

## **An Assessment of Child Care Needs in the Dundas Community**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

With funding through the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Today's Family Inc., in collaboration with St. Mark's Cooperative Pre School, partnered with the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC) to assess the child care needs of families in the Dundas community. The purpose of the research was to develop a better understanding of local child care needs from the perspectives of key stakeholders, and to identify innovative strategies that compliment the existing child care system and meet current needs.

Over the past year the SPRC has consulted with Dundas parents and local service providers to develop a clearer picture of the challenges that some families face in securing and maintaining quality child care arrangements. A range of methods were employed, including surveys, key informant interviews and focus groups.

All outward appearances would suggest that Dundas is an affluent community. In fact, compared to the city of Hamilton as a whole, average family incomes are considerably higher. Like any community however, Dundas is home to families with a range of incomes. According to Statistics Canada census data (2001) 12% of Dundas families were living in poverty, including 39% of lone parent families.

Child care advocates contend that without adequate child care, parents or caregivers face exclusion from the labour force and marginalization through poverty and unemployment. From this perspective, child care services are essential for reducing family poverty by providing parents the opportunity to participate in training, education and employment.

Reliable child care services are also important in helping parents balance work and family responsibilities. Difficulties in balancing work and family responsibilities contribute to family stress and most of the burden for juggling these falls on women. While child care services are not the sole remedy for reducing family stress, they are part of the solution to balancing work and family.

Challenges related to employment and employability emerged through out the course of the research, as did the resulting stress on families. The root of these challenges, according to parents and service providers from the Dundas community, include: the lack of licensed child care centre spaces for infants and toddlers; the difficulties in finding care for a sick child, a child with special needs, or care during 'off hours', and; the high cost of care.

The report includes an overview of the research methodology employed in this study, a profile of the Dundas community and findings from each phase of the research. The report concludes with a review of existing models or strategies related to the identified needs. A set of four recommendations are also included in the report. Recommendations focus on innovative strategies that would enhance the current child care system in the Dundas community.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

The study was designed to collect a range of quantitative and qualitative information to better understand child care needs in the Dundas community. Secondary research included an analysis of local demographics and an inventory of child care services in Dundas. The demographics analysis is based on Statistics Canada census data. At the time of preparing this report, the full set of 2006 census data had not yet been released. While 2006 data was used where possible, data from the 2001 census was also incorporated into the analysis. A review of promising practices was also conducted, related to the needs identified through primary research.

In terms of primary research, two key stakeholder groups were consulted during the course of the study; parents from the Dundas community and local child care service providers. Consultations followed a three phase process, beginning with a survey of each group. Surveys were designed to identify priority needs from the perspectives of both stakeholder groups.

Building on survey findings, phase two of the consultation process involved key informant interviews with members of each stakeholder group. Interviews allowed the researcher to add depth to our understanding of the needs identified through phase one of the process.

The third phase of the consultation process involved a focus group session with Dundas child care providers. Based on an understanding of identified needs, the focus group was designed to guide service providers through a process of defining potential strategies or solutions for change.

Through the course of the study an advisory committee, comprised of Dundas parents and child care providers, provided insight and direction on the consultation process and the development of data collection tools. The following subsections describe each phase of the consultation process in more detail.

### 2.1 Phase One: Survey of Key Stakeholders

Surveys were conducted with two key stakeholder groups, including parents accessing child care services in the Dundas community and providers of child care service in Dundas. Parent surveys were distributed through 11 local child care centres including an Ontario Early Years Centre (OEYC). An OEYC is a drop-in centre for parents and children. Each centre was provided with a package containing surveys in hard (paper) copy format, as well as flyers directing parents to conduct the same survey on-line (see APPENDIX A for a copy of the parent survey). The two options were provided to increase response rates. In total 130 parent surveys were completed, including 41 on-line and 89 manually.

A survey of service providers was also conducted as part of phase one of the consultation process. Service providers were given the same template to identify

problems and challenges with either finding or maintaining child care (see APPENDIX B for a copy of the service provider survey). The survey also included an opportunity for service providers to identify any potential solutions to the issues and challenges identified. The response rate for this part of the survey was too low to report any significant findings.

The service provider survey was conducted on-line. An email was sent to 13 child care service providers in Dundas, with a link to the online survey. With one follow-up reminder, the survey resulted in a 62% response rate.

## **2.2 Phase Two: Key Informant Interviews**

Building on phase one of the consultation process, a small number of telephone interviews were conducted with both parents and service providers. The purpose of this phase of the consultation was to focus on the key issues and challenges identified in phase one.

Parent interviews provided an opportunity to add depth to our understanding of how each challenge or issue affects Dundas families, what their alternatives were in terms of addressing a particular challenge, and how common they felt this challenge to be in the community. As part of the parent survey, respondents were asked if they would be willing to participate in a short telephone interview. In total, six parents were interviewed based on their survey responses and willingness to be interviewed.

The same process was conducted with local child care service providers. A total of four service providers were interviewed by telephone. Interviews focused on the difficulties that service providers face in addressing the challenges and issues identified during phase one, the implications of these issues and challenges for families, and how common they felt these challenges were among Dundas families.

## **2.3 Phase Three: Focus Group with Child Care Providers**

Building on phases one and two of the consultation process, phase three involved a focus group session with Dundas child care providers. The purpose of the session was to review the issues and challenges identified and begin to identify potential solutions or strategies to address them.

The two hour focus group session was held in September 2007, at St. Mark's Cooperative Preschool in Dundas. Twelve local child care providers attended the session, as well as one parent from St. Mark's.

### 3.0 BACKGROUND

This section of the report provides a profile of the Dundas community, focusing on a selection of population characteristics. This type of profile is important to service planning, as it helps to identify the size of the potential service user group, and highlights some of the barriers they might face.

We have also included an overview of child care services in the Dundas community. This includes the number and general capacity of licensed child care centres and cooperatives, as well as the number of identifiable home child care providers operating in the area.

#### 3.1 A Profile of the Dundas Community

This section of the report highlights some of the key social and economic characteristics and trends in the Dundas community. In most cases, comparative data is also included, reflecting circumstances in the City of Hamilton as a whole.

The selection of demographic characteristics included are most relevant to the need for and accessibility of child care. Specifically, we have included an analysis of population growth in Dundas, age distribution, family structure, connection to the labour market, income levels and levels of low-income. Where possible, data was drawn from the 2006 Statistics Canada census. However, at the time of writing this report, the full set of census data had not yet been released. Where 2006 census data was not available, data was derived from 2001 census data. A map depicting the incidence of low-income is also included in this section of the report.

##### 3.1.1 Population Growth in Dundas

Between the last two census years (2001 to 2006) the total population of Dundas increased less than the City of Hamilton as a whole.

**TABLE 1: Population Change in Dundas and Hamilton – 2001 to 2006**

Area	2001	2006	Population Change
Dundas	24,395	24,702	1.3%
Hamilton	490,269	504,559	2.9%

According to TABLE 1, the population increased by only 1.3% between 2001 and 2006, to a total of 24,702 residents. During this same period, the population of City of Hamilton as a whole increased by 2.9%.

### 3.1.2 Children and Youth in Dundas

This section of the report describes the number of children and youth aged 0 to 19 years living in Dundas. This type of information is often useful in terms of service planning, as it shows the size of a particular target population that may require a particular services.

According to TABLE 2, there were 1,090 young children aged 0 to 4 years living in Dundas at the time of the 2006 census, representing 4% of the total population. If we assume that ages are distributed evenly across each age group, this translates into 526 infants 0 to 17 months; 236 toddlers aged 18 months to 2.5 years, and 327 preschoolers 2.5 years to 4 years.

A total of 1,335 children were between 5 and 9 years; 1,640 between 10 and 14 and; 1,695 between 15 and 19. This translates into approximately 536 children of junior to senior kindergarten age (5 to 6 years); 1788 children 7 to 12 years, and; 1016 teens aged 13 to 16 years.

**TABLE 2: Children and Youth in Dundas by Selected Age Groups – 2006 Census**

Age Group	Total Population	% Of Population
0 to 4	1,090	4%
5 to 9	1,335	5%
10 to 14	1,640	7%
15 to 19	1,695	7%

### 3.1.3 Family Structure

Family structure, in this case, refers to either couple families with children or lone-parent families. TABLE 4 shows the number of lone parent and couple families with children in Dundas. The same figures have also been included for the City of Hamilton, for the purpose of comparison.

