

BRUCE COUNTY

Early Learning and Child Care

Service System Plan: 2024-2028



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Message from the Warden

It brings me great pleasure to share Bruce County's Early Learning and Child Care Service System Plan: 2024-2028. This roadmap outlines our collective vision for creating an affordable, accessible, inclusive, high-quality child care system that is responsive to the needs of our Bruce County community.

Over the past five years, the [Child Care & Early Years - Service System Plan: 2019-2024](#) was delivered with dedication, resiliency, and effective communication. With the implementation of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care system (CWELCC), we saw increased affordability for families, along with workforce strategies to support the demand of care as well as plans to increase access in underserved and marginalized communities. For more information on the progress Bruce County made through the last plan period, please visit: www.brucecounty.on.ca/childrens-services.

The Early Learning and Child Care Service System Plan: 2024-2028 is a collective effort, shaped by feedback from families, child care staff, and community partners. Your insights have been invaluable, and we thank you for your active participation in its development.

As we move forward, we'll embrace innovation, foster responsible growth, and continue to be responsive to the needs of our early years system. We will continue to build a strong and inclusive child care and early years community while enhancing programs and partnerships that support early learning, development, and well-being.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we'll create an even brighter future for our children.

Warm regards,
Chris Peabody
Warden, Bruce County



What is an Early Learning and Child Care Service System Plan?

The Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 (CCEYA) requires Service System Managers to establish a child care and early years programs and services plan (Service System Plan) for their service area that addresses matters of provincial interest under the Act.

As one of 47 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM) and District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs) in Ontario, it is important for us to engage with our community in planning, funding, and delivering local child care and early years programs and services.

Service system planning provides us with an opportunity to explore and gather in-depth knowledge about our community's needs, analyze the impacts of programs and services in our community, identify progress and service gaps, and develop key directions in our journey together.

As a CMSM, it is our role to implement Ontario's vision that all children and families have access to a range of accessible, affordable, responsive, high-quality, early years and child care programs and services that are child and family centred and contribute to children's learning, development, and well-being.



Section 1: Defining the Landscape



Here in Bruce County we are the Explorers! Here's to children who look under rocks and parents who help with the lifting. Here's to active inquiring minds, and those with the vision to look beyond obstacles.



About Bruce County

Bruce County is an upper-tier Municipality in Southern Ontario, founded in 1867 and consisting of eight local Municipalities. Bruce County is entirely within Saugeen Anishnaabeking, the ancestral, traditional and treaty lands and territories of the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation and the Saugeen First Nation, together known as the Saugeen Ojibway Nation. This area is renowned for its shorelines, farmland, and trails.

As highlighted in the [Bruce County Strategic Plan 2023-2026](#), Bruce County is committed to a meaningful truth and reconciliation process with Indigenous people and communities.

On July 4, 2024, with Council members from both First Nations, County Council endorsed the Bruce County's [Indigenous Reconciliation Framework](#), and Bruce County's [Saugeen Anishnaabek Reconciliation Pathway and Action Plan](#). This distinction-based approach acknowledges the Saugeen Ojibway Nation, as knowledge keepers in their traditional territory, and recognizes our unique government to government relationship with the Saugeen Ojibway Nation.

Vision

Bruce County, a welcoming, innovative, thriving community, committed to the well-being of current and future generations.

Mission

We foster innovation and sustainable growth, leading, engaging, and collaborating in the delivery of excellent services for residents, businesses, and visitors to our community.

Values

Our values guide all our decisions and actions:



Excellence

Committed to adapting, enhancing, and evolving responsive services for our community.



Welcoming Community

Cultivate a welcoming community of diversity, equity, and inclusion.



Good Governance

Prioritize transparency, accountability, integrity, and respect in all we do.



Environmental Stewardship

Protect, preserve, and celebrate our natural environment.



Financial Sustainability

Building financial capacity to sustain our resources.

Understanding Bruce County demographics is important so that we can provide adaptive and inclusive services to our community. The following sections include data from the 2021 Census¹, and from the 2016 Census² for comparison.

¹ Statistics Canada (2023). Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

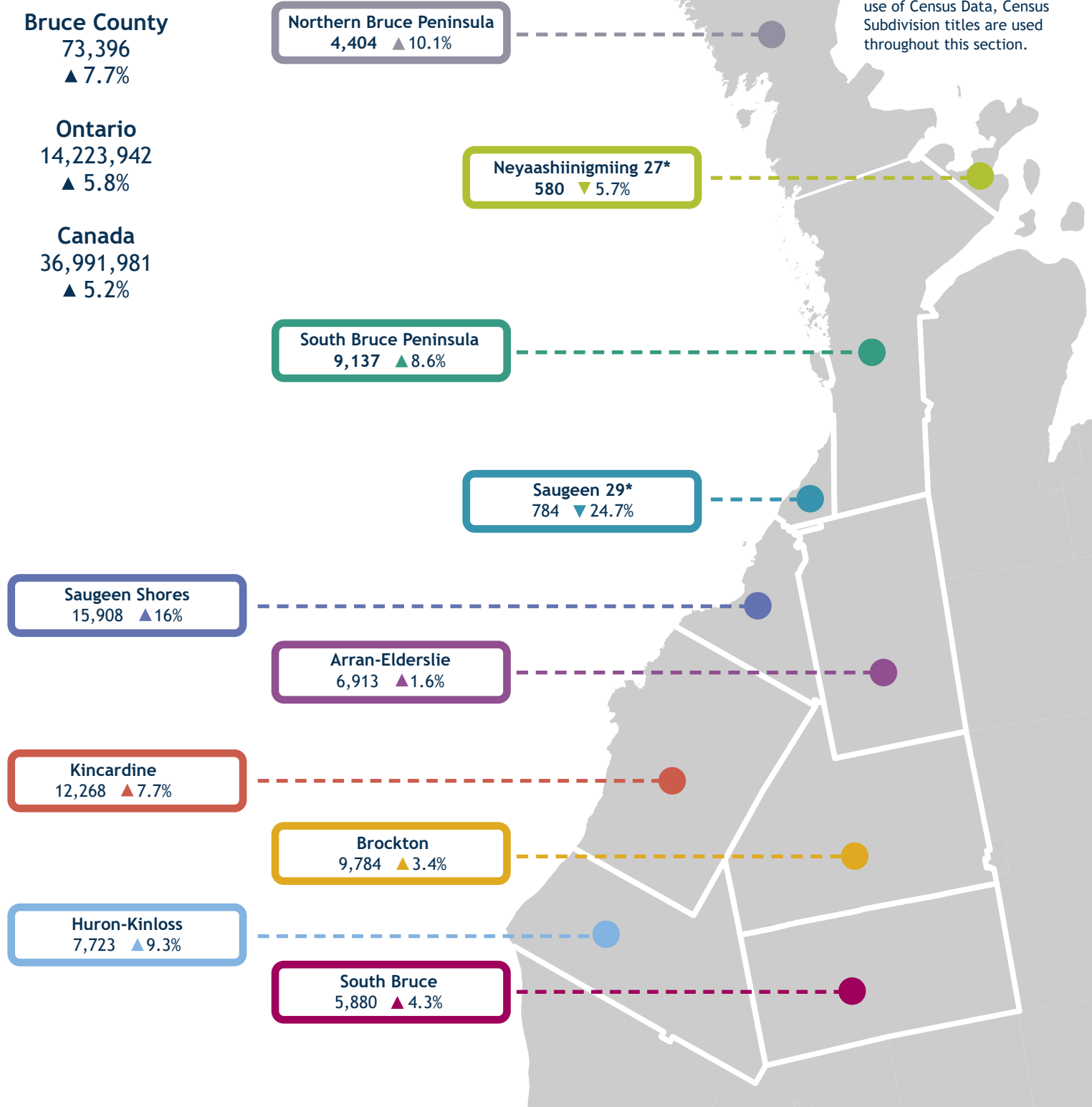
² Statistics Canada. (2017). Census Profile, 2016 Census. Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/bsolc/olc-cel/olc-cel?catno=98-316-X2016001&lang=eng>.

