

District of Sault Ste. Marie

Journey Together
Community
Strategic Plan

Early Years Services for Indigenous
Children and Families

September 2017

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1.0 Strategic Planning Report

2.0 Introduction

The Journey Together – Ontario's Early Years Initiative is intended to enhance access to culturally relevant, Indigenous-led early years programs and services off-reserve, including child care and child and family programs. In January 2017 the Ministry of Education released Capacity Funding agreements to partners to support meaningful, collaborative discussions and local planning in the implementation of this initiative.

In March of 2017, the District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board (DSSMSSAB) contracted NORDIK to provide assistance with the community review, planning, implementation and reporting of *The Journey Together – Ontario's Early Years Initiative*. Social Services staff, NORDIK and local Indigenous organizations including Waabinong Head Start & Family Resource Centre, Nog-Da-Win-Da-Min Child and Community Services, the Sault Ste. Marie Indigenous Friendship Centre, and the Métis Nation of Ontario (Historic Sault Ste. Marie Council) worked together to develop proposals for submission to expand access to culturally-relevant child care and child and family programs. Gleaning information from the consultations with both Indigenous families and service providers, the collaborative developed a community strategic plan for building on strengths and addressing gaps in current capacity within the Indigenous Child Care and Early Years Service system in the District of Sault Ste. Marie.

3.0 Methodology

A variety of community-based research methods were employed in the process to generate a broad picture of the needs of indigenous families within DSSMSSAB's service area.

Preliminary focus groups with the Algoma Child Care Supervisor's Committee and with the Best Start Network took place on April 7, 2017 and April 10, 2017, respectively.

Four initial Indigenous family focus groups were held between April 21 and May 2, 2017. In response to low rates of participation, additional consultations continued either in concert with established events or drawing on the networks of service providers to maximize engagement.

On May 11, 2017 researchers participated in a World Café held as part of the Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centre consultation and planning process, where a question was dedicated to Indigenous services. A World Café is a knowledge sharing conversational process where people are asked to discuss a topic freely as well as provide written feedback. People rotate tables, and are introduced to previous topics by hosts at each table. World Cafés encourage collective problem solving. The question NORDIK researchers proposed was “how do you think Early Year programming and services may become more inclusive of diversity for servicing off-reserve Indigenous children and their families?” Over 40 people, including parents and service providers participated in this event.

On June 14, 2017 researchers took part in an “Early Years Fair” at the Sault Ste. Marie Indigenous Friendship Centre. Over 100 people attended the event, and 30 participants answered questionnaires that profiled respondents' desires for relevant service.

On July 20, 2017 findings from the data compiled through these consultations were presented to Early Years service providers as part of the consultation process for Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres planning, and feedback was again collected and integrated into the findings.

On July 26, 2017, researchers attended Waabinong's Best Start 20th Anniversary celebration. Approximately 100 people attended the event with over 60 of those attendees signing the available guestbook and providing input into a “vision map” for Early Years services. They were also asked how Waabinong had supported indigenous children and families in the past. Access to surveys previously completed by Indigenous child caregivers was secured and incorporated into the findings.

The resulting vision was first articulated based on findings at a meeting held on July 19, 2017. This strategic planning meeting showcased the findings of the data collected from the needs assessment conducted by NORDIK Institute.

The vision and community strategic plan was modified and finalized at a meeting of partners on August 22nd, 2017.

4.0 Literature Review

A scan of early childhood education literature related to off reserve Indigenous children ages 0-6 years and their families, identifies several readily apparent themes. Emergent literature demonstrates opportunities and best practices to

integrate culture and language in early childhood education for Indigenous children. The literature also devotes attention to the traditional teachings, ways of knowing and family involvement in early childhood. The themes being presented within this review demonstrate the history of Indigenous Early Years programs in Canada and the role of culture, language and the worldviews of Indigenous peoples in early childhood education, complemented by the unique characteristics of off reserve Indigenous children.

