



Children First

2020-2021
ANNUAL REPORT



A message from the Board President & Executive Director

As we reflect on this last year, a year filled with incredible challenges and worry, we must acknowledge the opportunities that ultimately revealed some hidden gifts. During the uncertainty of the pandemic, many of us at Children First experienced a roller coaster of thoughts and emotions which at times led us to experience the constraints of conflict. We have collectively experienced the “highs” and “lows” of the roller coaster on which there certainly has been many moments of celebration, yet we continue to feel concern.

We are proud of our staff who demonstrate their amazing resilience as they continue to adapt services to meet the needs of the children and families they support. Yet, we are concerned for them as they continue to negotiate the demands of their own families. We are proud of the 710 families who throughout this past year took that first step and called us for support. Yet, we are concerned for the families who are too tired, stretched too thin or just do not know who to call or what to do. Although we celebrate the resilience shown by our childcare providers, early learning professionals, teachers, and support staff as they continue to creatively care for and engage our children, we are concerned that the limited opportunities for social engagement will negatively impact children's social and emotional development. We have immense pride in our community partners who have demonstrated creativity and forged new collaborations to better respond to the needs of children, youth, and families in our community. Yet, we are concerned that the demand for services will continue to outpace the resources available at a time when no one should wait for service. Now more than ever we all need to amplify the importance of mental health not only for the child, or youth, but for the entire family. We all need to be well.

As we move forward from this last year, we must recognize the presence of opportunity and find the hidden gifts. It is important to reflect on what was learned throughout this time and appreciate the positive changes that have led to positive outcomes for children and their families. Prior to the pandemic, Children First was not well positioned to provide virtual services to families and yet, this past year our staff provided close to 17,000 hours of virtual services in addition to in-person services. We are now able to offer families and childcare centres technological support so they can fully participate in virtual services. Our advancement in technology also includes a parent portal to allow families to access documents in their child's file and provide electronic approvals and consents. We are also pleased to provide families with an expansion of parenting group offerings. Groups are now offered not only throughout the day and in the evening, but also on weekends to better respond to the needs of our families.

Perhaps a hidden gift from this past year is that we have come to realize that change may not be as hard as we once believed. As an organization, we have skillfully continued to “walk the talk” of our mission while navigating an uncharted path. Not only have we been able to supportively respond to the needs of children and their families with flexibility and in a timely way, we have maintained our vision that every child, has every opportunity, to live any life. This is an incredible accomplishment that could not have been achieved without the unwavering commitment of our employees and volunteers. It is with deepest gratitude that we thank every one of you for the positive contributions you make within the lives of others every day.

Be well and be kind.

Lori Kempe, MSW, RSW
Executive Director

Adriana McVicker
President, Board of Directors

CELEBRATING STAFF

Our Staff

In November 2020, Children First was presented with a Healthy Workplace Award. This award was especially significant because it was awarded in recognition of the efforts of our staff to reach out and connect with families through our Youtube channel and our Facebook posts during the pandemic.

The Organizational Social Responsibility Award recognizes organizations that have demonstrated a commitment to supporting the health, safety, and well-being of the community in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the very beginning of the pandemic, we recognized the overwhelming impacts of school and child care closures on families, the worry and uncertainty surrounding the virus and the isolation as a result of public health restrictions. Our staff strategized ways to provide connection for the families and children we serve, and to reach out to all parents with young children in Windsor and Essex County using Social media.

Within three days of our office closure on March 17, a Youtube channel was created. Our creative staff began adding videos daily, sending messages of support, ideas, strategies, and activities for families. Our staff used our agency Facebook page to share our YouTube videos and to send posts targeted at caregivers, sharing everything from humour to family art activities. We received very positive feedback that our social media efforts met a need in the community.



Our Child Care Partners



Children First recognizes the flexibility of Early Learning Professionals as they continue to provide quality care for children on a regular basis. We applaud them for their ongoing understanding of the importance of peer engagement and interaction for children and the positive impact this has on their overall development, including their mental health and social emotional development.