Total Population and Population Change

73,396 residents in the geographic area of Bruce County.

7.7% population increase in Bruce County from 2016-2021, compared to **3.1%** from 2011-2016. Bruce County is experiencing growth!

*Census data for the geographic area of Bruce County includes two Census Subdivisions, Saugeen 29 and Neyaashiinigmiing 27, representing Census data for Saugeen First Nation, and Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation, both self-governed and separate from the upper-tier Municipality of Bruce County. To demonstrate use of Census Data, Census Subdivision titles are used throughout this section.



0-12 Population

14% of the population in Bruce County, Saugeen 29, and Neyaashiinigmiing 27, is between 0-12 years old. This proportion aligns with both Ontario's and Canada's overall population demographics.

	0-12 Population (2021 Census)	Total	<1 Years	1 Years	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years	5 Years	6-12 Years	% of Total Population Under 12
Arran-Elderslie	1,215	90	95	95	100	80	100	655	18%	
Brockton	1485	115	105	105	120	120	110	810	15%	
Huron-Kinloss	1265	120	100	105	100	100	80	660	16%	
Kincardine	1920	140	135	140	150	155	130	1,070	16%	
Neyaashiinigmiing 27	65	-	5	5	10	5	-	40	11%	
Northern Bruce Peninsula	295	20	20	20	20	25	20	170	7%	
Saugeen 29	125	10	5	15	10	5	10	70	16%	
Saugeen Shores	2,250	175	160	195	165	170	205	1,180	14%	
South Bruce	1,020	80	75	95	80	80	85	525	17%	
South Bruce Peninsula	935	50	60	55	65	60	75	570	10%	
Bruce County Total	10,595	800	750	830	825	800	815	5,775	14%	

Family Characteristics

As of 2021, **76%** of families with children were couples, and **24%** were lone-parents.

10,400 Families with Children

Couples with Children

Number of Families	7,920
Average Family Size	4.1
Average Family Income	\$125,000

Lone-Parent Families

Number of Families	2,480
Average Family Size	2.7
Average Family Income	\$62,400

11,470 Families without Children

Average Family Size	2
Average Family Income	\$81,000



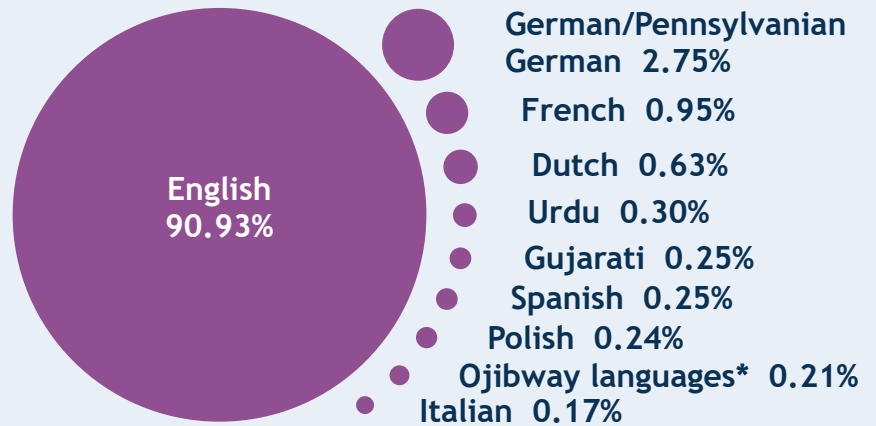
Languages

99.4% of Bruce County's population has knowledge of English, meaning the person can conduct a conversation in English.

1% of the population has knowledge of French.

Mother tongue is the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the person.

The top 10 Mother Tongue languages in Bruce County:



**including Anishinaabemowin (Chippewa), Saulteau (Western Ojibway), Ojibway n.o.s*

Indigenous Identity

4.5% of the total population in Bruce County, Saugeen 29 and Neyaashiinigmiing 27 identifies as **Indigenous** (3.1% First Nations, 1.2% Métis, 0.1% Inuit, 0.1% Other), compared to **2.9%** of Ontario's population.

Over 35% of this population with Indigenous identity reside in the First Nations Census Subdivisions of Neyaashiiningmiing 27 and Saugeen 29.

Saugeen Shores, Kincardine, and South Bruce Peninsula have the most residents identifying as Indigenous.



Visible Minority Identity

3.8% of Bruce County's population identifies as a visible minority, compared to **34%** of Ontario's population.

Immigrant Identity

395 Bruce County residents identified as Immigrants from 2016 to 2021.

43% reside in Saugeen Shores.

24% reside in Kincardine.

16% reside in Brockton.

8% reside in South Bruce Peninsula.

Human Services Department

Bruce County Human Services provides a range of integrated programs to support the well-being of people in our communities. We embrace an equitable and person centred approach in our delivery of services, that include:

Early learning programs and supports for licensed child care

Financial and stability supports

Housing and homelessness supports

Strategic community initiatives

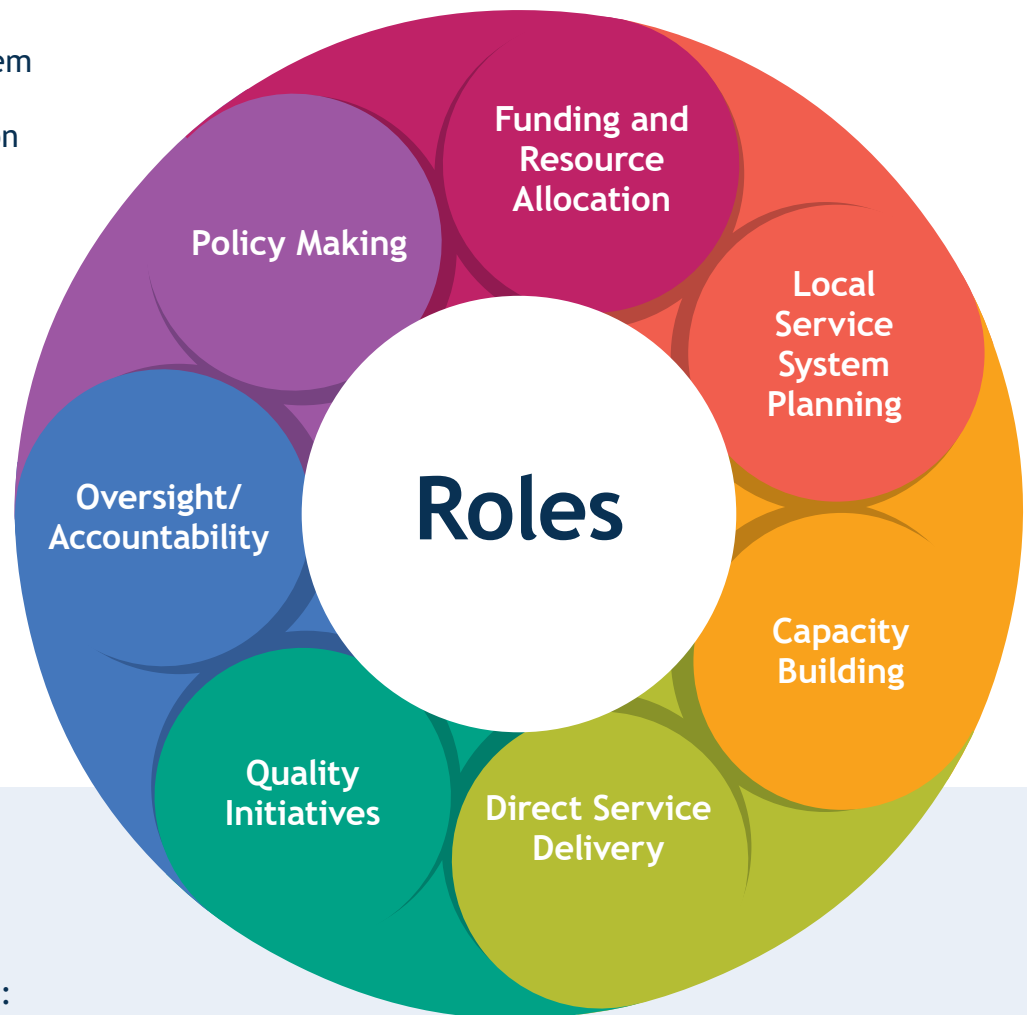
We all have a role in helping others, and our priority is to ensure everyone feels valued and included.



