
Subject: Actions to Inform Procurement Process of EarlyON Child and Family Centres

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, April 16, 2019

Recommendations

1. That all current service provider agencies (Appendix A) continue to operate EarlyON Child and Family Centres until the conclusion of the procurement process, and that Staff **BE AUTHORIZED** to negotiate any and all required amendments and documentation related to existing agreements for current service provider agencies;
2. That the Negotiated Request for Proposal (NRFP) process **BE INITIATED** in Q2 2019 and that Staff **BE AUTHORIZED** to enter into negotiations with the selected proponents based on the NRFP process, subject to confirmation of provincial funding;
3. That the evaluation scoring matrix (Appendix B), to be used to score NRFP submissions from potential service providers, **BE APPROVED**;
4. That Staff **BE AUTHORIZED** to negotiate with Bethlehem Housing and Support Services as the sole sourced EarlyON service provider to operate an EarlyON Child and Family Centre specifically for high needs families in Niagara;
5. That Staff **BE AUTHORIZED** to negotiate with Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre as the sole sourced EarlyON service provider to operate a culturally relevant, Indigenous-led EarlyON Child and Family Centre in Niagara;
6. That Staff **BE AUTHORIZED** to negotiate with Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Welland as the sole sourced EarlyON service provider to operate a French-language EarlyON Child and Family Centre in Niagara;
7. That Staff **BE AUTHORIZED** to negotiate with Sault Ste Marie Innovation Centre to license the use of KEyON data collection software in all EarlyON Child and Family Centres across Niagara; and
8. That the Commissioner of Community Services, or their designate, **BE AUTHORIZED** and directed to execute any and all documents required to implement sections 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the Recommendations.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to seek Regional Council's approval of a number of recommendations pertaining to the formal procurement for the EarlyON Child and Family Centre service system.
- As of January 1 2018, the provincial government added the EarlyON Child and Family Centre service system planning and administration to Niagara Region, as the Consolidated Municipal Services Manager (CMSM).
- Now in addition to its existing responsibility of service system management of the local early learning and licensed child care system, Niagara Region's Children's Services has the additional responsibility of service system management of all EarlyON Child and Family Centres across Niagara.
- Children's Services will be issuing a Negotiated Request for Proposal with the goal to seek preferred proponents who will be invited to enter into direct contract negotiations with Children's Services in order to operate an EarlyON Child and Family Centre in one or more service zones across Niagara, and to participate in the transformation to a new integrated early years system.
- In order to support and provide consistent and accessible core services throughout Niagara, 16 service zones have been identified (Appendix C). Service zones have been developed based on detailed analysis of population data, density and distribution of children ages 0-4 years, areas identified for population growth for young families, and feedback from parents/caregivers, service providers, and community service agencies.
- Throughout 2018 information was gathered through ongoing planning activities and community engagement to inform the NRFP framework and procurement process, evaluation scoring matrix, and other service system components outlined within the report, for consideration and approval by Regional Council.

Financial Considerations

Of the \$4.09 million EarlyON service system funding allocation from the Ministry of Education (MEDU), \$2.7 million is directed for operation of EarlyON Child and Family Centres. The remaining \$1.3 million is provincially mandated to support a number of services:

- Professional resource centre to support professional learning and development of staff,
- Early Literacy Specialist to support early literacy and numeracy by providing resources, workshops, and consultations for parents/caregivers and staff,
- Data analysis services to inform service system planning, and
- Planning activities by the local, provincially mandated Best Start Network.

As well, the \$1.3 million includes funding allocated to the three specialized service providers, (recommended to be sole-sourced), and the KEyON data collection software

to be used in all EarlyON Child and Family Centres across Niagara (also recommended to be single-sourced), in compliance with Niagara Region's Procurement By-law and as outlined in this report.

This funding allocation, received in January 2018, reflects a net increase of approximately \$120,000 (included within the \$1.3 million noted above) over previous years provincial amounts. The additional funding, consistent with provincial expectations, was used to increase service for Indigenous, French language, and high risk families, identified as provincial priorities. These are 100% MEDU funding dollars with no expectation for municipal cost share contributions.