For the purposes of this literature review references to Indigenous or Aboriginal peoples in Canada will refer specifically to and include First Nation, status and non-status members, Métis and Inuit peoples (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada [INAC] 2014). Indigenous peoples are diverse. Each is comprised of separate nations, bands or tribes, each with distinct cultural practices and teachings. In Ontario, the Indigenous population consists of 26 Métis community councils and 207 First Nation communities comprised of 126 bands that collectively speak 12 different languages within 3 distinct linguistic family groupings (Métis Nation of Ontario 2017; Statistics Canada 2014; University of Ottawa n.d.). This does not include urban communities where almost half (47.4%) of the Indigenous population resides (INAC 2017). Urban Indigenous peoples or off-reserve Indigenous peoples can reside in rural locations other than on a reserve and are primarily associated with living in higher populated urban areas such as cities or small municipalities. One in four of urban Indigenous peoples have moved from one residence within the same city or from a different community such as a reservation or rural area one year before the 2006 Census. The mobility of urban Aboriginals plays a part in accessing and provision of services such as education, employment and housing (INAC 2010).

4.1 Indigenous Early Childhood Program Development

With the progression of colonization, the government of Canada sought to assimilate Indigenous peoples through policy and legislation. These policies included removing Indigenous children from their families and placing them in residential schools, boarding schools, and adoption into non-Indigenous homes; sometimes these children never returned back into their home communities (Kirmayer, Brass & Tait 2000). These acts of government dismantled traditional family systems and intergenerational ways of knowing and doing within the community resulting in momentous losses. Today, trauma and unresolved grief are evident in Indigenous communities and revolve around losses associated with community, traditional language use, cultural and spiritual practices, lands

and the roles of kinship and child rearing practices (Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins & Altschul 2011).

Beginning in the 1980s in Canada, the murmuring of the unique needs of Indigenous children began to emerge. The Child Care Initiatives Fund, a fund created by the federal government, allowed for Indigenous peoples to conduct needs assessments, training programs, Indigenous specific curriculum and various service models with the underlying justification from the government to increase education and employment opportunities for Indigenous peoples. Indigenous communities were able to demonstrate and introduce much-needed research to advocate for Indigenous specific child care services. At that time, off reserve children and families were given little attention and were generally assumed to use the same services that were available to the mainstream population. It was not until the 1990's that off reserve Indigenous early childhood services began to appear, which included the development of the Aboriginal Head Start initiative dedicated to child care programming for urban and northern communities (Greenwood 2006).

When designing early years programming and services for Indigenous families and children it is important to recognize that, as Niles, Byers & Krueger (2007) have stated, often early years programs that are created directly from government control and are developed in response to dominant non-Indigenous best practice or evidence-based practices can act as the measure for quality early years education. What one considers to be best practices can often be misleading representation for indigenous communities due to a lack of Indigenous children taking part in test samples. Increasing and integrating Indigenous perspective into the development of early years programming and services decreases the likelihood that early years education does not fit the “learning styles, interests, or needs of Indigenous children...and perpetuates the colonial, assimilationist effects of education on Indigenous children” (Kirkness, Kirkness & Barnhardt qtd. in Niles, Byers & Kruger 2007, 114).

While there are government outcomes that are being achieved through the creation of Early Years services and programs, the key to Indigenous early learning programming includes embracing all community members such as immediate, external family members and elders, fostering a sense of identity and connection to culture, community ownership and the promotion of wellness (Greenwood 2006; Preston 2008; Niles, Byers & Kruger 2007). Input from Indigenous leaders and community members is necessary to the development of early childhood programs as this representation forms the basis of asserting

local needs and building capacity through governance and decision making processes within the local community. In addition to this, Indigenous communities are able to achieve control by insisting the presence and participation of parents and caregivers in education (Preston 2008; Preston et al. 2011).

4.2 Integrating Indigenous Pedagogies

Preston, Cottrell, Pelletier & Pearce (2011) contend that experiential learning, learning through lived experiences, and drawing on opportunities to exchange narratives and discourse which are based heavily in social interaction activities are early childhood Indigenous pedagogies. Activities focused on life tasks through various mediums such as art, crafts and outdoor activities like camping include different occasions for peer interaction and role modelling positive behaviour for young Indigenous children. The authors conclude that throughout their review of literature they were unable to identify “any one Aboriginal early childhood program solely grounded on the precepts of Aboriginal pedagogy” (2011, 9). Ball’s (2009) critique is similar in that close to 80% of Indigenous children do not have access to “any quality early development program with an Indigenous component.” (31). Ball continues to point out that development programs and specialized services are inadequate and lack cultural sensitivity and do not promote the acquisition of learning and sustaining Indigenous culture and language (32).

