

**Rural Child Care
Report**

**Task Force on Rural Child Care &
Early Childhood Education**

Prepared by Barbara Brownell

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Beginning in 1998 the Ontario Government made significant changes to the delivery and management of child care services. Planning and management of child care were devolved to the municipalities and child care was framed within a new ministry vision and its objectives. The provision of child care programmes by municipal governments became mandatory with implementation phased in as municipalities made the necessary adjustments to become Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM) or, in municipalities or territories without municipal organization, District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSAB). Prior to this new direction for child care, some municipalities had provided child care for years while others had not. With discretion removed, municipalities that had never provided child care had to develop new skills to comply with ministry directives. The province has retained the authority to define child care service expectations and will continue to cost-share service delivery and system management. As realignment progresses, it is anticipated that the CMSM/DSSAB will integrate child care into the broader system of programmes directed to families, parents and children.

Given the radical nature of these changes and many unresolved issues associated with rural child care, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Ontario Rural Council jointly initiated a Task Force to review the status of child care programmes in rural Ontario. It was agreed that, in the light of provincial/municipal realignment, stakeholders should refocus the issues, gather information and seek opportunities to work collaboratively with rural municipalities as the system is redesigned to meet current needs. The Task Force was comprised of representatives from the following organizations: **Ontario Rural Child Care Committee (ORCC); Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA); Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA); Ontario Farm Women's Network (OFWN); The Ontario Rural Council (TORC); Farm Safety Association (FSA); Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA).**

The Task Force met with several constituents representing parents, operators, planners, municipal service managers, and provincial and federal governments. These meetings provided the beginning of a networking structure. The information collected highlighted a number of issues which are listed in this document together with information related to the provincial and federal governments' known direction. Recommendations are made on changes to the Day Nurseries Act Regulations and Policies; on realignment of children's services and municipal responsibility; on fragmentation of services; and on structure, access and organization. The issues and recommendations contained in the document reflect the four pillars of child care:

Task Force Members

Elaine Ball,
*Ontario Rural Child
Care Committee*

Barbara Brownell,
Ontario Rural Council

Jackie Canning,
*Ontario Farm
Women's Network*

Bette Jean Crews,
*Ontario Federation of
Agriculture*

Tim Frakes,
*Ontario Federation of
Agriculture (research)*

Jean Kellogg,
*Ontario Municipal
Social Services
Association*

Pat Morgan,
*Farm Safety
Association*

Ellie Renaud,
*Rural Ontario
Municipal Association*

Mary Robertson,
Ontario Rural Council

Brenda Wilton,
*Ontario Rural Child
Care Committee*

Affordability: Affordability issues revolve around how fee subsidies are calculated; the inclusion of RSP contributions in fee subsidy calculation; cash-flow problems for self-employed people, particularly those in seasonally-based businesses; and limitations on the child care tax deduction.

Accessibility: This issue has many variables including: a lack of programmes or lack of choice within a given area; waiting lists for centre-based care; few subsidized spaces within a given area; unavailability of child care outside of normal working hours; and the lack of transportation.

Flexibility: A lack of flexibility with regard to licensing regulations is linked to accessibility and the need for child care to be provided as needed on a seasonal basis and to accommodate parents who work at home or whose shifts fall outside the nine-to-five business day.

Quality: The issues of quality child care in rural Ontario reflect the concerns that changing societal norms mean that parents require more support in rearing their children. Safe locations where child care is provided, the type of programmes which ensure appropriate early child development with enriched learning and socialization are all essential if parents are to function effectively in their work.