Children's Services Division

Bruce County is one of 47 Consolidated Municipal System Managers (CMSM) or District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) in Ontario.

Child care and early years programming falls under the direction of the Ministry of Education.



As a CMSM, our role includes:

- Developing a local early years and child care service system plan to meet our communities' long-term needs, in coordination with school boards and local service providers.
- Planning, negotiating, and maintaining service contracts with local child care service providers.
- Planning, administering funding, and supporting licensed child care and early years programs.
- Coordinating and administering the delivery of Ontario's Child Care Fee Subsidy program to families residing in Bruce County.
- Administering and delivering Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) in our community to allow children with special needs to participate in early years and child care programs at no additional costs to parents.
- Co-funding the delivery of local early years and child care programs.
- Providing capacity building support to local early years and child care service providers in areas such as governance, finance, operations, and service system planning.
- Playing a key role in oversight, by ensuring that local early years and child care services and service providers meet a high standard of quality and safety.

Supports to Licensed Child Care Programs

Bruce County has purchase of service agreements with **20** child care operators, including one directly operated home child care agency, providing **2,125** licensed child care spaces over **37** sites across the county.

Child Care Locations and Spaces	2020	2021	2022	2023
Head Offices	20	20	20	20
Number of licensed spaces	2,096	2,096	2,120	2,125
Operating Capacity	35%	51%	63%	70%

Licensed spaces refers to the number of licensed child care spaces approved by the Ministry of Education based on size of building, room, etc. as directed by the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014.

Operating capacity refers to the number of licensed child care spaces that are being operated and staffed.

Financial Supports to Licensed Child Care Operators

Child care funding is flowed to Bruce County from the Ministry of Education through a purchase of service agreement which describes the requirements of the funding and obligations for service system managers.

Funding available to child care operators varies from core funding covering general operating expenses, special purpose funding to support play-based materials and equipment, repairs and maintenance, to Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) funding to support fee reductions, wage enhancements, and funding to increase access.

The following chart illustrates the funding Bruce County provided to licensed child care programs in 2023.

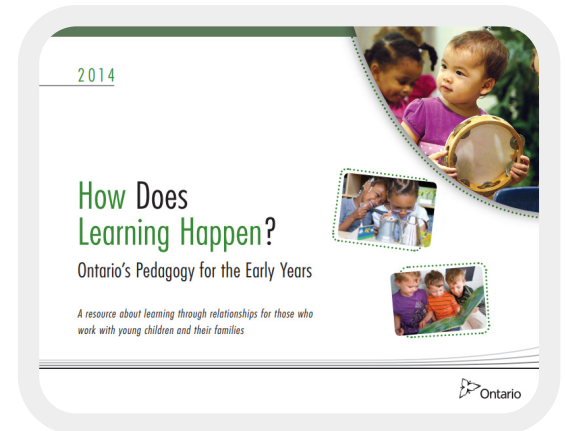
Funding Type	2023 Funding
Pay Equity	\$14,606
Capacity Building	\$207,225
Fee Subsidy	\$720,020
Small Water Works	\$26,933
Repairs and Maintenance	\$123,817
Play Based Materials and Equipment	\$145,014
SNR Enhancement Funding	\$436,150
Wage Enhancement Grant	\$880,152
General Operating Funding	\$2,663,199
Transformation	\$103,399
CWELCC Fee Reduction (Revenue Replacement)	\$6,854,689
CWELCC Workforce Compensation	\$146,484
CWELCC Start-Up Grants	\$109,961
CWELCC Cost Escalation	\$318,679
Total	\$12,750,328



Enhancing Quality in Early Learning and Child Care

Bruce County's Early Learning Coordinator engages, mentors, and supports educators in the early learning and child care community in accordance with *How Does Learning Happen?* - Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years. In collaboration with the Children's Services Team, this capacity role supports the implementation of quality supports, coordinates professional learning and community of practice events, and leads the mentorship program.

For more information on **How Does Learning Happen?**, visit: <https://files.ontario.ca/edu-how-does-learning-happen-en-2021-03-23.pdf>



Quality Scan Tool

To facilitate inquiry, enable educators to critically reflect, and exchange ideas to support their quality journey, the Early Learning Coordinator, in collaboration with the child care supervisor, completes a Quality Scan Tool (QST). The QST fosters conversations based on observations. The degree of assistance given to meet the special requirements of the program is determined by the QST findings.

Professional Learning Opportunities

Professional learning provides opportunities to network, share, and most importantly, stay up to date with the most recent developments in the child care and early years sector. This supports educators' knowledge and abilities while providing high-quality care. The process of professional growth lasts a lifetime.

As the CMSM, Bruce County plays a significant role in supporting professional learning opportunities which focus on current priority areas such as mental health, anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion, Indigenous perspective and pedagogies, and supporting children with special needs through inclusive practices.

To help address the needs of educators, professional learning is provided through a range of learning opportunities. Educators can expand their capacity, stay informed, and stay connected in their professional learning journey through communities of practice, learning conferences, in-person/hybrid sessions, and e-learning through the Community Learning Library.



Mentorship Program

The provincial government's investment in the child care and early years workforce has led to the creation of the Bruce County Mentorship Program.

The goals of the program are to:

Improve quality by providing tools, resources, and guidance to educators, enabling them to create enriching environments for children.

Enhance skills while receiving support, feedback, and professional development opportunities.

Increase workplace satisfaction by fostering a supportive mentor-mentee relationship. Educators feel valued and motivated, leading to a positive impact on their well-being and performance.

Reducing workplace stress by providing a network of support. Educators can share challenges, seek advice, and collaborate with their mentors, creating a healthier work environment.

Support child development. When educators receive effective guidance, children benefit from enriched learning experiences and nurturing care.



Early Childhood Education Recruitment and Retention

Together with members of the Early Years Planning Committee, The Early Learning Educator Recruitment and Retention Working Group, and other key stakeholders, Bruce County identified recruitment and retention of Early Childhood Educators as a key priority for a high-quality, sustainable, and accessible child care system.

Bruce County continues to invest in supporting existing Early Childhood Educators and supporting child care operators with the recruitment of new educators through:

- Promotion within schools and communities across Bruce County.
- Building relationships with students.
- Providing educational bursaries.
- Funding an employee assistance program.
- Development of resource tool kits to support recruitment and retention.
- Offering mentorship opportunities to support capacity building.



Did You Know?

Bruce County has partnered with Fanshawe College and local funders to develop and implement an innovative ECE program partially funded by bursaries, with timing and location created around student needs.

For more information on Becoming an ECE visit
www.brucecounty.on.ca/be-early-childhood-educator-bruce-county

Supporting Child Care Expansion

Under the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care system, Ontario will support the creation of approximately 86,000 new licensed child care spaces by December 2026.

Through the Access and Inclusion Framework, the Ministry of Education has developed a model to allocate **funding for new spaces for children aged 0-5**, with a focus on improving equity of access by working toward a common provincial **access ratio of 37%**.

Bruce County has been allocated an expansion of **645 spaces between 2023 and 2026**. Bruce County is working with interested operators to ensure spaces are opened in communities where there is a low access rate to licensed child care, while considering the following population demographics:

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

Over \$679,000 of start-up grants allocated in 2023 supported the creation of 136 net new spaces set to open before 2026.

Start-up grants will be available to support the creation of new spaces in locations and for populations most in need.