According to TABLE 4, there were 4,275 families with children in Dundas in 2006, with 77% (3,305) of these being couple families and 23% (970) lone-parent families. Compared to the city of Hamilton, the proportion of lone-parent families in Dundas was slightly lower by 4%.

**TABLE 4: Lone Parent and Couple Families with Children in Dundas Vs. Hamilton – 2006 Census**

Family Structure	Dundas	Hamilton
Total Families with Children	4,275 (100%)	91,855 (100%)
Couple Families	3,305 (77%)	66,765 (73%)
Lone-Parent Families	970 (23%)	25,090 (27%)

### 3.1.4 Connection To The Labour Market

This section of the report examines the connection of residents to the labour market, in Dundas versus Hamilton as a whole. Specifically, we consider participation rate, employment rate and the unemployment rate. At the time of writing this report, employment and income data was not available from the 2006 census. Consequently, statistics used in this section of the report are based on data from the 2001 census.

Labour force participation refers to the proportion of the population 15 years and over, who are working or actively looking and available for work. As shown in TABLE 9, the participation rate for Dundas (66.5%) was almost 3% higher than for the City of Hamilton (63.7%).

**TABLE 9: Labour Market Characteristics in Dundas vs. Hamilton – 2001 Census**

<b>Labour Market Characteristics</b>	<b>Dundas</b>	<b>Hamilton</b>
Participation in the labour force	66.5%	63.7%
Employment rate	64.1%	59.6%
Unemployment rate	3.6%	6.4%

The employment rate reflects the proportion of the total population, 15 years and over, that is employed at the time of the census. In the case of Dundas versus Hamilton, Dundas shows an almost 5% higher employment rate (64.1%) than Hamilton as a whole (59.6%).

With respect to unemployment, the unemployment rate refers to the proportion of individuals who are in the labour force, but who were not employed at the time of the census. As TABLE 9 shows, the unemployment rate in Dundas (3.6%) was much lower than for the City as a whole (6.4%).

### 3.1.5 Income Levels

Income levels in the Dundas community are substantially higher than for the City of Hamilton as a whole. TABLE 10 shows the median incomes by family structure for both Dundas and Hamilton.

**TABLE 10: Median Income by Family Structure in Dundas vs. Hamilton – 2001 Census**

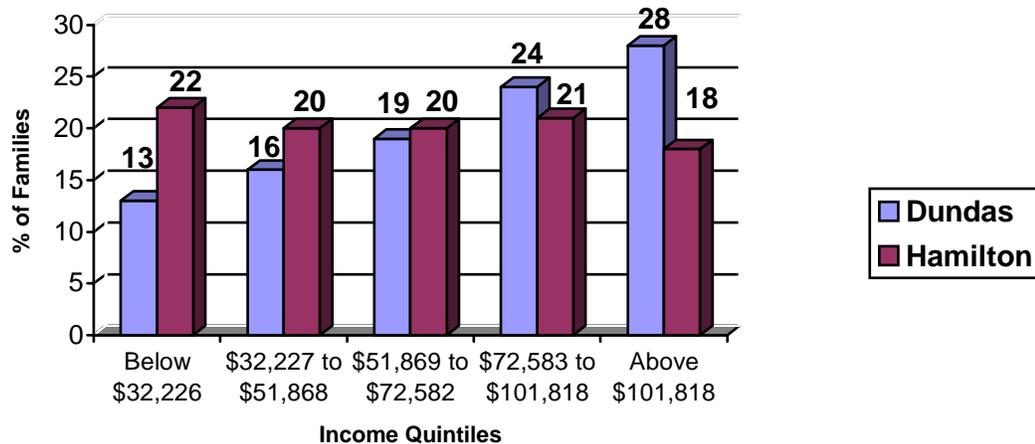
<b>Household type</b>	<b>Dundas</b>	<b>Hamilton</b>
Couple families	\$78,969	\$64,021
Lone parent families	\$41,505	\$31,330

Each family type reported a higher median income in Dundas than Hamilton; more than \$10,000 annually for lone parent families and more than \$15,000 for couple families. In terms of the distribution of income, Dundas displays somewhat of a reverse trend as

compared to Hamilton as a whole. CHART 1 shows the percentage of families by income quintile for Dundas versus Hamilton. In Hamilton, the largest group of families earns less than \$32,226 while in Dundas the largest group earns more than \$101,818.

Like any community, Dundas is home to families with a range of incomes. While 28% of households reported incomes of more than \$101,818 at the time of the 2001 census, 29% reported incomes less than \$51,868 and 13% less than \$32,226.

**CHART 1: Percentage of Families by Income Quintiles for Dundas versus Hamilton – 2001 Census**



### 3.1.6 Low Income In Dundas

For the purposes of this report, the Statistics Canada Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) will be used to measure the level of poverty in Hamilton. The LICO measure is a relative measure of poverty introduced in Canada in 1968. When researchers or the media refers to “poverty lines” or “incidence of low-income”, they are generally referring to the LICO measure.

Basically, the LICO considers the average cost of basic necessities (including housing, food, and clothing) for different sized households in different sized communities. While the calculation is more complex, the measure essentially adds an additional 20% to determine the low-income cut-off for the specific group. TABLE 11 shows the LICO for a community the size of Hamilton by family size. For example, the before tax LICO for a single parent with one child in Hamilton is \$21,224 annually or just over \$1,300 per month after taxes.

**TABLE 11: (Before Tax) LICO Levels for the City of Hamilton – 2003**

Family Size:	Low-Income Cut-Off
2 person	\$21,224
3 person	\$26,396
4 person	\$31,952
5 person	\$35,718

As described in TABLE 12, there are a smaller proportion of families and individuals in Dundas living below the LICO than in the City of Hamilton. Still, in terms of families with children, 12% of those in Dundas reported incomes below the LICO.

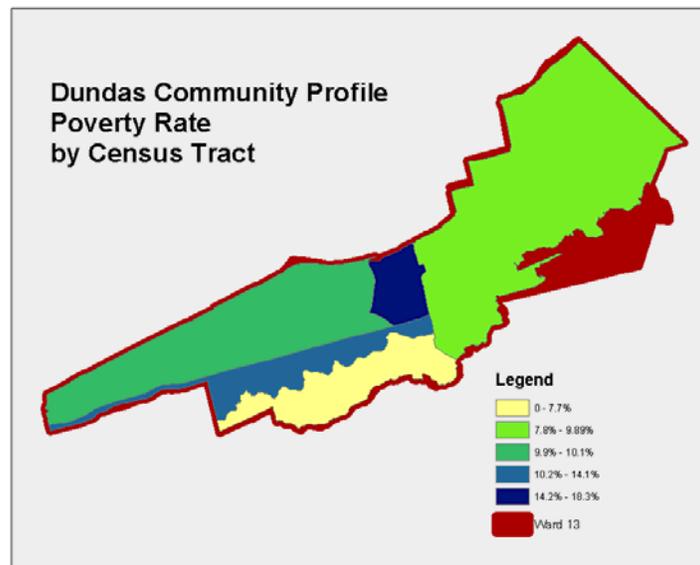
**TABLE 12: Families with Children Living Below the LICO in Dundas vs. Hamilton – 2001 Census**

Family Structure	Dundas	Hamilton
Total Families with Children	12%	22%
Couple Families	7%	13%
Lone Parent Families	39%	56%

While 7% of couple families are living with household incomes below the LICO, most disturbing is the proportion of lone parent families living in poverty. While the city of Hamilton as a whole reported a 56% rate of poverty among lone parent families, Dundas maintained a rate of 39%. If we apply the 2001 income data to the 2006 family structure data collected by Statistics Canada, it suggests that there are approximately 600 families with children living in poverty in Dundas.

MAP 1 provides a visual description of the distribution of poverty in Dundas by census tract. Among the five census tracts that make up Dundas, the one located in the town centre showed a rate of poverty in the range of 14.2% to 28.3%. At the other end of the scale, the census tract on southeast edge of Dundas shows a poverty rate of between 0 and 7.7%.

**MAP 1: The Proportion of Low-Income residents in Dundas by Census Tract – 2001 Census**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census  
Prepared: Sandy Shaw, Social Planning & Research Council Hamilton

While the map depicts all residents in Dundas who are living in poverty as opposed to families specifically, it provides a sense of the high poverty areas in the community.

### 3.2 Child Care Services in the Dundas Community

As in other communities, formal child care services are provided in either private homes or child care centres. Currently, there are 10 licensed child care centres in the Dundas community. TABLE 13 provides a listing of each, as well as the licensed capacity for toddler, preschool and school aged children.

