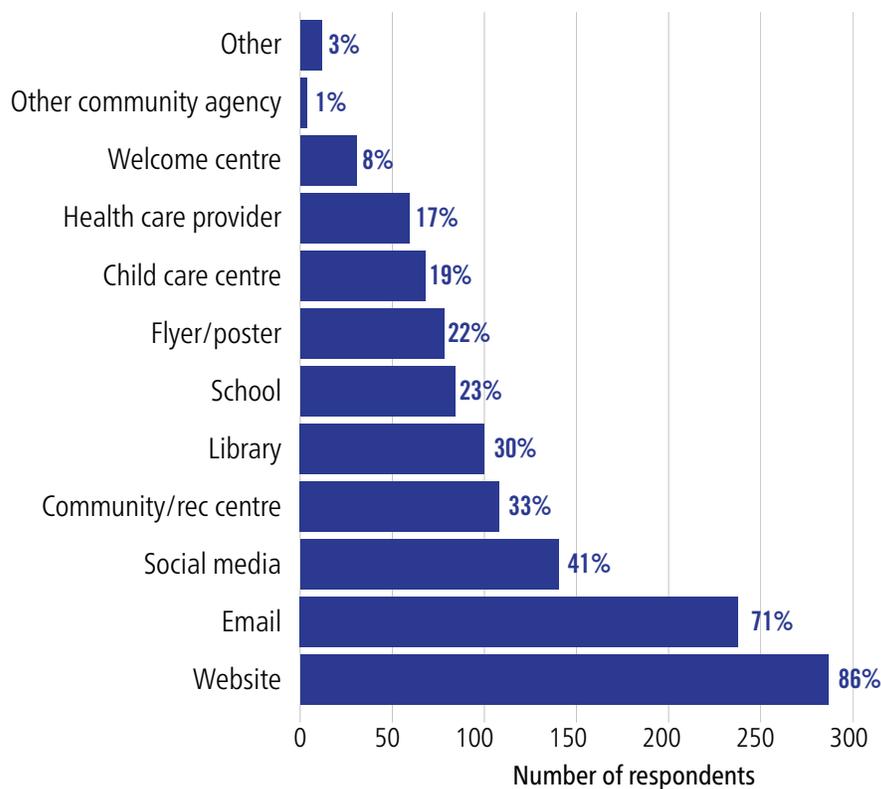
## Accessing programs



Respondents were asked how they would prefer to access child and family programs. Attending a program in-person on-site was selected most often.

329 respondents (multiple responses possible, percentages based on number of respondents)

