

# CAREGIVER FEEDBACK 2024



Each year we invite EarlyON families to provide feedback through an annual Middlesex EarlyON Parent/Caregiver Satisfaction Survey. This input helps us to provide high quality programs for all participants in our EarlyON programs. In 2024, a survey was opened for 8-weeks from Monday September 23 to Friday November 15, 2024. A total of 98 caregivers provided feedback.

Questions focused on the four foundational conditions that are important for children to grow and flourish: Belonging, Well-Being, Engagement, and Expression. Respondents were asked to rate from strongly agree to strongly disagree. **Overall, in all four foundational areas, respondents either strongly agree or agree with all statements.** Included is a summary of feedback from this survey.

## Belonging

Families report being greeted warmly, feel programs are welcoming of all families and help facilitate connections with other caregivers and families. Respondents also report being more aware of family-centered programs, services and resources in the community as a result of program participation.

### Caregiver Suggestions

- Have more programs for children with special needs (ADHD, Autism, Down Syndrome)
- More opportunities for working parents
- Promotion of local programs and activities

### What can you expect in 2025?

- We are offering additional Saturday programs.
- We are expanding the number of evening Kinder Connect programs as well as an additional 4-week Ready Set Learn program in the evening (total of two evening series).
- We have expanded our partnership programs in 2025. These include oral health with Middlesex-London Health Unit, car seat safety with London-Health Sciences Centre, speech & language with tykeTalk, gross motor skills with Thames Valley Children's Centre, and Parent and Infant Relationship clinics with Vanier.
- We will connect with community partners to explore opportunities for special programs for children with special needs.

## DID YOU KNOW?

**Information Sharing:** We share information on a variety of public sector and non-profit organizations and programs that are licensed, regulated, and funded by various levels of government to serve children and families in Middlesex County. We do so through:

- Our weekly email digest and on our social media channels
- Having available select brochures e.g. at the sign-in table, in a resource binder
- Some months, in support of a health-promotion theme (e.g. Speech & Language month) we will have available information on local agencies in support of the theme e.g. tyke Talk
- And, you can always inquire with a Facilitator!

**Partnership programs** are limited by agency capacity to balance outreach programs with their caseloads.

**Non-traditional hours:** We do offer programs on evenings and weekends throughout the year to support working families. We are limited by our staffing complement on how many of these opportunities we can offer. We also need to balance these opportunities with other program commitments. Programs are scheduled according to availability.

**Limiting Registration:** The funding we receive is intended to support Middlesex County families. For programs that require registration and which have limited spaces that fill quickly, we limit registration to residents of Middlesex County. Our drop-in programs are always opened to families outside of Middlesex.

*I had just moved to Mount Brydges before having my first child and EarlyON programming has helped me develop strong friendships with other moms in town. I don't know how I would have met people locally without this programming.*

*We have learned about a lot of opportunities in the community we would have never known if it wasn't for EarlyON.*

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Families report that program spaces are clean and well-maintained. Respondents feel educators demonstrate genuine concern for the well-being of children and offer support, advice, and/or information about child development and behaviour. Respondents feel aware of screening and interventions for development or behaviour concerns as a result of program participation.

### Caregiver Suggestions

- Offer the developmental screening program more often through the year, in case someone misses it before attending or can't make a class due to illness etc.
- Avoid food in play areas.

### What can you expect in 2025?

- We are offering our Developmental Screening Clinics as part of Play & Learn programs once per Quarter.
- We are regularly discussing developmental screening as part of our Baby Time program.
- Developmental screening will continue to be part of our Kindergarten programs (Ready Set Learn and Kinder Connect).

## DID YOU KNOW?

### Developmental Screening

- If you are unable to attend a developmental screening program, you can always connect with a Facilitator one-on-one by email or phone.

### Cleaning

- We follow a cleaning schedule that entails regular cleaning and disinfecting of toys and materials. We follow recommendations from Middlesex-London Health Unit and the Canadian Pediatric Society.
- All Baby Time toys and materials are cleaned and disinfected after program.
- All toys that have been placed in the mouthing bins are cleaned and disinfected after program.
- It is important to keep in mind that disinfected toys and materials can become contaminated during a program by a child or caregiver that is ill. This is why it is important for children and caregivers to stay home if they are ill, and why it is important to practice hand hygiene, especially before having a snack.