**TABLE 13: Licensed Capacity for Child Care Centres in the Dundas Community**

Program Name	Licensed Capacity		
	Toddler (18 to 30 months)	Preschool (31 to 67 months)	School Age (68 months to 12 years)
Dundas Valley Montessori School		24	
Highland YMCA Early Childhood Education Centre		32	
St Bernadette Children's Centre		42	35
St James Co-operative Nursery School of Dundas Inc	12	24	
St Mark's Cooperative Preschool		32	
Today's Family Children's Centre – Dundas	10	56	41
Umbrella Family – Dundana		20	30
Umbrella Family - Dundas Central			15
YMCA School Age Child Care - Central Park			20
YMCA School Age Child Care			30

(Child Care Information Hamilton (2007) Inform Hamilton)

According to the table, Dundas child care centres have the capacity to care for 22 toddlers, 230 preschoolers and 171 school age children. These figures however, should be viewed with some caution. Some child care centres have a condition within their license agreement that allows them to accept children who may be younger than the age noted. This is called a “20% aged mixed grouping”. What this could mean, for example, is that if a centre that generally cares for preschoolers accepts a toddler, the overall number of children in the centre would be reduced. The reason for this is that younger children require a higher staff/child ratio according the province’s Day Nurseries Act.

Home based care may take a number of forms. There are 3 private home day care agencies that operate in the Dundas community. These include Today's Family Inc., Wee Watch Private Home Day Care and Springbank Child Home Day Care. Licensed by Ministry of Children and Youth Services, these agencies administer and support home child care providers who are registered with the agency. The agency provides training, support, and consultation to the providers, as well as administration and 'matching' between families and caregivers.

In Dundas there are currently 3 home child care providers registered with licensed agencies. Individual caregivers provide care in their home for up to 5 children. There are a number of restrictions included in the Day Nurseries Act however, that may limit the actual number of spaces. For example, if you have children of your own, they are counted as part of the 5. Furthermore, a home child care provider is restricted from caring for:

- More than 2 children with special needs
- 2 children who are under two years of age
- 3 children who are under three years of age
- 1 child with special needs and 1 child under two years of age
- 1 child with special needs and 2 children who are over two but under three years of age

Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services (2007) Day Nurseries Act and Regulations.

There are also home child care providers that are not registered with a private home day care agency. This is a difficult group to define. While some advertise through different registries and media, others operate mainly through word of mouth. Ultimately, there is no consolidated list of unlicensed home day care providers.

There are fewer restrictions placed on child care providers not registered with a licensed agency. According to the Day Nurseries Act, "informal caregivers" can care for a maximum of 5 children of any age, in addition to their own children. They are also not required to meet the same standards with respect to the physical space where the child care is provided, or to participate in training required by licensed home day care agencies.

Another form of home based child care are Nanny services. Again, this is a difficult group to define as there is no central registry. Nanny's generally work in the family home, and may live on the premises or work set hours. The least formal type of child care arrangements include care from family or friends, or hiring a 'babysitter'.

The cost of care varies from centre to centre, across various child care options, and by the age of the child. According to an analysis of cost conducted by the of Hamilton's Parent and Child Branch (2007), the average cost of full-day child care service in Hamilton was \$35.90 per day as of June 2007.

### 3.3 Key Findings

The following points represent the key findings from this chapter of the report, including demographic characteristics of the Dundas community and existing child care services.

- According to 2006 Statistics Canada census data, there are 1,090 children aged 0 to 4 years, 1,335 children were between 5 and 9 years, 1,640 between 10 and 14 and 1,695 between 15 and 19 living in the Dundas community.
- In terms of family structure, of the 4,275 families with children living in Dundas, 3,305 (77%) were couple families and 970 (23%) were lone parent families.
- Dundas families report higher average household incomes than the city of Hamilton as a whole. Like any community however, Dundas is home to families with a range of incomes. While 28% of households reported incomes of more than \$101,818 at the time of the 2001 census, 29% reported incomes less than \$51,868 and 13% less than \$32,226.
- At the lowest end of the income spectrum, 12% of families with children are struggling with incomes below the poverty line or Statistics Canada's low income cut off (LICO). This includes 7% of couple families and 39% of lone parent families (approximately 600 families in total).
- The 10 licensed child care centres in Dundas have the capacity to care for approximately 22 toddlers, 230 preschoolers and 171 school age children.
- In Dundas there are currently 3 home child care providers registered with licensed agencies. Individual caregivers provide care in their home for up to 5 children.
- A number of private unlicensed home day cares operate in the Dundas community; however there is no reliable inventory of these services. Unlicensed home day cares are not subject to the same level of standards and regulation as licensed home day care.
- The average cost of full-day child care service in Hamilton was \$35.90 per day as of June 2007.

## 4.0 PHASE ONE: CHILD CARE SURVEY FINDINGS

Surveys were conducted with two key stakeholder groups, including parents accessing child care services in the Dundas community and providers of child care service in Dundas. The following sections provide an overview of findings from each set of surveys.

### 4.1 Parent Survey Findings

Parent surveys were distributed through 10 local child care centres, including an Early Years Centre which is a drop-in centre for parents and children. In total 130 parent surveys were completed.

To better understand the current (and past) child care arrangements required by the survey population, respondents were asked the number and age of children residing with them. TABLE 14 shows the number of children by select age groups as part of the population surveyed. While some age groups were more represented than others, it is important to note that no age groups are unrepresented.

**TABLE 14: Number of Children by Select Age Groups as Part of the Families Surveyed**

Age of Children	Number of children
0 to 1 year	17
Between 1 and 2 years	34
Between 2 and 3 years	54
Between 3 and 4 years	46
Between 4 and 5 years	32
Between 5 and 6 yrs	19
Between 6 and 12 years	50

Parents were also asked what kinds of child care arrangements, full-time or part-time, they were using at the time of the survey. This helps us to better understand the experience of the survey population, in terms of their understanding of the various types of care arrangements. It should be noted that many of the survey respondents identified more than one type of care.

TABLE 15 shows the types of child care arrangements reported by survey respondents, either full time or part time. Combining both full and part time arrangements, among parents surveyed 30 had children in licensed child care centres, 44 in nursery school or cooperative pre school and 20 in home based child care. In total, 67 families surveyed had one parent at home either full time or part time. 24 families were “off shifting”, where parents work or attend school at alternate times and alternate child care responsibilities; 32 accessed care from a relative; 3 had a regular daytime caregiver providing care in their homes, and; 13 were accessing before/after school care. None of the families surveyed were employing a live-in-Nanny.

**TABLE 15: Types of Child Care Arrangements Used by Families at the Time of the Survey**

<b>Type of Care</b>	<b>Full Time</b>	<b>Part Time</b>
Licensed child care centre	13	17
Nursery school or cooperative pre school program	4	42
Registered home child care	3	1
Unregistered home child care	3	13
One parent is a stay-at-home caregiver	34	33
Off-shifting (parents work or attend school at alternate times)	5	19
Care by a relative (either in your home, or in a relative's home)	2	30
Live-in Nanny	0	0
Regular daytime caregiver providing care in your home	2	1
Before/after school care	4	9

The next section of the survey was designed to gather information on the challenges or problems that families have faced in finding and maintaining child care arrangements. Those surveyed were provided a blank template that listed a range of challenges by child age group and asked to check all that applied. TABLE 16 represents the template provided, including the totals of all responses.

The top four priority challenges that emerged from an analysis of data, included: difficulty finding a full or part-time space for an infant or toddler at a licensed child care centre; finding child care to cover “off hours”; finding care for a sick child, and; the high cost of care.

Identification of priority challenges was based on a simple analysis of the distribution of scores. Figures included in the “Row Total” column provide a good indication of priority challenges. This was the case for the challenges of “finding care for a sick child” (24 responses) and “the high cost of care” (22 responses). While the highest row totals are related to finding a full or part-time space in a licensed child care centre, the majority of responses were specific to spaces for infants or toddlers (63 responses).

In the case of finding care to cover off hours, three separate problem or challenges were consolidated, including: “finding child care to cover shift work”, “finding child care to cover extended work hours” and, “finding child care to cover short-term relief” (52 responses). The rationale used here is that while the three categories represent very different circumstances, solutions or strategies to address each of these challenges would be similar.

