



Raising the Bar

Early Childhood Education

An ASCY Community Initiative

Peterborough's Early Learning and Child Care Community's
Commitment to Best Practices in High Quality Child Care

2010-2011 Report



Investing In Quality 
Early Learning and Child Care Peterborough



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This paper was prepared by Trish Bucholtz, Raising the Bar Project Coordinator for Investing In Quality – Early Learning and Child Care Peterborough (IIQ), under the direction of the Child Care Supervisor Network

Chair:

Lorrie Baird

Kawartha Child Care Services

Committee Members

Susan Bonsall
Strath MacLean Child Care Centre

Christine Mumford
Northern Lights Children's Day Care

Patricia Hogan
Hiawatha First Nation Child Care Centre

Mary-Ann Meagher
Peterborough Family Resource Centre

Lisa Miles
Peterborough Family Resource Centre

Alex Cranfield
Five Counties Children's Centre

Sandra Robinson
Children's Services, City of Peterborough

Teresa Burke
Nursery Two Child Care

Marie-Anne Saucier
Trent Child Care Inc.

Sue Kenton
Municipal Child Care Programs – Peterborough
Daycare

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Introduction

Peterborough has a rich history of collaboration within the child care community. In the 1990's, the Peterborough Child Care Forum (PCCF) was established to support the professional needs of the early learning and child care (ELCC) sector through networks, professional development, resource borrowing and administrative support. While the forum was in existence, the Executive Directors and Supervisors of local child care centres saw the need to collaborate, share resources and mentor new administrators through a network. The Child Care Supervisor's Network was formed and remains a strong and effective means of support and advocacy for the professionals working in the local ELCC sector. In the later part of the 90's, funding was pulled from the Peterborough Child Care Forum, leaving the community with limited professional support. The remaining dollars left from the PCCF moved to the Peterborough Family Resource Centre to be utilized for the annual child care conference. To date, the account is held in trust by Investing In Quality.

In 2007, a group of Directors, Supervisors, Special Needs Resource Agencies and Family Support Coordinators began to meet to discuss the existing, but sometimes fragmented support to the professional needs of child care and decided that a strategic plan was needed to guide the coordination of professional development and resources along with a process to measure and maintain high quality child care in our community. The Professional Development Committee was formed to develop a plan for the dollars in reserve at the Peterborough Family Resource Centre.

Through the Professional Development Committee, Investing In Quality – Early Learning and Child Care Peterborough (IIQ) was formed to look at best practices and a means to set community standards of quality within the local early learning and child care sector. After considerable research and discussion, Raising the Bar on Quality was chosen as the measurement tool for the Peterborough Community. Raising the Bar on Quality consists of 17 standards encompassed within 3 categories; Quality Monitoring, Best Practices in Management and Professionalism.

Raising the Bar is a program designed to help child care programs maintain community standards of quality early learning and child care services that go beyond the ministry licensing requirements. The presence of a Raising the Bar certificate is a sign that the program is committed to maintaining provincial regulatory standards as well as local community standards in quality monitoring, best practices in management and professionalism. Raising the Bar participants voluntarily submit to an annual review to ensure they meet community standards. After one year of participation in Raising the Bar, programs are expected to achieve bronze level and may progress further in subsequent years.

Bronze Level programs follow fundamental quality indicators and are also in full compliance with Ontario's Day Nurseries Act.

Silver level programs have additional strategies to enhance quality. Some strategies include increased professional education for Early Childhood Educators, parent and staff surveys, and opportunities for parents to become more involved.

Gold level programs demonstrate a long-term commitment to high quality in early childhood education. Short and Long term goal setting, increased professional involvement and community partnerships are some of the standards found at the gold level.



The Raising the Bar logic model was developed to measure the effects of efforts by Executive Directors and Supervisors along with increased support/mentorship by a Project Coordinator to implement community standards relating to quality assurance, best practices in management and professionalism as defined by Raising the Bar on Quality program.

Research suggests high quality early child care environments increase positive outcomes in children and families and are cost-effective for society. A logic model with measurable outcomes outlining the impact of Raising the Bar will create local evidence and contribute to the quality and effectiveness of the child care system in Peterborough. When developing the logic model for the RTB project, the Investing In Quality Committee designed the measurable outcomes by linking the activities identified in each standard with an appropriate output.

