

**Ministry of Children
and Youth Services**

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February 11, 2011

Dear Stakeholder,

I wanted to take this opportunity to update you on the progress we are making as we move toward the creation of Best Start Child and Family Centres here in Ontario.

As you know, Dr. Charles Pascal's report, *With our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, sets out the vision for an integrated system of services for families and children delivered through Best Start Child and Family Centres (BSCFC).

On April 27, 2010, I announced that, with the help of Charles, I would lead the work to design and implement a framework for integration of services for infants, children and families.

As part of the first phase, work is underway to:

- raise awareness about the BSCFC concept—what it is and what it isn't;
- get a better idea of what is and isn't working currently for kids and families;
- develop the provincial framework for BSCFCs;
- develop ideas for implementation in communities;
- highlight examples of innovative and promising service delivery practices around the province; and
- identify program and service integration opportunities at the provincial level.

The provincial framework for BSCFCs will be guided by the advice received from internal and external committees as well as community meetings and consultations and will build on the work that is currently underway.

Throughout the Fall, Charles and I enjoyed visiting several communities across the province to listen to and learn from the experiences of local providers and parents.

An Internal Reference Group made up of Assistant Deputy Ministers from across government has been meeting regularly to provide strategic advice and guidance. This committee is focusing on the development of a comprehensive inventory of programs and services that support families and children aged pre-natal to 12 years. The inventory will be used to develop the BSCFC concept and to identify opportunities to improve integration of programs and services across government.

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An External Reference Group of experts in childhood programs and services has been meeting to help identify best practices and offer advice as we move forward to implement the vision of an integrated system of services for children and families including child care, parenting literacy, and special supports. We are also seeking guidance from Aboriginal providers and practitioners regarding the needs of Aboriginal children and families in relation to the BSCFC concept.

In addition, we will be holding a meeting of relevant provincial associations to help ensure that we capture their important perspectives.

I am pleased that five community engagement tables will be held across the province in the upcoming weeks. The tables will be held in Hamilton (February 11), Toronto (February 24), Sudbury (February 25) and Clinton (March 4) and Casselman (March 7). These sessions are intended to get direct feedback from families and service providers on what's working for children and where the system could be improved. These discussions will help to identify the system gaps in services and supports for children as well as new ideas on how to offer high quality, integrated, and accessible services.

To complement this process, we have created an online feedback tool to ensure that anyone who wants to provide input to the development of the policy framework has an opportunity to do so. The online submission website became active on February 2nd at Ontario.ca/beststart.

Information gathered from the community engagement tables, the online submissions and the guidance and advice from these valuable sources will help us develop the policy framework for the Centres, which we will develop by the summer of this year.

We have embarked on a challenging process of change that will build on best practices and the dedication and ingenuity of the many dedicated children's service providers throughout the province. It will take time, but it's worth it. All children in Ontario deserve the best opportunities to reach their potential. We are working hard to deliver even better services for children and their families so we can make Ontario the best place in the world for kids to grow up.

Yours truly,

Original signed by

Laurel Broten
Minister