Hare (2011) provides increased insight into the use of land-based pedagogies and the extent to which Indigenous children learn from such contexts. Entrenched in land-based activities are opportunities to share teachings, history and connect with a sense of identity rooted in a relationship to land. Aspects of biology, geography, patterning and plant systems are identified on the land and are broadened into an understanding among children that incorporates Indigenous worldviews of the inherent connectedness and relationship to the natural world. This type of learning experience needs to be recognized as a legitimate approach to literacy akin to printed texts. With so much emphasis being placed on the inclusion of land based activities in early childhood education, Bougie (2010) notes that about half of off-reserve Indigenous children go hunting, fishing or camping; one in three off reserve children participate in seasonal activities like berry picking; and remarkably 23% neither participate in traditional nor seasonal activities. Low income off-reserve Indigenous children are more likely to participate in traditional activities and

higher income families are likelier to have gone hunting, fishing or camping (Bougie 2010).

4.3 Indigenous Culture in Early Childhood

Indigenous families continue to employ traditional worldviews in raising their children. These teachings guide several social roles within the family structure including prenatal to early childhood development. Indigenous culture “provides a virtual how-to manual for rearing children and establishes role expectations for mothers, father, grandparents, older siblings, extended family members, and friends” (Niles, Byer & Kruger 2007, 118).

Niles et al. (2007) assert that custom dictates sleeping arrangements for newborns, responses to and perceptions of special needs, disciplinary measures, illness and child care. Prior to the birth of a child, a mother is supported by extended family that helps to maintain balance between emotional, physical, mental and spiritual health, which may also be assisted by ceremony. This aligns with Indigenous teachings surrounding seven generations, to be mindful of situations that are occurring now because they have the ability to transform outcomes for the next seven generations. Sensory experiences such as singing, smell and touch, swaying and swaddling and the ways in which each are practiced, such as the use of a mossbag and breastfeeding, help create parent-child attachment (Pazderka et al. 2014).

Hare (2011) and McNeil (2012) similarly state that the history, blood memory, values, and how Indigenous people view the world and their place in it as well as relationship to all things are found within songs, dances, cultural symbols and the land. Teachings surrounding land and how Indigenous peoples lived on the land are where “...meaning and identity are constructed through landscapes, territory and land formations...[and] serve as sources of knowledge and authority, where meaning is constructed through relationships and experiences with a particular place” (Hare 2011, 392).

4.4 The Role of Family

In 2006, 44% of young off-reserve First Nations children had grandparents and 28% had other relatives who were involved in raising them (Bougie 2010). Extended family, aunts, grandparents and non-blood relatives transfer traditional knowledge and generate positive social and emotional development for the Indigenous child (Bougie 2010; Hare 2011; Preston 2008). Intergenerational relationships and opportunities to learn language through

interactive land based activities, storytelling and observation reinforce Indigenous children's understanding of their identity and worldview.

Hare (2011) posits that for educators, building of trusted relationships can be accomplished through familiarization with the families and communities with whom they work. In addition to hosting conversations with Indigenous families, the outreach approach with these families requires the time and effort to engage in meaningful ways outside of the classroom setting, within homes and community spaces and includes not only the educators but also children's service providers. Attending community events introduces information regarding cultural practices and norms that can then inform curriculum development, activity planning and Indigenous pedagogies within early childhood.

Several justifications are noted by McNeil (2012) to the positive outcomes based on formation of relationships with Indigenous families. Through this relationship, teachers can then offer support and exercise cultural sensitivity and responsiveness within the classroom and recognize the cultural, social and emotional norms of the culture not only for themselves but extend this understanding amongst peers and students as well. With the use of culturally relevant classroom materials all persons can "hear, read, and see expressive, emotional interactions in a concrete way" and in the process present reaffirming images and positive discourses that mitigate longstanding negative perceptions of marginalized groups (McNeil 2012, 103).