Analysis

Effective January 1 2018, Niagara Region Children's Services became responsible for planning and administration of EarlyON Child and Family Centres, in addition to its responsibility for local licensed child care system and other human services, on behalf of the province. Children's Services has been charged to locally implement the provincial vision of an integrated and coordinated early years system, with seamless transitions between programs and services that support early learning and healthy child development.

At the initiation of this new responsibility, as a short-term strategy, Niagara Region entered into service agreements with existing service providers to allow for a period of local planning, analysis and review of provincial policy. As a next step towards implementing the provincial vision, Children's Services will be issuing a Negotiated Request for Proposal (NRFP). The NRFP process will support the transition and transformation of the existing EarlyON service system as per MEDU expectations within provincial budget allocations. The NRFP will identify preferred proponents who will enter into contract negotiations to operate an EarlyON Child and Family Centre in one or more of the 16 service zones. Proponents will also be expected to participate in the transformation to a new integrated early years system.

The sixteen service zones have been developed based on detailed analysis of population data, density, and distribution of children ages 0-4 years, areas identified by Niagara Region's Planning Department for population growth for young families, and feedback from parents/caregivers, service providers, and community service agencies. Children's Services goal is to have a minimum of one EarlyON Centre operating within each service zone; however, this is contingent on annual provincial funding and the proposals received by the proponents to the NRFP procurement.

Throughout 2018, ongoing planning (through an EarlyON Advisory Committee), data collection, and community engagement with key stakeholders (children and their parents/caregivers, service providers, and staff) was used to inform the NRFP framework and process. Surveys and facilitated sessions were used to:

- Help develop service zones to meet the planning goal that each resident have equitable access to EarlyON Centres across Niagara,
- Locally define core services available across all EarlyON Centres in Niagara,
- Better understand service delivery needs of smaller and/or rural communities.

More information was subsequently collected from five (5) focus group sessions in rural and/or smaller communities and a pilot project. Results are consistent with findings from the local needs assessment completed in 2017. Staff continue to hear that families who attend EarlyON Child and Family Centres place a high value on the free programs and services and support they receive from staff. Parents/caregivers also noted their desire to:

- Have more flexible hours (open over lunch hour, evenings, weekends, and over summer months and other school closure times),
- Have more opportunities for outdoor play, and
- Have increased awareness of the Centre and programs and services offered.

A pilot project, established to support system transformation, started in April 2018, allowed for testing of stakeholder recommendations and key service delivery components, such as co-location with existing community services, flexible service hours and multiple aspects of accessibility and inclusion (e.g. universally accessible space, free and ample parking, within a 15 minute drive from home, increased access for Indigenous, French language services and services for high needs families).

To further support the formal procurement process, a Review Panel was struck, with members selected based on criteria, such as:

- Knowledge of the early years sector,
- Having no conflict of interest, real or perceived,
- Professional qualifications,
- Years of experience within the human services/children's services industry, and
- Local area knowledge.

The Review Panel role is two-fold. First, to provide advice and feedback to inform development of the NRFP framework, by reviewing information gathered from the aforementioned planning, data collection and community engagement activities in 2018. The Review Panel provided advice and feedback on components such as service zone selection, staffing ratios, evaluation scoring criteria and matrix to assess submissions, and submission eligibility requirements. Once NRFP submissions are received, the role of the Review Panel will shift, and members will review and score written submissions and presentations.

As was the intention when Children's Services was granted approval to temporarily defer the formal procurement process for a period of one year (COM 21-2017), this time allowed staff to gain experience and knowledge of systems management

responsibilities of the EarlyON Child and Family Centres. Information gathered through planning and engagement in 2018 has informed the NRFP framework and procurement process, evaluation scoring matrix, and other service system components outlined below.

Procurement approach and evaluation scoring matrix

The NRFP shall request proposals per identified service zone. Proponents will be required to complete a written submission for each service zone of interest. After the NRFP closing date, Niagara Region's Strategic Sourcing division will review all submissions to determine eligibility based on established mandatory criteria. All eligible written submissions will be distributed to Review Panel members for review and scoring.