**TABLE 16: Problems or Challenges in Finding and Maintaining Child Care by Age Group – Parent Survey Findings**

<b>Problems or Challenges</b>	Infant 0 to 16 months	Toddler 18 months to 2.5 years	Preschool 2.5 to 5 years	JK to SK between 5 and 6 years	Children 7 to 12 years	Row Total
Finding a full-time space at a licensed child care centre	16	9	4	1	1	31
Finding a part-time space at licensed child care centre	24	14	6	3		47
Finding a home child care provider	1		4	1		6
Finding child care to cover shift work	4	5	7	3	1	20
Finding child care to cover extended work hours	3	1	7	2	1	14
Finding child care to cover short-term relief	6	3	6	2	1	18
Finding a nanny			1	1		2
Finding care for a child with special needs				2	1	3
Finding before/after school care			5	5	1	11
Finding care for a sick child	4	4	8	6	2	24
The high cost of care	7	4	8	3		22
Accessing a child care subsidy	1		1			2
Transportation to and from child care provider		2	5	2	1	10
Escorting children between child care and school			4	5	1	10
Staff turnover	1	3	4			8
Quality of care	2	2	2	3	1	10

The survey also collected information on how parents gain access to information about child care options in the Dundas community. Respondents were given a list of information sources and asked to indicate which sources of information they have used.

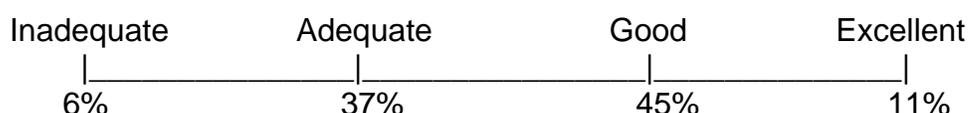
**TABLE 17: Sources of Information on Child Care Options in the Dundas Community Accessed by Survey Respondents**

Information Source	Number of Responses
The Child Care Information Line	18
The Coordinated Access to Child Care website	20
Through a local child care provider	22
An Ontario Early Years Centre	35
Friends or family	76
Local newspapers	25
Telephone book	19
Schools	32

TABLE 17 shows the distribution of responses across the eight options provided. Friends or family was by far the most commonly used source of information, followed by an Ontario Early Years Centre and local schools. There was a fairly even distribution of responses across the other 5 information sources.

To gauge parent satisfaction with access to information on child care options in the Dundas community, respondents were asked to rate access on a scale of 1 to 4, 1 being “inadequate” and 4 being “excellent”.

**CHART 2: Parent Satisfaction with Access to Information on Child Care Services in Dundas**



As CHART 2 shows, the majority of responses fell in the range of adequate to good, with only 6% of those surveyed indicating that access to information on child care services in Dundas is inadequate. On the other end of the scale, 11% felt that access to information was excellent.

#### 4.2 Service Provider Survey

A survey was also conducted with child care service providers in the Dundas community. Specifically, representatives from 10 licensed child care centres and the local OEYC, were surveyed, with a response rate of 64%.

Like the parent survey, the service provider survey was designed to gather information on the challenges or problems that families have faced in finding and maintaining child care arrangements. Those surveyed were provided the same blank template that was

included in the parent survey, and asked to check all that applied. TABLE 18 represents the template provided, including the totals of all responses from service providers.

An analysis of responses from service providers identified the same four priority challenges as the parent survey, including: “difficulty finding a full or part-time space for an infant or toddler at a licensed child care centre”; “finding child care to cover “off hours”; “finding care for a sick child”, and; “the high cost of care”. A fifth challenge was identified by service providers, which was “finding care for a child with special needs”.

Again, identification of priority challenges was based on a simple analysis of the distribution of scores. Figures included in the “Row Total” column provide a good indication of priority challenges. This was the case for the challenges of “finding care for a sick child” (19 responses) and “finding care for a child with special needs (22 responses). While the highest row totals are related to finding a full or part-time space in a licensed child care centre, the majority of responses were specific to spaces for infants or toddlers (23 responses).

In the case of finding care to cover off hours, three separate problem or challenges were consolidated, including: “finding child care to cover shift work”, “finding child care to cover extended work hours” and, “finding child care to cover short-term relief” (80 responses). The rationale used here is that while the three categories represent very different circumstances, solutions or strategies to address each of these challenges would be similar.

**TABLE 18: Problems or Challenges in Finding and Maintaining Child Care by Age Group – Service Providers Survey Findings**

<b>Problems or Challenges</b>	Infant 0 to 16 months	Toddler 18 months to 2.5 years	Preschool 2.5 to 5 years	JK to SK between 5 and 6 years	Children 7 to 12 years	Row Total
Finding a full-time space at a licensed child care centre	7	5	4	4	2	22
Finding a part-time space at licensed child care centre	6	5	5	4	2	22
Finding a home child care provider	3	3	2	1	1	10
Finding child care to cover shift work	6	6	6	6	5	29
Finding child care to cover extended work hours	6	6	6	6	4	28
Finding child care to cover short-term relief	5	5	5	5	3	23
Finding a nanny	2	2	1	1	1	7
Finding care for a child with special needs	4	5	5	4	4	22
Finding before/after school care	0	0	3	4	4	11
Finding care for a sick child	4	4	4	4	3	19
The high cost of care	3	3	4	3	1	14
Accessing a child care subsidy	2	2	2	1	1	8
Transportation to and from child care provider	2	2	2	2	1	9
Escorting children between child care and school	0	0	2	2	1	5
Staff turnover	1	1	0	0	0	2
Quality of care	2	2	2	2	1	9

### 4.3 Key Findings

The following points highlight the key findings from phase one of the consultation process. Phase one involved a survey of parents from the Dundas community as well as representatives from local child care centres.

- Parents who completed the child care survey reported a range of current child care arrangements and had children from a range of age groups. This type of diversity serves to increase the reliability of survey findings.
- Four priority challenges were identified by both parents and service providers. These included: “difficulty finding a full or part-time space for an infant or toddler at a licensed child care centre”; “finding child care to cover off hours”; “finding care for a sick child”, and; “the high cost of care”. An additional priority challenge was identified by service providers, which was “finding care for a child with special needs”. This level of agreement among two distinct stakeholder groups suggests a high level of validity of survey findings.
- In terms of where Dundas families access information on child care options, friends or family was by far the most commonly used source of information, followed by an Ontario Early Years Centre and local schools.

## **5.0 PHASE TWO: INTERVIEW FINDINGS**

Building on phase one of the consultation process, a small number of telephone interviews were conducted with both parents and service providers. As described in the methodology section, the purpose of this phase of the consultation was to focus on the key issues and challenges identified in phase one.

From a research perspective, interviews allow us to add depth to our understanding of specific issues and challenges by asking probing questions. The analysis considers the themes that emerge from each set of responses. The following subsections provide an overview of findings from each set of interviews.

### **5.1 Parent Interviews**

From the survey of Dundas parents, four key issues or challenges were identified. These included the high cost of child care; the difficulty finding care for an infant or toddler; finding care for “off hours” (ie. To cover shift work, extended hours, short term relief, before and after school care) and; care for a sick child.

Parent interviews provided an opportunity to add depth to our understanding of how each challenge or issue affects Dundas families, what their alternatives were in terms of addressing a particular challenge, and how common they felt this challenge to be in the community.

In total, six parents were interviewed by telephone. Following is an overview of findings from the interviews, related to each issue or challenge identified through parent surveys.

#### **5.1.1 Challenge: The high cost of child care**

To better understand the impacts of the high cost of care, those interviewed were asked “How has the challenge of the high cost of child care affected you and your family?”

As one might expect, the high cost of child care can affect household financial stability. Some of those interviewed spoke of making “sacrifices”, in deciding whether one parent would stay at home with their child. As one parent explained, “we have chosen to have me stay at home. We have two children and child care is very expensive”.

For parents working in low paying jobs, where the monthly cost of child care approaches their monthly income, the choice becomes easier. As another parent explained, “because I work in child care I am not paid very well. It is not worth my while to work because of the cost (of care)”. While the choice may be made easier, the result is a lower household income and the struggles related to a reduced income.

One alternative to deal with the high cost of child care is to make care arrangements with friends or family. As one parent reported, “I have used my mother in law because she does not charge me”.

Those interviewed generally felt that this was a common challenge in Dundas, based on a reflection of their own social networks. One parent, who lived in Hamilton but worked in Dundas, felt that while it was common within her own social networks “maybe not in Dundas”.