4.5 Indigenous Language use and Early Childhood

Culture and language use are inextricably linked to one another. Indigenous teachings, spirituality and concepts are embedded in the languages of Indigenous peoples. Land based activities increase the chances to develop language use and understanding for indigenous children who are actively participating in these events versus those who enjoy them less frequently (Bougie 2010). McIvor, Napoleon & Dickie (2009) relate that often culture and language advocates highlight the interrelatedness and association between the two and understanding and teachings found within Indigenous languages broaden the opportunity to retain fundamental traditional knowledge.

Findings from the Aboriginal Children's Survey identified that approximately 90% of off-reserve First Nations children were spoken to in either English or French as their primary language at home. When Indigenous languages were being used in a child care setting the odds that the language will be understood are 3.7

times the odds for children who were in a child care setting where they were not exposed to Indigenous languages. Child care providers, parents and family members who place emphasis on communicating in Indigenous languages also have positive impacts on language use (Bougie 2010). Unfortunately, only about half of off reserve children attend a child care center (Guèvermont 2010).

4.6 Culture and Language as Protective Factors

Access to Indigenous culture can contribute to positive health and well-being for an Indigenous person by providing individuals the opportunity to “gain a deeper sense of identity and live a life of balanced reciprocity...an alternative way of being in the contemporary world and a means to deal with some of the struggles of existing in mainstream society.” (McIvor, Napoleon & Dickie 2009, 14; McNeil 2012). The interrelation of all things is the basis for Indigenous spirituality and is directly associated with healing practices. Indigenous spirituality continues to create shared community interaction, expression and support. As individuals congregate through rituals and ceremonies, fundamental teachings on respect, honour and communication make it necessary to include culture and language as a protective factor for Indigenous communities (McIvor et al. 2009). Together, Indigenous language and culture are of paramount importance for prosperous Indigenous communities.

As indicated by the literature, there are several facets of Indigenous culture that support early childhood development within Indigenous families through traditional teachings, practices and community responsiveness. Indigenous culture and language use fosters esteem and identity for the Indigenous child and when educators are able to synthesize Indigenous cultural values and worldview into the classroom through learning, teaching methods and experiences, the growing participation of Indigenous families in early years' services and programs will endure to the benefit Indigenous children.

5.0 Needs Affecting Indigenous Children and Families

Gaps and needs affecting Indigenous children & families were identified and fell into seven distinct categories: Culture and language; Land and Physical Activities; Programming; Social Interaction; Family Supports; Service Provision and Collaboration; and Transportation and Location.

5.1 Culture and Language:

With respect to culture and language, there was a strong desire to see more programming and opportunities to learn and engage in traditional practices, ceremonies, teaching and to learn and speak indigenous languages.

Participants identified a number of examples of practices they wished to see, including but not limited to: beadwork; hand drumming; singing; learning traditional and ceremonial songs and dances; making regalia, moccasins, drums, shiishiigwan (shakers), and other leatherwork or traditional crafts; and introductions to pow wow protocols and dance styles. It was also emphasized that programming should be age-appropriate for the children, providing something for each age level.

Ceremonies that families want to see include, but are not limited to: sweatlodges; berry fasts; and receiving one's name, clan and colours. Desired teachings include, but are not limited to: men's and women's roles; creation stories; traditional medicines; water teachings and more.

The use and promotion of indigenous languages was also accorded significant value. Interventions that would support the acquisition and promotion of indigenous languages include providing classes for families; staging language nests where all communication is provided in the target language; bringing native speakers into the centres and providing opportunities for children to converse with speakers.

5.2 Land and Physical Activities:

Land and Physical Activities were tied closely to the cultural needs of families and children. Activities such as berry and traditional medicine picking, nature walks, gardening, fishing and hunting excursions, and instruction on basic survival skills for children were among those that families wished to see and were integral to cultural maintenance. The teachings connected to these activities also featured prominently in responses from families, emphasizing the need for such activities to integrate cultural education. Examples included teachings about seasons, about why certain animals exist, and the uses of different medicines. The critical dimension of such activities is to promote and maintain the children's sense of interconnection with the natural world.

