

2024-2029



LANARK
COUNTY

Child Care & Early Years
Service Plan

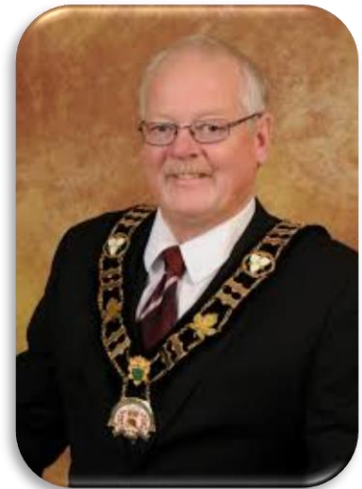
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Message from the Warden

The health and well-being of young children has a direct impact on their overall development and greatly influences the person they will grow up to become. Early child development sets the groundwork for lifelong learning and behaviour. The experiences children have in early childhood shape the brain and the child's capacity to learn, to interact with others, and to respond to daily stresses and challenges. That is why the need to invest in the early years is so critical.

Accessible, affordable, and quality early year's experiences are what all families and children in Lanark County want, need, and deserve. High quality, caring, and nurturing environments are already present in our many licensed child care centres, licensed home care and EarlyON programs. Through this plan, Lanark County aims to break down barriers encountered by families, address service gaps, and explore opportunities for improvement.



Lanark County council is committed to ensuring the needs of children and families are being met. It truly takes a village to raise a child and as such our community is committed to providing the best possible outcomes for all families.

I would like to thank families, community organizations, child care/EarlyON providers, and staff for the collection of data and development of this plan. I look forward to working with you as we continue to meet the objectives and goals established in this plan.

Sincerely,



Steve Fournier, Warden

Message from Lanark County Children's Services

Lanark County is pleased to share the Child Care and Early Years Service Plan, 2024-2029.

The Child Care and Early Years (CCEY) system in Ontario has gone through substantial change over the last number of years. The Covid-19 pandemic brought forward challenges never experienced before. Local child care operators and EarlyON programs were faced with shut downs, additional health and safety measures, screening, emergency child care, and providing more services virtually. The pandemic also highlighted how great the need is for quality child care, EarlyON programs, and quality Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs). Families needed quality care, programs, and educators to continue in the workforce. Introduction of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system initiated many changes to the delivery of licensed child care and made substantial progress in providing affordable child care for families across the province of Ontario.

This Service Plan will focus on the priorities and initiatives over the next five (5) years and will highlight how Lanark County will continue to make the child care and early years system a quality system that is equitable, accessible, affordable, inclusive, and sustainable. This process was a community effort that relied on community partners, families, children, child care operators, and local Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) and child care workers to help direct priority needs and goals across Lanark County. The Children's Services department would like to take this opportunity to thank all community members who participated in a community focus group, survey or meeting to support the creation of this plan.

Lanark County would like to thank all RECE and child care workers across the County for their continued passion, dedication, and hard work in the early years sector. The County appreciates all you do for the families in your communities.

An investment in the early years system supports children in Lanark County to reach their full potential. This Service Plan is an important step in ensuring children and families have a successful foundation that will support their future well-being.

Lanark County Children's Services Team



1.0 Introduction

Lanark County is the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM / Service Manager) responsible for the development of the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan. Children’s Services is a team within the Lanark County Social Services department. The CMSM role requires the County to solicit and maintain in-depth knowledge of the community needs, plan and manage the system, and identify strategic priorities and intended outcomes. The County is to identify and address service gaps while supporting service coordination.

Lanark County plays a vital role in the community by ensuring children have access to affordable, high-quality, and nurturing early childhood experiences. Committed to the health and well-being of children and families, Lanark County aims to provide the necessary support for families to thrive. Raising children can be challenging, but when the community comes together to support families, everyone benefits.

Research shows that children who engage in quality child care within stimulating and nurturing environments develop advanced verbal and intellectual skills, and thrive mentally, socially, emotionally, and physically. Children who participate in quality early learning programs have a sense of belonging and well-being, are more likely to succeed in school, enjoy positive self-esteem, and maintain better mental health. Investing in early childhood education allows children and families in Lanark County to reach their full potential.

This Service Plan aims to assess the current landscape of child care and early years in Lanark County, with a primary focus on child care and EarlyON centres. While the vision of this plan encompasses the entire system, the outcomes are centered on enhancing the well-being of children across Lanark County.

Lanark County is comprised of eight (8) lower-tier municipalities plus the Town of Smiths Falls, for the purpose of this report. The local municipalities are outlined below.

- Township of Beckwith
- Township of Montague
- Town of Carleton Place
- Town of Perth
- Township of Drummond North
- Town of Smiths Falls
- Elmsley (DNE)
- Township of Tay Valley
- Township of Lanark Highlands
- Municipality of Mississippi Mills

2.0 Background

2.1 Lanark County Social Services

Lanark County envisions a community where all people are respected and supported to live empowered and fulfilled lives. Lanark County plays a fundamental role in the community in ensuring that children have access to affordable, high quality, and caring early years experiences. Lanark County is committed to the health and well-being of children and families. Lanark County wants to ensure that the necessary support is available so that all families can thrive.

Lanark County Children's Services is a sub department of Lanark County Social Services. Other sub departments are:

- Housing Services
- Ontario Works
- Community Support Services

As the Service Manager, Lanark County has a deep understanding of the community's needs. Lanark County is well positioned to work collaboratively with local partners and families to identify effective program delivery strategies.

LANARK COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES YOUR STORY, OUR JOURNEY. TOGETHER WE'RE STRONGER.

Values

An Inclusive Community - Together we're better
Compassion & Appreciation - Everyone's story matters
Collaboration & Collective Energy - Together we're stronger

Vision

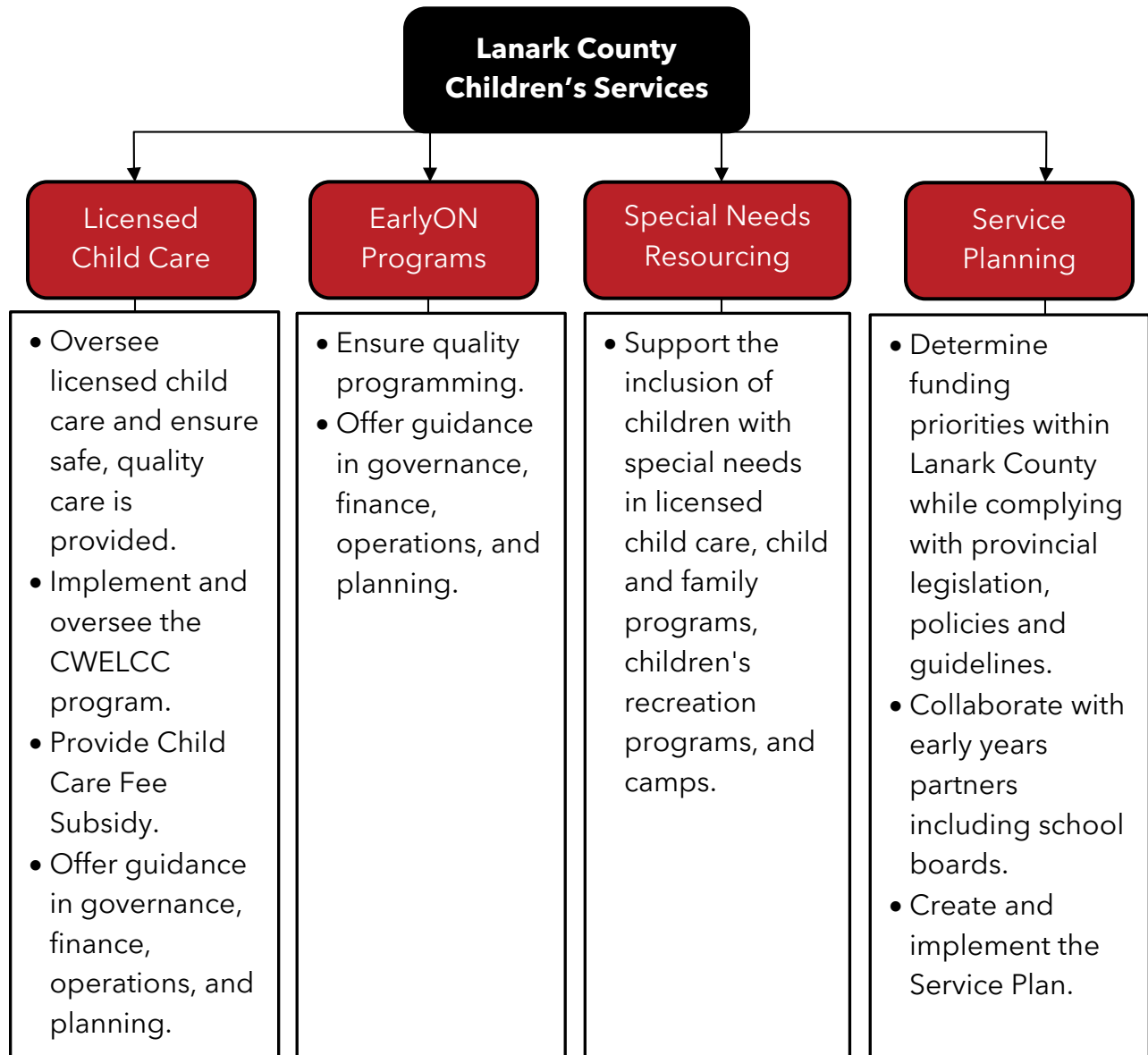
We envision a community where all people are respected and supported to live empowered and fulfilled lives.

Purpose

Our purpose is to provide guidance, support and resources to the people of Lanark County, to promote empowered and fulfilled lives.