For more information on child care expansion and applicable financial supports, please visit www.brucecounty.on.ca/human-services/early-learning-and-child-care-expansion-toolkit



Child Care and Early Years Supports and Services



Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care

In 2021, the Government of Canada identified child care as a national priority to enhance early learning and childhood development, support workforce participation, and contribute to economic recovery through the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system. The new system will lower child care costs and improve access, quality, and inclusion across Ontario's child care and early years sector. This agreement is part of the Federal government's commitment to deliver \$10 per day child care by the end of 2026.



90% of licensed child care operators in Bruce County opted into CWELCC system, making child care more affordable for families.

“

Expanded access to licensed, quality child care services not only supports early learning and well-being for children, but also positively impacts our local economy by supporting workforce participation and reducing poverty for low-income families.”

Child Care Fee Subsidy

Child Care fee subsidy is available to families residing in Bruce County, who have children aged 0-13 years. Families may qualify to have the full or partial amount of their child care costs paid based on financial needs determined by their recent notice of assessment and child tax benefit. Fee Subsidy is available to families in approved home child care settings, licensed child care programs, nursery schools, before and after school programs and authorized children's recreation programs.

Visit www.brucecounty.on.ca/services/human-services/child-care-fee-subsidy



Did You Know?

On a monthly average, 180 children are supported in attending licensed child care through Bruce County's Fee Subsidy program.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres

EarlyON Child and Family Centres provide high-quality, welcoming, and inclusive programs for caregivers and children aged 0-6 years. Programs foster a sense of belonging and contribute to overall well-being. The goals of these programs are to:

Strengthen Adult-Child Relationships: We foster meaningful connections between adults and children, recognizing their pivotal role in healthy development.

Provide Parent/Caregiver Education and Support: Our programs empower parents/caregivers with knowledge and resources, equipping them to navigate the early years effectively.

Promote Healthy Child Development: Parent-caregiver-child interactive programs ensure that children receive the best start in life through engaging, inquiry-based learning experiences.

Leverage Community Partnerships: We work closely with our local early years partners to ensure equitable service that meets the needs of children and families across Bruce County.

Did You Know?

To better serve all Municipalities, Bruce County directly operates 6 main EarlyON sites and 55+ innovative EarlyON Mobile sites!

The impacts associated with the pandemic had profound effects on the mental well-being of children, families, and caregivers, which have contributed to a range of mental health concerns. EarlyON programs support families navigating these challenges and can provide resources and referrals to interventions that can significantly enhance academic achievement and overall health and well-being outcomes throughout life.

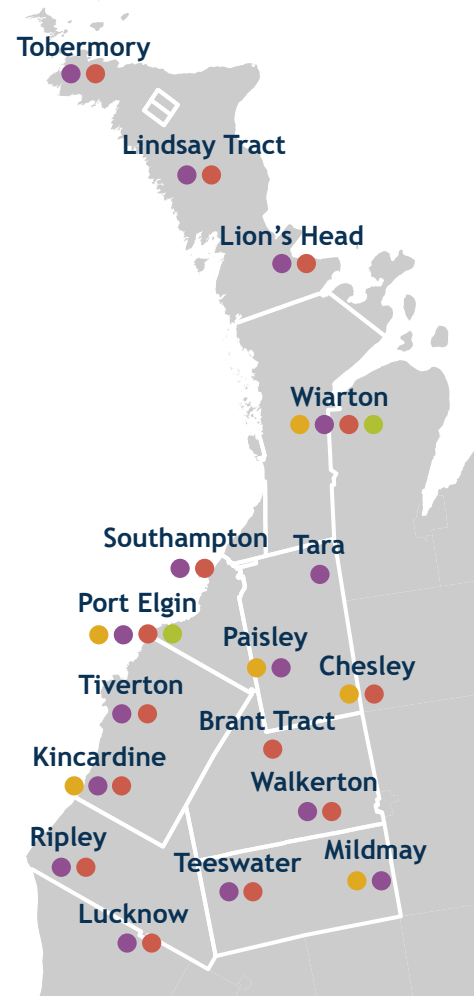
3,200 followers on Facebook.

Join us at @EarlyONBruceCounty



Bruce County EarlyON Sites and Locations

- **EarlyON Main Site:** a permanent leased space offering weekly programming.
- **EarlyON Mobile Site:** a temporary indoor or outdoor program space offering seasonal, bi-weekly, or session-based programs.
- **EarlyON Virtual Service:** virtual or hybrid programs, services, and resources.
- **EarlyON Partnership Program:** Collaborative programming offered at our Main and Mobile sites.
- **Indigenous Led Program:** EarlyON works with Indigenous partners to plan and implement culturally responsive early years programs and services to foster cultural awareness among both urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and families, and deepen general knowledge of Indigenous culture within an inclusive environment. These programs and services integrate traditional teachings and promote understanding and respect for the rich culture and language of Indigenous communities in Bruce County.



Licensed Home Child Care

Bruce County directly operates a licensed home child care program which contracts with home child care providers to provide quality child care in their home.



The home child care program offers individual care in a small group setting. Home child care providers offer positive experiences and view children as competent, capable, and rich in potential. Providers build positive relationships with children and their families and provide environments and experiences to engage children in active, creative, and meaningful exploration, play and inquiry.

Child Care Caseworkers, who are trained in Early Childhood Education, work closely with each home child care provider to ensure they meet Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 licensing requirements and promote the safety and well-being of children. Visits are completed on a regular basis to the providers home by the Child Care Caseworker to offer support and training.

All home child care providers approved under the County of Bruce Licensed Home Child Care Program are enrolled in the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system. Families with children 0-6 years of age are eligible for the applicable fee reductions.

Visit www.brucecounty.on.ca/services/human-services/onest-bruce-county to explore your licensed child care options.

Did You Know?

There are 20 Licensed Home Child Care Providers in Bruce County. An increase of 7 providers since the pandemic.

Special Needs Resource Program

Bruce County's directly operated Special Needs Resource Program provides a tiered level of service, with the purpose of providing universal inclusion strategies, focused short term consultation services, and intensive, individual support when needed.

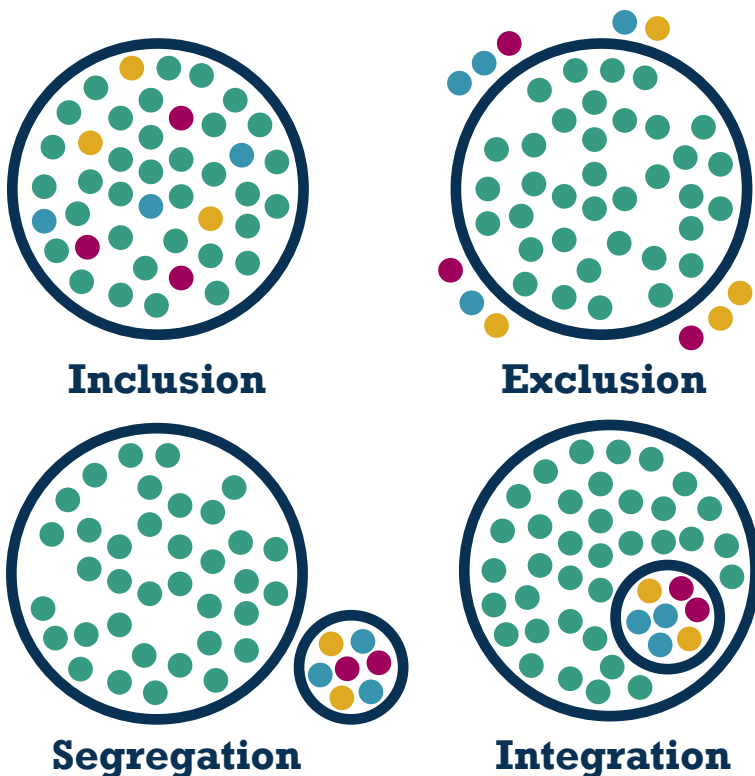


The Special Needs Resource Team builds capacity while promoting inclusion for all children within licensed child care settings, EarlyON Child and Family programs, authorized camps, and children's recreation and skill building programs.