### Snacks

- In 2024 we incorporated snacks into our Play & Learn programs. One reason for this inclusion was to support families who may struggle financially in accessing healthy snacks. As well, learning to transition from play to sitting quietly at a table with peers is a skill important to a successful school transition. We offer peanut/nut free snacks and have available a gluten-free option as needed by a family.
- We encourage that all snacks, including any snacks brought from home, be eaten at the snack table. Snacks brought in from outside must be peanut/nut free.

*The educator structures Baby Time so that there is a prompt to spark discussion and share advice amongst parents.*

*The educator is so wonderful at greeting all families and interacting with all children.*



*The educator inquires about each baby/child and remembers specific things about them.*

*They know my child's name, always check that we're hitting milestones, any new skill developments.*

*As a first-time mom, I can't thank the educators enough for the judgement-free advice they provided and for just being a great listener when I needed it.*

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Families' feel that programs are a good balance of active and quiet activities, that their children are given opportunities to follow their interests and that programs are stimulating and fun. Families feel that there are enough program supplies, toys, games and equipment that are developmentally appropriate. Parents feel the educators support them in their parenting role.

## Caregiver Suggestions

- Inclusion of sensory table weekly
- More activities geared towards 3.5-4 year old children
- Greater variety in crafts
- More programs and more locations

## What can you expect in 2025?

We will continue to explore ways we can adapt our programs to best support the needs and interests of families.

## DID YOU KNOW?

### Activities and Experiences

- Facilitators offer some consistent toys and materials, while also rotating in new materials to spark interest.
- Facilitators plan activities and experiences during programs based upon the interests of children and based upon the ages of children that are more typically attending a location.
- If there is interest in having an experience more often or if a toy that your child loves to play with is not available one day, just ask your Facilitator.

### Creative Materials

- Colouring sheets or structured crafts can limit creativity and imagination, hindering a child's ability to freely express themselves and construct their own meanings, which is considered a crucial part of learning. Providing blank paper and other 'loose' creative materials encourages children to express their unique perspectives and ideas.
- On occasion a Facilitator may offer a more structured craft. We ask that caregivers try not to instruct on how to do it "right" as this approach can discourage experimentation and exploration.
- Some weeks a Facilitator may not have the planning time to plan more elaborate creatives, due to competing programs, professional learning or meetings.

### Space and Storage Limitations

- Some of our program locations are smaller spaces. Storage is also a limitation in many locations. We do our best to offer a high quality program with the space we have available.

### Program Locations and Number of Programs

- We have the funding to support four full-time Facilitators and one casual. With our current staffing complement, we are very limited in our ability to support additional programs or locations.
- The program schedule has been carefully planned to provide equitable access to programs across the County of Middlesex. The County is a very large geographic area and we do our best to reach as many families as we can with the planned schedule.



*My baby loves the variety of environments/toys between Dorchester Library, and the two rooms at River Heights. The sensory room at River Heights offers a quiet area for little ones who may need a break.*

*Parents are treated with respect, listened to, and supported.*

*Facilitator encourages my children to vocalize and use their words when asking for things and it's great reinforcement*

*I am beyond impressed with the programming, instructors, and resourcing. I think that the Early On programs are so valuable for early childhood development and parental support.*

Respondents report seeing positive interactions between educators and children and that they themselves have positive interactions with educators. Respondents feel comfortable approaching educators about concerns and reported concerns are dealt with in a timely and professional manner. Many report using ideas and activities at home that they learned in the program.

## DID YOU KNOW?

If you have any concerns, you are always welcome to discuss these with the Facilitator at the location you visit. Alternatively, you can communicate these concerns with Nadine Devin, Early Years Program Manager, [ndevin@middlesex.ca](mailto:ndevin@middlesex.ca) or 519-520-3520.

