



# THE DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY OF MUSKOKA

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November 27, 2017

TO: District of Muskoka Staff, Councilors, Muskoka Family Focus Board of Directors,  
Staff and Volunteers, Early Years Stakeholders and Families with young children

FROM: Rick Williams  
Commissioner  
Muskoka Community Services

SUBJECT: EarlyON Child and Family Centres in Muskoka

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## Background and Branding

In 2016 the Ministry of Education announced their intention to transfer the responsibility for Muskoka's Early Years Programs to the District Municipality of Muskoka (the District). Early Years Programs are aimed at children aged 0-6 and support children, parents and caregivers in learning, growing and connecting together.

These programs will be transferred starting in January 2018 and branded across the province as EarlyON Child and Family Centres.



The Ministry feels service system managers will be critical to the success of early years transformation and the EarlyON portfolio compliments their current role as service system managers for child care.

## Program Schedule

Early years programs will be delivered by the District starting January 15, 2018 when programs begin in the new year. To minimize disruptions to families, the District will honour the current Ontario Early Years schedule launched by Muskoka Family Focus in September 2017, including Soup Days, Dinner Programs, Make the Connection, and Baby Talk.

To find the current schedule, which will be running until June 2018, please visit:  
[www.muskokaoycfc.ca](http://www.muskokaoycfc.ca).

After June 2018, when early years programs have historically shut down for summer, an expanded 12-month EarlyON schedule will begin. In addition to maintaining current services and programs, expansion will focus on creating more rural programs, expanding rural hours, hosting more dinner programs across Muskoka, and implementing more program hours for under-resourced families or families who struggle in larger program spaces.

EarlyON staff will be consulting with families and communities over the winter and spring before finalizing and publicly launching the expanded schedule, which will be effective starting July 2018. As per Ministry of Education direction, a key principal in finalizing the 2018 EarlyON schedule will be minimizing disruptions to families.

The new EarlyON schedule will be announced and communicated broadly in spring of 2018, well ahead of the launch, to allow families time to plan new routines should they wish to attend any of the expanded hours. In addition to EarlyON programs, a parent education series will be delivered in 2018.

The new schedule, when finalized, will be posted on the Districts early years website at: [www.muskokaoyfc.ca](http://www.muskokaoyfc.ca).

### **EarlyON Educators**

The Ministry of Education recognizes that Registered Early Childhood Educators play a key role in delivering high quality early years programs and have specialized knowledge and expertise in child development, play and inquiry-based learning. As per Ministry guidelines, EarlyON programs in Muskoka will be delivered by qualified early childhood educators. While there will be some new faces in some programs, the District is pleased a number of current qualified staff will be in place to welcome families into programs starting in the new year. Additionally, the District will be meeting soon with other early years staff to discuss the possibility of occasional roles in the programs.

### **Looking Forward**

One of the plans that came out of the broad community engagement process that took place between October 2016 and May 2017 and included focus groups with families, as well as consultation with children services agencies and stakeholders, was to create dedicated spaces for EarlyON Child and Family Centres in Gravenhurst, Bracebridge and Huntsville. Currently, programs run out of a variety of shared community spaces such as churches, schools and community centres.

EarlyON centres that operate out of dedicated spaces allow for more consistent and richer programming, and better outcomes for young children and their families. The District will be working towards finding appropriate, accessible, dedicated spaces in Muskoka's three main towns, as well as looking for opportunities to bundle child-focused services in these locations.

### **Volunteers**

Volunteers have been instrumental in the success of early years programs in Muskoka over the past 15 years and will continue to be integral to EarlyON programs going forward. If you are interested in volunteering in any of our EarlyON programs, please contact Pam Rennie, Manager, Early Years Programs at [pam.rennie@muskoka.on.ca](mailto:pam.rennie@muskoka.on.ca) or 705-645-2412 x 1420.

The District and Muskoka Family Focus will continue to work together to ensure a smooth transition for the community, as well as active growth in areas of program development and

innovative delivery. Broad communications will continue to be provided at key milestones to ensure a transparent and inclusive process throughout the transition.

For more information on the District's official plan for early years transformation, please visit the District's online document centre at the following link:

<https://muskoka.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/30414?preview=30422>

For a current Ontario Early Years schedule which will be effective September 2017 to June 2018, please go to the District early years website at: [www.muskokaoeycfc.ca](http://www.muskokaoeycfc.ca).