Written submissions will be scored, out of a possible 80 points based on:

- Organizational and Administrative Capacity and System Readiness (32 points)
- High Quality Accessible Service Delivery (24 points)
- Family Relationships and Partnerships (16 points)
- Innovation (8 points).

See Appendix B for further details on the above.

All proponents will be invited to present to the Review Panel, as the second phase of the evaluation process. Proponents will receive a question/scenario to inform their presentation, to consist of 20 points of the overall score.

The preferred proponent for each service zone will be based on the highest score, and will be invited to enter into contract negotiations with Niagara Region to operate an EarlyON Child and Family Centre for that particular service zone, and participate in the transformation to a new integrated system.

Should those contract negotiations fail, Niagara Region will enter into a new round of contract negotiations with the proponent having the second highest score for the specific service zone. While the goal is to have a minimum of one EarlyON Centre operating within each service zone, this is contingent on annual provincial funding. Children's Services will not exceed the funding allocation of \$2.7 million, therefore any changes to the funding allocation will impact contract negotiations, and require changes to the service zone goal.

Pending Committee and Council approval of this report, following is the proposed NRFP schedule:

Steps	Timelines
Council Approval	April 2019
NRFP Information Session (for interested proponents)	April 2019
NRFP Issuance	May 2019
NRFP Close	June 2019
Evaluation of NRFP (including Presentations)	June - July 2019
Announcement of Preferred Proponents	August 2019
Negotiations	Until complete (anticipated by the end of Q4 2019)

Subject to provincial funding, and following negotiations, Children’s Services will enter into purchase of service agreements with preferred proponents on a phased in basis in order to ensure continuity of services across Niagara.

Term of service agreements with successful EarlyON proponents

Children’s Services Staff are recommending the term for the successful proponents remain in effect for one year and automatically renew for further terms of one year on each service agreement anniversary date.

This allows for long-term service system planning, and is consistent with current practice within the Children’s Services Division for service agreements with licensed child care service providers and agencies delivering special needs services. As is the case with licensed child care and special needs services, Children’s Services will monitor to ensure EarlyON programs and services are provided in accordance with the service agreement. Should the EarlyON service provider fail to perform these programs and services, Niagara Region may terminate the service agreement in accordance with the terms and conditions of the agreement.

Approval for entry into a sole source agreement with Bethlehem Housing and Support Services as high needs family service provider:

Children’s Services staff recommends that Bethlehem Housing and Support Services be exempt from the NRFP process, and that Niagara Region be allowed to amend its existing service agreement with Bethlehem Housing and Support Services to continue operation of an EarlyON Child and Family Centre for high needs families in Niagara.

Since 1996, Bethlehem Housing and Support Services has operated a child and family program within a building that provides one year transitional housing to children and their families who are homeless due to issues with poverty, physical disability, mental health, domestic violence and family breakdown. Co-location has ensured accessibility and intensive supports available for high needs families, to improve child and family outcomes.

In January 2018 these child and family programs were integrated within the local EarlyON system, as part of a cohesive system of services and supports for children ages 0-6 years and their families/caregivers.

While the funding provided to Bethlehem Housing and Support Services is part of the overall \$4.09 million allocation, it is not included in the \$2.7 million allocated as part of the NRFP for the operation of EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

Approval for sole source agreement with Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre as Indigenous EarlyON service provider:

Children's Services staff recommends that Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre be exempt from the NRFP process, and that Niagara Region be allowed to amend its existing service agreement with Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre to continue operation of an Indigenous led EarlyON Child and Family Centre in Niagara.

Niagara Region is required, by the MEDU, to offer programs and services that reflect local Indigenous cultures, and are expected to work in close partnership with Indigenous organizations to plan for and deliver culturally relevant early years programs and services off-reserve.