## Accessing information about programs

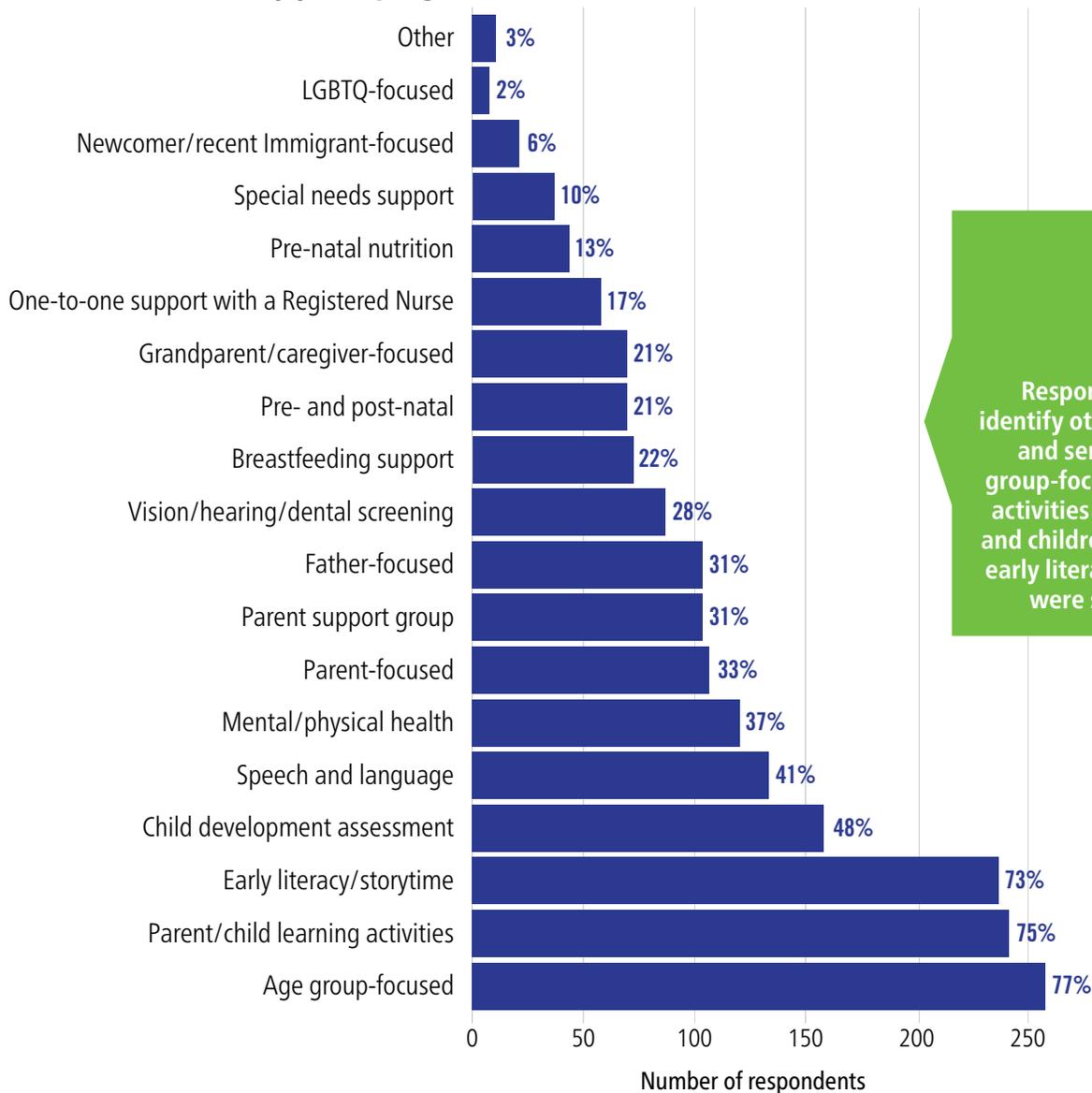


Respondents were asked how they prefer to access information about child and family programs and/or resources. Online methods (website, email and social media) were selected most often.

335 respondents (multiple responses possible, percentages based on number of respondents)

# Feedback specific to early years programs and services

## Interest in other early years programs and services



331 respondents (multiple responses possible, percentages based on number of respondents)



Respondents were asked to identify other early years programs and services of interest. Age group-focused programs, learning activities that parents/caregivers and children could do together and early literacy programs/story time were selected most often.

# WHAT WE HEARD

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## Stakeholder Meetings

### AT STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS, PARTICIPANTS WERE ASKED:

- What is working well (strengths) and what is not working well or missing (barriers, gaps, challenges, limitations) in their existing child and family programs. Participants were asked to consider:
  - Collaboration with other early years stakeholders and service providers
  - The unique needs of their community with respect to geography
  - The unique needs of their community with respect to inclusivity and diversity
- How York Region can support the transition to the new EarlyON centres and ensure consistency with respect to EarlyON core services
- To provide additional suggestions, such as:
  - Innovative ideas
  - Enhancements/changes
  - Approaches to reach those who do not know about or do not come to child and family programs

“BECAUSE THE CENTRE PROVIDES AFFORDABLE ACTIVITIES THAT ARE BENEFICIAL FOR BOTH PARENTS/ CAREGIVERS AND THE CHILD. THE CENTRE ALSO HAS WELL-QUALIFIED STAFF WHO ARE EXPERTS IN THEIR FIELD.”