Resource Consultants work closely with parents and service providers to enhance each identified child's skills. Services are designed to respect the family's values and choices.

Did You Know?

On a monthly average, there are 163 children receiving special needs resourcing supports.



For more information please visit:
www.brucecounty.on.ca/services/human-services/resource-program

Enhancement Program Support Fund

The goal of the Enhancement Program Support Fund is to support the inclusion of children with special needs (aged 0-12) in licensed child care programs, camps, and authorized recreation programs at no additional cost to parents or guardians.

To be eligible for the Enhancement Program Support Fund, child care operators are required to confirm the following set criteria of needs;

Health: the child has serious health issues (e.g., uncontrolled seizures)

Mobility: the child requires adult support to access the environment

Safety: the child needs more attention and care than other children of the same age (e.g., running away, self-harm, aggression)

Did You Know?

In 2023, Bruce County provided \$436,149.84 in Enhancement Program Support Funding to operators.

Journey Through the Ages and Stages (ASQ)

Bruce County's Journey Through the Ages and Stages uses the Ages and Stages Questionnaire® (ASQ™) to help parents and caregivers understand and guide child development, and is currently available to all families attending Bruce County child care and early years programs. This proactive approach allows the child care system to be responsive to children's learning, development, and well-being.

The ASQ helps parents and caregivers to celebrate milestones and provides information on what to look for next. Further, it provides important information for children who may require links to community support, have additional needs for developmental well-being, and may require enhancement support.

Data gathered from the ASQ is also valuable in understanding and prioritizing services and programs that meet the needs of children in Bruce County.

Bruce County has partnered with The Kids Brain Health Network (KBHN) at Queen's University to mutually promote family-centered early intervention in infant mental health and early child development.

To learn more about Journey Through the Ages and Stages, www.brucecounty.on.ca/sites/default/files/cs_jttas_information_package_for_parentsguardians_web_version.pdf

Did You Know?

320 children participated in the Spring 2023 Journey Through the Ages and Stages and 336 in the Fall of 2023. Resource consultants made referrals and connections with 209 unique children.

Bruce County's OneList

OneList Bruce County is an online child care application system that simplifies the process of finding and applying for child care. It connects families with all registered child care providers in their chosen area and lets them apply to one or more programs with one simple application.

OneList helps families find child care programs near their homes, work places and anywhere in between. If a desired provider has no spaces available, the family can still register on the waitlist to be notified when a space becomes available.



1254 children on the waitlist at year-end 2023.

For more information or to apply for child care in Bruce County, please visit www.brucecounty.on.ca/services/human-services/onelist-bruce-county



Section 2: Exploring and Engaging with our Community



To inform this plan, we consulted parents and guardians, community partners, and early childhood educators, and incorporated perspectives from ongoing community engagement.



Community Engagement

Parent/Guardian Consultation

Including the voices of parents and guardians of children in our community in developing our service system plan is important to Bruce County. From February 12 to March 17, 2024, a 16-question survey with open-ended feedback was widely distributed and promoted to parents and guardians of children aged 0-12 who reside in Bruce County. The purpose of the survey was to better understand parent and guardian priorities and expectations, as well as successes and gaps in child care and early years services across the County.

600 parents/guardians completed the Parent/Guardian survey, with representation from all 8 Municipalities and 2 First Nations. An outstanding response rate!

Community Partner Consultation

Community engagement and collaboration are key to the success of children's services and programs across Bruce County. Two surveys were distributed to child care and early years operators/services providers and partners to understand their partnership experience with Bruce County, and to inform planning.

18 licensed child care and home child care providers provided feedback in a comprehensive, 27-question, mostly open-ended "Operators/Provider Feedback" survey.

17 individuals from partnering agencies provided feedback in a 13-question "Partnering Agency Feedback" survey widely distributed to partners.

Service providers and partners gave verbal feedback at an Early Learning Educator Recruitment and Retention Working Group meeting.

Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Consultation

In 2023-2024, Bruce County joined 43 of the 47 Service System Managers across Ontario to participate in a study, "Knowing our Numbers", to understand the challenges faced by the early years workforce in Ontario today. Information was gathered about demographics, compensation, job satisfaction, working conditions, opportunities for career advancement and professional learning, as well as experiences with workplace racism and discrimination. This information will help inform workforce strategies and policy developments across the province³. Provincial³ and Grey-Bruce⁴ results are shared in this document.

4,603 Registered and Non-Registered Early Childhood Educators provided feedback across the province.

³ Akbari, E., McCuaig, K., Schurter, M. Varmuza, P., Akbari, S., Mudie, S. (2024). *Knowing Our Numbers: A Provincial Study with a Local Lens on the Early Childhood Education Workforce in Ontario*.

⁴ Akbari, E., McCuaig, K., Schurter, M. Varmuza, P., Akbari, S., Mudie, S. (2024). *Knowing Our Numbers: A Provincial Study with a Local Lens on the Early Childhood Education Workforce in Ontario. The Counties of Bruce and Grey*.

Ongoing Community Partner Engagement

Bruce County regularly engages with community partners through our leadership and involvement on various committees including the Early Years Planning Committee, the Early Learning Educator Recruitment and Retention Working Group and the Children's Alliance.

The Early Years Planning Committee

The Early Years Planning Committee (EYPC) works in partnership to support Ontario's vision for the early years and to collaborate in systems planning, and in the delivery of local child care and early years programs and services.

Bruce County and the EYPC continue, as they have in the past, to be innovative, work collaboratively, and continue to communicate and streamline services with community partners to enhance the services for children and families in Bruce County.



The Grey Bruce Children's Alliance

The Grey Bruce Children's Alliance is a membership-based organization of 15 service providers. Formed in 2004, the partnership is dedicated to identifying community needs and supporting collective action that improves the well-being of children and youth in Grey Bruce. It seeks to offer a more seamless, integrated system of supports to young people and their families across the respective agencies.



Early Learning Educator Recruitment and Retention Working Group

Recruiting and retaining early learning educators presents a major challenge to the viability of licensed child care programs.

Many child care centres in Bruce County have indicated that a barrier to operating at full capacity was the need for qualified staff, primarily Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs), who are essential to ensuring a high-quality early years and child care system.

As a key priority of the Early Years Planning Committee (EYPC), the role of the Early Learning Educator Recruitment and Retention Working Group is to develop strategies to:

- **Sustain** the existing workforce to ensure a stable and high-quality child care system.
- **Enhance** access to opportunities to promote retention and recruitment, including professional development, training, and qualification upgrades to promote career growth and development.
- Develop strategies to **grow** the number of qualified staff in the workforce to increase access to families.
- **Attract** and support the development of a diverse workforce to reflect the children and families accessing programs.

Key initiatives:

- Promotional videos.
- Building relationships with students.
- Providing educational bursaries.
- Funding an employee assistance program.
- Development of resource tool kits to support recruitment and retention.
- Offering mentorship opportunities to support capacity building.

Visit www.brucecounty.on.ca/be-early-childhood-educator-bruce-county for more information



What We Heard from our Community

Feedback from parents/guardians, community providers, early childhood educators, and partners can be summarized into five main themes, with feedback summaries in the following pages. As the overarching approach of this plan is being responsive to evidence-based community and family needs, each of the themes below form the priorities of the Plan.

1. Access to Licensed Child Care and Early Years Services

2. Affordability for Parents/Guardians

3. Quality

4. Inclusivity

5. Valuing, Strengthening, and Supporting the Early Child Care Workforce

Access to Licensed Child Care and Early Years Services

Priority 1: Support and encourage sustainable system growth to increase access to child care and early years programs in schools, communities, workplaces, and home settings so that parents/guardians can choose affordable, inclusive, high-quality child care programs and services that work best for their family.