Since 1996 Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre has been operating culturally relevant, Indigenous-led early years programs and services off-reserve, including licensed child care and a child and family program. In January 2018, the child and family program was integrated within the EarlyON system

While the funding provided to Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre is part of the overall \$4.09 million allocation, it is not included in the \$2.7 million allocated as part of the NRFP for the operation of EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

Approval for sole source agreement with Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Welland as French language EarlyON service provider:

Children's Services staff recommends that Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Welland be exempt from the NRFP process, and that Niagara Region be allowed to amend its existing service agreement to continue operation of a French language EarlyON Child and Family Centre in Niagara.

Niagara Region is required to provide French language child and family programs and services in accordance with its legislated responsibilities under the *French Language Services Act*. Currently the municipalities of Welland and Port Colborne are designated communities.

Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Welland is a multi-service agency providing health and social services to French-speaking clients and serves the entire Niagara region. Since 1996, Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Welland has been operating a French language child and family program. In January 2018, this was integrated within the EarlyON system.

While the funding provided to Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Welland is part of the overall \$4.09 million allocation, it is not included in the \$2.7 million allocated as part of the NRRFP for the operation of EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

Approval for Sault Ste Marie Innovation Centre as single source vendor, for licensing agreement for KEyON software to be used at all Niagara EarlyON Child and Family Centres

Accurate and quality data is required for MEDU quarterly reporting requirements, local measurement of participation and critical for ongoing local system planning. The current system used by many EarlyON Centres is aging and no longer supported, while other locations rely on manual data tracking. As well, the MEDU has noted no additional investments will be made at the provincial level for data collection software. Therefore, Children's Services staff sought to find data collection software that would:

- Collect the MEDU required data variables,
- Be subject to ongoing system improvement and updates,
- Allow for central collection of participant data across Niagara,
- Be in use by other municipalities, and
- Be user friendly for both parents/caregivers and staff.

Since September 2018, the KEyON data collection software, created by the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre, has been in use at the EarlyON pilot site at Seaway Mall in Welland. This software was created specifically to collect MEDU data variables, is used by eight other Ontario municipalities, is being piloted by two municipalities, and meets all other aforementioned criteria.

Based on positive results of the software pilot, Children's Services staff recommend purchasing a license and related service maintenance for the KEyON data collection software. The license purchase cost is approximately \$13,000 annually. The software would improve data quality to support reporting to the MEDU, as well as support informed decision making and local ongoing system planning.

Alternatives Reviewed

Not issue a formal procurement and work with existing providers and negotiate single source service agreements to provide EarlyON services

Children's Services staff have reviewed the alternative and are not recommending it due to the challenges noted below:

- A formal procurement process will ensure openness, accountability and transparency with current service providers and any possible new service providers are given equal opportunity to make a submission
- A formal procurement process will ensure preferred proponents, who enter into contract negotiations with Children's Services, are fully aware of service system expectations, and willingly participate in the transformation to a new integrated early years system.
- A formal procurement process will allow Children's Services to build on existing strengths of the current EarlyON system, and also capitalize on opportunities that occur through system transformation (e.g. eliminate duplication of services, more equitable access across Niagara, consistency of program delivery).

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The provision of accessible and quality early learning programs and services supports Council's focus on Economic Prosperity.

Other Pertinent Reports

- COM 9-2016 Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres
- COM 21-2017 Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres
- COM 23-2017 Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centre Plan
- CWCD 289-2018 Pilot EarlyON Child and Family Centre at Seaway Mall in Welland

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

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Appendices

Appendix A – List of current EarlyON Child and Family Centre service provider agencies

Appendix B – Proposed Evaluation Scoring Matrix

Appendix C – Map of Service Zones

Appendix A – List of current EarlyON Child and Family Centre service provider agencies

Name of Agency	Operating EarlyON Centre(s) in the following municipalities:
Bethlehem Housing and Support Services	St. Catharines
Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Niagara	Welland
District School Board of Niagara	Fort Erie, Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, Welland
Family and Children Services Niagara	Pelham, Welland
Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre	Fort Erie
Niagara Catholic District School Board	Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake
Port Cares	Fort Erie, Lincoln, Port Colborne, Welland, West Lincoln
Strive Niagara	Grimsby
YMCA of Niagara	St. Catharines, Thorold