“How Does Learning Happen” is the framework developed for the Early Years by the Ministry of Education and has been in place for a number of years. The Four Foundations; Belonging, Well Being, Expression and Engagement have never been more important in encouraging inclusion of all children within the group. They have become equally important to the adults in children’s lives.

The need for preventing the spread of Covid 19 continues to be front and centre for child care centres. Protocols including sanitizing, the use of required Personal Protective Equipment, physical distancing, and Covid screening have necessitated changes that have been implemented to ensure the safety of all. Classroom educators are limited in their movement within the centre. Parents are restricted to dropping off their children at the door of the centre, limiting their contact with educators. Resource Consultants must follow guidelines limiting the number of classrooms and number of centres they can attend in a specific time period.

Children First’s role in the child care community continues to change and adapt, as needs warrant, related to Covid 19. As the child care community transitioned out of emergency service last summer Resource Consultants were anxious to get back into early learning environments to provide consultation around child and classroom needs. Collaboration between Early Learning Professionals and Resource Consultants now takes place in person during allotted times and using virtual service or telephone contact between those visits. Creativity in the use of materials, types of materials and set up of the physical environment is more important than ever before. Child care centres now have access to iPads that they may use for virtual consultations with Children First. These iPads are available for loan through the agency thanks to our collaboration with the Children’s Services Department, City of Windsor.

As we have all adapted over the past 15 months, we have developed new ways of maintaining the connections between Resource Consultants and children, and the adults who are important in their lives. Children First is grateful for the strength of our child care community.

GROUP OFFERINGS



Circle of Security

Circle of Security is a relationship-based caregiver program that explores the significance of how daily interactions with children can enhance a secure attachment with them. It is a reflective program that allows caregivers to explore their own triggers and perceptions of their child's needs in a supportive environment. Participating in this group provides caregivers the opportunity to look at challenging behaviours through a different lens, and to better understand that behaviour is a form of communication about a need the child is trying to express. This then allows the parent to respond to their child's need and to be with them in that need. Circle of Security highlights for parents the importance of developing relationships in order to support a secure foundation through understanding and accepting that all emotions are valid and safe.

Circle of Security is an eight-week program with a commitment time of 1.5 to 2 hours each week. The material discussed during each session builds upon previous weeks allowing participants to further reflect and understand each concept. Groups are offered in-person or virtually when necessary, to both families currently involved with services and those in the community.



FRIENDS Resilience

The Friends Resilience group is based on the Australian program, Friends for Life. It is an eight-week group with two separate components – a child portion and a parent portion. Each group meets separately with the goal to build children's emotional resilience and social skills. Each week children learn various strategies to better understand their feelings, how they feel in their body and how to cope with challenging situations. Parents learn how to best support and encourage their children as they learn these new skills. Typically, parents and children attend weekly sessions which run concurrently. When offered virtually, adaptations have been made so the parent attends the eight-week group with their child, and additionally, attends three monthly parent-information sessions.

Friends Resilience Program is an anxiety-based group that helps caregivers better understand what anxiousness in children could look like, how to cope with and problem solve to support children's anxious feelings and to how to build and support children's confidence to conquer anxious feelings. This program is an opportunity for children to participate in a safe and welcoming group setting with similar age peers, to learn information, gain confidence and tools and develop problem solving skills to support their journey of building resilience and regulating their emotions.



The Alert Program® was created by Mary Sue Williams and Sherry Shellenberger, occupational therapists. The structured program teaches caregivers and children how to identify their own sensorimotor strategies, in an effort to manage their level of alertness. The program offers tangible ways a child can change the way they are feeling in order to operate in their most optimal state. The children learn about the “how does your engine run” analogy, comparing their body to a car engine that may run on high, sometimes too slow or just right, to support their ability to identify their level of alertness. They trial and explore a variety of sensory based strategies (i.e. moving, eating, touching, looking and listening) which can help them better regulate their alertness and ultimately get their engines running just right.