- Caregiver



# Summary of key ideas



## Strengths of child and family programs

- Programs provide welcoming, supportive and comfortable environments for families
- Participants feel valued and have a sense of belonging
- Programs offer a safe environment in which to receive supports
- Drop-in formats offer flexible hours of operation and provide socialization and networking opportunities
- Staff are professional, knowledgeable, experienced and maintain good connections with families



## Program locations and space

- More program locations are required to meet current needs and address growing demand across the region
- It is difficult to find new locations and appropriate program space
  - Securing no-cost and/or low-cost space in the community is a challenge
  - Available spaces are often too small or unsuitable (for example, there is a lack of storage space, stroller parking)
  - Consistent locations and program spaces that are guaranteed over time are desirable
  - Exclusive use/dedicated program space is preferable over shared space



## Program capacity

- More programs are required to meet current needs and address growing demands across the region
- Existing programs are often at or over capacity and have wait lists
  - Limiting capacity in terms of staff/client ratio is important
  - Room size and fire code restrictions place limits on capacity
- There is a need for increased hours of operation as well as flexibility in hours



## Transportation

- Transportation to program locations is a challenge both in rural and urban areas
- Many program locations
  - Are easily accessible by participants (such as schools)
  - Are walkable (considered beneficial)
  - Are easily reached by public transit
  - Offer free and plentiful parking
- However, some program locations
  - Are only accessible by car
  - Provide limited parking
- Many child and family programs assist families experiencing transportation barriers by providing bus and/or taxi fares, but transportation budgets are limited



## Staff

- Additional staff (and funding for hiring) are required to support the demand for increased programming
- It is beneficial to have long-term staff and staff who live in the communities which they service (long-term commitment facilitates development of trusting relationships with families)
- Consistent, ongoing early development and other professional development training opportunities are required across all locations
- Agencies provide some funding for staff training, including opportunities for awareness, sensitivity, diversity and inclusion training
  - Low- or no-cost training opportunities are often accessed
- Staff require data support to assist with local planning (such as demand, gaps, under-servicing), including access to:
  - Program attendance data
  - Community demographic data
  - Early Development Instrument (EDI) results
  - Feedback related to effectiveness of programming
- Salaries/benefits must be consistent for all staff across all locations



## Inclusivity/Diversity

- Programs are “universal” and inclusive of everyone
- The demographic makeup of communities (languages spoken and cultural groups) is diverse and changes over time
- Many participants experience language barriers given their limited knowledge of English
  - Some staff speak languages of the community they serve which is a strength
  - A variety of resources is provided in different languages to service needs of the community
  - There is need for additional resources in languages other than English, as well as a demand for translators and interpreters; however, the cost of both is high
- Some locations provide language-specific and/or culture-specific programming
  - There is a demand for additional language-specific and/or culture-specific programming
  - There is a need for French language supports and programming in French
- It is difficult for programming to support specific languages and/or cultural groups and still be inclusive of everyone
  - Programming specific to any one language or culture causes “unintentional exclusion”
- More needs to be done to better support inclusivity, such as addressing the needs of:
  - Newcomers
  - Families with children having special needs
  - Members of the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Two-Spirit, Queer) community
  - Young mothers
  - At-risk populations (such as low income families)
  - Indigenous communities
- Many locations are not physically accessible (space requiring access via stairs or elevator, doors too small to accommodate wheelchairs, no ramps, etc.), which can be a barrier to participation



“MY SON AND I ABSOLUTELY LOVE THE STAFF AND PROGRAMS AT THE EARLY ON CENTRE. WE LOOK FORWARD TO OUR DROP IN TIMES AND REGISTERED PROGRAMS SO MUCH! THEY BRING A LOT OF JOY AND VALUE TO OUR LIVES, AND WE’VE MADE LIFELONG FRIENDS AND CONNECTIONS THERE. WE ARE VERY GRATEFUL TO HAVE THIS CENTRE SO CLOSE TO US. THANK YOU.”