*I always feel I am in a safe space to be myself and express my struggles, ups and downs.*

*Every family that walks through the doors is treated all the same, with the help of very approachable and likeable staff.*

## River Heights

We officially opened River Heights EarlyON Child & Family Centre in Dorchester in 2024. We asked a series of questions of caregivers who have attended programs at this location about what they enjoyed and areas for improvement. A total of 17% of all respondents provided feedback on this location

### What do you enjoy?

- Welcoming and warm and cozy; home-like environment
- Clean and modern and well resourced
- Great kitchen for cooking programs
- Sensory light room
- A variety of different stations set up
- Different options for different ages
- Engaging materials
- Creative use of space and the halls

### What would you like to see?

- More morning hours for toddlers
- Outdoor space with shade to meet
- Better layout for baby time - gets crowded
- More group walks when the weather permits

### What can you expect in 2025?

We will continue to explore ways to adapt the program schedule and how programs are offered to best support the needs and interests of families.



*How welcoming it is, a very relaxed space to come into. Yes, it is small but somehow it was made to feel so warm that you do not notice how small it is.*

*Baby time offers a great space to speak to other parents. Although the room at River Heights can get a bit busy at times, being closer together helps the conversation flow and allows you to engage in conversations with a variety of parents.*

## DID YOU KNOW?

- We offer at our River Heights location a variety of drop-in (Open Play and Baby Time) and special programs by registration (Busy Bees and Infant Massage).
- This location was carefully designed to maximize the space while aiming to be welcoming and engaging. We are very pleased to hear families are enjoying our creation!



# Open Spaces Outdoor Adventures

A total of 50% of all respondents provided feedback on our Open Spaces Outdoor Adventures program. Just under 20% attend regularly while another 30% attended less regularly.

- Families report being greeted warmly, feel programs are welcoming of all families and help facilitate connections with other caregivers and families.
- Respondents feel educators demonstrate genuine concern for the well-being of children and offer support, advice, and/or information about child development and behaviour.
- Families' feel that the program gives children the opportunity to follow their interests and that programs are stimulating and fun.
- Respondents report seeing positive interactions between educators and children and that they themselves have positive interactions with educators.
- Respondents feel comfortable approaching educators about concerns and reported concerns are dealt with in a timely and professional manner.
- Many report using ideas and activities at home that they learned in the program.

## Caregiver Suggestions

- More programs in some location
- More dates for program locations
- Offer other days than Tues and Thurs
- Maybe bringing along a scavenger hunt specific to certain locations and wildlife that the children might see and find could help with another sense of engagement.

## What can you expect in 2025?

We will continue to explore ways to adapt the program schedule and how programs are offered to best support the needs and interests of families. We are planning for a Quarterly Open Spaces program on a Saturday, rotating around the County.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- We have funding to support four full-time Facilitators and one casual. With our current staffing complement, we are very limited in supporting any additional programs or locations.
- The program schedule has been carefully planned to provide equitable access to programs across the County of Middlesex. The County is a very large geographic area and we do our best to reach as many families as we can with the planned schedule.
- Our Facilitators have other program commitments. Programs are scheduled according to availability.



Miss Donna is so much fun and we love that she gets right in there with the children, mainly so I don't have to! It is always so much engagement with other children and their families, and we love that it is taken at the children's pace, it allows us parents to slow down and enjoy the little things with them. If this was offered more often it would be great!

My kids (4yo and 2yo) absolutely loved this program with Donna! They get so excited for the hikes, and especially love the water portion in the summer time, as well as the songs during circle time. Donna has such wonderful energy; I think the kids really feed off of that. My kids even play "hikes with Donna" at home, re-enacting the walks and circle times on blankets with their toys.

## Special Programs

A total of 57% of all respondents provided feedback on our special programs. In terms of participation, 47% had participated in Little Sensory Seekers, 43% in Infant Massage, 27% in Zumbini, 25% in a virtual program, 23% in Ready Set Learn, and 7% in Busy Bees.

### Caregiver Suggestions

- Move opportunities around to more locations
- More opportunities on weekends and evenings
- More sensory seeker opportunities
- Additional splash pad weeks
- More Bear Hunts

“Kindergarten Social was really amazing for first time parents who had kids going to school. Met a lot of families and some kids that were going to be in her class.”