COLLABORATIONS

Survey on the impact of COVID19 on Early Years Mental Health:

In Fall 2020, in collaboration with the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental health, Children First and Kids Brain Health Network, the team at Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion surveyed a large sample of Canadian families with children age 6 and under. We wanted to learn about their experiences through the first wave of the pandemic, and understand what services they did/did not have access to. Tune into this webinar <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrx6PR1DJYE> to learn what we found, and key recommendations to ensure that families have access to the necessary practical and mental health supports required to enable the positive social-emotional development of their children under age 6 both through and post-pandemic.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Hub:

Children First is proud to announce that we are collaborating with McMaster Children's Hospital Ron Joyce Children's Health Centre to offer ASD diagnostics for children 6 years of age residing in Windsor and Essex County. If families have a concern about their child's development, we encourage families to first speak with their child's doctor as soon as possible. Our ASD diagnostic hub provides timely assessments so that children can start to access the right services at the right time.

HEADS-ED under 6 Screening tool:

The HEADS-ED mental health screening tool was initially developed for use with children and youth between the ages of 6 and 18 years presenting to the Emergency Department. It has since been adapted and used in a variety of settings including youth mental health walk-in clinics, centralized intakes, and most recently to facilitate care pathways between primary care and community-based mental health services. A new version of the tool has been developed for use with children under age 6. Children First has been working in collaboration with the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health to validate the tool. We are proud to fully implement the HEADS-ED as part of our Intake process for all referrals to the agency.

Promoting Healthy Families: A Canadian Evaluation of Two Evidence Based Parenting Programs:

The Offord Centre for Child Studies out of McMaster University has collaborated with Children First to launch a parenting and family support study. This project aims to evaluate Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) and Circle of Security Parenting Program (COSP) for effectiveness in healthy family relationships, and positive child outcomes for children 2-6 years of age.

InterRAI Trauma-Informed Care Project:

In collaboration with Western University, Children First will be participating in their 5-year project implementing and evaluating the trauma-informed use of the interRAI Child and Youth Mental Health (ChYMH) assessment-to-intervention tool that assesses the mental health needs of children between 4 to 18 years of age. Embedded with the ChYMH are evidence-based guidelines for 30 areas of need called Collaborative Action Plans (CAPs). This project aims to provide training on the interRAI ChYMH CAPs using a trauma-informed lens and subsequently assess the impact of incorporating trauma-informed care with children who have been exposed to domestic violence and abuse (DVA) and those who have not.

InterRAI 0-3 Validation:

The validation of the 0-3 (Early Years) InterRAI Assessment Tool has been completed in partnership with Western University, led by Dr. Shannon Steward and her team at the InterRAI Lab. The tool along with the associated manuals is currently being published for more widespread use globally. To date, Children First staff have completed approximately 1200 Early Year (0-3) assessments, many of which contributed to the overall validation.

Children First

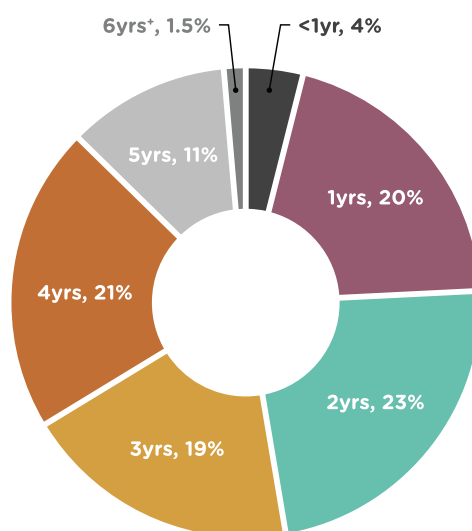
2020-2021 Continuous Quality Improvement:

A YEAR IN REVIEW

710
NEW REFERRALS

1363
UNIQUE CHILDREN
RECEIVED SERVICE
FROM ALL PROGRAMS
AND SERVICES

AGE AT REFERRAL TO AGENCY



SPECIAL NEEDS RESOURCING

- Communication
- Delayed Development
- Aggression
- Temper Tantrums
- Question of Autism

INFANT & CHILD DEVELOPMENT

- Communication
- Delayed Development
- Question of Autism
- Parent Education
- Motor Delays

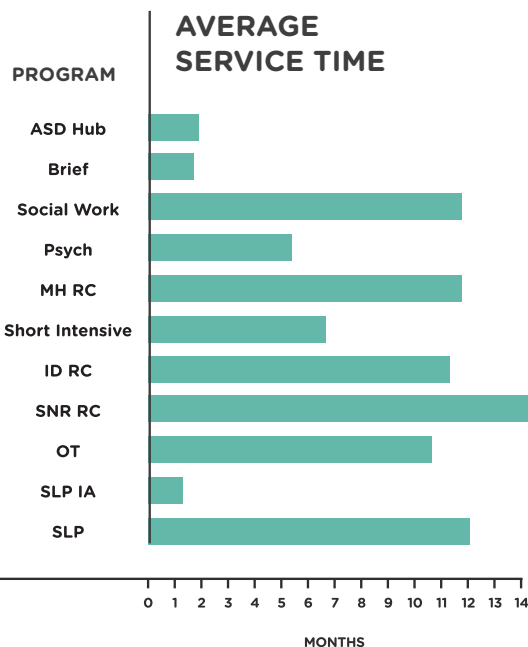
MENTAL HEALTH

- Aggression
- Regulation
- Parent Education
- Oppositional
- Temper Tantrum

AVERAGE WAIT TIME



AVERAGE SERVICE TIME



PROGRAM # SERVED

PROGRAM	# SERVED
ASD Hub	35
Brief	204
Social Work	61
Psych	86
MH RC	311
Short Intensive	65
ID RC	216 (370)*
SNR RC	548 (559)*
OT	168
SLP IA	217
SLP	545

2020-2021 FINANCIAL REPORT

Revenue Fund for the year ended March 31, 2021	Total
Funding	
City of Windsor	\$3,617,577
Province of Ontario	\$2,793,482
Connections Early Years Family Centre	\$165,014
ASD Hub	\$72,809
Rebates, Interest and Recoveries	\$23,226
Fundraising	\$22,984
	\$6,695,092
Expenses	
Salaries and Benefits	\$5,034,612
Program Expenses	\$664,288
Administration	\$381,100
	\$6,080,000
Excess of revenue over expenses	\$615,092
Opening fund balance	\$626,915
Transfer to capital	(\$661,510)
Fund balance, end of year	\$580,497