The Context

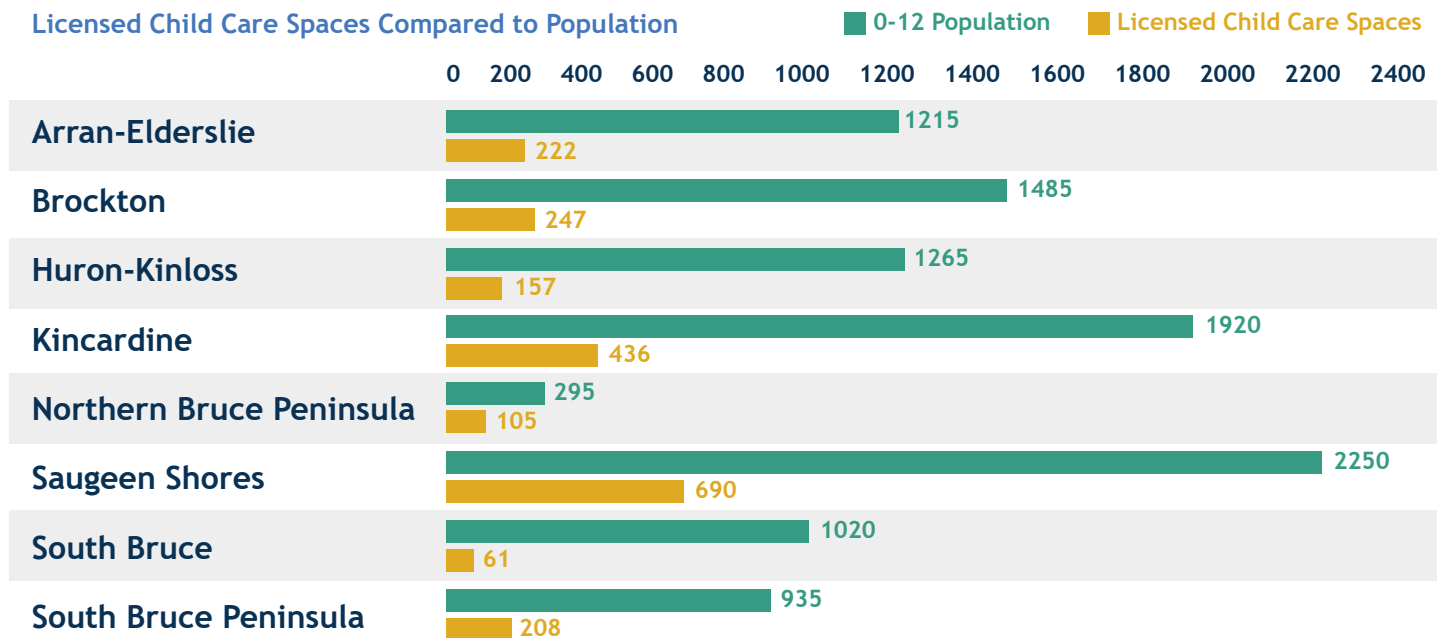
Access continues to be challenging with a limited number of licensed spaces, funding, and Registered Early Child Educators (RECE) in Bruce County and across the province.

At the end of 2023, there were **2,125** licensed child care spaces for children ages 0-12 for approximately **20%** of Bruce County's aged 0-12 population as of 2021.

Licensed child care programs are having difficulty operating at their licensed capacity due to lack of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs).

The chart below compares the 0-12 population with the number of licensed child care spaces in each municipality.

Licensed Child Care Spaces Compared to Population



44% of non-school-aged children in Canada are living in 'child care deserts' - areas where at least three children are in potential competition for each licensed child care space.

Challenges with the Waitlist

OneList Bruce County is an online application system designed to **simplify the process of finding and applying for licensed child care.**

Some parent/guardians had OneList access concerns including:

- not hearing updates about waitlist spot.
- needing to respond to emails in junk folders or risk losing waitlist spot.
- requests for a clearer process related to accessing limited available spaces within licensed child care centres.

“ We have been on the list for over a year now and have heard nothing from any of the licensed centres we applied to. Having an update on your position on the list would be nice.”

- Anonymous parent/guardian

Lack of Available Licensed Child Care Spaces

53% of parents/guardians with licensed child care reported “no child care spaces available” as a child care related problem experienced in the last 12 months.

Many parents/guardians **without licensed child care** highlighted the importance of having more licensed child care spaces, and some commented how this is **impacting their ability to work:**

“ I signed my little one up on the wait list in 2022 and we are still waiting for child care.”

- Anonymous parent/guardian



Flexibility in Hours of Operation

29% of parents/guardians report “**operating hours of child care**” as a problem when deciding care arrangements for their child(ren). This is an increase from 19% in the 2019 survey. Currently there are no licensed child care programs in Bruce County that operate before 6:00 AM or after 6:30 PM.

“**Desperately need child care for late hours.**”
- *Anonymous parent/guardian*

Days of Operation

35% of parents/guardians with licensed child care report “**finding care for PA days, summer**” as a problem. Many parents highlighted the need for licensed child care options.

“**More licensed child care providers in the community are needed. More child care for young kids in the summer is needed.**”
- *Anonymous parent/guardian*

Many parents asked for more EarlyON programming hours and days in general, with some requests for summer and weekend programming.



Locations

Location is the third most important feature for parents/guardians when deciding care arrangements for their child(ren). EarlyON stakeholders also provided comments about the importance of location.

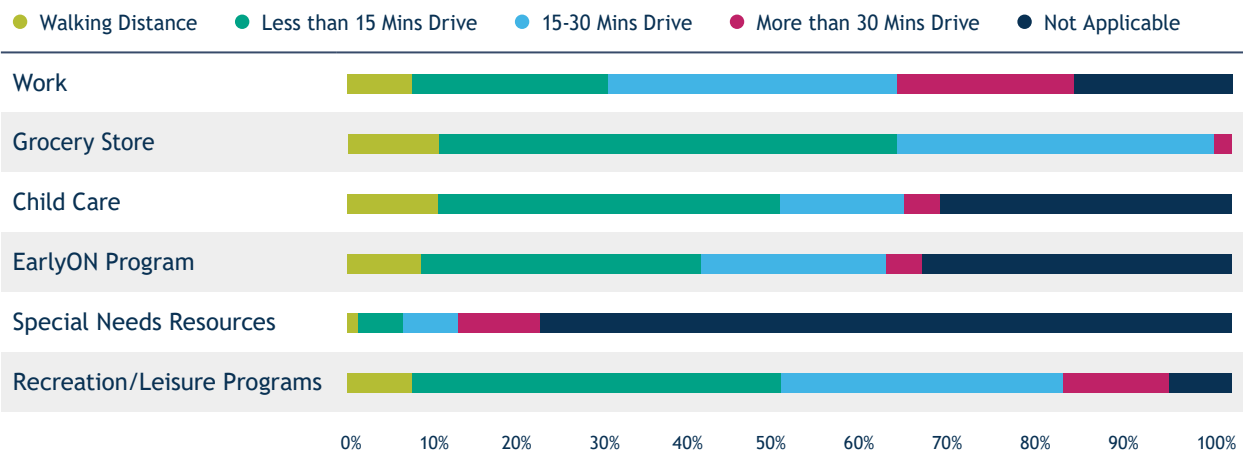
15% of parents/guardians using licensed child care have experienced “child care too far away” as a problem in the last 12 months; **9%** have experienced “lack of transportation.”