### **5.1.2 Challenge: Difficulty finding a full or part-time space for an infant or toddler at a licensed child care centre**

Currently there are no spaces for infants in licensed child care centres in Dundas, and very few for toddlers. To understand the impact of this on Dundas families, those interviewed were asked “How has the challenge of finding a full or part time space for an infant or toddler at a licensed child care centre affected you and your family?”

Those interviewed expressed a general sense of frustration. One parent, looking for part-time care for her toddler, reported “I have been looking for a space for my toddler for a few months”. In terms of alternatives, parents relied on friends or family. As one parent reported: “for a long time I used a friend. She was home with her own child”. In other cases, parents make the choice to either leave work or take an extended leave to stay home with their child. This has an impact on household income and, as one parent put it, “it means a lot of sacrifices”.

Finding a full or part time space for an infant or toddler at a licensed child care centre was seen as a common challenge for Dundas families. As one parent responded: “Yes most of our friends and family have struggled with finding care (for infants and toddlers)”.

### **5.1.3 Challenge: Finding child care to cover “off hours” (ie. To cover shift work, extended hours, short term relief, before and after school care)**

The challenge of finding child care to cover off hour regularly affects shift workers and those who are required to work extra hour during evenings and weekends. Parents interviewed also identified short term ‘respite’ care as gap in the child care service system.

In terms of alternatives, three of those interviewed relied on “babysitters” that the could pay “under the table”. As one parent stated however, “this would not have been our first choice”. The reason for this was what they termed as “substandard care”. While they characterized their babysitter as “a very nice person”, they were concerned that the babysitter did not take child out or provide any real stimulation.

In another instance, the parent interviewed was part of tight-knit community. As the parent reported: “In my community we all rely on each other – I have been using friends and repaying the favor for them”.

Those interviewed felt that finding care to cover off hours is a common problem in the community, with one parent remarking that “All professionals seem to have the same problem”.

#### **5.1.4 Challenge: Care for a sick child**

Finding care for a sick child is difficult in most communities as child care providers will generally not accept a sick child or send them home if they become sick during the day.

According to those interviewed, the greatest impact on parents is related to employment and income. As one interviewee reported: “Most parents take vacation days or days without pay. This adds stress to the family”.

In terms of alternatives, most acknowledged that care for a sick child is truly a challenge for the child care system. As one parent articulated: “It is difficult to imagine an arrangement where a sick child is interacting with other children. For working parents, the solution needs to involve employers. The definition of a “sick day” needs to include care for sick children”.

In tight-knit communities or strong social networks, alternative arrangements can be easier to manage. As one parent reported : “All children get sick. But in our community everyone is doing well because they rely on the each other”.

### **5.2 Service Provider Interviews**

From the survey of child care service providers in Dundas, five key issues or challenges were identified. Four of the five challenges identified were the same as those identified by Dundas families, including the high cost of child care; the difficulty finding care for an infant or toddler; finding care for “off hours” (ie. To cover shift work, extended hours, short term relief, before and after school care) and; care for a sick child. The additional challenge identified by service providers was finding care for a sick child.

The same process was conducted with local child care service providers. A total of four service providers were interviewed by telephone. Interviews focused on the difficulties the service providers face in addressing the challenges and issues identified during phase one, the implications of these issues and challenges for families, and how common they felt these challenges were among Dundas families.

Following is an overview of findings from the interviews, related to each issue or challenge identified through the survey of service providers.

### **5.2.1 Challenge: Difficulty finding a full or part-time space for an infant or toddler at a licensed child care centre**

Service providers were asked to comment, from their perspective, on the main challenges in providing licensed child care centre spaces for infants and toddlers. Those interviewed explained that service providers are reluctant to take on this role because of cost and staffing.

In terms of staffing, service providers noted that they have difficulty recruiting and maintaining staff currently. This, at least in part, is due to low wages associated with the field. Care for infants and toddlers requires a high staff/child ratio as legislated in Ontario's Day Nurseries Act.

While the cost of hiring additional staff is in itself prohibitive, service providers identified other costs. As one service provider explained, "The training for toddler daycare is completely different from daycare for 3 and up. The cost is higher".

To understand from a service providers perspective the impact on families, interviewees were asked the following questions: "What are the implications for parents who are unable to find a space for their infant or toddler in a licensed child care centre? What are their alternatives? What are the impacts on families?"

General frustration was a common theme in the responses. Families are facing such realities as disrupted employment, travel long distances to find care, staying at home despite the need to work and relying heavily on friends and family. The impact is often on family income.

Another alternative identified by those interviewed was home based care. While they were quick to point out that there are a lot of good home daycares, it was also noted that "the quality is not there all the time". It was noted that licensed and unlicensed home day care providers operate under very different sets of standards.

When asked if this is a common challenge among Families in Dundas, all agreed. As one service provider put it: "I have a lot of people calling me about toddler care. – demand seems to be high"

### **5.2.2 Challenge: Finding child care to cover "off hours" (ie. To cover shift work, extended hours, short term relief, before and after school care)**

The main challenges in providing care to cover 'off hours', from a service providers perspective, are again staffing and cost. In terms of staffing, one service provider pointed out that "We can't get people to fill positions during normal hours". In terms of cost, providing a responsive service would require that staff are present even when a centre is not at capacity.

In terms of 'predictable' days that families struggle with, one service provider suggested that "an option for children should be created for the odd days like PD days and shortened days at school – these children have no support either".

The implications for families who are unable to find care to cover off hours include limited employment opportunities, lost wages and sacrificing the quality of care during off hours.

The majority of those interviewed felt that finding care to cover off hours a common challenge faced by families in Dundas. One service provider however, reported that they did not get a lot of requests.

### **5.2.3 Challenge: Finding care for a sick child**

From a service provider's perspective, the main challenges in providing care for a sick child are clear and written into policy – "if you are sick you cannot be at the centre". Service providers simply cannot take sick children into care, at risk of letting other children get sick.

In terms of addressing this challenge, one service provider suggested that "This needs to become more of a community response – parents need to stay home with their children when they are sick. Employers (and community) need to focus more on the children and not so much on the employment.

Again, the implications for families are the impacts on employment and income. It was suggested however, that this is less of an issue in Dundas than in Hamilton because "more mom's stay at home in Dundas". Another interviewee suggested that, because of strong social and family networks, the impacts of finding care for a sick child are reduced.

### **5.2.4 Challenge: The high cost of child care**

From a service provider's perspective, they have little control over the high cost of child care. As one provider stated: "It will never be affordable until the government kicks in some money". Service providers need to cover their expenses, including staff, space and taxes. One service provider pointed out that "Taxes are equal to big business – we need to lower these taxes. It is very hard to run a centre when paying the high cost of taxes".

Part of the problem is public perception. "People do not see child care as being as important as school – they do not see the cost as being reasonable. The environment that the children need is costly but well worth the expense".

The implications for families who are unable to afford the high cost of child care, from the perspective of service providers, is that they often look to family or friends. Another

cheaper alternative may be home day care, however the quality of care may be substandard.

Responses were split in terms of whether or not the high cost of child care presents a common challenge among families in Dundas.

### **5.2.5 Challenge: Finding care for a child with special needs**

Service providers pointed out that the term “special needs” is a broad term. If a child requires one-on-one support or consultation for example, and there are no additional staff, then “the overall quality of care is lost”.

From a service providers perspective, the implications for many families with a child with special needs are that families feel lost with very little help from Community. With a lack of child care options, a parent is often required to stay at home, which affects household income.

As one service provider suggested, “there needs to be a community to response, either financially or with volunteer work, to help the parents of special needs children. This cannot only fall to the Centre’s to find ways of affording this service”. Again, staffing and cost become issues for child care centres. This is thought to be a common challenge faced by families in Dundas who have a child with special needs.

## **5.3 Key Findings**

The following points highlight the key findings from phase two of the consultation process. Phase two involved one on one interviews with parents from the Dundas community (6), as well as representatives from local child care centres (4).

- Service providers cite the high cost of providing care for infants and toddlers as the main issue behind the lack of spaces at licensed child care centres in Dundas. Families are facing such realities as disrupted employment, travel long distances to find care, staying at home despite the need to work and relying heavily on friends and family. The impact is often on family income.
- While child care service providers have little control over the high cost of care, it results in negative impacts on some Dundas families. Alternatives include child care arrangements with friends or family, opting for cheaper home day care arrangements that may lack quality, or to stay home with their child rather than working.
- While some families struggle more with finding care during ‘off hours’, others have tight social networks that help with back-up care. Those without such networks often rely on substandard care arrangements, or are required to alter their work arrangements.