The silver phase review year took place from April 1, 2010 to May 20, 2011. The data in the tables below are derived from the activities that occurred during the silver review year, and took place over a 13 month timeline. The information collected for this report was achieved through attendance lists from professional development (workshops, seminars and networking groups), impact surveys to the child care community, and documents completed during the Raising the Bar on Quality Peer Review.

**Noted: in the following tables the bronze phase data (appears in brackets), is found alongside the silver phase data.*

**Also note: The Bronze phase took place over a 19 month period which began on September 1, 2008 and was completed on March 31, 2010.*

Results from phase two of the project outcomes show a significant increase in staff engagement through staff meetings and surveys. There was also a significant change in the number of child care centres employing an environmental assessment tool to evaluate their program on an annual basis and utilizing the information gained to provide a more responsive program for young children. The positive impact of the implementation of networking groups as well as increased participation in professional development was also apparent at the end of the review year. 92 individuals were awarded platinum recognition for their efforts towards increased professionalism in the field of early learning and child care.

The following tables outline the progress this initiative has made and recognizes the work that continues as the project moves through each phase.



Category Progress

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is any systematic process of checking to see whether a product or service being developed is meeting specified requirements. Quality is monitored through observations by supervisors, the education teams and by the Raising the Bar project coordinator as well as through parent/guardian and staff feedback. Action plans are developed to address areas of need and to plan for improvement. In addition to annual provincial licensing reviews and local public health inspections, participating programs undergo site visits by qualified third party early learning and child care professionals that the community has deemed appropriate.

Raising the Bar Category			Quality Assurance
Activities	Outputs	Progress in Outputs 13 month timeline	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child Care Programs conduct annual Parent surveys in each program. -Child Care Centres conduct annual staff work environment surveys. -Delivery of environmental assessment tool workshop for all participating centres. -Delivery of DECA mentoring training. -Health and Safety training support -Development of Child Care Centre Action Plan (gold standard) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - # of parent survey's completed and returned -# of CCC staff survey's completed and returned (Phase 2) -# of DECA community mentors trained -# of participants participating in DECA training (other assessment) -# of agencies accessing health and safety training. (Phase 2) -# of action plans competed (phase 3) -# of programs in full compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 990 parents were surveyed in 2010-2011. • 357 surveys were returned. 36% return rate (40% previously in the 19 month bronze phase timeline) • 333 staff were surveyed in 2010- 2011. • 208 surveys were returned 62% return rate (no data for previous year) • 9 Mentors continue to provide training and support to facilitate DECA (12 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline. Number has dropped due to changes employment for mentors) • 215 Early Childhood Educators, Resource Teachers and Preschool Consultants have been trained in the use of the DECA to date. (106 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline) • 42 Early Childhood Educators were trained in the use of the ECERS-R to date. (8 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline) • 25/25 participating centres are in full compliance and have clear licenses. (2 profiles are except as they are master binders for multi-site organizations) 	<p>Child Care Centres & agencies are more equipped to monitor the quality of service on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>Indicator Number and or percent of participants that complete the silver level. (see RTB silver standards)</p> <p>26/27 programs that submitted for the 2010/2011 review year were successful in achieving a silver bar.</p>



The Impact on Quality in Our Community

Parent Surveys and involvement:

“More thought has gone into parent communication – making it more 2-way rather than just sending newsletters and posting notices.”

“With these standards, we have used the feedback and survey data for making adjustments to such things as our menus and outdoor spaces. Parents also feel more involved with the centre and that their opinions and suggestions do count and do help us to make changes that will better meet their needs.”

“The organization continues with its long time initiatives, such as the annual parent satisfaction survey, the fun fair and the newsletter. The newsletter did take a different focus and offers not only information on our programs, but also education material on child development and ELCC practices.”

“Our program has always prided itself on encouraging and promoting family involvement and engagement. RTB has provided us with tools to ensure we are offering ample opportunity, and communicating those opportunities more effectively.”

Environmental Assessments:

“Observing each child is still difficult for us, but we are more aware of the relationship building with each child and family – this has been a great benefit for the program.”

“DECA has given us the insight to focus on social and emotional development. We still support cognitive development, but not in the pattern of 1,2,3 and A,B,C. Our observations and documentation prove that the teachers are more reactive to the children’s interests and quicker to change their environment to suit their learning.”