2.2 Children's Services Roles and Responsibilities



2.3 Challenges and their Impact on Child Care in Lanark County

While living in a rural community certainly has its benefits, it is not without challenges. Rural living can have a significant and unique impact on access to child care and EarlyON programs, and one's ability to participate in these services on several fronts. These include but are not limited to:

- Lack of public transportation to attend child care/EarlyON programming.
- Longer commute times due to distance.
- Healthcare, tourism, service, and manufacturing sectors require weekend, overnight and extended hour care. Licensed child care centres in Lanark County do not currently offer unique hours, overnight or weekend care.
- Outspread populations require services throughout the community which results in stretched resources.
- Difficulty attracting staff in the early year's workforce
- There is a provincial wide shortage of RECEs. If Ontario meets its expansion goal of 86,000 more child care spaces under the CWELCC program, by its own estimates, it will be short 8,500 RECEs¹⁴. Lanark County certainly feels the impact of the lack of quality RECEs as many are working extended hours to account for the lack of staff, and to keep programs from closing.
- The local Algonquin College - Perth Campus ended the Early Childhood Educator (ECE) program from being offered locally in 2023. All local students interested in attending the ECE program now must travel to the City of Ottawa or attend the course online.
- Many child care providers are unable to offer the same competitive wages that are offered in a larger city.
- Small child care centres and EarlyON agencies allow for less advancement due to fewer positions.
- Lack of affordable housing makes it difficult for others to move to Lanark County for work.
- Lack of child care options in more rural areas, which create child care deserts (Lanark Highlands, Montague, Tay Valley). A child care desert is an area that has less than 30% of child care spaces available to that population. Lack of transportation makes accessing the closest licensed child care a challenge.

3.0 Environmental Scan

3.1 Community Input

In total, 640 responses were received from the community that contributed to the Service Plan. Feedback was obtained in the form of surveys targeting EarlyON users, parents of children with special needs, child care service providers, and the public. In addition, a public community consult was hosted, a meeting with licensed child care centres was held, and feedback was obtained from children in the local child care centres.

Surveys were posted online, shared through 13-child care providers, 20 community agencies, and directly sent to workers of non-traditional hours. The community consult was hosted externally by KMR Consulting to ensure unbiased responses. It should be noted that when comparing the response rate from the survey to the population of the municipalities some areas were under represented. Underrepresented areas were Smiths Falls, Montague, visible minorities, and Indigenous populations in the community survey responses. In contrast, there was an overrepresentation of community responses from residents of Mississippi Mills. The overall response rate given the size of the population was significant enough to be confident that the results are representative of the needs of the community. In addition, the environmental scan considered not only the community responses, but also a wide variety of publicly available data to obtain the clearest snapshot available of the community.¹

3.2 Population and Demographic Profile

The expansion of Highway 7 from Lanark County to the City of Ottawa has contributed to larger growth in the communities of Carleton Place, Beckwith, and Mississippi Mills. These municipalities have consistently maintained the highest growth rates in Lanark County for both the 2016 and 2021 census. Community members have taken advantage of the location to obtain employment in this near-by urban centre with 51% of Lanark County residents stating they commute to Ottawa for work.¹⁵

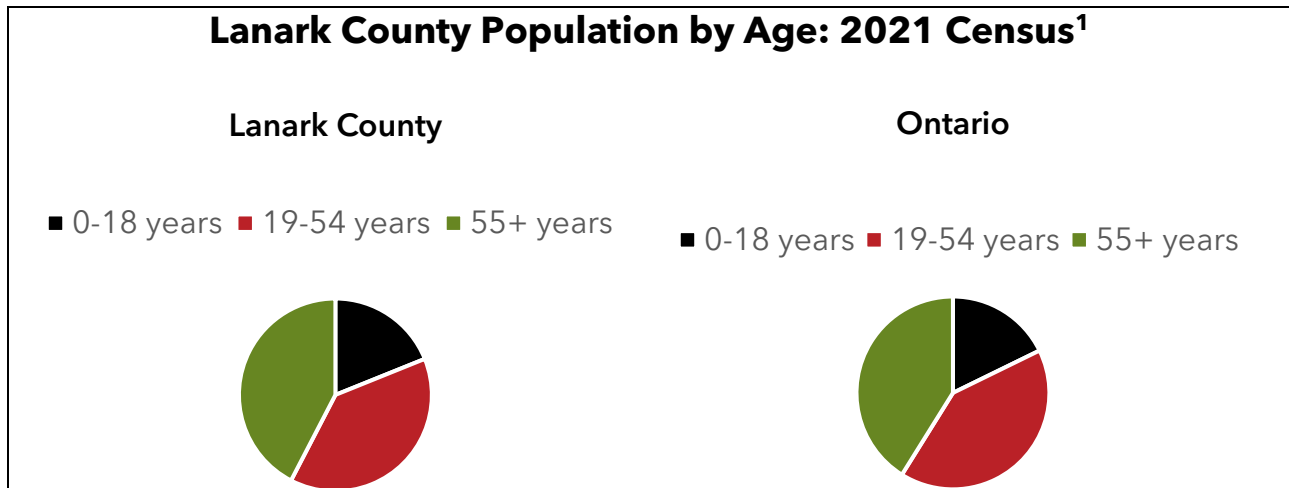
Lanark County has a population density of 25.4 people per square kilometre, up from 22.6 in 2016. From 2016 to 2021, Lanark County's population density increased by 12%, while Ontario increased by 6%, and Ottawa increased by 9%.

Within Lanark County, Carleton Place has the largest population density at 1259 people per square kilometre. The next two most densely populated areas are Smiths Falls (529) and Perth (958). All other municipalities have population densities of less than 40.¹

For future growth, by 2030, there will be 668 more children 12 years or younger compared to 2024. One in three of these additional children will be between the ages of 0 to 6.

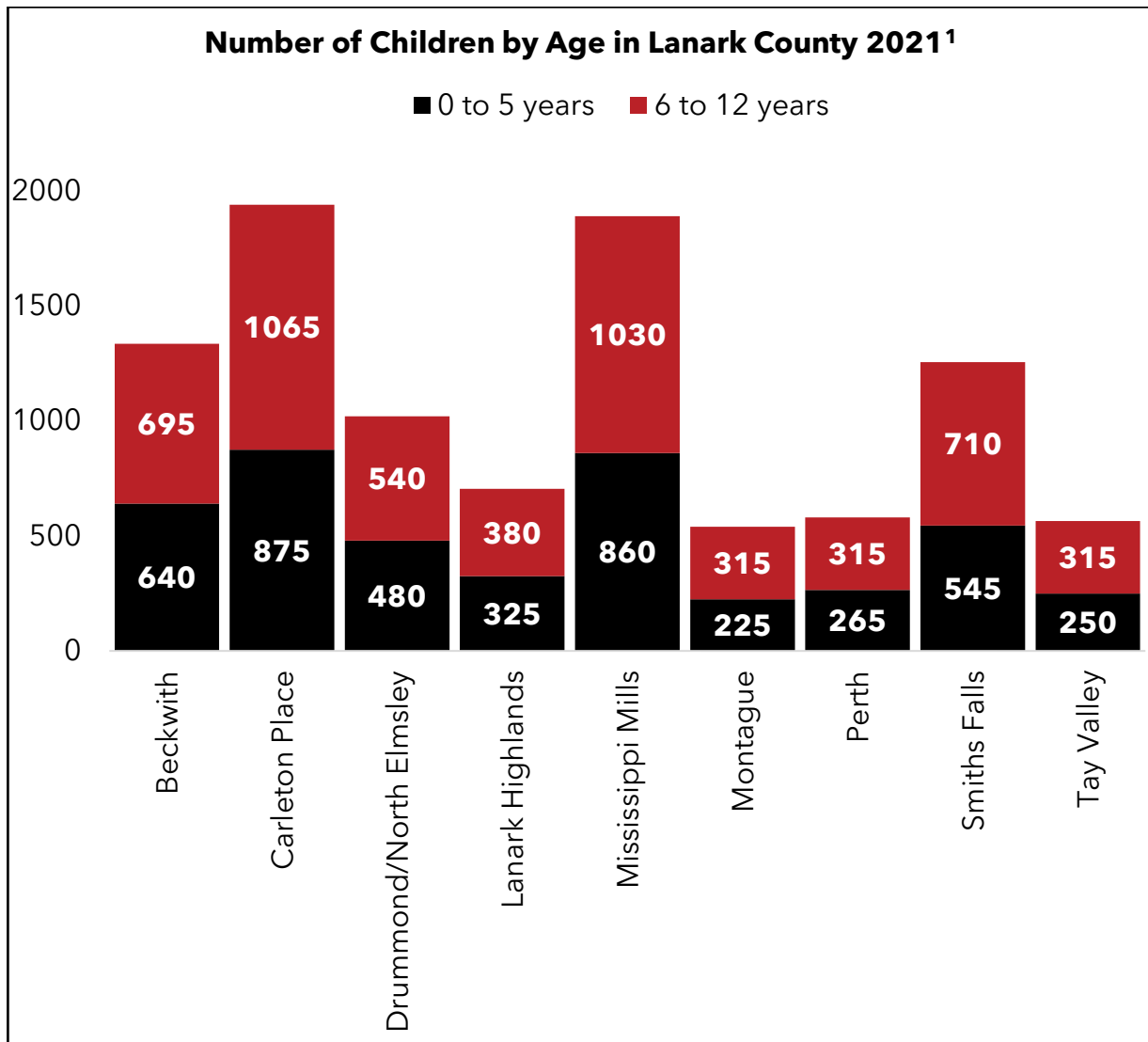


Overall, there will be an increase in 813 youth (0-15), an additional 2,820 people of working age (15-55), and 3,949 more older adults (55+) representing a 9.4% population growth since 2024¹. Ontario in general is expected to grow by 9.7% in the same timeframe. Contrary to Ontario, older adults (55+) make up a higher percentage of the population in Lanark County (42%) vs. Ontario (31%) in 2024. Perth and Tay Valley have the largest representation of those 55+, at 55%, and 54% of their municipality population respectively.²



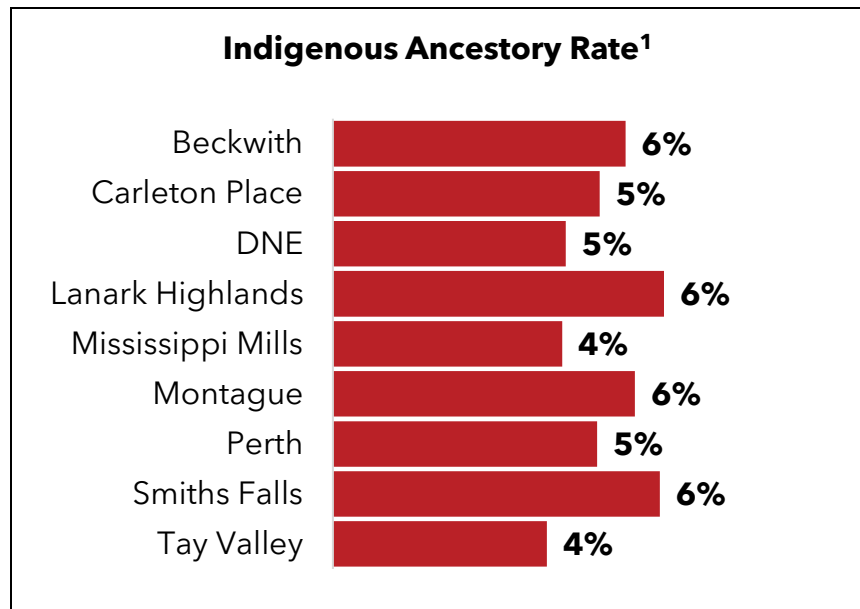
As of 2021, the communities of Carleton Place, Mississippi Mills, and Smiths Falls had the largest counts of children in Lanark County. For this same year, it is estimated that over 10,000 children 12 years and under reside in Lanark County.