- Under the current system of licensed child care services, service providers are restricted from allowing a sick child into a child care centre. Without strong social networks, many families experience work disruptions when their child is sick. This can result in loss of income and resulting stress on the household.
- In terms of finding care for a sick child, both parents and service providers felt that the solution must involve employers.
- Service providers felt that families with a special needs child require additional supports, both physical and financial. Integration into licensed child care centres would require additional resources currently not available in the existing child care system.

## **6.0 PHASE THREE: SERVICE PROVIDER FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS**

Building on phases one and two of the consultation process, phase three involved a focus group session with Dundas child care providers. The purpose of the session was to review the issues and challenges identified and discuss potential solutions or strategies to address them. The two hour focus group session was held in September 2007, at St. Mark's Cooperative Preschool in Dundas. Twelve local child care providers attended the session, as well as one parent from St. Mark's.

Through the course of the discussion, a number of strategies or solutions were considered. While some were dismissed as not being viable options, others seemed to hold more potential from the perspectives of participants. These included: the development of a formal and/or informal system for providing emergency care; promoting the benefits of licensed home care, and; increased private sector involvement in the provision of child care. The issue of staffing was identified as a barrier across the system, with difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff.

The following sections provide an overview discussions related to each of these potential strategies and barriers.

### **6.1 Systems for Providing Emergency Care**

Discussion related to systems for providing emergency care for a sick child or respite/off hours care touched on two separate models. One model involved emergency child care as an employment benefit. The second was more of an informal system that created networks of parents that could provide support to each other.

In terms of emergency care as an employee benefit, participants identified two such systems. One of these systems is operating in the Ottawa Region and the other is a United States based program. These services involve finding emergency care to cover days when regular care arrangements break down. Under this model the service is paid for, at least in part, by the employer.

Parents access emergency care through a centralized coordinated access system. This could either result in finding a temporary space in an existing child care centre or with a home based care provider. It could also connect a child care provider to a family where the provider cares for a child in the family home.

The second model discussed involved creating networks among local parents that could provide mutual child care supports. While this type of system would need to be developed with input from local families, it would essentially involve a barter system dedicated to the exchange of child care services.

Described as a system of "poker chip trade offs", parents would agree to care for each others children with no money exchanged. Instead of paying each other directly, families would maintain a balance of credits/debts based on service provided or used.

This way, it is not simply an exchange between two families, but rather access to a larger system of potential caregivers.

To ensure a high quality of care, it was suggested that parents involved in this type of system have access to training in various aspect of child care such as nutrition, behavior management, first aid, etc. This training could build on courses currently offered through the local Ontario Early Years Centre. It was also suggested that the Ontario Early Years Centre could act as the ‘hub’ where parents could come together to meet other parents and develop networks.

## **6.2 Promoting the Benefits of Licensed Home Based Child Care**

The group discussed licensed home based child care arrangements as a means to addressing the lack of care for infants and toddlers in Dundas. Part of the discussion revolved around the benefits of licensed versus unlicensed providers. While the group acknowledged that well established and quality care arrangements do exist among unlicensed home child care providers, they are not subject to the same level of standards and do have the same level of support.

While unlicensed home child care providers remain highly unregulated, licensed home care providers must maintain fairly rigorous standards. These standards encompass the physical space where care is provided, as well as specific caregiver/child ratios based on the ages of children. Licensed caregivers are also provided training and the private home day care agency will make alternative care arrangements when a caregiver is ill.

As participants explained, it can be more lucrative for home child care providers to forgo the licensing process as it allows them to care for more children. It is also less intrusive, as they do not require home inspections from the private home day care agency.

Participants raised the question: “Do parents understand the difference between licensed and unlicensed care?” The thinking here was that if parents had a better understanding of the standards and accountability associated with licensed home child care, there would be an increased demand. This, in turn, would result in more home child care providers turning to licensed home day care agencies to become licensed. Ultimately, these quality standards would instill confidence among Dundas families who are looking for care for their children.

It was recommended by the group that a public education campaign be implemented, to promote the benefits of licensed home day care. It was suggested that the local Ontario Early Years Centres could be a “hub” or place to educate and bring parents together.

### **6.3 Promoting Increased Private Sector Involvement**

Participants engaged in a general discussion around the lack of value placed on child care, and the lack of private sector involvement in the provision of child care. Two separate types of private sector involvement were discussed. These included employers providing child care benefits to employees, and different types of private sector sponsorship arrangements.

In terms of employee benefits, it was noted that some of the larger employers provide backup care for children of their employees, but that this is not a common practice. In many situations parents have no choice but to take time off work, either as vacation time or leave without pay.

Focus group participants also discussed the possibility of corporate sponsorship, where “big business” or local employers contribute to the capital or ongoing cost of operating local child care services. This would not only provide a benefit to the community but also to the companies themselves. As suggested by one participant, many companies currently lose productivity as a result of employee absences related to child care.

Ultimately, private sector involvement in the provision of and access to child care services was seen as a matter of corporate responsibility. It was suggested that a public education campaign be launched, that focused on the importance of accessible and quality child care, and that local employers be targeted and asked to ‘step up to the plate’.

### **6.4 Staffing as a Barrier**

Focus group participants expressed the need for more staff in order to expand programs and address the challenges identified. Participants recounted the difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. As one participant explained, “it’s an employee’s market”.

Finding early childhood educators (ECE’s) to work in Dundas is difficult for a number of reasons. Transportation was identified as an issue, where public transport does not reach areas where child care is located. Another factor is low wages. As one participant suggested, “for many ECE’s their training and education becomes a stepping stone to university” once they realize that their opportunities for financial advancement are limited. Participants agreed that the child care system is not funded the way it needs to be. Child care must be affordable for families, while providing a living wage for child care providers.

## 6.5 Key Findings

The following points highlight the key findings from phase three of the consultation process. Phase three involved a focus group session with Dundas child care providers. The purpose of the session was to discuss potential strategies or solutions to the specific challenges identified.

- Promising strategies identified during the course of focus group discussion included the development of a formal and/or informal system for providing emergency care; promoting the benefits of licensed home care, and; increased private sector involvement in the provision of child care. The issue of staffing was identified as a barrier across the system, with difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff.
- Participants felt that employers need to take more responsibility for ensuring quality child care arrangements for the children of their employees. This could be achieved by incorporating emergency child care supports as part of an employee benefit package.
- Participants felt that many Dundas families would benefit from a system that connected parents and helped to strengthen social networks. Strong social networks are invaluable to families when they require emergency back-up or respite care. It was suggested that the Dundas OEYC could act as a ‘hub’ for connecting parents, while offering training to improve skills and knowledge related to early childhood development.
- It was recommended by the group that a public education campaign be implemented to promote the benefits of licensed over unlicensed home day care. It was suggested that the local Ontario Early Years Centres could be a “hub” or place to educate and bring parents together.
- It was suggested that a public education campaign be launched that focused on the importance of accessible and quality child care, and that local employers be targeted and asked to ‘step up to the plate’.
- Focus group participants expressed the need for more staff in order to expand programs and address the challenges identified. Participants recounted the difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff.

## 7.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter of the report provides a summary of key findings related to the make up of the Dundas community, child care challenges and the impact on families. In terms of strategies or solutions to some of these challenges, we expand on the input gathered through the focus group with Dundas child care providers. In these sections additional research has been incorporated that describes similar strategies being implemented in other jurisdictions.

Each section under strategies and solutions includes a recommendation aimed at addressing some of the priority challenges identified. Recommendations focus on innovative strategies that would enhance the current child care system in the Dundas community. Recommendations are stated broadly, and do not identify a lead agency to spearhead the implementation. This was done purposefully, so that the child care community, in consultation with local parents, can determine the most appropriate way to proceed.

The child care system itself is always evolving to better meet the needs of families. With respect to addressing the challenges of finding care for a child with special needs, the high cost of care and the difficulties involved in recruiting and retaining qualified staff, local efforts are currently under way. Many of these positive directions are outlined in the City of Hamilton Child Care Service Management Plan 2007 – 2008.

### 7.1 The Community

The Dundas community has distinctive characteristics as compared to the city of Hamilton as a whole. According to the 2006 census, of the 4,275 families with children living in Dundas, 77% were couple families and 23% were lone parent families. These families include 1,090 children aged 0 to 4 years; 1,335 children were between 5 and 9 years; 1,640 between 10 and 14 and 1,695 between 15 and 19.