- Caregiver



## Partnerships/Collaborations

- Many partnerships exist between child and family programs and other agencies/organizations that provide early years services, and these partnerships help to strengthen the overall system
- Continue to enhance and establish partnerships/relationships with external early years programs and services to:
  - Better understand programs/services offered
  - Minimize duplication
  - Improve referral processes between agencies/organizations
  - Facilitate co-delivery of programs
  - Engage families including those that are hard to reach (such as high-risk families and newcomers)
- Good relationships between program staff and school administration are important for successful programming in school locations
- Include the voices of the community to reflect diverse cultural perspectives and needs when planning
- Regular all-staff networking meetings (with participation from all locations) would help to ensure consistency and encourage collaboration



## Communication/Promotion

- Develop a comprehensive, centralized communication strategy that provides clear, consistent messaging for everyone within the system, including EarlyON management and staff, parents/caregivers and external stakeholders throughout the region
- Define “quality” and ensure consistency across all locations in terms of policies, service delivery and programming
- Develop and maintain a client-friendly EarlyON website
  - Finding information online has been confusing, unclear and difficult to navigate for families
  - Provide a single-point-of-contact phone number where parents/caregivers can obtain information on locations, programs and services



## Reaching families that do not know about or do not come to child and family programs

- Create an advertising/promotional campaign to attract families to EarlyON centres
- Advertise broadly through existing promotional materials such as guides circulated by recreation centres and libraries
- Reach out to:
  - New mothers through health care professionals and/or distributing information packages to birth mothers during hospital discharge
  - Newcomers through Welcome Centres
- Set up booths and pop-ups in malls and at local community events
- Arrange a community open house to formally introduce EarlyON centres



## Innovative ideas

- A one-stop shopping approach to service delivery in which families can access a variety of services at one location
- A website that is searchable by postal code and that links to websites of local municipalities and other agencies/organizations offering early years services
- An EarlyON caravan that is a full-time, fully-staffed mobile unit which moves from location to location to reach and service more families
- A mobile site that employs Indigenous staff and services the Indigenous community
- Indigenous land recognition and displaying Indigenous art at all sites, as well as the LGBTQ symbol to encourage inclusivity
- Google Translate on iPads at all locations to assist participants with language barriers
- Toy lending/exchange within programs
- A sensory room for children with special needs
- Additional programming to support families (such as cooking on a budget, basic life skills training, programming specifically for children with special needs)

# WHERE ARE WE GOING?

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"WE ENJOY AND REALLY APPRECIATE ALL THE PROGRAMS AVAILABLE TO THE PARENTS AND THE WONDERFUL STAFF WHO PROVIDE THESE HIGH-QUALITY, ENRICHING PROGRAMS! JUST WISH THERE COULD BE MORE SPACE FOR THEM!"

- Caregiver



# RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS FOR EARLYON CENTRES IN YORK REGION

As the Service System Manager responsible for the oversight and accountability of EarlyON centres in York Region, the Region has gathered valuable feedback through this community engagement to help inform ongoing planning and development of EarlyON centres. It is important that EarlyON centres provide quality programs and services that meet the unique needs of our communities while ensuring that they are delivered in an efficient manner.

The Region heard from parents, communities and other early years stakeholders that there is a need for EarlyON child and family programs and services in York Region that:

- Can be found in more locations in our Region
- Are easy to get access to (geographically and physically)
- Provide increased hours of operation and more flexible hours
- Support diversity and are inclusive of all children and families
- Are easy to find out about and clearly communicates information about EarlyON programs (calendars, website, promotion)
- Facilitate strong collaboration/partnerships that assist families with referrals
- Are delivered at no-cost to families, so that all families can take part

## Next steps to respond to our communities' needs include:



Continue to expand the current EarlyON system by increasing the number of site locations, hours of operation and services offered across York Region



Continue to work with service providers to ensure they meet the local needs of children, families and caregivers with inclusive, responsive, accessible, welcoming and high-quality programs and services



Work with service providers to redefine outcomes of core programs in alignment with the mandatory core services, while working towards the same goal — that all EarlyON centres across York Region provide the same core programs with the same intended outcomes



Establish an EarlyON Community of Practice for Facilitators to further build the capacity of EarlyON facilitators, share best practices and better facilitate community connections



Provide consistent training for EarlyON staff that promotes the inclusion of all children and is in alignment with *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*



Redesign the [york.ca/EarlyON](http://york.ca/EarlyON) webpage to ensure it is user-friendly and responsive to community needs and provides families with a "one-stop shop" for program information and early years community resources



Work with service providers to improve registration processes for families



Support service providers and the community by expanding partnerships with York Region Public Health and Early Intervention Services



Increase data sharing (such as demographic data and Early Development Instrument (EDI) results) with service providers to better support planning for EarlyON programs and services





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