BOARD MEMBERS

PRESIDENT

Adriana McVicker

VICE PRESIDENT

Brian Dube

PAST PRESIDENT

Marina Iannitelli

TREASURER

Kristen Micallef

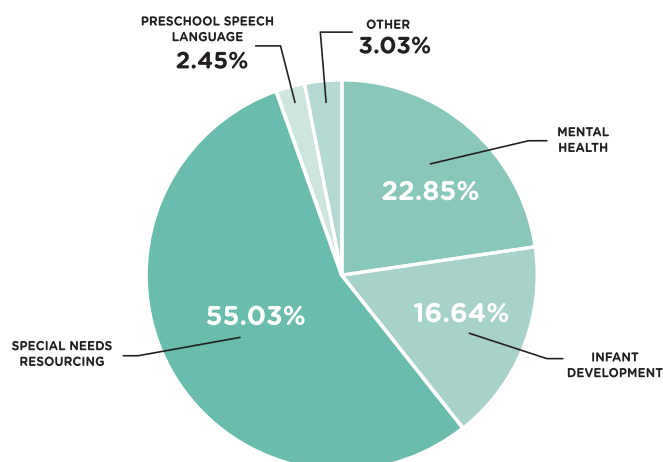
SECRETARY

Andrea Tremblay

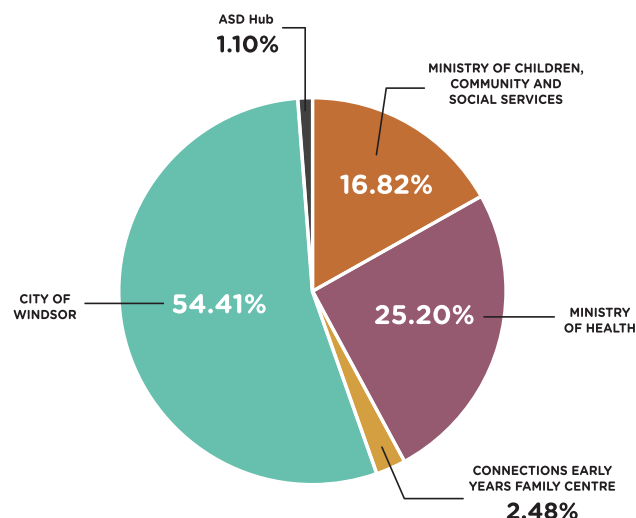
DIRECTORS:

Jackie Chartier
Nicole Ouellette
Jennifer Rooke
Rachel Stewart
Venus Olla
Paul Layfield
Rob Carruthers

2020-2021 Expenses by Program



2020-2021 Funding



Building Stronger Families: PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

McMaster University research study to collaborate with Children First for the betterment of families.



HEALTH SCIENCES
Psychiatry & Behavioural
Neurosciences

[Windsor-Essex, ON] — With COVID-19 not yet in our rear-view mirror, there has never been a more poignant time to look at strengthening families. The Offord Centre for Child Studies out of McMaster University has collaborated with Children First to launch a parenting and family support study. The overall goal is to take a closer look at two new parenting programs and get an understanding if families benefit from either, or both.

Both the Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) and Circle of Security Parenting Program (COSP) offer ways for parents and caregivers to develop practical skills, which can help decrease challenging behaviours and emotions in young children, and help, better the families' relationship. It will also address an important evidence gap – “we want to see which of the programs will benefit families and their children more, and whether these programs are better than existing ones”.

Andrea Gonzalez, Associate Professor, Canada Research Chair in Family Health and Preventive Interventions, Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University.

This project comes at a time when COVID-19 has introduced increased levels of challenges for families.

40 per cent of parents indicated their children's behaviour/mood had deteriorated and there were findings of extremely high levels of depression among caregivers.

*Offord Centre's landmark 2020 Ontario Parent Survey.

Research suggests that parenting programs can improve emotional and behavioural adjustment of children and enhance the psychosocial well-being of parents. By taking part in this study, parents/caregivers may find they feel more positive about themselves and caregiving skills and strategies, but also helping other parents/caregivers in the future.

“We are actively looking for families to enroll in this study, online,” says Gonzalez. If families need technology in order to participate, we can help with that too. In recognition of the time and effort as participants in the study, parents will receive gift cards for completing required interviews.

Interested in Participating?

If you are a family with children aged 2-6 and are interested in participating in this study, contact Children First Intake at:

519-250-1850 or children-first.ca

Children First

Children First is a community-based organization providing services for families with children up to six years of age in the Windsor-Essex area who are at risk for or are experiencing mental health challenges or developmental concerns

children-first.ca.



A multi-disciplinary research institute established in 1992. Through collaboration across fields such as child psychiatry, pediatrics, policy development, and social work. The Centre's aim is to better understand children's mental health problems with the overall goal of improving the lives of children and youth.

Contact for Questions / Interviews on the study;

Andrea Gonzalez,
Associate Professor

Tier II Canada Research Chair in Family
Health and Preventive Interventions

McMaster University Department of
Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences
Offord Centre for Child Studies.

p. 905.510.1652
e. gonzal@mcmaster.ca