Dundas families report higher average household incomes than the city of Hamilton as a whole, however the community includes a range of household incomes. According to the 2001 census, 28% of households reported incomes of more than \$101,818, while 29% reported incomes less than \$51,868 and 13% less than \$32,226. Furthermore, 12% of families with children were surviving on incomes below the poverty line or Statistics Canada's low income cut off (LICO), including 7% of couple families and 39% of lone parent families. While all outward appearances would suggest that Dundas is an affluent community, it is important to appreciate that many local families struggle with income and affordability issues.

In terms of local child care service, Dundas is home to 10 licensed child care centres, with an overall capacity of 423 spaces. These spaces however, include none for infants and only 22 for toddlers. There are an additional 3 home day care providers registered with licensed agencies. Individual caregivers provide care in their home for up to 5 children.

Outside of the licensed programs operating in the Dundas community, there are also private home day care providers and Nanny's. Currently there are no reliable inventories of these services, so capacity is unknown. What is known however, is that unlicensed home day cares are not subject to the same level of standards and regulation as licensed home day care, and are not provided the same level of training and supports.

## **7.2 Child Care Challenges**

Through the course of the research a number of priority challenges emerged. Both parents and service providers from the Dundas community identified the difficulty finding a full or part-time space for an infant or toddler at a licensed child care centre"; "finding child care to cover off hours"; "finding care for a sick child", and; "the high cost of care". An additional priority challenge was identified by service providers, which was "finding care for a child with special needs".

Community Information Service of Hamilton operates the Child Care Information Line. In addition to providing information on a wide range of child care options in the city, the service collects information from parents on unmet child care needs. According the unmet needs report, each of the priority challenges identified through this research are also identified as needs throughout the city. This further validates the findings from the study.

## **7.3 Impacts on Families**

Dundas families that are struggling with the child care challenges identified suggested a number of individual strategies, none of which are optimal. Some rely heavily on family and friends for care during off hours or when their child is sick. Others travel long distances to find a space in a licensed centre for their infant or toddler, or for a child with special needs. Families struggling with the high cost of care opt for cheaper home day care arrangements that may lack quality.

The most striking impact of these challenges however is related to employment and income. Limited access to infant and toddler spaces and care for a child with special needs can result in families making the decision to have one parent stay at home with their child. Lack of care options for 'off hours' and for a sick child also results in disruptions in employment. Ultimately, as reported by both parents and service providers, taking extended leave or days off without pay effects household income and results in stress on the family.

## **7.4 Strategies and Solutions**

Through consultations with parents and child care providers, a number of strategies were identified that would fill some of the gaps in the current child care system and address some of the child care challenges faced by Dundas families. One message reiterated at different points through out the consultation process was that employers

need to become more involved in ensuring that their employees have adequate child care arrangements.

According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, the number of employer supported child care centres doubled through the 1990's and continues to rise a slower pace. A local example of this type of corporate investment is McMaster University, which operates a child care centre on site and provides related benefits to employees.

While these situations generally involve large employers (500+ employees), the majority of employers are still reluctant to provide child care benefits for their employees.

### **7.5 Emergency Back-Up Care**

A relatively new approach to connecting employers to child care benefits is emergency back-up care. This approach offers employers the ability to effectively and affordably support working parents, and provides an alternative to investing in full time regular child care centres.

Back-up services are available for employees when their primary or regular child care is unavailable, when a child is mildly ill, when schools are closed, during maternity transition or when there is an increase in work demands. Following are four models or approaches to providing back-up care:

- Regular centres with backup capabilities:** Primary child care options that “accommodate” emergencies or fulfill demand for backup services. The few programs that offer these services have limited capacity (one or two children per day) and are often unable to accommodate high demand periods such as school holidays due to lack of free space.

- Specialized backup child care centres:** Licensed centres set-up exclusively for backup child care, designed for the special challenges of backup care and staffed with qualified early childhood educators. Since they only provide backup services, a typical centre can accommodate 40 children per day and serve up to 2,000 families per year. A regular centre of the same size would serve approximately 30 families per year. Most specialized programs also offer additional summer or school break programs to accommodate the increased demands for school age child care.

- Drop-in care:** Unlicensed workplace programs located on or near the work site. Parents may be able to access these programs during emergencies or school holidays. They may be temporary or permanent programs and can generally accommodate a maximum of 10 children at any one time.

- In-home emergency care:** Licensed or unlicensed child care providers offering backup care in the child's home or their own homes. The cost is generally significantly

more than centre-based care. The effectiveness of these programs depends heavily on the availability of community resources, which can vary location by location.

There are a number of working models of back-up operating in Canada and the United States. One such system has been operating in the Ottawa Region since the early 1990's (Howe and Swail, 1998). In this case, a consortium of large employers and employee unions access back-up care through the Short Term Child Care program (STCC). The National Capital Region - Emergency Child Care Consortium (NCR-ECC) includes the following partners: Ottawa-Carleton District School Board; Public Service Alliance of Canada; Union of Postal Communication Employees; County of Carleton Law Association, and; Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Consortium partners contract with the STCC to provide quality, back-up child care service to employees and members.

STCC offers three options to meet the temporary child care needs of employees, including:

- Arranging for an STCC caregiver to care for the child in your home
- The child is cared for in a caregiver's home, accessing existing spaces in licensed home child care agencies in the community
- The child attend a licensed child care centre, space permitting

STCC care givers are provided additional training through the service provider, and must abide by STCC policies and procedures and by the Principles of Service Quality.

Research on the impact of emergency child care on individuals and organizations was conducted by the STCC provider. When compared to those without access to back-up care service, the 800 families with access to STCC surveyed reported:

- fewer days of absence from work due to child care problems;
- a significant decrease in tension caused by conflicting responsibilities at home and work;
- increased job satisfaction;
- decrease in stress;
- improved relationship between parents, and;
- increased level of commitment to the job.

This provides a strong business case for employer involvement in a back-up care system. When employees can be at work, focused, stress-free and guilt-free they are more committed, more engaged and more satisfied.

The City of Hamilton has already acknowledged the need for emergency back-up care systems locally. The 2007 – 2008 City of Hamilton Child Care Service Management Plan, identifies the need to “develop a system to identify and manage emergency care spaces in licensed home child care provider programs”. The model suggested is to use empty spaces in existing child care agencies for emergency situations.

It should be noted that a back-up care system developed at the community level must be tailored to that community. More specifically, planning should consider the needs of local families, the interest and willingness of local employers to contribute to a back-up care system or provided access for their employees, and existing services that can be integrated into the system. A local system for back-up care should also be accessible to all families, regardless of their employment status.

**Recommendation 1:**

***It is recommended that an emergency back-up care system be designed and implemented in the Dundas community that considers the needs of local families, the perspectives of local employers and is integrated with the current child care system.***

## **7.6 Promoting Social Networks**

As identified by parents and service providers, the parents with strong social and family networks have less of a challenge in finding short term or emergency back-up care. Promoting networks among more isolated parents would help to offset these struggles.

A 'caregiver exchange' could follow an existing model of goods and service exchange. The Local Exchange and Trading System (LETS) was developed in British Columbia in 1982, and versions of the system are operating around the world (Croall, 1997).

LETS networks use local credit so direct swaps are not required. For instance, a member may earn credit by doing childcare for one person and spend accessing care from another member. As credit is issued by the network members, for the benefit of the members themselves, LETS are considered mutual credit systems.

Under this type of system, parents would ultimately make the decision to accept care responsibilities or to access care from particular members. There are controls in place however, that ensure a balance between providing care and receiving care.

As discussed during the service provider focus group, strong and trusting relationships would need to be established among potential members of a caregiver exchange system. In Dundas, it was suggested that networks could be promoted through the local OEYC. This is ideal as it is centrally located and a place where local parents currently converge.

It was also suggested that members of a caregiver exchange system receive training related to safety and early childhood development. This would help to educate parents generally, and help to promote confidence that other members have the skills and knowledge to provide safe and affective care. While such workshops are currently provided through OEYC's, additional training requirements could be identified by the membership.

**Recommendation 2:**

***It is recommended that a system be designed in the Dundas community that promotes social networks among parents and provides an infrastructure for a local caregiver exchange.***

**7.7 Promoting the Benefits of Licensed Home Day Care**

As explained in the background section of this report, there are two types of home based day care – private home day care providers and home day care providers registered with licensed agencies. Currently, there are three such agencies operating in the Dundas community.

