

Brief: *Newcomer Consultations on the Context of Early Learning and Care in Edmonton (2019)*

Newcomer Consultations on the Context of Early Learning and Care in Edmonton (2019) was compiled for the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) by the Multicultural Family Resource Society (MFRS) to provide insight into the lived experiences, barriers, and keys to success for newcomer families in Edmonton when it comes to child care. The experiences of newcomers and inclusionary practices described in this paper will be used to inform and guide the Council in its forthcoming work.

The ECELC is an organization composed of institutional and community partners tasked with improving early learning and care in the city, with a focus on vulnerable populations. It was established in response to Action #29 of the EndPovertyEdmonton Road Map in 2016.

Realities, Barriers, Keys to Success

Newcomer families are diverse and, though they share some immigrant experiences, no two families have exactly the same experience. Some issues, such as poverty and discrimination, are similar to other families in Edmonton, especially where it affects experiences of early learning and care.

Realities

- Each family comes with their own pre-migration history that can affect family members' mental health.
- Newcomer realities include struggling with food, rent, transportation, and other basic needs.
- Newcomer families with children with disabilities face greater barriers when accessing or participating in child care.

"Most challenges are poverty ... struggling financially with housing - these are common struggles they have"

"They are leaving their families behind"

Barriers

- Language barriers present challenges to accessing child care and other programs, and obtaining employment in child care settings.
- There are barriers to newcomer families understanding regulations and procedures to access affordable child care.
- There is an increased burden on families when programs and services in early learning and care are not coordinated for various age groups, forcing families with multiple children to attend multiple locations for services.

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- Child care workers may have limited understanding of different families' cultural and child-rearing beliefs, which can cause misunderstandings between staff and families.

"They are waiting two years for a child care space - and they cannot wait that long"

"The curriculum says, 'be authentic.' But the system is telling them they can't. . . Guidelines are strict when it comes to things like children eating from one plate or twins sleeping together."

Keys to Success

- Involving cultural brokers, not just translators, can help families access early learning and care services.
- Strengthening service providers' understanding of newcomer families' pre-migration histories and cultural parenting practices.
- Involving newcomer parents to bridge cultural differences or distance.
- Conducting further research and analysis of community needs (for example, services required, locations, and ages of children).

"When a child comes into a Centre, it's their first mirror of society. 'Who am I?' and 'Do I belong?'"

"[Newcomer families are] rich with cultural knowledge that can be beautifully interwoven into the ... curriculum"

Recommendations

- A. Increase access to education on bias, intercultural practice, diversity, inclusion and equity for those who work in child care.
- B. Improve coordination of early learning and care services and the sharing of information for newcomer families.
- C. In developing solutions, work with newcomers in designing and implementing strategies to address barriers.

Additional briefs and full reports are available at endpovertyedmonton.ca/ecelc