“**When my son was younger, we would have attended EarlyON more often had it been located in our town. Some of the extra programs like art in the park, stroller walks, etc. are great & would be great if they could happen more often...**”
- Anonymous parent/guardian

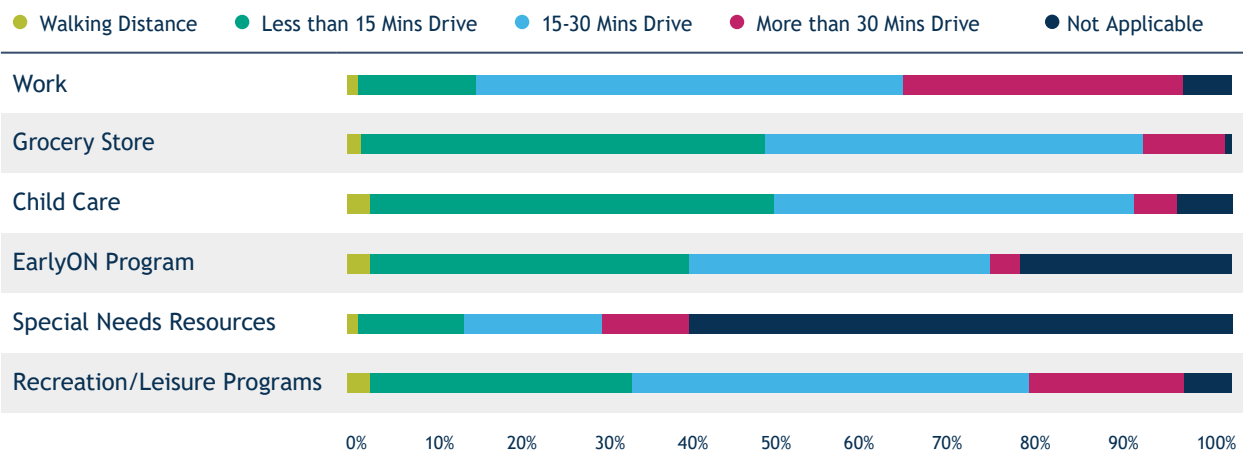
Location reality: Most parents have child care within a 15-minute drive from their home.

Location preference: Just over **50%** of parents would prefer child care within a 15-minute drive from their home, while almost **40%** would be willing to drive 15-30 minutes to child care. Early Years stakeholders and community partners also identified location and transportation as a challenge for many of their families who are trying to access supports and services.

How far do you travel, one way, from your home to access the following:



How far are you willing to travel, one way, from your home to the following:



Affordability

Priority 2: Ensure licensed early years programs and services are within affordable reach for families.

The Context

Licensed child care continues to become more affordable.

18 out of 20 or 90% of licensed child care operators in Bruce County opted into the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system, making child care more affordable for families.

As of year end **2023**, parents/guardians saw an average of **52.75%** reduction in licensed child care rates. By **2026**, licensed child care fees will reach an average of \$10 per day.

For parents unable to access licensed child care, affordability of child care continues to be an important issue.

Child Care Fee Subsidy

73% of parent/guardian survey respondents said they are aware of child care fee subsidy: financial assistance for those who have a child or children attending licensed child care, based on income, with application required.

Cost of Care

Affordability is the fourth most important feature to parents/guardians when deciding care arrangements for their child(ren).

41% of parents/guardians with licensed care report “**high cost of care**” as a child care related problem experienced in the last 12 months.

Many parent/guardian comments highlighted affordability issues, especially for unlicensed child care programs, or those enrolled in non-CWELCC programs:

“**More child care in Bruce County. More mothers would go back to work if they had affordable child care.**”

- Anonymous parent/guardian

“**Would love more access to licensed daycare facilities that are affordable.**”

- Anonymous parent/guardian



Quality

Priority 3: Enable safe and reliable programs built on positive, responsive relationships, engaging environments, and meaningful experiences for children and families, delivered by educated and well-supported staff.

The Context

High-quality licensed child care helps children develop vital skills during their first five years, which marks a critical developmental period in a child's life. Participation in high-quality learning environments can help support children and their communities and to improve social, health, and academic outcomes.

Benefits for Children of High-Quality Licensed Child Care

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 01 | Improved physical and mental well-being |
| 02 | Decrease in chronic health problems |
| 03 | Increased self-confidence |
| 04 | Improved outcomes in literacy, math, and science |
| 05 | Higher rates of completing high-school |
| 06 | Increase in conflict resolution skills |

For more information, refer to:

[High-Quality Licensed Child Care Fact Sheet \(brucecounty.on.ca\)](https://www.brucecounty.on.ca/high-quality-licensed-child-care-fact-sheet)



Operator/Provider Feedback on Quality

93% of operators/providers providing licensed child care state that they “Always” or “Often” incorporate the four learning foundations outlined in Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years: How Does Learning Happen? **Belonging, Well-Being, Engagement, Expression.**



When operators/providers were asked “What kind of information could help build a better understanding of program quality among families?”, they provided feedback on increasing awareness of the QST [Quality Scan Tool], hosting educational workshops for parents and educators, and sharing information about all the background work and parent support required to run a high-quality child care.

“A ‘coles notes’ version of the QST [Quality Scan Tool] that we can send out so families are aware of our level of quality.”

- Anonymous Operator/Provider

Parent/Guardian Feedback on Quality

24% of parents/guardians with licensed care report “concerns about quality of child care” as a child care related problem experienced in the last 12 months.

Parents/guardians had positive feedback about the quality of licensed care and programming:

“ ...Quality of care is great. Staff are very loving towards their children. Programming is good. Explore a wide variety of areas or interests of the children.”

- Anonymous parent/guardian

“ We love the EarlyON program. It’s been a great way to get into the community and out of the house, and it comes with lots of great information and opportunities for our daughter. We recommend it to friends with young children or new moms often.”

- Anonymous parent/guardian



Inclusivity

Priority 4: Provide a range of child care and early years programs that are inclusive and culturally appropriate, so all children feel welcomed and are able to actively and meaningfully participate and are supported to form authentic, caring relationships with their peers and educators.

The Context

Children thrive when given the opportunity to fully participate in the experiences and activities of daily living within their community.

Bruce County partners with licensed child care providers to **regularly identify and support children at risk** using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ).

Spring 2023 Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) Results:

Children at Risk of Developmental Delay

8.1%	Communication
7.8%	Fine Motor
6.5%	Gross Motor
5.3%	Personal-Social
3.7%	Problem Solving
3.3%	Social-Emotional



Bruce County is responsive to the changing demographics, and works with community partners to understand needs. For more information about community demographics, refer to the [“About Bruce County”](#) section.

Service Awareness

Part of providing **inclusive service** is ensuring that all parents/guardians know about children’s services offered through Bruce County.

Over 73% of parents/guardians who responded to the survey had an awareness of **at least four of the five listed Bruce County Children’s Services supports and services.**

Only **39%** had an awareness of **Bruce County Resource Program: Supports for children with special needs.**



Staff Professional Development in Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Top 3 Learning Themes in Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Learning that Early Childhood Educators received within last 12 months:		Learning that Early Childhood Educators would like to receive:	
Supporting children with disabilities	52%	Critical trauma-informed practice	49%
Cultural diversity in Early Years settings	43%	Supporting children with disabilities	46%
Anti-bias/anti-racism/anti-oppression education	41.5%	Supporting 2LSGBTQIA+ children and families	44%

Interest in Cultural and Indigenous Programming

6% of parents/guardians with licensed care report “lack of cultural programming” as a child care related problem experienced in the last 12 months.

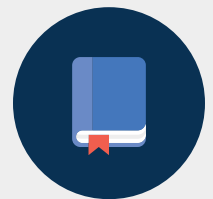
Operators/providers and Bruce County are making efforts to increase cultural programming:

“ We love the multi-cultural books, toys that the County has provided us with. If that could continue, that would be great.”
- Anonymous Operator/Provider

13% of parents/guardians who participated in EarlyON programming requested “Indigenous Cultural Awareness” programming.

40% of ECEs in Bruce and Grey County received professional learning in Indigenous ways of knowing and being and decolonization in the last 12 months.

Operators/providers provided feedback on meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities to support reconciliation efforts.



“ I feel Bruce County Children’s Services recognizes Indigenous communities in our areas. Bruce County Children’s Services often hosts Indigenous-led learning to offer members of the Child Care community, which is excellent.”
- Anonymous Operator/Provider

“ Continue to support and include [Indigenous communities] when considering changes to our sector.”
- Anonymous Operator/Provider

Valuing, Strengthening, and Supporting the Early Child Care Workforce

Priority 5: Sustain, enhance, and attract the child care and early years workforce.