Additionally families also wanted to see activities that encourage active, healthy lifestyles, including various sports such as swimming, hockey, soccer, and curling, and seasonal activities such as hiking, biking, skating, snowshoeing, and going for trips to parks.

A variety of other recreational activities were proposed, including a number of games, reading and movie screenings. Some additional expressed a desire for outdoor programming on the weekends.

5.3 Programming:

As is clear from a number of needs identified above, there was a clear desire for additional programming. In particular, participants also expressed strong interest in evening and weekend programming as well as summer programs.

In addition to cultural, language and outdoor programming, there was interest in health programs, such as infant wellness, longer contact with prenatal workers and education about post- and ante-partum depression. Programs that encourage or incorporate healthy eating and nutrition education were also of great interest.

A number of participants also emphasized the need to incorporate role-modelling and fostering intergenerational relationships into early years programming. Providing opportunities for children to interact with and learn from elders would help to build and maintain a broader sense of community throughout the immediate region while contributing to cultural maintenance as well. Some expressed a desire to bring community leaders into the program in similar fashion.

5.4 Social Interaction:

Opportunities for social interaction were highly valued by many participants. Families placed high value on their children being able to play with others and in being able to spend time playing and interacting with their children.

5.5 Family Supports:

Participants identified a number of family supports they wished to see emerge or continue. These included family participation in children's programming and playing a role in identifying programming opportunities; financial support, such as funds to supplement groceries for expectant mothers or for emergency purposes; educational programming for families, including cultural teachings, financial literacy, and child wellness; and perhaps most significantly, mental health supports for children. A number of participants identified the need for more quality mental health specialists for children and youth.

5.6 Service Provision & Collaboration:

Organizational concerns ranged from promoting greater collaboration with other agencies, to the adoption of certain approaches in management and ECE practice, to ensuring that practices and resources are culturally sensitive.

Opportunities for greater collaboration include ensuring events aren't overlapping (where it is avoidable), developing more formal partnerships, and meeting regularly to increase awareness of each others activities and providing opportunities for innovation. Some suggested partnerships included: the Public Library, Parent & Family Literacy Centres, the Indigenous Friendship Centre, and the MNO's children's program.

Some respondents had specific ideas of the kinds of practices they wanted to see applied, including trauma informed service practice, and a move away from a "pathological" model of child care and service to a strengths-based model. The calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission were also cited as being important to informing the kinds of services and programs offered. Among the calls to action relevant to the District of Sault Ste. Marie stakeholders is the call for federal, provincial and indigenous governments to "develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families" (p. 2). While the needs assessment itself is largely tasked with identifying means for ensuring the cultural appropriateness of the service, specific suggestions from families and service providers emphasized the need for ensuring resources such as books, crafts, toys, and any lessons did not reinforce negative or inaccurate stereotypes or images of indigenous peoples, and that such resources be provided that addressed culturally relevant topics and provided indigenous children positive images and associations with their culture.

Many emphasized the need for services to be inviting, and that service providers be willing to talk and listen to parents and children, and that the care children receive be patient and kind, with corrections done in a calm manner.

Many families noted they weren't always aware of the events and services available, and that there should be greater resources for outreach and advertising to increase that awareness. Similarly, there were questions about the accessibility of services, with some Best Start Hubs located in schools run by the separate Huron Superior Catholic District School Board, for instance, some families were not sure if they were eligible for the services offered by the Hub.

5.7 Transportation & Location:

Transportation was an issue for a number of families. Some indicated the need for free bus passes for families with children between 0 and 6 years of age, and that transportation was especially lacking for families living in Garden River or

the West End. Some also indicated that the timing of bus schedules was not conducive for them attending programming.

Physical space was also a concern, with some expressing the need for additional space for indigenous child care services and programming. Most participants did not specify a location, but when it was offered, among the suggestions were the city's west end and generally outside of downtown.

6.0 Community Vision Statement

All Indigenous children and their families have access to accessible Indigenous-led Early Years centres/services that strengthen their relationship to Indigenous culture and language and contributes to healthy child development.

The consultations with off-reserve Indigenous families as well as service providers throughout the District of Sault Ste. Marie contributed to the development of the vision of Indigenous cultural programming available to children in the community.

