



## Best Start in Toronto

It's been a busy time in the early learning and care sector. Toronto's Best Start Network developed the Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children that describes how Toronto will bring together the existing patchwork of services into a system that works for Toronto's families. Our first steps included:

- 55 new or expanded child care programs opening their doors — many of them in Toronto schools — resulting in more children having the opportunity to be cared for and educated in the same place.
- Toronto's Best Start Network developed an implementation plan — Best Start: Getting Started Year 1 — to make the 10-year vision a reality.
- A groundbreaking Partnership Agreement was established that outlined the commitment of the Network members in moving forward jointly on the Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children.



## Moving forward...

This year is going to be just as exciting. An Implementation Steering Committee is developing strategies to make the vision a reality, and professional development and community engagement are the primary focuses. So what does this mean for service providers on the ground?

Phase one of Toronto's Best Start Strategy focuses on supporting teachers, Early Childhood Educators and family support practitioners to work together in a more coordinated, comprehensive way to enhance the early learning experience for families and children. This is an opportunity for service providers to change how services are delivered to children and families.

## What can I do?

- Think "outside the box"
- Invite your colleagues to visit your program and spend some time observing
- Set up a meeting to discuss strategies on how to work together to enhance the programs for families and children
- Organize an event or trip with school, child care and family support programs
- Produce a joint newsletter with information
- Share policies with each other.



## Best Start: what we've heard...

### Getting started at the Blessed John XXIII Early Learning Program

"It was very beneficial for the kindergarten and child care staff to have a meeting before the program opened. We all sat down and compared the programs that we offer, and we were delighted to find lots of similarities. We also had the opportunity for a staff from the kindergarten class and a staff from the child care program to attend The Incredible Years training together, which provides more consistency for our children.

Due to the content of the Incredible Years program, it works better to have two staff teaching the information at the same time, so we've made arrangements to deliver the program together."

(Jane Wilson, Kindergarten Teacher, Blessed John XXIII Catholic School)



### Why it's working so well

"We feel the programs run smoothly because we take a minute to talk each day and discuss our children. If needed we arrange time for more intense conversation. The biggest reason the program has been working so well is because everyone involved really believes in the importance of working together and is doing everything they can to make it a success. Everyone is very flexible and easy going and open to change. Parents also like that they can relay messages to the kindergarten teacher through the child care staff and vice versa. So far everything seems to be naturally falling into place for us, and the vision for best start is becoming clearer and more of a reality."

(Donna Robinson, Early Childhood Educator, Blessed John XXIII Catholic School)

## Building bridges at Blevins Child Care Centre and Nelson Mandela Public School

"Members of the child care team met with the Nelson Mandela Public School Principal, Councillor and Kindergarten teachers several times to discuss how we could be working more effectively together. We decided that it would be a good idea to start by visiting each other's programs to see what each other does. Three of the child care staff visited the kindergarten classroom, and we invited the kindergarten teachers to our centre for lunch. The staff in the school, child care and parenting program have signed the same confidentiality agreement, and our first plan is to have parents sign consents to share information. This will help us all to plan together for the needs of individual children, and to make sure programs are consistent in our approaches."



"In the new year, we plan to continue meeting regularly to further discuss what our goals are. We're looking at the professional development we have scheduled for the year, and are working with the school to allow the child care staff to attend the TDSB workshops and for the Nelson Mandella staff to attend our workshops."

(Helen Hasiuk, Supervisor, Blevins Child Care Centre)

For more information, check out our website:

**[www.toronto.ca/children/bs\\_network.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/children/bs_network.htm)**

### Questions?

E-mail your Best Start questions and comments to:

**[childcare@toronto.ca](mailto:childcare@toronto.ca)**

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