The Context

Due to a shortage of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) across Ontario, **ECEs are urgently needed** by licensed child care providers in Bruce County.

As of 2023, Ontario had the lowest ECE annual wage rate of every province and territory in Canada.

The expansion of 645 licensed child care spaces in Bruce County by 2026 requires between **100-130 additional ECE's** in the sector to accommodate child to staff ratios.

Early Child Care Workforce Challenges

37% of all service providers said “the number of qualified staff” prevents them from providing the amount of services they would like for children aged 0-12.

16% of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) in Bruce and Grey County intend to leave the sector, and **26%** are unsure.

In Bruce and Grey County, non-RECEs are more likely to report plans to leave the sector (**33.3%**) versus RECEs (**16%**).

“ **Working conditions for the early childhood education workforce affect the quality of learning children receive⁵.**”

“ **The most important aspects of quality in early education are warm, stimulating, responsive, and supportive interactions between educators and children, as well as the effective use of curricula. Legislation about the maximum number of children in a room, the ratio of staff to children, and staff qualifications helps increase the likelihood of, but does not assure, responsive and stimulating interactions. When low wages and poor working conditions lead to high staff turnover, the benefits of early education become compromised⁵.**”

⁵ Akbari, E., McCuaig, K., Schurter, M. Varmuza, P., Akbari, S., Mudie, S. (2024). *Knowing Our Numbers: A Provincial Study with a Local Lens on the Early Childhood Education Workforce in Ontario.*

Early Childhood Educator Perspectives on Workforce Support

The 10 Factors Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) across Ontario reported would improve their personal job satisfaction are listed below:

01 Appropriate salary

06 Respect for the work

02 Improved benefits

07 Improved career opportunities

03 Support for children with emotional and behavioural needs

08 Lower child to educator ratios

04 Supports for children with disabilities

09 Educator mental health support

05 Paid preparation time

10 Regular paid breaks

In Bruce and Grey County, ECEs report having access to the following non-mandatory benefits:

80.0% Paid sick days

73.9% Paid professional development

69.2% Extended health benefits (ex. dental, physio)

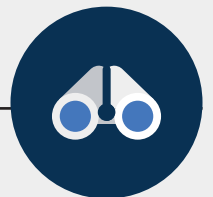
58.5% Paid programming time during the workday

50.8% Paid personal or mental health days

46.2% Pension benefits or contributions to an RRSP

32.2% Salary scale with regular guaranteed increases reflecting my qualifications, responsibilities, and seniority

21.5% Pay increase for obtaining a new credential or degree in early childhood education



Operator/Provider Perspectives on Workforce Support

When operators/providers were asked about workforce issues and how Bruce County could help mitigate these issues, comments centered around providing support to value, recruit, and retain Early Childhood Educators, through positive career promotion, as well as exploring strategies to increase wages, benefits, and professional development opportunities:

“Educator shortages are stopping the growth of classrooms, where we cannot fill the rooms, and our wait lists keep growing. With CWELCC, our wait lists have grown so large, and we cannot provide services to many on the lists.”

- Anonymous Operator/Provider

“Finding a provider that could offer health benefits at group rate county-wide maybe to lower costs.”

- Anonymous Operator/Provider

“Of course this is funding dependent - but hosting professional learning opportunities such as the one at Blue Mountain was a HUGE success and made employees feel valued as professionals.”

- Anonymous Operator/Provider



Section 3: Setting Our Compass



We will continue to build a strong and inclusive child care and early years community while enhancing programs and partnerships that support early learning, development, and well-being. For progress reports, visit our annual WayPoints on our website at www.brucecounty.on.ca/childrens-services



Setting Our Compass

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Bruce County Strategic Goals	Bruce County Children's Services Goals	Children's Services Priority Areas					Actions	Timeline				
		Quality	Inclusivity	Access	Affordability	Workforce Support		2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
1. Build a strong and inclusive community	Collaborate with community partners to support the child care and early years needs of newcomers to Bruce County.	●	●			●	Build capacity within the child care and early years system to support the cultural and diverse needs of children and families.	●	●	●	●	●
	Increase awareness of Bruce County Children's Services supports and programs.		●	●			Promote programs and services to priority populations in Bruce County, including newcomers, using preferred channels.	●	●	●	●	●
2. Enhance and grow partnerships	Work together with Indigenous partners to support the needs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis (FNIM) families.	●	●	●			Work together with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis (FNIM) partners to expand programming.	●	●	●	●	●
	Support and enhance the capacity of child care programs.	●	●			●	Continue to provide collaborative coaching and mentoring.	●	●	●	●	●
							Offer ongoing professional development initiatives for licensed child care programs.	●	●	●	●	●
							Continue to increase knowledge across the local early learning and child care sector regarding "How Does Learning Happen?"	●	●	●	●	●
	Collaborate with community partners to attract and retain Early Childhood Educators (ECEs).	●		●	●	●	Continue to collaborate with colleges, high schools, and community partners to implement actions to attract and retain ECEs in Bruce County.	●	●	●	●	●
							Continue to offer the innovative Early Childhood Educator (ECE) program with Fanshawe. Continue to explore and support community strategies that address cost and time barriers for those interested in the ECE program.	●	●	●	●	●
	Build partnerships with agencies offering the ASQ to families.	●	●	●			Collaborate with community partners and agencies to make the Journey Through the Ages and Stages accessible to all families in Bruce County.			●	●	●

Bruce County Strategic Goals	Bruce County Children's Services Goals	Children's Services Priority Areas					Actions	Timeline				
		Quality	Inclusivity	Access	Affordability	Workforce Support		2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
3. Strengthen County's use of technology and innovative initiatives	Utilize data to drive programming.	●	●	●	●	●	Continue the implementation of Journey Through the Ages and Stages (ASQ) to assist caregivers in understanding the strengths and needs of their children.	●	●	●	●	●
							Provide relevant data about child care and early years with operators and community partners (ex. BGDISC).	●	●	●	●	●
	Ensure all child care applications are processed through a centralized, on-line registry.			●			Explore options to enhance child care registration and wait lists.		●	●		
4. Promote Responsible Growth	Provide child care and early learning programs and services at times that support families.		●	●	●		Explore partnership opportunities to meet the needs of parents/guardians who require alternative hours of care.	●	●	●	●	●
							Continue to monitor, assess, and respond to community needs regarding EarlyON programming times across Bruce County in accordance with ministry guidelines.	●	●			●
	Increase child care and early years access and options across the County, especially in high need areas.						Initiate a review and develop a sustainable business model to support and expand the Bruce County Home Child Care Program.	●	●	●		
		●	●	●	●	●	Promote expansion of licensed child care providers in high need areas as per the Access and Inclusion framework.	●	●	●		
							Work with authorized camps, children's recreation, and skill building programs to ensure they meet the needs of our community.	●	●	●	●	●
							Continue to monitor, assess, and respond to community needs regarding EarlyON programming locations across Bruce County.	●	●			●
	Explore cost-saving opportunities.				●	●	Explore cost effective rental agreements for EarlyON programming.	●	●			●
							Explore group cost share opportunities for licensed child care providers and employees.		●	●		

Bruce County Strategic Goals	Bruce County Children's Services Goals	Children's Services Priority Areas					Actions	Timeline				
		Quality	Inclusivity	Access	Affordability	Workforce Support		2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
5. Ensure a positive, inclusive, and accountable work culture	Implement strategies to increase child care workforce satisfaction to attract and retain Early Childhood Educators (ECEs).	●	●	●	●	●	Explore and implement strategies to improve ECE workforce satisfaction.	●	●	●	●	●
							Explore opportunities to support diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace.	●	●	●	●	●





For more information please contact:

Bruce County Human Services
Children's Services Division
childcare@brucecounty.on.ca
1-800-265-3022

www.brucecounty.on.ca

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