As of 2021, around 10% of Lanark County adults aged 15-54 were single parents, with the highest rates in Perth (17%), Smiths Falls (16%), and Carleton Place (11%). Females dominate the single parent population by almost 3 to 1. However, Lanark County has a lower percentage of lone parents identifying as female (74%) compared to Ontario (79%).¹



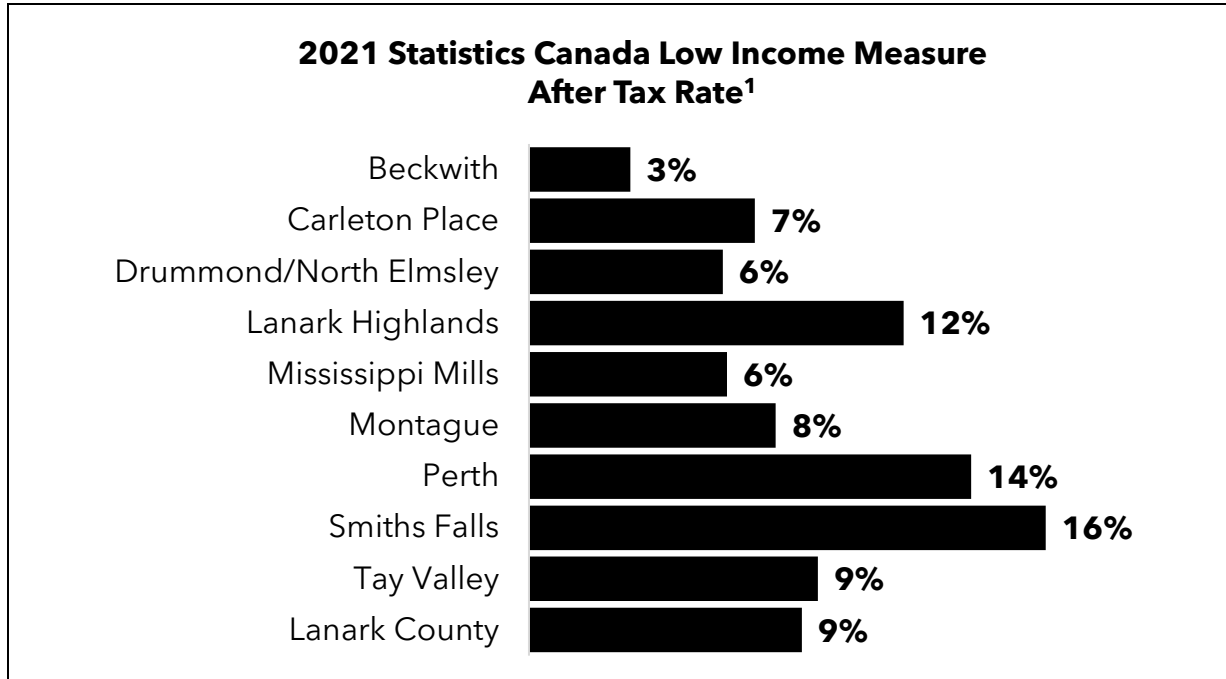
3.3 Minority Populations

Lanark County has low rates of immigrants (7%), and visible minorities (3%) compared to Ontario at 30%, and 34% respectively. However, Lanark County's Indigenous population at 5% is higher than the provincial average of 3%, and accounts for over 3,200 people in Lanark. The highest representation of Indigenous people in Lanark County is in Smiths Falls (7%) with more Indigenous people than any other municipality in Lanark County.¹



Regarding languages, Lanark County residents are predominately English speaking with about 15% of the population in Lanark speaking English and French. Less than 1% of Lanark County's population does not speak one of the two official languages. The highest rates of French speakers are in Carleton Place, Mississippi Mills, and Beckwith - all the municipalities that border Ottawa¹.

3.4 Household Income



The median after-tax annual household income for residents of Lanark County is \$92,000. This is below the provincial household median of \$96,000. Lone parent households' median annual income average is \$62,800. Dual parent households in Lanark County are above the provincial baseline, except in Smiths Falls. Smiths Falls also has the lowest median income among lone parent households in Lanark County, and the largest deviation from the provincial average income. Across all municipalities in Lanark County, women's individual incomes are below the provincial average. The same is true for men in Perth, Lanark Highlands, and Smiths Falls. These three municipalities also have the highest rates of low-income households, all above the provincial average.¹

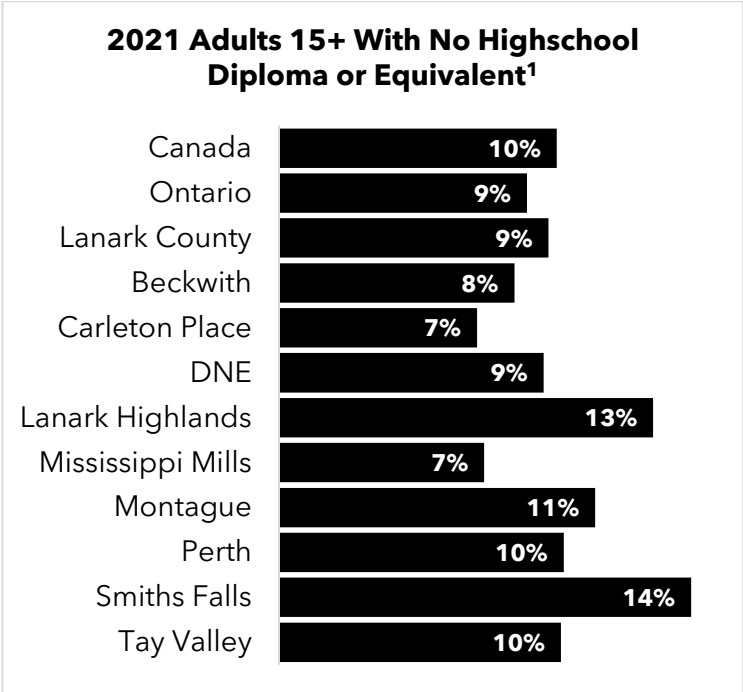
For those unable to find work, the two primary social assistance programs in the province are Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Parents on social assistance are a priority for Lanark County's Fee Subsidy program, which assists in covering the costs of child care for low-income individuals at no additional cost to the child care providers.

Although Ontario Works caseloads have been relatively stable since 2019, a decline in recipients was observed in 2021, likely due to the impact of federal Covid-19 response benefits. However, since 2022, the County has experienced a 22% increase in

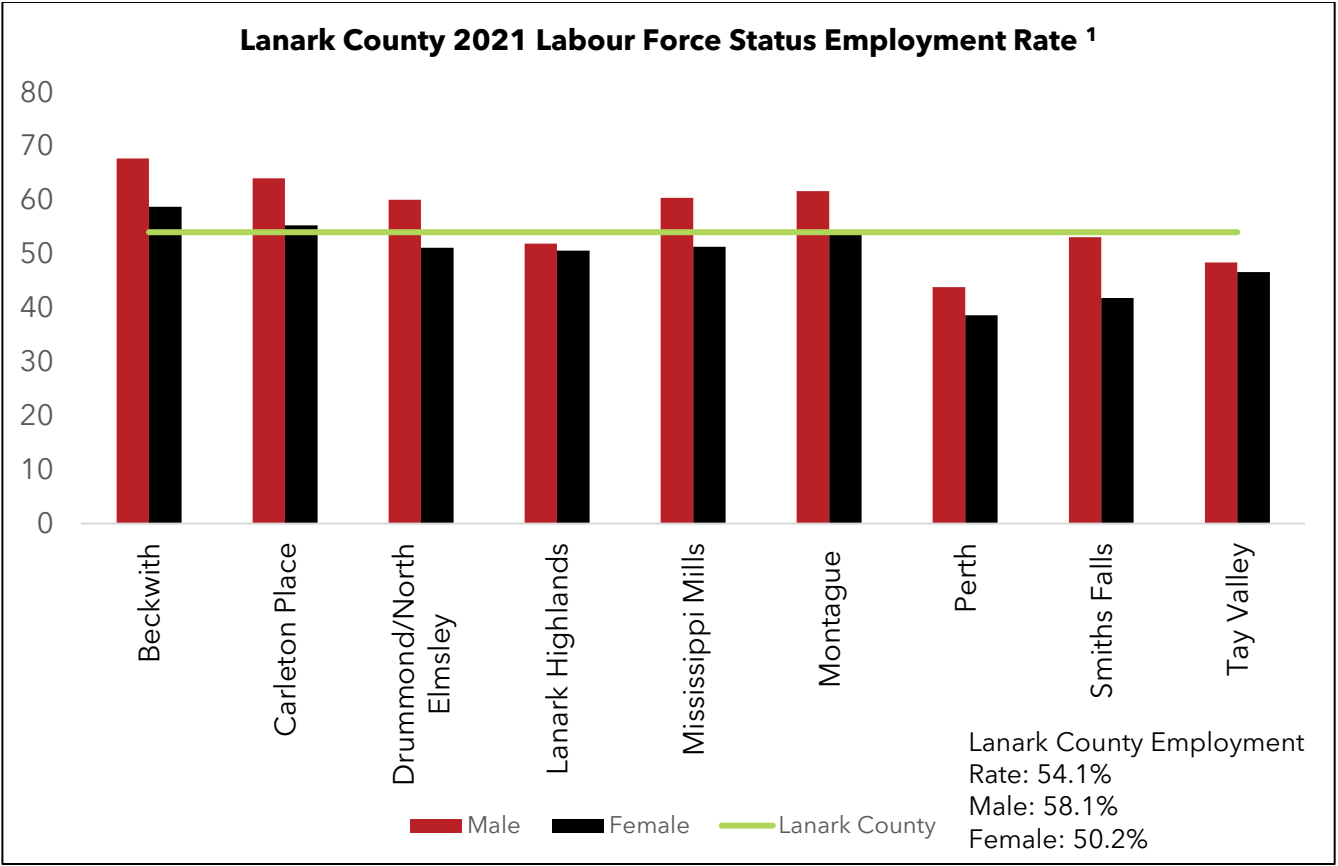
caseloads returning to pre-pandemic levels, with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) forecasting an additional 10% increase by the end of 2025. As of 2024, the total percentage of adults on social assistance was 5.3% of the adult population over the age of 15 in Lanark County. Cases with children have steadily remained an average of 39% of the total OW caseload over time, and 15% of ODSP caseload over time.⁹