Essentially, there are fewer restrictions placed on child care providers not registered with a licensed agency. According to the Day Nurseries Act, “informal caregivers” can care for a maximum of 5 children of any age, in addition to their own children. For licensed home day care providers, if they have children of their own, they are counted as part of the 5. Furthermore, a home child care provider is restricted from caring for:

- More than 2 children with special needs
- 2 children who are under two years of age
- 3 children who are under three years of age
- 1 child with special needs and 1 child under two years of age
- 1 child with special needs and 2 children who are over two but under three years of age

Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services (2007) Day Nurseries Act and Regulations.

Private home day care providers are also not required to meet the same standards with respect to the physical space where the child care is provided. Licensed caregivers are visited regularly in their homes by qualified Home Child Care Consultants to ensure the highest standards of health, safety, nutrition and child development. As a further safety precaution, each resident in the home must have current medical immunization and participate in a screening process.

In terms of training and consultation, licensed home caregivers require and are provided training through the licensing agency. They also receive professional guidance and consultation through the agency. Families accessing child care through a licensed agency also receive the benefit of back-up care when a regular caregiver is ill or on a temporary leave.

The Home Child Care Association of Ontario (HCCAO) believes that quality home-based care is achieved in part through existing licensing standards. They believe that both licensing and legislated standards should apply to all home-based child care.

According to the The Canadian National Child Care Study (1993) 23% of families pay for the services of an informal provider. Of those families, only 4% would keep their children in their current arrangement if regulated care were available and affordable.

Local service providers acknowledged that while there are some great private home day cares operating in the Dundas community, the quality is not always there. During the focus group session, the following question was posed: “Do parents understand the difference between licensed and unlicensed care?”

**Recommendation 3:**

***It is recommended that a public education campaign be implemented that promotes the benefits of licensed home day care and that highlights the licensing and legislated standards.***

## **7.8 Promoting Increased Private Sector Involvement**

Participants engaged in a general discussion around the lack of value placed on child care. More specifically, discussion focused on the lack of private sector involvement in the provision of child care, despite its importance to productivity in the workplace. As described earlier in this report, there is a strong business case for employers ensuring that their employees have quality child care arrangements. When employees can be at work, focused, stress-free and guilt-free they are more committed, more engaged and more satisfied.

Focus group participants discussed the possibility of corporate sponsorship, where “big business” or local employers contribute to the capital or ongoing cost of operating local child care services. This would not only provide a benefit to the community but also to the companies themselves.

Ultimately, private sector involvement in the provision of and access to child care services was seen as a matter of corporate responsibility.

**Recommendation 4:**

***It is recommended that a public education campaign be launched, that focused on the importance of early learning and child development, accessible and quality child care, and that local employers be targeted as an issue of corporate responsibility.***

## 8.0 REFERENCES

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Parent Survey**

# Assessment of Child Care Needs in the Dundas Community

## Survey of Parents/Guardians

Dear Parent/Guardian,

The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC) has been contracted by Today's Family Inc., in partnership with Saint Mark's Cooperative Pre School, to conduct an assessment of child care needs in the Dundas community.

To better understand the child care needs of parents/guardians in the Dundas community, we are conducting a short survey. Your responses are confidential, and you are not required to include your name unless you are willing to be contacted in the future.

### 1. How many children reside with you from the following age groups?

0 to 1 year	_____	children
Between 1 and 2 years	_____	children
Between 2 and 3 years	_____	children
Between 3 and 4 years	_____	children
Between 4 and 5 years	_____	children
Between 5 and 6 yrs	_____	children
Between 6 and 12 years	_____	children
Between 13 and 16 years	_____	children

### 2. What kinds of child care arrangements – full-time (F/T) or part-time (P/T) -are you currently using? (*Check all that apply*)

F/T	P/T	
___	___	Licensed child care centre
___	___	Nursery school or cooperative pre school program
___	___	Licensed home child care
___	___	Unlicensed home child care
___	___	One parent is a stay-at-home caregiver
___	___	Off-shifting, where parents work or attend school at alternate times and share care responsibilities
___	___	Care by a relative (either in your home, or in a relative's home)
___	___	Live-in Nanny
___	___	Regular daytime caregiver providing care in your home
___	___	Before/after school care
___	___	Other (please specify): _____

### 3. Have you faced any problems or challenges with either finding or maintaining your child care arrangements?

Yes  No

**3a. If Yes, what were the problems or challenges that you have faced? (Check all that apply. For each problem or challenge identified, please check the age group(s) affected)**

<b>Problems or Challenges</b>	Infant 0 to 16 months	Toddler 18 months to 2.5 years	Preschool 2.5 to 5 years	JK to SK between 5 and 6 years	Children 7 to 12 years	Youth 13 to 16 years
Finding a full-time space at a licensed child care centre						
Finding a part-time space at licensed child care centre						
Finding a home child care provider						
Finding child care to cover shift work						
Finding child care to cover extended work hours						
Finding child care to cover short-term relief						
Finding a nanny						
Finding care for a child with special needs						
Finding before/after school care						
Finding care for a sick child						
The high cost of care						
Accessing a child care subsidy						
Transportation to and from child care provider						
Escorting children between child care and school						
Staff turnover						
Quality of care						
Other problems or challenges (please specify)						
Other problems or challenges (please specify)						

**4. Where do you access information on child care options in the Dundas community? (Check all that apply)**

- The Child Care Information Line
- The Coordinated Access to Child Care website
- Through a local child care provider
- An Ontario Early Years Centre
- Friends or family
- Local newspapers
- Telephone book
- Schools
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**5. On a scale from 1 to 4, 1 being “inadequate” and 4 being “excellent”, how would you rate access to information on child care options in the Dundas community?**

Inadequate                      Adequate                      Good                      Excellent

|\_\_\_\_\_ |\_\_\_\_\_ |\_\_\_\_\_ |\_\_\_\_\_ |

**6. to help us to better understand ‘where’ families with child care needs live in the community, please provide us with you home postal code.**

Postal code: \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_

**7. To add depth to our understanding of specific child care issues, we will be speaking directly with a number of parents/guardians. If you are willing to participate in a short (20 to 30 minute) interview, either by telephone or in person, please provide your contact information:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: Day            \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_  
                  Evening        \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for participating in our child care survey. Your responses are important to us!**

**\*\*Funding for this research was provided through the Ontario Trillium Foundation\*\***

**APPENDIX B**

**Service Provider Survey**

## Assessment of Child Care Needs in the Dundas Community Survey of Child Care Providers

The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC) has been contracted by Today's Family Inc., in partnership with Saint Mark's Cooperative Pre School, to conduct an assessment of child care needs in the Dundas community.

To better understand how child care needs are currently being met and where gaps in service exist, we are conducting a short survey of local service providers. This survey will allow us to identify some key themes with respect to child care issues in the Dundas community, and compare with the perspectives of local families. To add depth to our understanding of issues and potential solutions, we will be convening a focus group discussion with child care providers in the coming weeks.

### Challenges/Needs

1. From the following list, please identify the areas that you believe represent challenges for parents in finding or maintaining child care in the Dundas Community.

<b>Problems or Challenges</b>	Infant 0 to 18 months	Toddler 18 months to 2.5 years	Preschool 2.5 to 5 years	JK to SK between 5 and 6 years	Children 7 to 12 years	Youth 13 to 16 years
Finding a full-time space at a licensed child care centre						
Finding a part-time space at licensed child care centre						
Finding a home child care provider						
Finding child care to cover shift work						
Finding child care to cover extended work hours						
Finding child care to cover short-term relief						
Finding a nanny						
Finding care for a child with special needs						
Finding before/after school care						
Finding care for a sick child						
The high cost of care						

<b>Problems or Challenges</b>	Infant 0 to 18 months	Toddler 18 months to 2.5 years	Preschool 2.5 to 5 years	JK to SK between 5 and 6 years	Children 7 to 12 years	Youth 13 to 16 years
Accessing a child care subsidy						
Transportation to and from child care provider						
Escorting children between child care and school						
Staff turnover						
Quality of care						
Other problems or challenges (please specify)						
Other problems or challenges (please specify)						

**Potential Solutions or Strategies**

2. To address the challenges faced by families in finding and maintaining child care services in the Dundas community, what potential solutions or strategies would you recommend? *(Please note: at this point in the process potential solutions or strategies can be described in broad terms. More detailed discussion of potential solutions or strategies will follow through interviews and focus groups)*

Solution or Strategy 1

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Solution or Strategy 2

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Solution or Strategy 3

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**Thank you for completing our survey.  
Your insights and perspectives are important to us.**