Once the compilation of data extracted from the Needs Assessment consultations was presented to the steering committee, discussion was held that centered on the main points of action, visions for the future and implementation processes.

The vision encompasses the requirement from the community that services incorporate the following components:

5.1 INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND LANGUAGE: culture and language are implemented into current Early Years program delivery, increased cultural training for ECE and Early Years staff in SSM, a network of professionals who want to learn Indigenous culture is created; retain elders/resource people as mentors and advisors; ensure playground/green space is available for children

5.2 INDIGENOUS-LED: Waabinong Head Start leads child care services; Indigenous staff is hired; organizations are supported in delivering services and create partnerships

5.3 HEALTHY CHILD DEVELOPMENT: school transition support; special needs services; summer programming, family support services

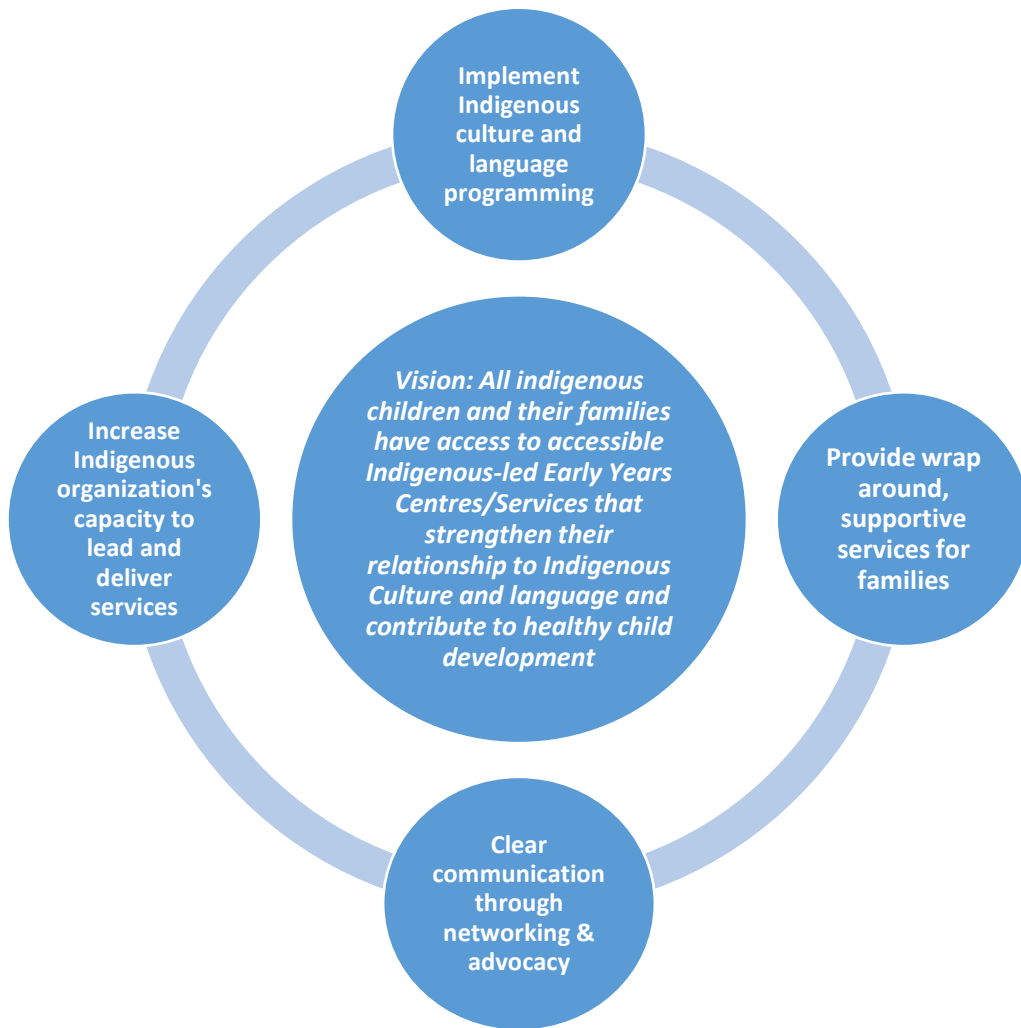
5.4 ACCESSIBLE: transportation to and from services; fully funded child care; located in areas of need, full day childcare

Further to the vision statement the following 4 objectives are:

- **Implement Indigenous culture and language based programming in Early Years Services**
- **Increase Indigenous organization's capacity to lead and deliver Early Years services**
- **Provide wrap around, supportive services for families**
- **Clear communication through networking & advocacy**

These objectives were drafted to provide the direction required to achieve the vision. Each objective was prepared using 'Action Analysis Charts'. These charts determine how to develop the objectives into achievable actions.