3.5 Education and Employment

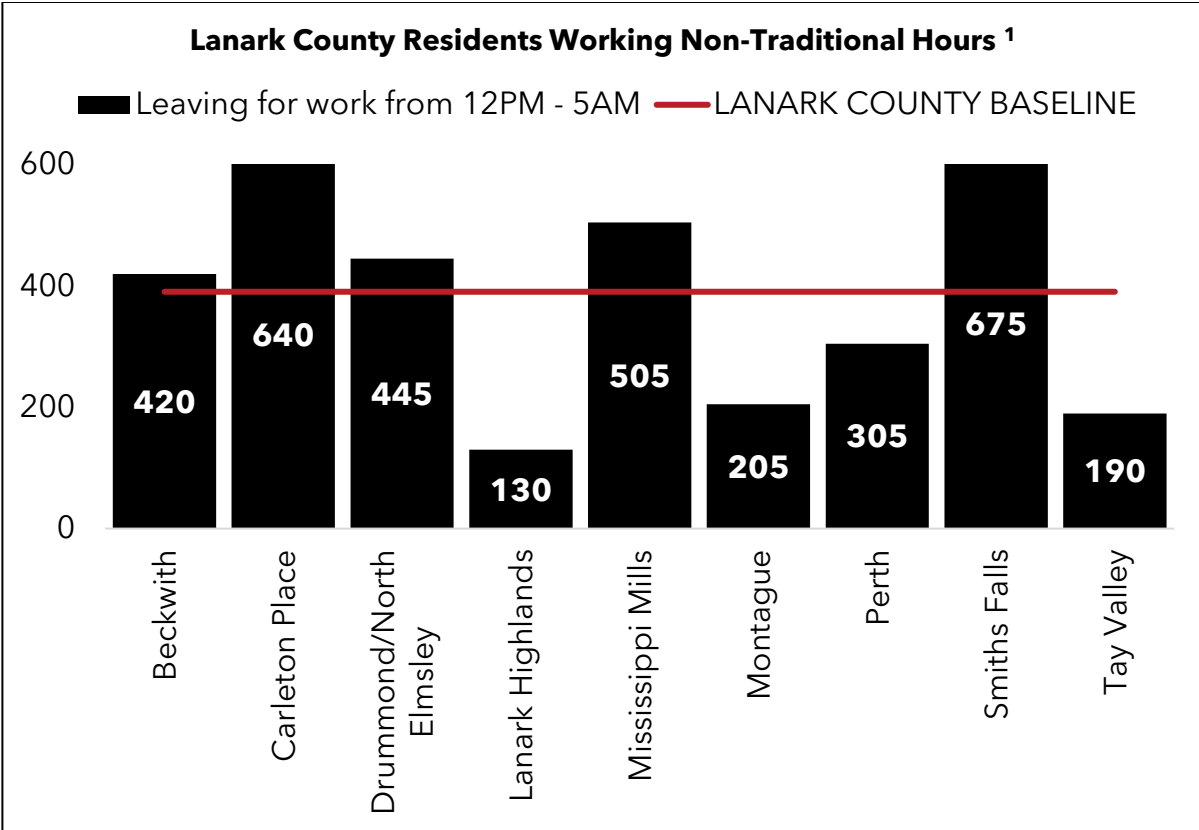
In general, Lanark County residents are educated to levels consistent with provincial and national norms at around 35% for those 15 years and older completing post secondary education. Within Lanark County municipalities, all towns remain around this rate except for Smiths Falls. For both men and women, less adults in Smiths Falls have post secondary education, and there are higher rates of adults with no completed education certificate compared to Ontario, Lanark County, and Canada.¹



Child care responsibilities have changed over the years with more women entering the workforce. Although women make up 51% of the population in Lanark, and have higher rates of post secondary completion, they make up only 48% of the employed workforce. The greatest discrepancy is in Smiths Falls, where only 46% of women are working or looking for work compared to 60% of men. The highest rates of employment are in the Beckwith 67.8%, and Carleton Place 64.1% areas.



This chart illustrates the proportion of men and women participating in the labor force across various municipalities. In almost all municipalities over 50% of both men and women are employed speaking to the need for child care. The highest rates of employment can be found in the Beckwith, Carleton Place, Mississippi Mills areas.

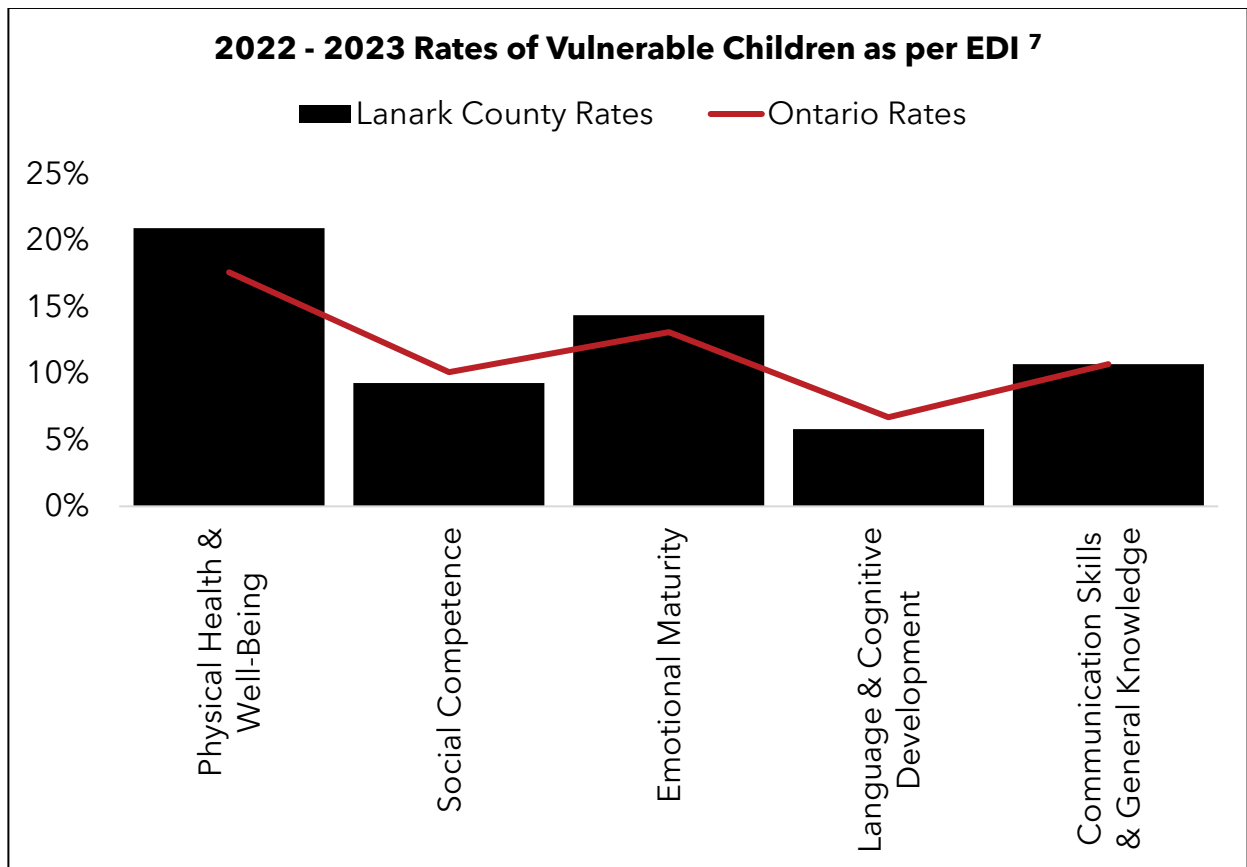


For those employed or looking for employment, Lanark County’s fastest-growing industries are accommodation/food services, and manufacturing. With such employment often comes nonstandard hours. In Smiths Falls, a higher rate is commuting to work during non-traditional hours (12 pm - 5 am) is at around 22% vs about 16% across the province. Although it has the third highest population in Lanark County, Smiths Falls also has the largest total number of adults commuting during these hours. Only one home child care provider operates overnight and weekends, and no child care providers operate during nontraditional hours in Lanark County. This gap presents a challenge for those working nonstandard hours who are unable to access licensed child care.¹

The post-Covid-19 world has changed the working set up with 26% of those employed working from home in Lanark County. Hybrid set-ups may require part-time child care for in office days. However, this poses a challenge for child care centres that require spots to be filled as full-time spots to maintain their financial viability. ¹

3.6 Early Development Instrument

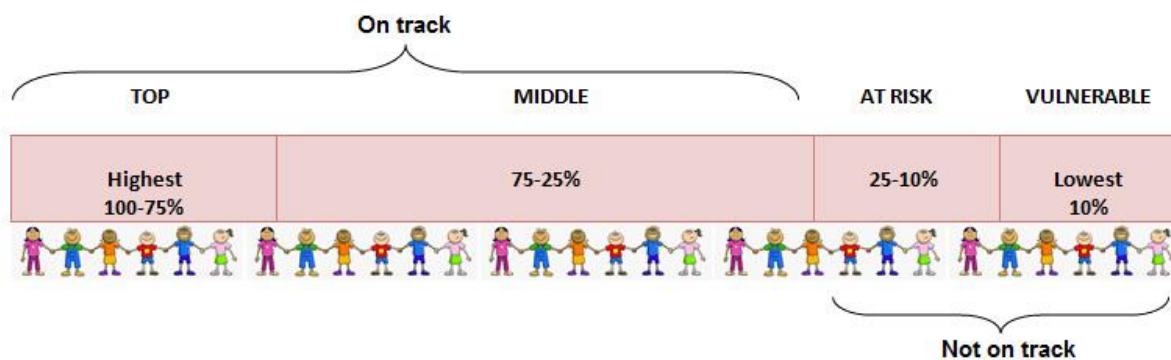
The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a population level tool used across Ontario in public schools to determine the rate of vulnerable children in kindergarten. The EDI is an assessment done on all Kindergarten aged children, and not just those that attended licensed child care. The EDI is a 103-item questionnaire completed by kindergarten teachers in the second half of the school year that measures children’s ability to meet age-appropriate developmental expectations in five general domains of communication and knowledge, language and cognitive development, social competencies, emotional maturity, and physical health. There have been six cycles since 2006 in Ontario (completed every three years), the most recent cycle was completed in 2023.