“Encourages staff to be thoughtful about planning and setting goals.”

“Just more universal awareness. Everyone is more accountable and responsible to provide an enriched environment for the children and their families. We always observed the children on arrival, but the health checks provide that extra observation/documentation. Excellent tool!”

“It has helped us observe the children, learn what their interests are, and plan around what they want to focus on, not what we plan. We have become child focused instead of teacher focused.”

“Staff have used the environmental assessment tool to improve their rooms, to better suit the needs of the children.”



Best Practices in Management

Best practice is a technique or methodology that, through experience and research, has proven to reliably lead to a desired result. A commitment to using the best practices in any field is a commitment to using all the knowledge and technology at one's disposal to ensure success.

Participating programs in Raising the Bar offers information on high quality early learning and child development for parents and promotes opportunities for community involvement. There are detailed policies, procedures and management practices to guide day-to-day operations along with specific strategies put in place to support optimal child health and development.

Raising the Bar Category			Best Practices in Management
Activities	Outputs	Progress in Outputs 13 month timeline	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training to support the development of Policies, governance, job descriptions - Child Care Network & Business Partner meetings - Develop an annual organizational planning model. (calendar) - Promote parent education and training opportunities - Promote parent involvement - Facilitate annual recognition event - Develop a template for data collection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -# of child care programs /agencies participating -# of training opportunities - Frequency (#) of Child Care Network & Business Partner meetings -# participants attending the recognition event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27/32 Child Care Programs have signed on to participate in the project. (27/32 previously in the 19 month bronze phase timeline) • 19 Training opportunities have been offered through Raising the Bar. (33 previously in the 19 month bronze phase timeline) • 6 Child Care Centre Supervisor Network meetings have taken place from April '10 to May '11. (14 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline) • 7 Business Partner Meetings have taken place from April '10 to May '11. (7 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline) • 174 people participated in the RTB/ECE recognition (108 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline) 	<p>RTB participants are more aware of identified best practices in the child care field.</p> <p>Indicator Number and or percent of participants that complete the silver level. (see RTB silver standards)</p> <p>26/27 programs that submitted for the 2010/2011 review year were successful in achieving a silver bar.</p>



The Impact on Best Practices in Our Community

Staff Engagement:

“Raising the Bar was the trigger for our centre to review its philosophy and policies. Parent participation was always welcome, but we didn’t offer many opportunities. Now we are offering parent surveys, parent DECA surveys, open houses, parent/teacher meetings, in-house training and a number of other opportunities.”

“Our organization saw a need to support staff through more professional development and moved to have staff participate in at least 15 hrs of professional development.”

“Having meetings more often, discussing children and family needs. The staff surveys help to see what areas, if any, we need to focus more on. We also can see what we are doing that is working well.”

“Staff meetings have a much more involved feel to them. Staff have opportunities to engage in the decision making process, more transparency between association, administration and staff has allowed staff to feel more part of the program overall. Their understanding of the position of the supervisor has also allowed for overall respect and appreciation for each other’s roles and responsibilities.”

“Organizational meetings now held – work as a group to decide on new policies – staff have more input.”

“During staff meetings, staff bring concerns for the whole group to work together on. If anyone has attended a workshop or networking meeting, they share what they learned.”

“Opportunities to get together with staff and teams... time and relationship building here too.”

“We have taken out housekeeping items in our staff meetings. No more boring monologues from the Director. The Director and Assistant Director are collaborating and sharing the responsibility of using staff meetings to inspire and train. We are asking for much more response, feedback and participation from staff. We are planning more outside support to come in as well. These meetings are more dynamic, structured and fun!”

“More connectedness with the group. We are all in this together.”

“We agree that meeting often is one key component to quality child care and to build positive relationships. We have always felt it is important to keep the lines of communication open.”

Community Involvement:

“We are continuing to build on our partners and find new areas in which to grow.”

“We had linkages in the past already.”

“An increase of community has happened in the school we are connected to. Our fundraisers are shared with the school etc. United Way is one of our partnerships and now we have others as well.”

“Thinking outside the box. I feel a much warmer link to other centres and a respect for our individuality but also our similarities.”