6.0 Figure 1: Community Vision and OBJECTIVES



7.0 Supporting Actions and Outcomes

Each of the objectives outlined above is supported by a series of supporting actions, outlined in Figure 2, that in turn result in a series of desired outcomes. The supporting actions and corresponding outcomes are enumerated below:

7.1 Objective 1: Implement Indigenous culture and language based programming in Early Years Services

Supporting Actions

- ▶ Develop and maintain a list of cultural resources, how to access and develop relationships with Indigenous resource people
- ▶ Include Indigenous education in ECE curriculum; recruit placement students
- ▶ Early Years hubs integrate cultural programming in service delivery

Outcomes

- ▶ All Early Years service providers are equipped with cultural resources
- ▶ All Early Childhood Educators are aware of Indigenous culture
- ▶ Early Years Hubs (to be known as Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres) in 5/10 locations deliver cultural programming regularly
- ▶ Families have access to Indigenous culture and language within an Indigenous led Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centre

7.2 Objective 2: Increase Indigenous organization's capacity to lead and deliver Early Years services

Supporting Actions

- ▶ Expansion in year round, full day child care
- ▶ Increase space to deliver services to a higher number of children attending
- ▶ Recruit Indigenous support staff to provide child/family support services and receive equitable pay
- ▶ Create committee of Indigenous Early Years service providers to help facilitate implementation process

Outcomes

- ▶ Waabinong Head Start is expanded & re-located
- ▶ Long-term Indigenous staff delivers Early Years services
- ▶ Indigenous representation in oversight of Early Years service delivery

7.3 Objective 3: Provide wrap around, supportive services for families

Supporting Actions

- ▶ Indigenous organizations deliver family support services in hub locations
- ▶ Staff is trained to deliver specialized programming and services for families and children with special needs during waitlist times
- ▶ Organizations are able to act as community resources for Indigenous families
- ▶ Early Years service providers strengthen relationship to Indigenous families' needs
- ▶ School Boards are active partners in supporting the transition and retention of all Indigenous children

Outcomes

- ▶ Active support for children during school transitions
- ▶ Connection/access to specialized services
- ▶ Programming suitable for all ages
- ▶ Services are delivered on location
- ▶ Indigenous families receive the support in making informed decisions regarding their child(ren)'s school integration

7.4 Objective 4: Clear communication through networking & advocacy

Supporting Actions

- ▶ Early Years organizations identify and provide opportunities for all staff to participate in and exchange/deliver relevant training