When exploring trends in children’s development over time, the data will show whether children are improving, declining, or the same as in the past. If it is determined that a change in the vulnerability rate is meaningful, that means that it is accurate, rather than a result of uncertainty due to sampling or measurement issues. The EDI measures the percentage of children that are vulnerable in one or more of the domains.

Between the last cycle (2017-2018) and the most recent cycle (2022-2023), there was an increase in percentage of vulnerabilities in children in 4/5 of the domains. Ontario saw change in these domains between these two cycles in the same direction but at different rates than Lanark County. It is important to note that the last EDI cycle for 2022-2023 was completed as the province was coming out of the Covid-19 Pandemic. There is a bigger span in the years the EDI cycles were completed due to the pandemic.

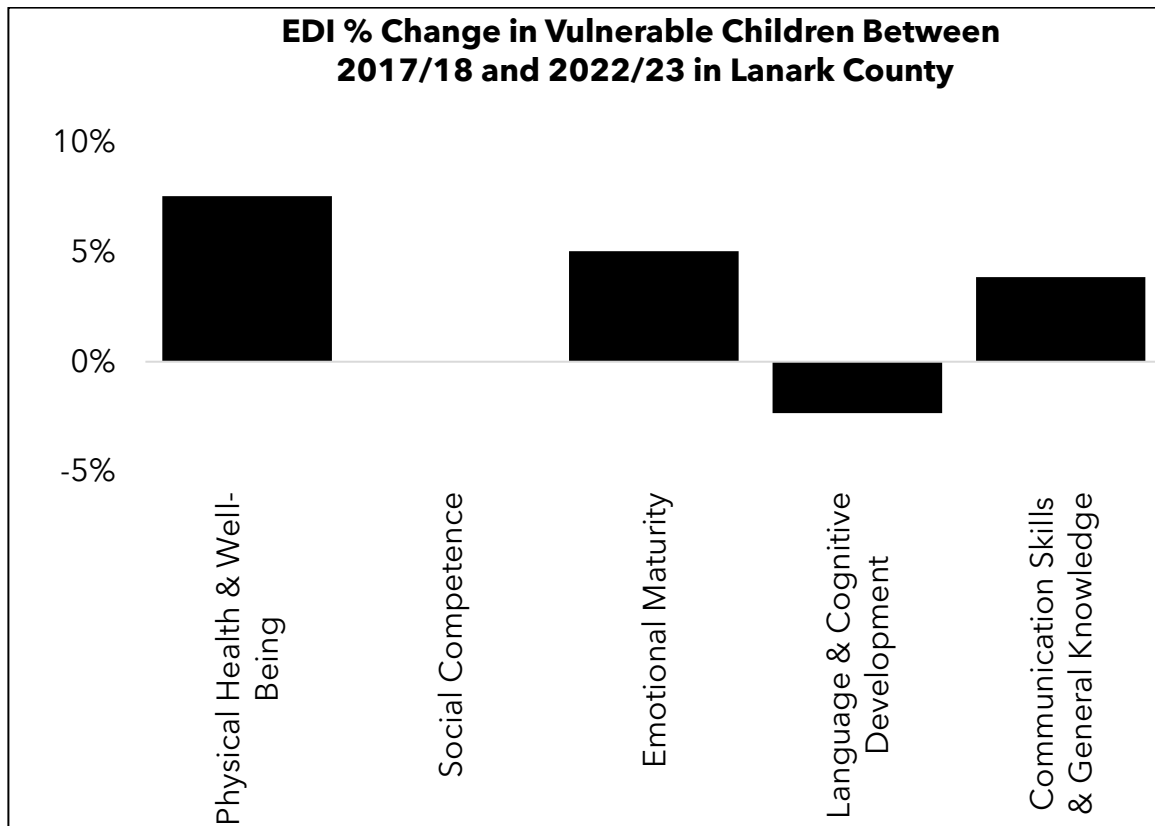
The average EDI scores for each developmental area - Physical Health and Well-Being, Social Competence, Emotional Maturity, Language and Cognitive Development, and Communication Skills, and General Knowledge - are divided into categories representing the highest scores to the lowest scores in the community and the province.



The total group of children who score between the lowest 10th and 25th percentiles of the distribution are the “at risk” group. This represents a group of children who are not in the “vulnerable” range at the time of the EDI assessment but whose scores are still lower than expected for children at that age. They are therefore called “at risk” for continuing the low achievement and health trajectory. ⁷

EDI reports focus on the children who fall in the “vulnerable” category, which describes the children who score low, below the 10th percentile, on any of the five domains. This provides a glimpse into the groups of children who are vulnerable for problems in later childhood by casting a wide net that includes all children who may benefit from universal programs. It captures the children who are struggling, but not only those who are doing so visibly to have already been identified.

In Lanark County the largest increase was in Physical Health and Well-Being with an increase of 7.6% in vulnerabilities for children. This domain considered a child's physical readiness for a school day. There was an increase of +5% of children presenting as vulnerable in Emotional Maturity. This domain considers prosocial and helping behaviour, anxious and fearful behaviour, aggressive behaviour, and hyperactivity and inattention. An increase of +3.9% in vulnerabilities also occurred in Communication Skills and General Knowledge. Vulnerabilities in Language and Cognitive Development saw a decrease in vulnerable children of -2.3%. This domain considers literacy and numeracy. The Social Competence domain remained unchanged.⁷



The municipalities of Tay Valley, Drummond/North Emsley, and Lanark Highlands were combined into a single rural region due to limited numbers. This rural region and Smiths Falls had higher percentages of vulnerable children at +5% and +6% respectively above the provincial average. When looking at all vulnerabilities in Lanark County, children in Smiths Falls had the highest rates of vulnerabilities in Physical Health and Social Competencies. Smiths Falls also had the second highest rates of vulnerability in Emotional Maturity. The rural region had the highest rates of vulnerability for Emotional Maturity, and Carleton Place had the highest rates of Communication Skills and General Knowledge vulnerabilities.⁷



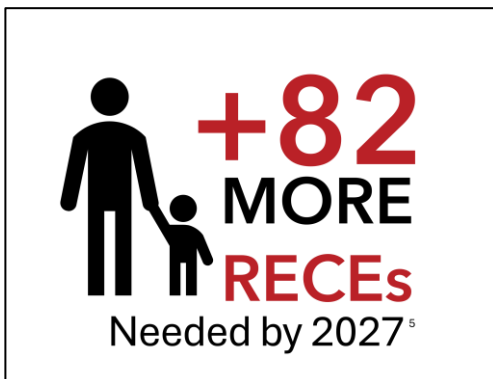
5.0 Pillars and Goals of the Early Years

5.1 Quality of Child Care

How children feel about child care in Lanark County



Quality care is central to a parent’s choice of programming. In the community consult, parents identified the professionalism of staff, the environment, and the programming as factors they consider in choosing care and factors they value in their current provider. Parents also value personalized attention, and the ability to adapt to the individual needs of their children.⁵ The quality of care is noticed not only by parents but the children themselves. Over 90% of children in Lanark County child care centres associated positive feelings with their child care, and 99% associated positive words with their educators.⁵



When parents were asked about the positives of their current child care, quality values were identified as the top three positives, including safety of children, nurturing environment, and children being happy.⁵

From the community survey 91% of parents preferred licensed child care over unlicensed care. The desire for child care increased from 36% to 49% between 2019 and 2023 across Canada.⁵

The limit on the number of CWELCC spaces and the lack of RECEs makes it challenging to meet the demand of child care spaces. As of 2024, there were only 170 RECEs working in Lanark County child care centres. With the expansion of child care spaces occurring, more RECEs will be needed to fulfill this role. For current providers to increase spaces to the licensing capacity, and for there to be enough workers for the allotted expansion spaces, there needs to be an additional 82 RECEs in Lanark County by 2027. This shortage of child care workers is a province wide phenomenon, with 90% of providers indicating challenges filling vacancies in Lanark County. ^{5 6}

RECEs provide a wealth of knowledge regarding child development and wellbeing. Similar to psychologists, social workers, and nurses, RECEs adhere to the standards of a provincial governing body and are required to remain up to date in their professional practice. RECEs are not only professionally trained but passionate about the children they serve. In Eastern Ontario, RECEs on average rated their work as a 4.4/5 in terms of being meaningful to the lives of children. In addition, RECEs have higher job satisfaction and receive higher pay compared to non-RECEs child care workers. ⁶

The province has supported RECEs by providing a Wage Enhancement Grant (WEG) and CWELCC base rate to supplement RECEs income. The provincial average hourly wage has seen an increase from \$19.78 (2017) to \$25.65 (2023), resulting in a 30% increase compared to a 21% increase in cost of living in this same timeframe. ⁶

Lanark County invests in child care workers with an annual RECE appreciation day, bi-annual RECE Conference, regular professional development, expanding lending library, and ongoing support through the Children’s Services Early Years Specialist.

Lanark County shares information about becoming a RECE, available education funding, and professional events on its website and in the community.

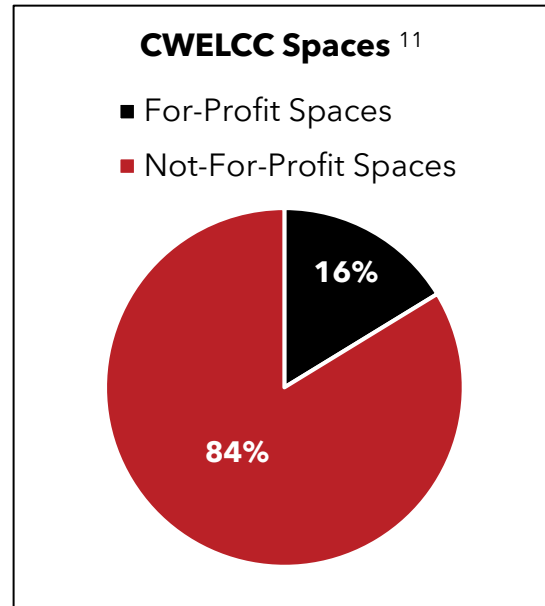


5.2 Accessibility of Child Care

Many child care spaces are situated in local schools, making up 60% of all licensed centre-based space in Lanark County. Not-for-profit programming also makes up many spaces, accounting for 84% of licensed spaces.¹¹

The community's mixed preferences for home-based versus centre-based care underscore the need for diverse options to serve diverse needs.