The issues of **affordable, accessible, flexible and quality** child care are contained in the following recommendations:

Day Nurseries Act, Regulations & Policies

- 1. Modify regulations and policies to reflect changing societal norms with respect to the family and workplace, including more options for licensing locations where care is provided. Allow for flexibility in order to provide a full range of services.*
- 2. Review regulations and policies with a view to addressing the complexities of self-employed people with regard to eligibility for child care subsidies; the Ontario government should continue to work with the federal government to ensure that child care expense deductions reflect the true cost of child care.*
- 3. Ontario should examine social support systems of other countries with similar rural situations for potential solutions.*

Affordable
Affordable
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Affordable

Accessible
Accessible
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Flexible
Flexible
Flexible
Flexible

Quality
Quality
Quality
Quality

Realignment of Child Care Services & Municipal Responsibilities

Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSAB) have the responsibility to plan and manage all aspects of service delivery at the local level. The term “local level” has very different connotations in rural areas than in urban centres. With this in mind, the recommendations are as follows:

4. *Encourage CMSM/DSSAB to use a coordinated approach to the delivery of child care programmes within an integrated model.*
5. *Ensure that child care budgets have consolidated base funding with flexibility to allocate funds as needed at the local level.*
6. *Ensure that municipalities have adequate financial and training resources to address the unique needs associated with child care planning and provision in rural areas.*
7. *Allow, with provincial approval, that parent fees are retained by the municipality for reinvestment in child/parent programmes, thus enhancing the ability of the municipality to develop or enrich programmes appropriate to the local context.*
8. *Review per capita funding via the province and develop equalization measures to ensure that low child populations, distance and isolation do not hamper meeting the distinct needs of rural areas.*
9. *Consider the timely transfer of child care licensing authority from the province to the municipalities, with appropriate provincial funding, to enable total service system management by CMSMs/DSSABs at the local level.*

Fragmentation

The province should enable municipalities to unify the child care system at local levels by:

10. *Allowing for integrated case management for families with multiple needs, and encouraging local strategic partnerships for planning and consensus building regarding what models will work best and service delivery. The ideal would be a single point of contact for the parent. This will also make for more effective use of funding.*
11. *Encouraging further inter-ministerial collaboration to remove barriers that impede the smooth transformation of a complex system to one that is seamless at the local level for end users and managers.*

There was consensus among Task Force members that the four pillars of affordable, accessible, flexible, quality child care for rural communities are goals that are yet to be achieved. The Task Force was of the opinion that, given the restructuring process, it would be timely to affirm these four pillars of child care as the municipalities begin their planning.

training

address the

unique needs

associated

with child

care planning

and provision

in rural areas

- Recommendation
#6

BACKGROUND

The Task Force on Rural Child Care and Early Childhood Education was formed in July 1999 to raise awareness of rural child care issues during the implementation stages of the provincial/municipal realignment of child care programmes. The idea to create a task force came from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) with a request to the Ontario Rural Council (TORC) to undertake a coordinating role and bring together stakeholders with an interest in rural child care.

New information put into perspective previous work and efforts to enhance the system's capacity to provide appropriate child care programmes, and emphasized the reality that, despite pilot projects directed at demonstrating innovative models for addressing rural child care needs, little of permanence had been achieved.

The OFA Rural Affairs Committee had articulated the urgent need to address critical rural child care issues. Given the ongoing changes taking place in child care as a result of provincial and municipal restructuring, as well as the potential for Ministry of Community and Social Services policy changes and funding/policy developments, it was considered timely to bring together public and community agencies and rural stakeholders. The goal was to identify and describe the child care needs of the farming and tourism industries and those of rural families in general, as systemic change was forged and implemented.

The Rural Child Care and Early Childhood Education Task force was established with the following purpose and objectives:

- **Purpose:** To provide the information and networks required by stakeholders to better understand and advocate for Ontario rural child care services and early childhood education programmes.
- **Objectives:** To identify rural child care issues arising from ongoing changes in the Ontario child care system, and to understand how these issues can be addressed by public and community agencies and rural stakeholders.

Among other techniques, three focus groups were used to generate discussion and collect the data required for the development of an information package and for policy recommendations. Potential members for the Task Force were identified and responses were received from the following organizations: the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA); the Ontario Farm Women's Network (OFWN); the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA); the Rural

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Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA); the Women's Institute (W.I.); the Ontario Rural Child Care Committee (ORCC); the Ontario Public School Boards Association (OPSBA); the Farm Safety Association (FSA); the Junior Farmers' Association of Ontario (JFAO).