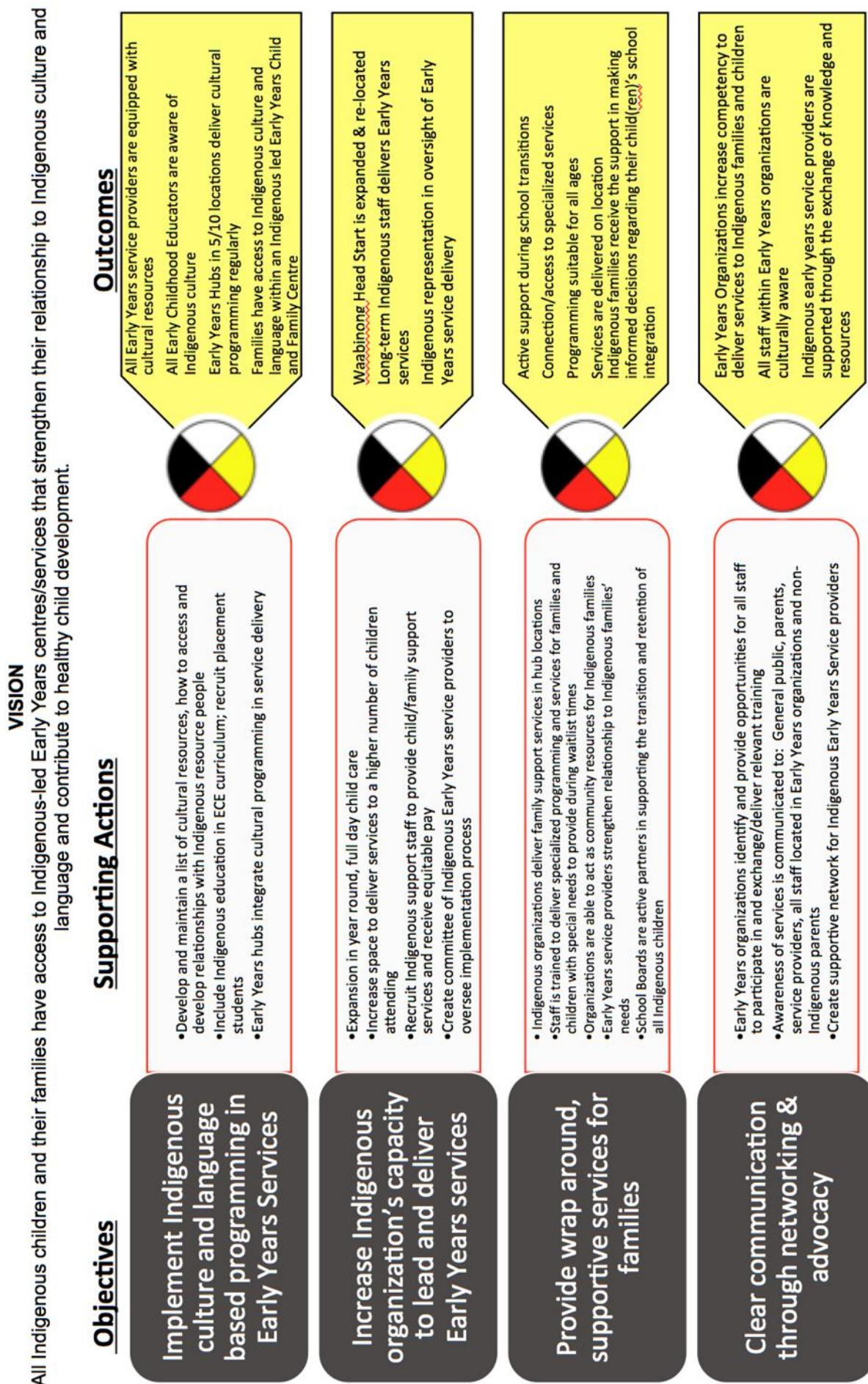
Strategic Plan

- ▶ Awareness of services is communicated to: General public, parents, service providers and all staff located in Early Years organizations and non-Indigenous parents
- ▶ Create supportive network for Indigenous Early Years Service staff

Outcomes

- ▶ Early Years Organizations increase competency to deliver services to Indigenous families and children
- ▶ All staff within Early Years organizations are more culturally aware as a result of intentional processes for knowledge transfer
- ▶ Indigenous early years service providers are supported through the exchange of knowledge and resources

Figure 2: Community Strategic Plan for Indigenous Early Years Services in Sault Ste. Marie District



8.0 Conclusion

Service providers of Indigenous Child Care and Early Years services stand at the cusp of tremendous opportunity to develop a new, affirming relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples and communities and to make the most significant intervention in addressing the social and economic disparities experienced by indigenous peoples as a consequence of ongoing colonization and the long-standing impacts of the residential school system.

The community plan outlined above provides a roadmap for ongoing dialogue, engagement and the development of new programs and services to support improving the social, educational and cognitive outcomes for indigenous children and answering the call for greater integration of indigenous culture and language into Child Care and Early Years services. Not only will such initiatives benefit indigenous families and children, but opportunities to share cross-cultural dialogue will benefit both indigenous and non-indigenous people, both at the administrative level as well as among children and their caregivers.

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