Lack of space was the greatest concern among the surveyed community, with over 75% of parents/caregivers indicating it as a barrier to access. This concern was reiterated in the community consultation. Due to shortages of space, parents expressed being on waitlists for multiple years to find a spot, the barrier being larger for keeping siblings together. It was also noted that those who may unexpectedly become a caregiver are in a particularly challenging spot as they could not have put the child's name on a waitlist in advance. There are many circumstances (illness, death, incarceration, Children and Family Services involvement) where a parent can no longer care for their child and a relative becomes the guardian.



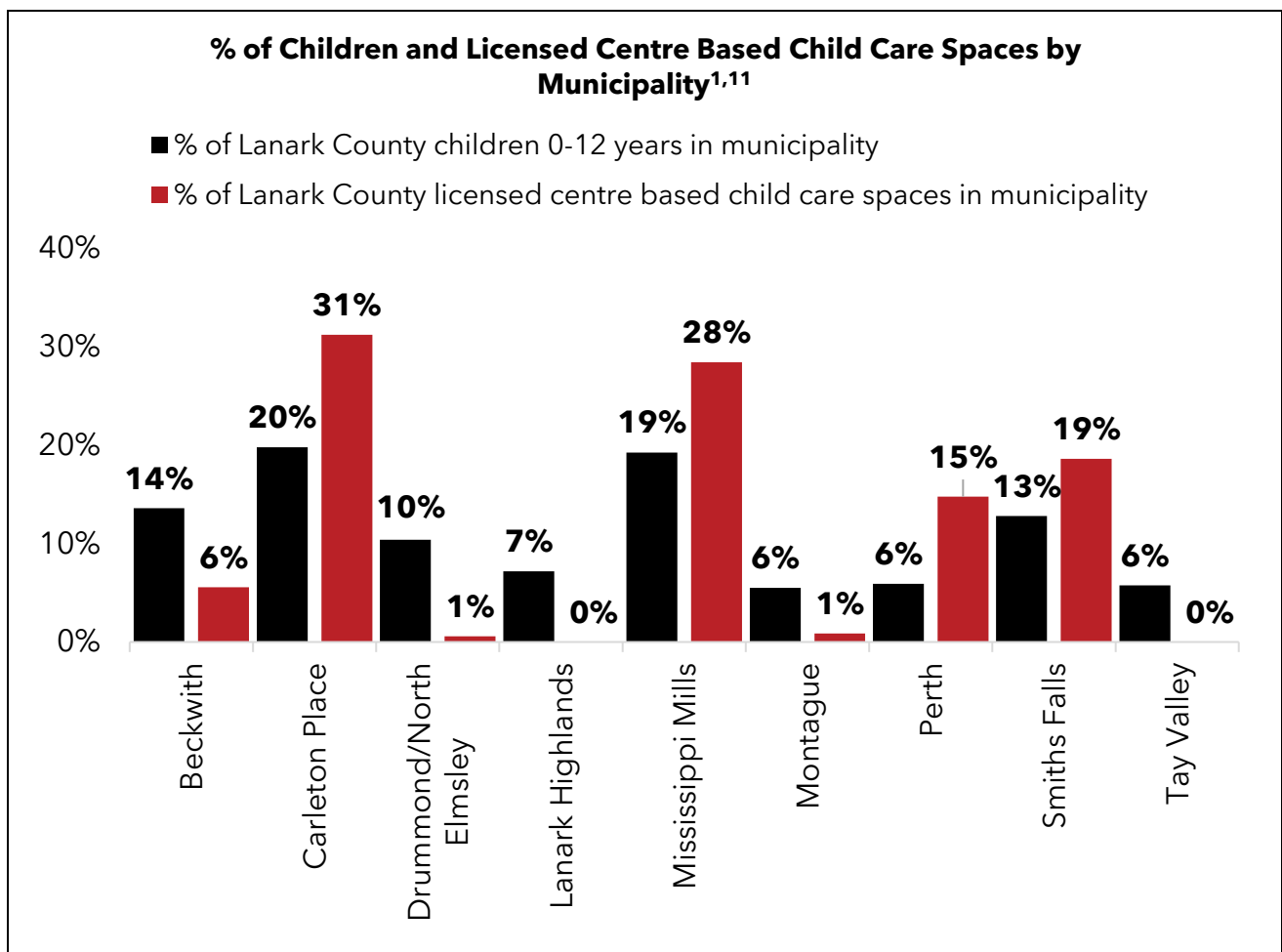
"...been on the waiting list for 4 years! We put him on the waiting list when he was born."

- Parent in Lanark County

Lanark County does not have a centralized waitlist; therefore, it is not possible to quantify the exact number of children waiting for care as parents stated being on multiple waitlists in the survey, and it was also identified in the community consultation^{4,5}. However, in comparing waitlists from 2019 and 2024, there has been an increase of 269%.

In 2024, according to the Know Our Numbers report for Lanark County, it is estimated there is a deficit of 1,300 licensed child care spaces assuming a rate of 49% of parents are seeking spaces.^{11,6} This is in line with the message from the community and providers that there is a need for more spaces. The rural municipalities have the largest gap in service for child care, relying heavily on the neighbouring towns such as Perth, Carleton Place, Mississippi Mills, and Smiths Falls. The community consult identified travel, location, and hours as barriers to access and priority for choosing care⁴.

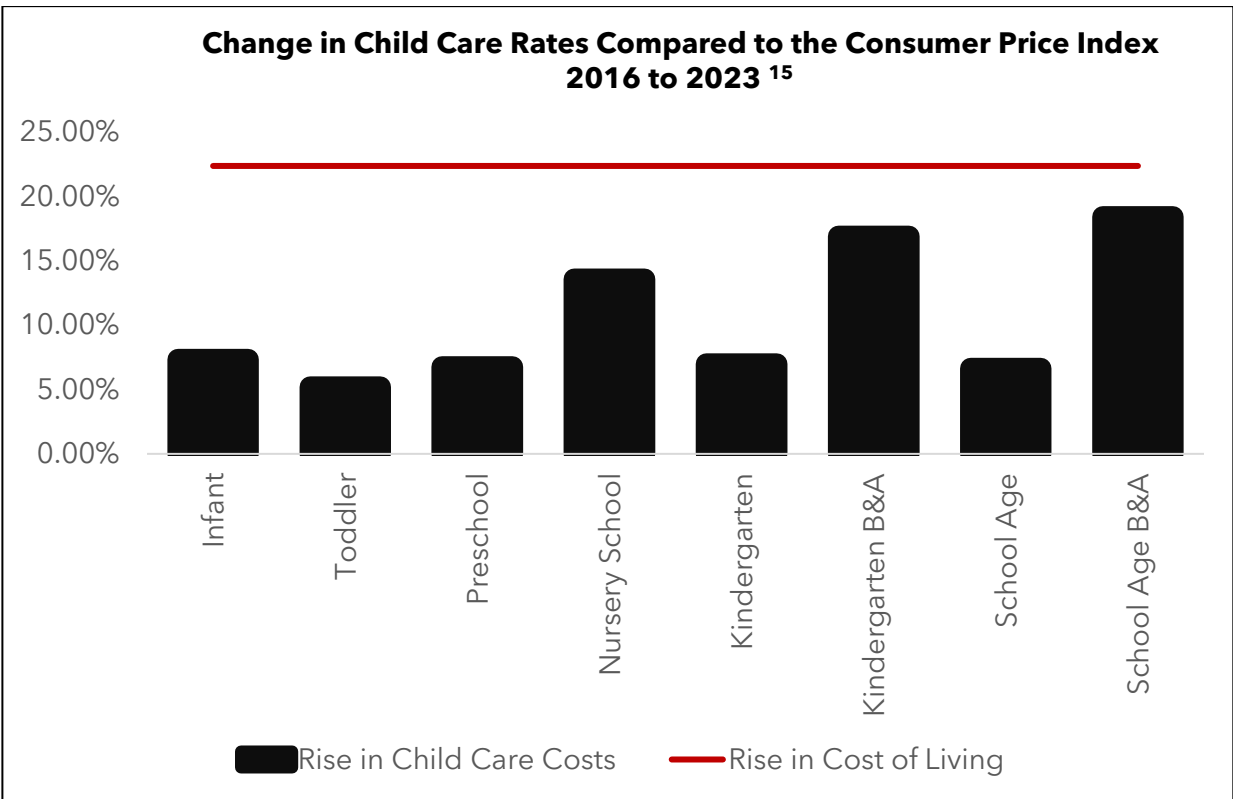
The need for child care spaces has economic impacts on families. Multiple community members stated they had to quit their job or delayed return due to costs, and not being able to access a child care space. Some have become creative and utilized grandparents or hired private nannies to fill their need. Multiple community members stated that they are accessing child care that is far from their work, as far as Ottawa, and commuting up to 2 hours to obtain a child care space.^{4,5}



5.3 Affordability of Child Care

The CWELCC system was initiated in 2022 with the aim to create \$10 a day average child care for children ages 0-6 (<6). Those who have access to CWELCC are grateful for the lower costs. However, the primary barrier identified is not enough spaces compared to the demand. Costs have remained the second highest barrier to access according to the community. In the community survey, 18% of caregivers are single income, and 9% are single parents with no family or friends to support them with child care. Among the groups that have family supports for child care, it was noted that this is not a sustainable option⁵

**"We're single income ...
It makes it very scary to
think of how we'll continue
to support our family."
- Parent in Lanark County**



Overall, the CWELCC system has provided success in keeping child care affordable. In Lanark County, a cap on how much licensed child care providers could raise their fees was implemented in 2016 before CWELCC. Once a cap was reached rates could only be raised by the previous year's consumer price index (CPI). With CWELCC making child care even more affordable for families, there is a clear message from the community that more child care spaces are needed.