Appendix B – Proposed Evaluation Scoring Matrix

Item	Evaluation Components	Points Total 100
<i>Demonstrate Organizational and Administrative Capacity and System Readiness</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The organization has experience in directly delivering early years programs and services and working with community partners. 2. The delivery of EarlyON Child and Family Centre(s) is aligned with organization’s mandate, services and structure. 3. Organization supports the Provincial strategy of one common brand to achieve greater coherence across the EarlyON Child and Family system. 4. The organization has a realistic readiness and transition plan, including engagement and communications to minimize disruption during start up and transition; clearly identify challenges and appropriate mitigation strategies. 5. Human resource plan for the recruitment and retention of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) and other staff supports: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Qualified staff teams, consisting of a minimum of 1 RECE, to deliver mandatory core services related to supporting early learning and development b. Staff engage in professional learning opportunities to ensure they remain aware of current practice and new research on child development 6. Administrative and financial capacity to operate and sustain EarlyON Child and Family Centre(s): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Proposed budget that is aligned with the EarlyON Child and Family Centre objectives and supports equity across the system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Administration costs do not exceed 10% of total budget 	32

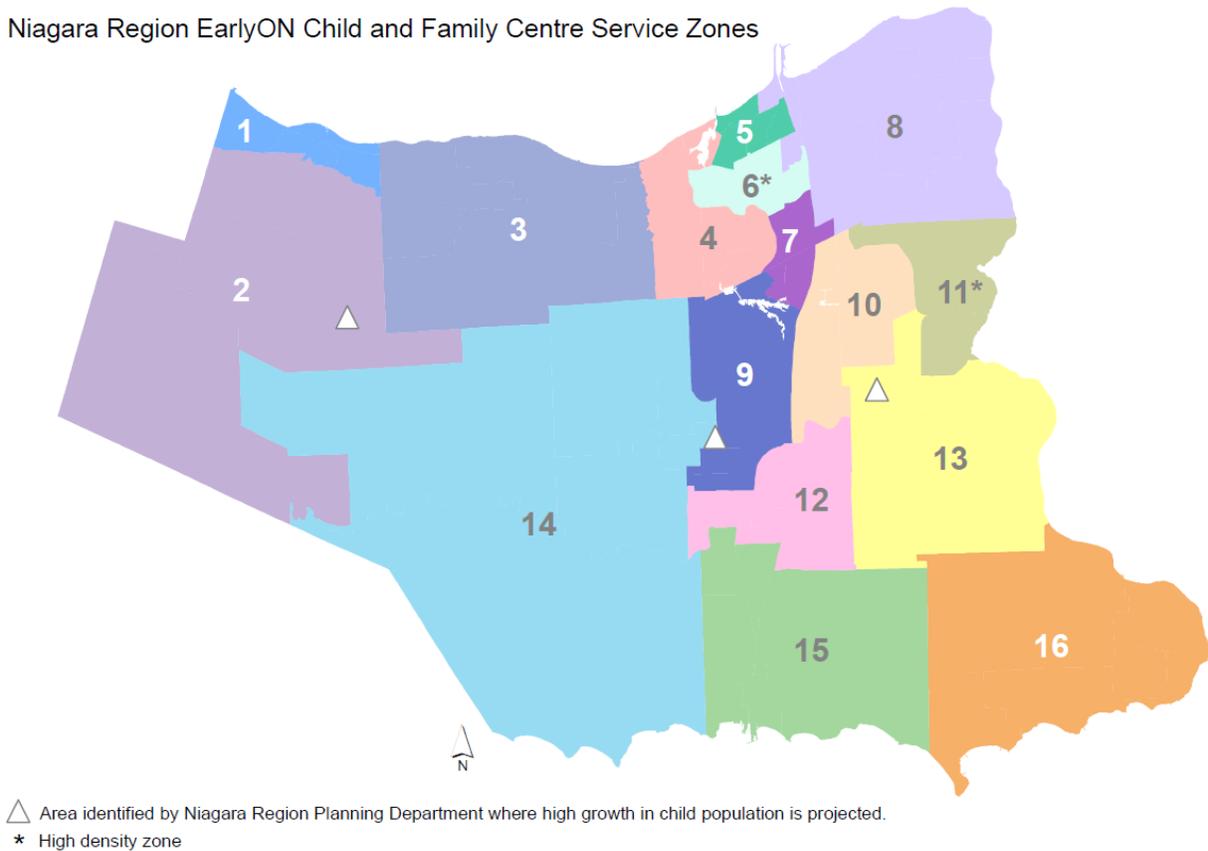
Item	Evaluation Components	Points Total 100
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An established, fair and equitable remuneration plan for staff ▪ The organization shows a healthy financial position 	
<p><i>Demonstrate High Quality Accessible Service Delivery</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clearly demonstrates understanding of population needs and community assets within the service zone: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Proposal is informed by research/evidence (e.g. community or program data, key community planning/research documents, statistics or community trends, regional/local planning documents, etc.) 2. Submission includes sound schedule, staffing and costing for the proposed service zone. 3. Offers inclusive barrier free environment where programs and services are designed and delivered in a way that is responsive to diverse populations in alignment with local needs (i.e. diverse cultures and languages, children of varying abilities, various family structures, Francophone and Indigenous families, and newcomers to Niagara). 4. Service delivery is evidence informed, offers no fee programs and services for all children aged 0-6 years and their parents/caregivers that contribute to healthy child development and align with the expectations outlined in the EarlyON Child and Family Centres Planning Guidelines for Service System Managers. 5. Service delivery includes mandatory core service requirements as defined in the Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres Business Practices and Funding 	<p>24</p>