The Task Force immediately undertook a fact-finding mission to clarify the current status of rural child care services within the context of systemic restructuring and to open a dialogue with rural municipalities as they worked through the realignment process, which included the creation of Consolidated Municipal Service Delivery Agencies (CMSM) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSAB) to manage child care services. The Task Force recognized that the consolidation of municipal social services would involve significant changes in the delivery and management of child care services at both the community and systems levels.

In assessing the current needs, gaps and barriers identified by stakeholders, the Task Force believed it essential to examine these within the realities of a system undergoing a significant redesign and to find, within this process, the opportunities for input by all parties. Child care in Ontario is at a critical juncture in its evolution. Partners in a change process can inform and strengthen the means and ends of change.

Threatening though change may be, the Task Force viewed it as an opportunity for rural communities to bring solution-based strategies to the process. While CMSM/DSSAB struggle with the development of systems redesign, service planning, service delivery, service evaluation and local system integration, it would be invaluable to include strategic partners at the *local* community level in the development of a comprehensive rural model that reflects local needs and priorities.

The Task Force recognized that radical re-thinking was required when deciding how best to meet the needs of children and parents, and that this applied to all levels of government. Accordingly, the Task Force consulted with three distinct groups of stakeholders representing:

- i) the federal and provincial governments (respectively, Human Resources Development Canada – National Agenda for Children, the Ministry of Community & Social Services and the Early Years Project);
- ii) municipal service managers through the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association; and
- iii) Ontario organizations involved in planning and research or advocacy for child care programmes (Founders' Network, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care).

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Much work has been done over the last fourteen years. Many organizations have come together to focus on issues and models that would demonstrate creative solutions for child care in rural areas. The Task Force was committed to providing a venue that would allow members to build on these organizations' previous work and generate new energy to meet the challenges now facing those involved in the planning and provision of child care. Every level of government, providers of child care services and communities have all contributed to a substantial body of work. Fresh ideas have been generated, new models for rural child care created, old thinking has been challenged and new definitions have been explored.

Rural child care is the creative development and operation of stable, quality, flexible, safe and affordable child care choices within a process of local community building that includes parents, community members, organizations, agencies, businesses and adequate government supports.
(Ontario Rural Child Care Committee, 1995)

REALIGNMENT PROCESS

In the autumn of 1999, The Ministry of Community and Social Services released the document "Local Services Realignment – a user's guide." The guide outlines the principle differences between child care before January 1, 1998 when municipal involvement in child care was discretionary and after that date when amendments to the Day Nurseries Act made municipal involvement mandatory. In January 1998 the province began transferring to 37 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM) and 10 District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSAB) responsibility for management of the delivery of child care services (fee subsidies, Ontario Works child care, resource centres, special needs resourcing, and wage subsidies). The document noted the following changes:

Cost-Sharing

The amendments to the Day Nurseries Act and its regulations provide for new child care cost sharing arrangements:

Programme costs

Beginning January 1, 1998, programme costs related to Ontario Works child care, resource centres, special needs resourcing, and wage subsidy have been cost shared on an **eighty per cent provincial and twenty per cent municipal basis**. Cost sharing is administered by the Ontario Works delivery agent, which bills

Administrative costs for managing the delivery of child care services are shared on a fifty per cent provincial and fifty per cent municipal basis.

individual municipalities. **CMSM/DSSAB operates as Ontario Works delivery agent upon being designated under the Ontario Works Act.**

Following child care designation, all programme costs related to child care services will be shared on an **eighty per cent provincial and twenty per cent municipal basis.**

Administrative costs

Prior to child care designation:

Administrative costs related to fee subsidy administration (i.e., the cost of needs testing) are shared with participating municipalities on an **eighty per cent provincial and twenty per cent municipal basis**; Ontario Works child care administrative costs are shared on a **fifty per cent provincial and fifty per cent municipal basis**; and the province is responsible for **one hundred per cent of child care administrative costs** related to resource centres, special needs resourcing and wage subsidies.