5.4 Responsiveness of Child Care

Lanark County has a wealth of diverse needs for its rural environment and an increased need for child care that reflects this population. In the community survey, it was found that 11% of children presented with a special need, a visible minority, Indigenous ancestry, or from a Francophone home. In 2024, 8% of child care spaces in Lanark County provide French language programming. It was noted in the community survey that parents are seeking programming with French in child care and in EarlyON. There is no Indigenous child care provider in Lanark County, but programs do offer Indigenous learning experiences¹.

The greatest concern for specialized programming was among parents of special needs children. Across Canada in 2023 it was found that 62% of parents of children with special needs could not find suitable child care⁶. Of families in Lanark County with special needs children, 39% experienced challenges with employment due to lack of child care⁵. Concerns included having to reduce work hours or take time off work to care for their child.

"Parents shouldn't be in a situation where they lose childcare and have no option but to lose work."

- Parent of special needs child

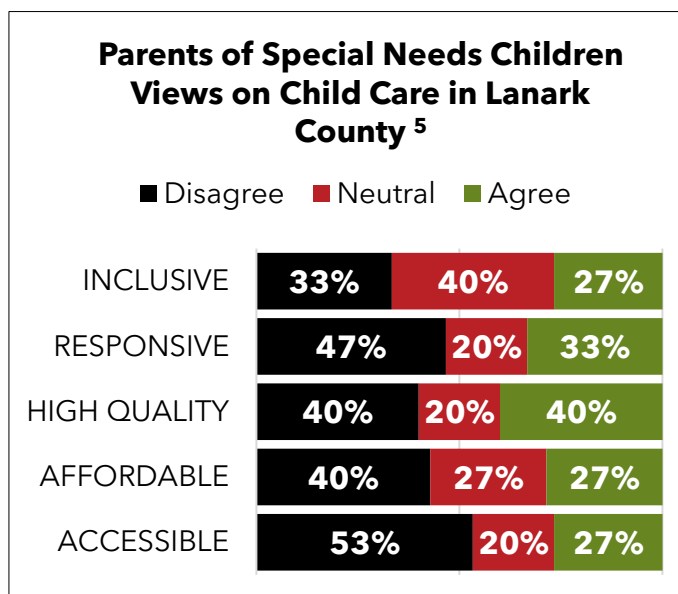
Access to child care was identified as making a positive impact in the lives of children with special needs. In Lanark County the parents and caregivers of said children, 84% stated they believe child care had enhanced their family life, and 83% saw a positive impact on their child's development. Some Lanark County families didn't believe their family's needs (65%), or child's needs (46%) were being met⁵. These results were

collected from community survey results, and these families may or may not have children in licensed child care in Lanark County. Their lack of needs being met may be due to not having access to a licensed child care space.

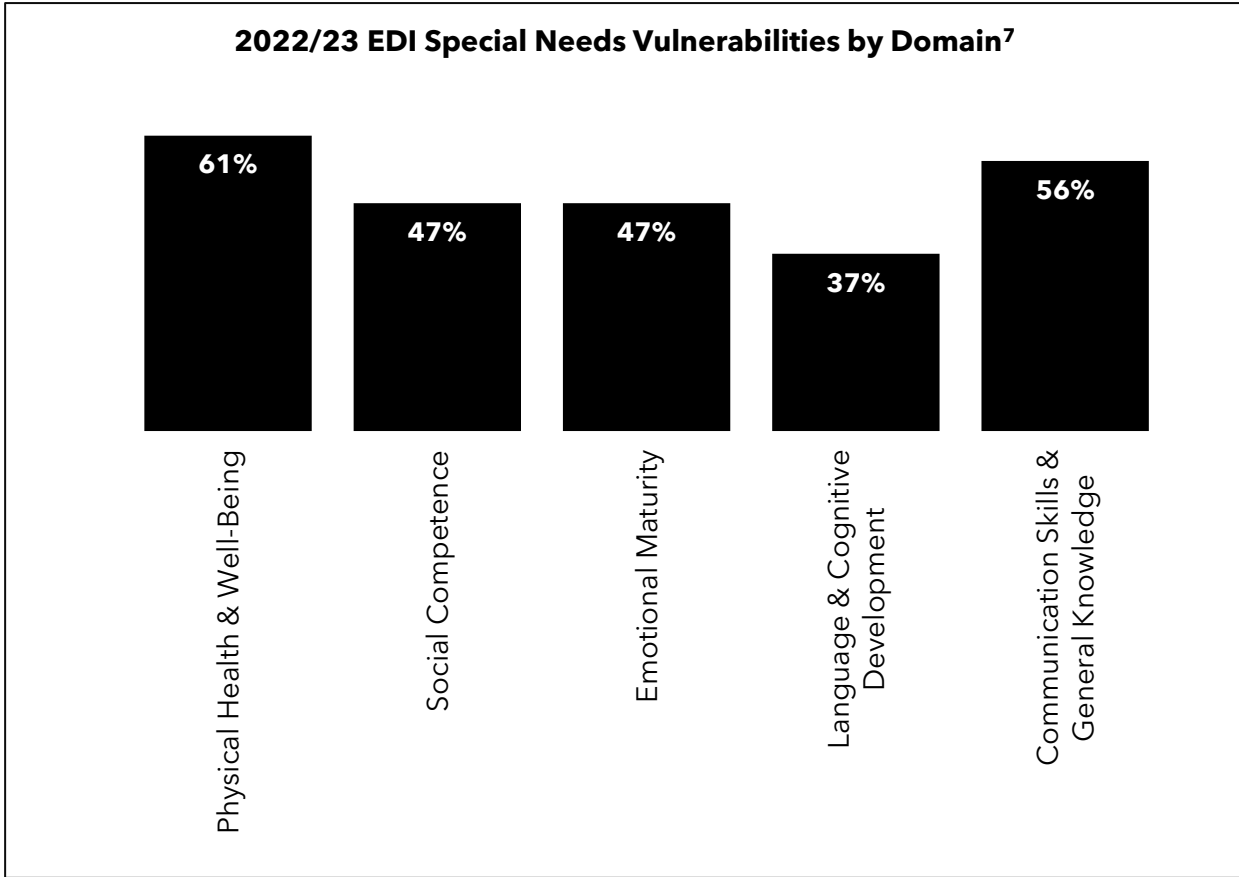
Special needs resourcing was identified by the community providers as a significant need, with only 13% of providers believing the current processes are working. Another 35% of child care providers identified that the demand for special needs services is greater than the current resources. In addition, parents of special needs children identified the greatest need was for more programming for special needs (56%)⁵.

From the community surveys, parents of special needs children were less likely to consider Lanark County child care services to be inclusive, responsive, and of high quality compared to the public. Community members accessing services identified their top resources as Occupational/Physical Therapy, (43%), Language Express (33%), and Lanark Early Integration Program (29%). When looking at EDI scores, special needs children have high rates of vulnerabilities across all domains⁵.

Lanark County acknowledges the necessity of assessing the practices and processes related to special needs resourcing, with the aim of establishing a system that serves the interests of all families.



According to the 2022-2023 EDI tool, vulnerabilities of children with special needs in Lanark County are much greater than vulnerabilities of all children. This remains true across all five EDI domains.



6.0 EarlyON Child and Family Centres

EarlyON Child and Family Centres provide opportunities for children from birth to six (6) years of age to participate in play and inquiry-based programs, and support parents and caregivers in their roles. These programs offer safe and welcoming environments open to all families across Ontario, with qualified professionals, and quality programs. Families and caregivers will be able to find support, advice, make personal connections, and access a network of resources.

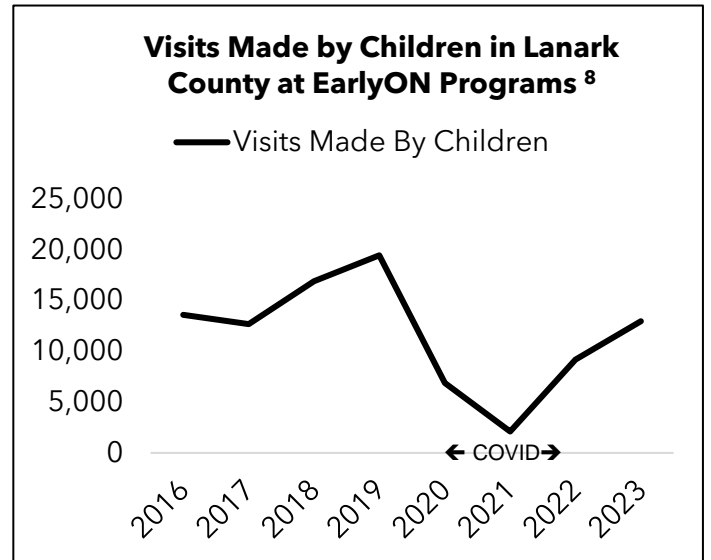


// This program has helped me become a better first-time mom //
- EarlyON participant

EarlyON is a free community service. It is available in multiple locations in Lanark County, supported by a mobile playgroup that changes location from month to month to better serve the more rural areas. EarlyON primarily runs playgroups and parent education but has partnered with local agencies to provide targeted programs to diverse populations. One such agency is Connections, Community Action

Program for Children. This program is for families and caregivers of children from prenatal to age six (6) that are in a higher risk demographic (low-income, teenage parents, mental health, and addiction, etc.). Family and Children's Services of Lanark, Leeds & Grenville provide parent education workshops on supporting parents/grandparents/foster parents. EarlyON also provides specialized groups for French Language, parent education, and guest presentations from professionals such as Dietitians and Infant Development Specialists.

EarlyON serves an average of over 3,000 parents, caregivers, and children annually. Covid-19 had a large impact on in-person programming. EarlyON adjusted during this time to provide virtual programming during the time of closures. In-person programming in Lanark County saw a drop in visits during 2020-2022 but has since risen again⁸. EarlyON virtual programming consisted of using over nine (9) different platforms providing live virtual programming, information sharing, parental support, and referrals.