Item	Evaluation Components	Points Total 100
	<p>Guidelines for Service System Managers such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. engaging parents and caregivers, b. supporting early learning and development c. making connections for families <p>6. Expertise in the delivery of programs and services in alignment with the pedagogical approach described in the Ministry of Education How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years.</p>	
<p><i>Demonstrate Ability to Establish Family Relationships and Partnerships to Create Customized Community Connections</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Commitment to working collaboratively and effectively with organizations (public, non-profit or private) to compliment core services and offer additional programs and services at the EarlyON Centre that align with the unique needs and priorities of individual communities. 2. Making connections for families through established linkages to other agencies or programs that would support further integration, facilitate smooth transitions and referrals, within a broader system context of local community services (e.g. public libraries, child care, public health, employment and training programs). 3. Engaging communities, educators, parents and caregivers in designing EarlyON and Family Centre programs and services that embrace and build on strengths, address identified gaps and meet unique needs. 	16
<p><i>Demonstrate Innovation and Continuous Improvement</i></p> <p><i>Definition of Innovation-Innovative approaches</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organization demonstrates how the proposal supports an innovative approach; this results in clear impact to the target population, service delivery and/or organizational efficiency; innovative approach can be implemented. 	8

Item	Evaluation Components	Points Total 100
<p><i>can include: a new and/or improved way of delivering a service; initiatives that will result in greater efficiency within organizations; and/or that identify and respond to new and emerging needs.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Delivery of early years programs and services that are responsive and flexible and include strategies to support local assets/needs and/or circumstances. 3. Leveraging opportunities to provide multiple community services through fewer service delivery mechanisms/locations to ensure that children, parents/caregivers have easy and efficient access to services they need (reference to Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework Action Plan). 4. The organization offers additional value added resources that demonstrate enhancement above and beyond mandatory core services, such as, but not limited to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. community resources (e.g. toy lending library, employment services), to support unique needs of parents/caregivers b. specialized staffing and/or services to support unique needs of parents/caregivers c. Measure and report on key indicators aligned with measuring outcomes to assess progress; adherence to terms and conditions of funding, reporting, monitoring and tracking of participants. 	
<p><i>Presentation</i></p>	<p>Scenario with evaluation components will be provided to proponent during scheduling of presentations.</p>	<p>20</p>

Appendix C – Map of Service Zones

Niagara Region EarlyON Child and Family Centre Service Zones



Data source: Statistics Canada 2016 Census, Single Year Age Profile