After child care designation and effective July 1, 1999:

- Administrative costs for managing the delivery of child care services are shared on a **fifty per cent provincial and fifty per cent municipal basis.**

OTHER FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON RURAL CHILD CARE

Rural Ontario, with its diverse socioeconomic make-up of farming, tourism, small business, distinct social structure and community values, represents a critical component of a province that sees itself as a leader in economic and social change. While change is necessarily forward-looking, taking stock of and assessing the current status is an essential precursor to a solidly based foundation that will hold up the promise of change.

Some problems can be attributed to the nature of rural Ontario itself, with its small, spread-out communities, lack of transportation, and the businesses of farming and tourism that build a working year around the seasons, the weather and the vagaries of the marketplace. In addition, thinking about child care is often informed by a belief that young children belong at home with their mothers, and that the extended family should pick up the slack and provide care within the family context. The economic realities of farming and rural living, however, are no longer consistent with this view.

Quality child care makes economic sense.

“Failure to invest in all stages of human development, particularly in the early years, will negatively affect future economic prosperity. . .”

*Daniel Keating and Fraser Mustard
(Our Promise to Children)*

Rural child care, based initially on the extended family, has made an uneasy shift from supportive care within a family structure to the concept of care outside the family in a formal, licensed setting (child care centres, licensed in-home care) or the more informal baby-sitting arrangement with a neighbour. But it has made the shift, and certain changes in the family structure are permanent.

The family has undergone what amounts to an operational restructuring. The number of women engaged in full or part-time work outside the home is increasing. Approximately 65% of mothers with young children take on some form of paid employment outside of the home. Within the farming and tourism communities women are operational partners, performing a wide range of functions essential to the business of these and other seasonal occupations.

The 1996 census reported that of the 53,850 farm operators with an agricultural occupation, 12,040 were women. An additional 14,155 were engaged in off-farm occupations. This latter does not mean that the women working off the farm did not contribute to the work on the farm, but rather that more hours were reported for off-farm work. Other rural women are engaged in home-based work for considerable periods of time.

In addition, there are increasing numbers of commuters who live in rural areas but who work in towns and cities. Given a shortage of job opportunities in small rural communities, women as well as men are likely to travel some distance to their place of work. In short, child care outside the family has become a necessity. As parents struggle to adjust to the realities of socioeconomic change and mothers become key players in the workforce, it is essential that

A society that values the economic contribution of women and the contribution of parents in raising the next generation . . . adapt to these realities.
(Early Years Study, 1999)

A symbiotic relationship exists between child care and the local economy. Child care allows parents and particularly women to become productive participants in the workforce. The providers of child care services, whether centre or home-based, private or non-profit, are members of the service business community. Child care services create jobs and support other businesses in the community with their purchasing power, which in turn brings money back into the community.

Child care has an impact on the broader economic picture, both rural and urban, across the province. Universal access to four pillar child care (quality, appropriate, affordable and flexible) increases participation in the workforce and provides for the early intellectual, emotional and physical development of the children who represent Ontario and Canada's future. Quality child care makes economic

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sense; investment in child care is an investment in the future that pays dividends in terms of reducing social spending on possible future problems in the same way that preventive dentistry reduces the need for expensive remedial work later in life.

During this period of rapid change, it is important to recognize the interdependence of economic and social development. Successful 'new economies' will place a high premium on knowledge and innovation, which depend on a society's human resources. Failure to invest in all stages of human development, particularly the early years, will negatively affect future economic prosperity in two ways. First, we may lack the human resources needed to sustain future economic growth. Second, we may increase the social burden arising from problems that begin early in an individual's development and that can increase multiple costs for the individual and for society over time.

Daniel Keating and Fraser Mustard (Our Promise to Children)

WHAT RURAL STAKEHOLDERS SAID

The stakeholders - parents, child care providers, representatives from farm organizations - recognize the changing needs of rural communities and the opportunity the current move from provincial to municipal management offers. They also recognize that today's farming and other rural communities want to ensure that rural society's core traditions and values are maintained. This includes supporting the family as a unit and offering choice to parents. The stakeholders have a long-standing investment in finding creative solutions to the complex problems of rural child care, and they want child care and early child development built into the foundation of the new Ontario.