“Stronger linkages because other organizations are encouraged to reach out. Our organization fares very well in its efforts to create stronger linkages with other programs and community partners. Although little has changed because of RTB requirements, RTB has instilled a certain pride that we are doing well in this area.”



Professionalism

Early Years Professionals participating in Raising the Bar programs maintain credentials and commit to additional training each year. First aid and CPR are kept current. All directors and staff attend workshops and conferences to enhance their understanding of early childhood education and care.

Raising the Bar Category			Professionalism
Activities	Outputs	Progress in Outputs 13 month timeline	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child Care Connections Newsletter: identify existing community PD calendar - Initial assessment to develop baseline measurement. - Mentoring through networking - Recruit volunteer trainers/facilitators - Promote/deliver workshops/training - PD certificates/cards - Develop a contact list of professional associations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of workshops and training offered # of participants accessing PD -# of newsletters sent out. - Frequency of networking groups taking place. -# of networking groups -# of baseline assessments completed - Total # Hours of professional education offered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 Workshops and courses have been offered to the child care community through RTB. (33 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline) • 758 participants have accessed the training offered to the community. (984 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline) • 568 Newsletters have been sent out to community members. (4 newsletters, 142 centres and individuals) (644 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline) • 35 bi-monthly Networking groups have taken place since April 2010 – May 2011 Infant/Toddler Preschool, JK/SK/ School Age Cooks Supervisor Science Apprentice (54 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline) • 20 Baseline peer assessments have been completed prior to beginning RTB. (20 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline) • 128 Hours of professional Development has been offered through RTB related events. (131 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline) • 92 Individual Platinum Recognition (114 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline) 	<p>RTB participants are able to apply the knowledge acquired through the professional education accessed through work.</p> <p>Indicator Number and or percent of participants that complete the Silver level. (see RTB Silver standards)</p> <p>26/27 programs that submitted for the 2010/2011 review year were successful in achieving a silver bar.</p>



The Impact of Professional Involvement in Our Community

Impact on program:

“Yes, staff that have attended workshops have thoroughly enjoyed them and have had some wonderful ideas come from them.”

“Positive impact on a lot of different areas of the program. A staff mentioned that they feel they are more conscious and aware of the impact of every aspect of the children’s experience.”

“Absolutely – excellent opportunities.”

“yes, there has been a good selection to choose from – there is enough for all areas of child care. Lots to pick and choose from.”

“Yes, staff are using ideas that they have experienced through PD or networking meetings. It’s great to see their enthusiasm.”

“Yes, in most cases. Staff are given a nudge when they attend pd, to reflect on their own practices and ideas to implement new ideas.”

“Staff are more empowered, confident. Even changes in teams have gone smoothly this year than any other year. All staff are working more collaboratively, rather than just in program teams.”

“DECA is being used as the environmental assessment tool and staff have become proficient in its use. Many staff members are expressing interest in knowing more about the ELECT which may facilitate progression in program planning standards for the organization.”

“Over many years we have worked hard to make sure the learning that occurs outside of the program gets transferred back into the program.”



Findings

Based on the results from an impact survey completed by 55% of the participating child care programs, the following comments, suggestions and questions reflect the feelings and thoughts of the participating administrators in the Peterborough Early Learning and Child Care Community.

Disadvantages, Challenges and Concerns:

Time, time, time and time! The challenge of finding enough time to complete the tasks necessary for every day operations of a child care program as well as Raising the Bar has been identified as a challenge.

“Managing program, paperwork and committing time every week for RTB can be tricky when also balancing family/home life.”

“Time and energy given to meeting RTB standards can be time away from the organization’s own goals and objectives.”

“With each level time becomes an issue. We have the full support of the organization. Staff changeover and full day learning is coming in. Having more time for mentoring staff.”

“-Just finding time to complete the final stage -finding time to work with people to meet the goals”

There were also comments regarding the pressure to keep up with the rest of the community and the increase in workload.

“The pressure you put on yourself to do the best job you can.... There is pressure to keep up with everyone, without feeling like a failure.”

“The biggest challenge is the coordination of new standards and change management for front-line workers who may not have the time and conviction to change their ways.”

“What happens after the Gold Level is completed”

“Trying to stay on top of the expectations over the next year.”

“More and more pressures on staff – more paperwork, forms to be filled out.”