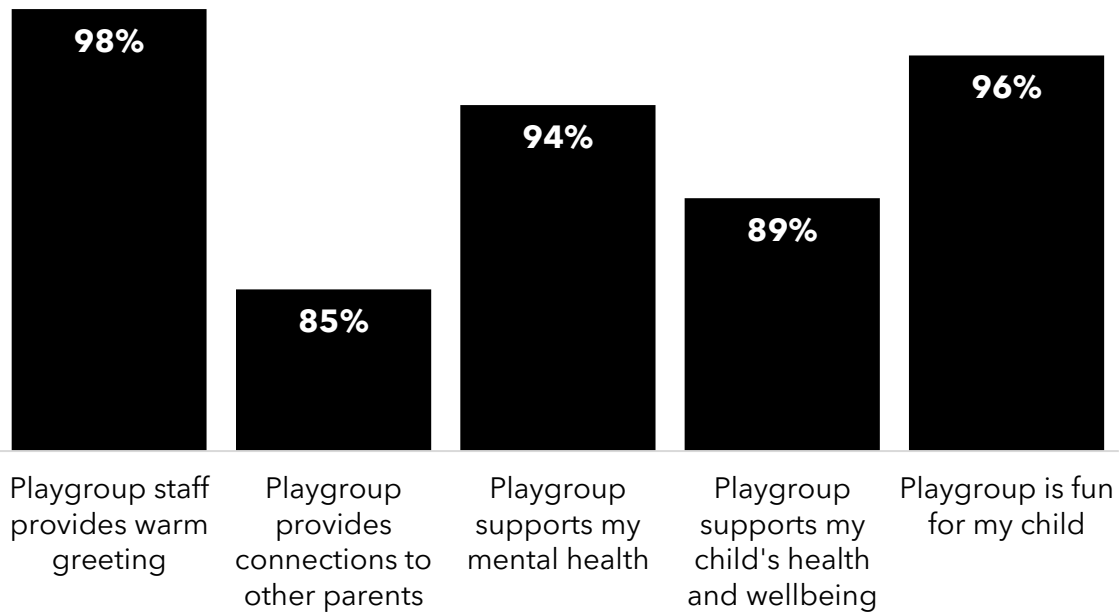


EarlyON has a positive impact on Lanark County’s community. According to the community survey, EarlyON participants highly regard the EarlyON facilitators and connections they have made in the program. Other things about EarlyON that participants highlighted include that it is fun, safe and comfortable atmosphere, children enjoy the activities, families feel it is an inclusive space, and that it is a free program⁵.

Of those surveyed, 90% were satisfied with EarlyON programming in Lanark County. Parents suggested wanting French programming or multi-cultural days. Overwhelmingly, parents agreed that EarlyON had a positive impact on their children, such as supporting the caregiver’s and children’s development and mental well-being.⁵



EarlyON Programming Parent and Caregiver Feedback⁵



7.0 General Challenges for the Early Years

Significant progress has been made to improve early years services but there is still much work to be done. In recent years, Lanark County has faced considerable obstacles that continue to impact child care and EarlyON programs, including:

- The Covid-19 pandemic forced many people to leave the workforce. Many of which were RECEs.
- Access to child care spaces that are part of the CWELCC system to ensure affordability.
- Higher employment rates result in a higher demand for child care.
- Growing child population.
- Demand on special needs resourcing continues, and services are not meeting needs.
- The CWELCC system made child care more affordable, creating a greater demand for more child care spaces.
- Less family support for child care than previous generations due to families not living in proximity, grandparents still in the workforce or no transportation.
- Families working jobs with unique hours (weekends, overnights) and no licensed child care that accommodates unique hours.
- Increased EDI vulnerabilities.
- Workforce shortages, specifically RECEs, continually have difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified staff.
- Poor compensation and lack of benefits available for many professionals in the early years sector.

Families living in rural areas favour the slower pace, friendliness of a smaller community, and the ability to access more green space. Parents prefer a strong sense of community and a less chaotic environment.

To continue encouraging families to move to Lanark County, it is imperative that municipalities have the necessary infrastructure, amenities, and quality services that families come to expect for the overall well-being of their family.

8.0 Strategic Priorities

Objectives and outcomes have been drafted for each priority and will be updated as needed throughout the next five (5) years in partnership with the community and community providers.

Five main priorities have been identified:

- 1) increase accessibility of child care
- 2) ensure sustainability of child care
- 3) offer quality programs
- 4) engagement with providers, community partners, and participants
- 5) inclusivity of early years settings for children with special needs

Strategic Priority #1:

Increase accessibility of child care in Lanark County.

- 1) Increase licensed child care capacity where possible.**
- 2) Prioritize expansion of spaces for providers with non-traditional hours of operation (extended hours, evenings, weekends), and child care spaces in more rural areas. Communities inhabited by low-income families, newcomers, and non-standard hour workers, as well as rural and remote communities, are the most underserved child care deserts.**
- 3) Recruit and retain quality RECEs and child care workers who are required to create new or expand existing child care spaces. This may include but is not limited to; job fairs, visiting local high schools, attending community events to promote the early years profession, and working closely with community partners.**

Strategic Priority #2:

Ensure affordability of the child care sector by maximizing efficiencies and ensuring sustainability of the child care/early years system.

- 1) Reduce administration burdens for child care providers and EarlyON programs, where possible.**
- 2) Assess waitlist options and consider moving to a centralized waitlist to ensure consistency and transparency for all families trying to access affordable child care spaces.**
- 3) Advocate for fair wages for RECEs to support recruitment and highlighting the importance of RECEs in increasing high quality affordable child care spaces.**
- 4) Promote child care fee subsidy options for families of children over the age of six (6) who have aged out of the CWELCC system.**

Strategic Priority #3:

High-quality programs and educators.

- 1) Provide consistent professional learning and collaboration opportunities for all RECEs and Child Care Workers in Lanark County that are free of charge.**
- 2) Ensure each agency/centre is represented and has a voice at the Lanark Early Learning and Child Care Association committee (LELCCA) to support in planning professional learning and continued growth opportunities that are relevant to what the educators need locally.**
- 3) Create opportunities to collaborate between providers, educators, and the Lanark County Early Years Specialist to work on the Lanark County Quality Assurance Resource Guide. This will ensure every child, family and educator has a sense of belonging in their program, feels comfortable engaging with others, and expressing themselves in the environment, and has a strong sense of wellbeing.**

Strategic Priority #4:

Responsive with providers, families and community partners.

- 1) Conduct frequent site visits to providers and regular collaboration meetings with providers, educators, and administrative teams to ensure a consistent and transparent system.**
- 2) Create opportunities for parents and families to have the flexibility to select their child care based on their preferences, rather than being restricted to whatever space is currently open.**
- 3) Ensure that EarlyON programming addresses participant needs by offering diverse programs across multiple locations and times.**
- 4) Collaborate with a diverse range of community organizations that possess expertise, skills, and specialized materials and resources. These partnerships will enhance child care and early years programs and offer families the necessary support and information they need.**

Strategic Priority #5:

Inclusivity of early years settings for children with special needs.

- 1) Complete an operational review of special needs resourcing program to seek improvements and efficiencies.**
- 2) Educate and train all early year's staff to ensure they possess the confidence and comfort necessary to effectively support the diverse needs of all children.**
- 3) Ensure access to services is equitable. Transition to a waitlist that guarantees uniformity and clarity for all families seeking access to affordable childcare options.**
- 4) Maintain an inclusive approach by ensuring that no families with children who have special needs are denied service or have their enrollment terminated.**

8.1 Ongoing Assessment and Evaluation

Communication plan

- Service Plan will be shared and approved by Lanark County Council.
- Service Plan will be presented at various planning tables for community partners (LELCCA, Lanark County Child & Youth Services Collaborative, child care service providers).
- Service Plan will be posted to be publicly available on the Lanark County website.
- Service Plan will be a standing agenda item for Children's Services team meetings.

Solicit continuous feedback from community and community partners

- Child care directors: bi-monthly meetings with Children's Services staff.
- Lanark Early Learning Child Care Association: get input at monthly meetings.
- Planning tables (school boards participate): regular updates given.
- Early Years Specialist visiting child care centres and EarlyON programs: talking to staff, parents and children.

Monitor progress

- Monitor child care providers fiscally through regular reporting.
- Track number of operating and licensed child care spaces.
- Streamline and track waitlist information to have a more accurate picture of child care pressures.
- Track community partners and what services they can provide to the early years sector.
- Monitor professional development activities provided to Early Childhood Educators by Lanark County including topics, participants and frequency.
- Complete an annual report on progress

References

¹Statistics Canada. 2022. Census Profile. 2021 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released December 15, 2022.

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

²Population Projections [Population projections - 49 census divisions mof population projections 2022-2046 - Ontario Data Catalogue](#)

³[Download, Census Profile, 2016 Census \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)

⁴Community Consultation

⁵Community surveys, including EarlyON, SNR, providers, and general community survey/children voices.

⁶KON, general report and also one for Lanark County. Information was provided from both

⁷EDI: <https://edi.offordcentre.com/secure/>

⁸EFIS data

⁹Ontario Works Internal Data

¹⁰OCCMS

¹¹Internal data from Lanark County reporting

¹²Labour Market Group: [Publications - Labour Market Group of Renfrew and Lanark](#)

¹³Canada country background report - Quality in early childhood education and care <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/early-learning-child-care/reports/2021-canada-country-background-quality.html>

¹⁴Akbari, 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.

https://knowingournumbers.ca/media/filer_public/52/22/5222b720-6d56-45f3-bd55-970c44eab60b/kon-executive_summary_en.pdf

¹⁵Statistics Canada. [Table 18-10-0005-01 Consumer Price Index, annual average, not seasonally adjusted](#)

Terms and Acronyms

CCEY - Child Care and Early Years System

Children - defined as those 12 years and younger for the purpose of this report.

CMSM - Consolidated Municipal Service Manager

CWELCC - Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care

DNE - Township of Drummond North Elmsley

EarlyON - EarlyON Child and Family Centres provide opportunities for children from birth to 6 years of age to participate in play and inquiry-based programs, and support parents and caregivers in their roles.

ECE - Term often used for REECE. All ECEs should be registered with the College of ECE and receive the registered designation.

EDI - Early Development Instrument

Fee Subsidy - helps with the cost of licensed child care for those that are eligible.

LELLCA - Lanark Early Learning Child Care Association

Licensed Capacity - the number of children a child care provider is allowed to provide care for at a given time

Licensed Child Care - child care providers that are government-regulated and inspected. These providers are licensed by the Ministry of Education.

Operating Capacity - the number of children a child care provider can host given their current staffing.

ODSP - Ontario Disability Support Program

OW - Ontario Works

Qualified Staff Ratios - are the percentage of staff that must be RECE (in some cases a child and youth worker).

RECE - Registered Early Childhood Educator

SNR - Special Needs Resourcing

Staff Ratios - the number of children for whom each child care provider is responsible for supervising based on the child's age.

Unlicensed Child Care - child care providers that are not licensed by the Ministry of Education.

