

MUSKOKA BEST START NETWORK

TERMS OF REFERENCE

PROVINCIAL BEST START DIRECTION

Best Start is described as a comprehensive, evidence-informed early learning and care strategy designed to give Ontario's children the opportunity for healthy development and the best start in life. It involves an expansion of quality and affordable childcare and an expectation of actively moving towards coordinating resources and services with the goal of system integration. Best Start is about organizing resources within and across a community in order to support parents and children from birth to school.

GOAL

Children in Muskoka will be ready and eager to achieve success by the time they start Grade 1.

MANDATE

To plan, implement, and monitor Muskoka Best Start at the local level in accordance with the MCYS Implementation Planning Guidelines for Best Start Networks.

SCOPE

Best Start will create a comprehensive integrated system of services that supports families with children from birth through the transition into school. The scope of the initiative is intended to be as broad as possible, covering the spectrum of health, education, social supports, and children's services.

PRINCIPLES

The following guiding principles should be followed in the planning for Best Start:

- Simplified access
- Integrated services
- Partnership with parents and families
- Community-driven
- Flexible and responsive
- Cross-ministerial
- Quality services

OBJECTIVE

Best Start is designed to give Ontario's children the best possible start in life and help them achieve success in school. To achieve this objective, Muskoka's Best Start service plans will:

- help parents support their children
- help children in Muskoka to be ready to learn when they start Grade 1 and achieve success in school
- help make the transition to Grade 1 as smooth, seamless, and successful as possible for children and their families
- make high quality early learning and care available
- help parents by providing a variety of parenting supports
- help identify and provide support to children who need extra help
- build on partnerships with communities and with the federal, provincial, and municipal levels of government

KEY ACTIVITIES OF MUSKOKA BEST START NETWORK

- Develop innovative ways to expand the licensed early learning and child care system in Muskoka, within reasonable funding allocations
- Develop system integration initiatives with Muskoka Best Start Network stakeholder agencies
- Develop service plans that achieve the Muskoka Best Start objective, and meet stakeholder agencies' and MCYS objectives
- Include mechanisms to build strong effective partnerships with parents, community agency stakeholders, other local children's services advisory/planning committees, municipal government representatives, and provincial government representatives

CORE ELEMENTS OF THE BEST START SYSTEM INTEGRATION FRAMEWORK

- Family-centred; driven by the needs of children and their families
- Comprehensive, responsive and flexible; able to respond to the changing needs of children, families and communities
- Developmentally appropriate
- High quality
- Cost-effective
- Partnership that includes, but is not limited to education services/system; children's services organizations/providers; Ontario Early Years Centres; Infant Hearing; Blind/Low Vision Initiative; Preschool Speech and Language; Healthy Babies, Healthy Children; licensed child care; parent/caregiver support; and stabilization programs in order to increase access to services for children and their families

- Mechanism for increased screening and early identification
- Coordinated services for special needs population
- No duplication of existing resources and services
- Parental/caregiver involvement and support
- Common language and terminology
- Clear understanding of the community's Best Start vision and how the consortium of programs and agencies contributes to the actualization of the vision

ACCOUNTABILITIES

Muskoka Best Start Network

The Muskoka Best Start Network will be accountable to the MCYS for developing all service plans and for monitoring their implementation. These plans will integrate services provided by a number of different agencies. This means that all members of the Muskoka Best Start Network will have shared accountability for integrating services and making sure that they work together to achieve Best Start goals.

The Muskoka Best Start Network will have an internal accountability mechanism in the form of a self-assessment that the Network will conduct annually to assess:

- Achievement of objectives and outcomes
- Membership and participation of all members
- Adequacy of the established Terms of Reference

Muskoka Best Start Network Members

Network members are accountable for representing their agency at Muskoka Best Start Network meetings, and to implement their components of Best Start service plans.

Members of the Muskoka Best Start Network will bring their individual service plans/contracts to the Best Start Network, where they will be shared and integrated into service plans as appropriate. During that process, they will also confirm their role in Best Start (e.g., providing some services through Best Start hubs, accepting and making referrals to other Best Start services).

Agency representatives will be accountable for fulfilling their commitments for Best Start components funded directly to their agency. For those agencies that receive Best Start funding, service plans will include components that relate to the Best Start enhancements. Agencies that do not receive Best Start funding may also commit to Best Start strategies, and it is widely acknowledged that these commitments are made in the spirit of Best Start goal, principles, and system integration elements.