“Extra staff is needed for me to have more office time to complete and read material related to RTB- This comes at a cost to the program.”

“Staff find it difficult to find time to observe and log and the organization is not in a financial position to financially compensate for all the time required”



Advantages

Many respondents made comments on the improved connections between child care programs since Raising the Bar began.

“Brings the community together – working towards a common goal.”

“A sense of community empowerment (working together, not competitive)”

“Strengthening ELCC community relations: Cooperation and support as opposed to competition and judgement.”

“It has created supportive networking with the child care community. We are all in it together. Sharing ideas, policies etc...”

“Lots of opportunity for Child Care Centres to help one another”

“Having common ground for all participating centres”

Other advantages mentioned were the increase availability of professional development, the benefits of having a binder with everything in one place, a better understanding of DNA requirements, and the new motivation and energy coming from programming staff.

“Having all of our achievements, goals in one place is beneficial because I have to get things completed when dealing with ongoing “regular” high demands of the child care field.”

“A useful binder that has everything in one place.”

“More professional development opportunities for staff.”

“PD opportunities ready and easy – Thank you.”

“Improved quality of child care – parents are aware of this, and all staff are working toward the same goal.”

“Centre seems more alive with activity, lots of pride and hearing great compliments from parents and visitors.”

“Information flowing throughout centre to the benefit of children and families”

“It has and is helping us bring families together to share and communicate.”



New Initiatives

Through Raising the Bar, the participating early learning and child care programs have begun a number of new initiatives to meet the quality standards. From the results of the survey, administrators have indicated that the following areas have seen new growth and development.

Staff meetings and surveys:

“We have added more staff meetings which helps children, parents, staff etc...”

“More sharing among staff of info received at conferences, workshops.”

“Purposeful and regular team and staff meetings, all staff receive program time for learning stories and project work.”

“Staff have the opportunity to express concerns and make suggestions through meetings and surveys.”

Programming:

“We have adopted the E.L.F. – all children have binders that contain observations and examples of their individual development.”

“We have redeveloped our planning sheets to include reference to the ELECT document and the children’s emerging interests.”

“We have moved to the ELECT framework –keeping in mind theme but being more flexible.”

“The environmental assessment through DECA raised consciousness of the children’s needs, individual and group and allowed for more intentional programming.”

Parent Involvement:

“We are looking to add more activities for opportunity for parents to mix and mingle with each other.”

“We have more open houses to increase parent involvement. We continue to work with our community partners so families can take part in more workshops.”

“We have enlisted several parents with specific skills (such as music, art, woodworking) to do workshops with the children to allow them to share these skills and passions.”



Conclusion

The quantitative data contained in this report, provides strong evidence of the positive impact of Raising the Bar initiatives (professional development activities and access to standards of excellence) on the quality of child care across the Peterborough community. Participation in improvement activities, networking opportunities and demonstrated dedication to quality standards also leads to the perception of improved coordination and communication among the centres, their staff and the child care community.

Raising the Bar on Quality is the peer-reviewed accreditation program that the City of Peterborough has integrated and continues to sustain the positive influences of training, networking and professional development by providing centres with clear, achievable guidelines for best practice. Although Raising the Bar on Quality has shown improvements to quality, there are limitations to its influence. RTB operates on a voluntary participation basis and is not linked to a regulatory system for ongoing accountability.

Although there are very definite challenges to participating in Raising the Bar, there are also great advantages to truly engaging in the process. When asked what they were most proud of achieving through the Raising the Bar process, administrators told us;

“The staff (for the most part) and their enthusiasm in participating in networking and various other activities.”

“I am proud of myself and my accomplishments. RTB has helped me out as an administrator; become more efficient and more organized, and has helped me become a better educator.”

“The changes in staff, with respect to them being more dedicated to professional development that benefits them as well as the children and families that we care for and about.”

“Our improved communication with parents and our ability to show them what we are doing every day.”

“The gains the staff have made with the new curriculum and working together to have fun and be inspired. I love when they come to see me in the office with an idea and plan to make it go – the excitement is fantastic!”

“I like to think I am fairly organized, but you can get bogged down so easily. The RTB process has validated and acknowledged the work and care that goes into making a vibrant, happy to be there, high quality child care program.”