### What can you expect in 2025?

- We are planning for a quarterly Sensory Seeker opportunity on a Saturday at our Strathroy location
- We have plans for a quarterly “Kids in the Kitchen” program on a Saturday at our Strathroy location
- Ready Set Learn has been expanded to 4 locations and a total of 6 opportunities, two of which are evening programs
- We will be offering 7 Kinder Connect programs in the evening between February and April
- We plan to offer an additional Splash Pad week, resulting in one week in July and one in August
- With support from a Summer Student, we hope to offer additional Bear Hunt programs this summer!

## DID YOU KNOW?

While we would love to offer more programs in more locations at different times of the day, we have limitations. Our primary mandate is to offer our Baby Time and Play & Learn drop-in programs. From here, we layer in some special programs. Programs are scheduled according to staff availability. Space to run the program is also a variable.



## Communication

### Email List

- 92% of respondents are on the email list
- 89% feel the information shared in the email digests is satisfactory

### Social Media

- 66% follow our Facebook account
- 37% follow our Instagram account
- 23% follow neither account
- 73% feel the information shared on our social media channels is satisfactory



## DID YOU KNOW?

If you would like to unsubscribe from our email list, email [earlyon@middlesex.ca](mailto:earlyon@middlesex.ca).

## How has your participation in an EarlyON program made a difference for you or your family?

The following is a summary of the themes that emerged from this question.

- Socialization skills for child and socialization for parent
- Making connections, making friends, meeting new people, build lifelong relationships
- Community, sense of belonging, welcomed, feel less isolated, mental health support
- Interacting with new materials, change of scenery, getting out of the house, something to look forward to
- Bonding time
- Learning how to share
- Being aware of milestones, learning (songs, activities, games), awareness of resources
- Free and accessible
- Security that the program is available to provide support, reassurance
- Enjoyment, laughter, happiness
- Connections to nature
- Builds confidence
- Thoughtfully prepared environment



*We make it out almost every day of the week attending programs as something to do to pass the time of day, but also to see friends. We look forward to each day seeking out where we go and enjoy every minute of our time in program, while also making use of going to the Library afterwards. It feels nice to feel so welcomed and thought of.*

*It has been amazing! We have met people and made friends with families in the neighbourhood. It allows our stay at home child a chance to socialize and play with kids their age!*

*I found confidence in motherhood. Grateful for somewhere to discuss the ups and downs of parenthood, get advice, get new ideas for activities and development, and somewhere to meet other parents in similar situations, and to build new friendships. Going to class a few times a week has been great for building a routine and having a fun outing to look forward to.*

*It helped me greatly! It got me out of the house with a small fussy baby and gave me a warm welcoming environment where I had a chance to vent, talk, learn and make friends.*

*We love coming to EarlyON programs. It is always nice to feel wanted in the space and cared about. Every facilitator we have encountered has been incredible, and the materials and environment are always so welcoming, clean, and fun!*

*The EarlyON program was one of the highlights of my maternity leave. It helped me feel less isolated while also giving me a space to learn from the educators and other moms. I also feel I became less anxious as a first time mom seeing how other babies interact (and put everything in their mouths) and knowing that this is all a normal and important part of development. I tell everyone I meet how incredibly valuable this program is - I really can't say enough good things.*

*It has helped my daughter, and I form a community of parents and kids. Being able to get out of the house early on was so important to my mental health. The fact that programs are free are amazing and encourage people of all demographics to attend them.*

*I am new to Dorchester, and I am also a new parent. EarlyON has been my "go to" and social "hub" these past number of months. The facilitator cultivates such a warm environment for newcomers to the area and new parents. This sets the tone in the programming that all are welcome. It is clear that families feel at ease, and are therefore able to open up, be themselves, and perhaps make a new friend (modeling this to their own children)!*

*We love EarlyON programs and staff are all doing such a great job we appreciate them so much! Every location and program we have attended has been nothing but great, fun, welcoming and educational. Thank You*

*Thank you for everything that your team does to make a positive experience for families and especially for little ones. It's so amazing to have programs that are free for us to engage in on a regular basis.*

*I appreciate all the effort, planning and communication required to run these programs! Thank you!*