Regional French-Language Best Start Network

The Regional French-language Best Start Network will inform and guide the Muskoka Best Start Network so that needs of the francophone population are reflected in the local Best Start plan.

The District of Muskoka

The District of Muskoka will be responsible for the Best Start service plans, incorporating the input and guidance of the Muskoka Best Start Network and its stakeholder agencies.

HBHC, Infant Hearing, Blind/Low Vision Initiative, Preschool Speech and Language Services, OEYC's, and Other Pertinent Programs

Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Early Years, Preschool Speech and Language, Infant Hearing Program, Blind/Low Vision Initiative, District of Muskoka, local school boards, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and Ministry of Education are accountable for participating in the Best Start planning process.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Best Start Community Partners

- Participate actively at the Muskoka Best Start Network
- Identify issues/barriers
- Identify ideas/creative suggestions to make system integration work
- Provide information regarding individual agency requirements to the Muskoka Best Start Network
- Provide information regarding Best Start planning to home agency and respective Ministry, including identifying systemic issues
- Develop and implement individual program plans, which reflect Best Start vision and planning, in collaboration with community partners and share the plans at the Muskoka Best Start Network
- Provide information, as required, to enable The District of Muskoka to report on Best Start planning and implementation
- Sign off on Best Start service plans

Child Care Providers

- Provide high quality and developmentally appropriate programming
- Meet licensing requirements, as per provincial legislation, standards and guidelines
- Identify community need for child care
- Provide flexible child care options

- Establish fee schedule
- Expand provision of child care options/spaces through joint activities with community partners
- Identify and implement a common mechanism/approach to track children's development
- Identify difficulties and provide access to early intervention
- Participate in joint programming/resource sharing with teachers and community service providers
- Participate in community planning

The District of Muskoka as Service System Manager

- Plan and manage delivery of child care services, within provincial legislation, standards, guidelines etc. and report to MCYS, as required
- Obtain Muskoka District Council approval for Best Start service plans
- Establish local policies and best practices, within the context of provincial legislation, standards and guidelines
- Establish service agreements with child care providers that allocate available resources to achieve established outcomes
- Promote, monitor and support quality early learning and child care programming
- Promote access to and utilization of early learning and child care programs
- Identify community needs for, and gaps in, child care
- Lead/participate in community planning with other organizations to develop a Best Start Community Plan, which reflects a system integration approach
- As a component of the Best Start Community Plan, develop local child care plans with community partners that establish local priorities and outcomes.
- Ensure that the Best Start service plans reflect the requirements of Francophone and Aboriginal children and their families, children with special needs and their families, and culturally and/or linguistically diverse children and their families

MEMBERSHIP

The Muskoka Best Start Network consists of parents and decision-making representatives from child and family-serving agencies across Muskoka. At a minimum, membership must come from the following programs: Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Early Years, Preschool Speech and Language, Infant Hearing Program, Blind/Low Vision Initiative, District of Muskoka, local school boards, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and Ministry of Education. New members will be reviewed and approved by the Network.

STRUCTURE OF THE NETWORK

The Muskoka Best Start Network will be chaired by The District of Muskoka. The Muskoka Best Start Network will meet at least three times per year.

Sub-groups will be appointed on an ad-hoc or long-term basis to address areas such as:

- Capital Funding
- System Integration
- Parental Input
- Gap Analysis/Needs Assessment
- Early Learning Initiatives
- Early Identification Processes

Organizations that are not represented on the Network, may have representation on the sub-groups. Regular sub-group updates will be sent to the Network.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Decisions will be made by consensus whenever possible. If consensus is unachievable, decision-making will be through a vote. Quorum required for decision-making will be fifty percent of current members. When it is known in advance that important decisions are to be made at a meeting, notification will be sent out to members prior to the meeting. A vote will carry with a fifty percent plus one majority. Each organization will have one vote on the Network. Proxy voting may occur in written format, addressed to the Chair in advance of the meeting. If a quorum is not present, and a deadline needs to be met, the final decisions rest with the attending members.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Members are to ensure that they are not in conflict of interest by speaking in favour of, or recommending a course of action that may benefit them personally, and that may not be in the best interests of Muskoka.

SIGNATORIES TO DOCUMENTS

The terms of reference and service plans ideally will be signed by all member organizations of the Network, but at a minimum, by representatives of The District of Muskoka, relevant District School Boards, Simcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit, Preschool Speech and Language, Early Years, Infant Hearing Program, and Blind/Low Vision Initiative. Agency representatives will ensure they have the appropriate approval from their governing body in order to be a signatory.