The once traditional supports of the extended family and the close-knit community have been eroded. This means that, without quality child care, rural children are put at a disadvantage when they are denied access to programmes and services that create an environment in which social, emotional, cognitive and physical development are nurtured. The provincial government recognizes that

Children ensure that a society goes on and determine . . . the quality of that society.
(Early Years Study, April 1999)

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture policy statement supports these critical concerns:

There is an urgent need for accessible, affordable and high-quality child care in rural areas particularly for families working in agriculture. The demand for child care is increasing among farm families, as both parents are required to devote more of their energy to full-time work on the farm. As well, a growing number of parents are working off-farm in order to supplement family income.
(Ontario Federation of Agriculture)

The policy goes on to recognize those conditions and circumstances that exacerbate the problem of support in rural areas: seasonal fluctuations in the demand for child care; a scattered population with relatively few users for any one type of service; little if any public transportation and long distances to be traveled; and the appropriateness of the type of care, such as that provided in the home of the child whose parents are both engaged in full- or part-time farm operations. While these are issues identified by OFA on behalf of its constituents, other rural families will relate to them and acknowledge the validity of the OFA statement.

Many factors impinge upon the cohesive life of a rural community. Rural schools, for instance, have traditionally been an integral part of a closely-knit system of community supports, programmes and special events. Child care programmes and services, from formal licensed care to child care resource centres with a spectrum of informal support for children and parents, often use space in local schools. Changes to school boundaries and allocation of available space mean some rural schools may be closed, and those that remain may no longer be in a position to provide space for child care programmes. Those schools which can provide ongoing, sessional or occasional space require rent beyond the means of small rural organizations.

A question raised by stakeholders is why schools in danger of being closed cannot be used more effectively through a shared service approach. Inclusive child care programmes offering the spectrum of services to children and parents, including before and after-school programmes, make an appropriate fit with schools. Child care resource centres could be suitably located in rural schools, as could outreach services such as community mental health and public health, as well as other programmes directed at families and children. Rural schools could become the hubs for many programmes and services. Costs could be shared between programmes.

What is at issue here is the funding and ownership of both programmes and facilities. The federal and provincial governments have a complex system of funding streams for child-related programmes; in addition, public foundations provide funding in some

Conditions that exacerbate the problem of support in rural areas:

- seasonal fluctuations in the demand for child care
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cases for similar programmes. Community solutions are frequently thwarted because funding is applied narrowly with little fiscal collaboration between funding bodies and government departments. Because governments have a limited lifespan and tend to work within a four-year horizon, what is missing is a long-term strategic approach to the broader problem of child care and parent supports in terms of policy and funding. As a result, local structures are not able to do their own long-term planning.

Transportation is a major issue in rural areas. Working parents from rural areas who require before and after-school care have to make complicated and frequently unsatisfactory arrangements for their children. Before and after-school programmes pose logistical problems for rural children because they depend on the school bus for transportation, and school bus scheduling policies are based, in part, on the normal school day. Changes to education funding may lead to even more restrictive policies, thereby adding to the existing problems and leaving parents and children with even fewer options.

WHAT GOVERNMENT IS SAYING

Both the provincial and federal governments are developing new directives and strategies for children. In Ontario, the Children's Secretariat envisions a family, child and community-oriented approach to those services and supports that promote the healthy growth and development of Ontario's children. The Secretariat's position regarding partnerships in the implementation of its vision is that all sectors - public, private and community - will be involved in identifying and solving problems. The Secretariat seeks to foster a unified approach that will lead to community-based initiatives and models. This could mean radical change in the way child care services are provided in the future.

The federal government has assigned responsibility for the implementation of the Agenda for Canada's Children to Human Resources Development Canada. The approach of the federal government is to engage key partners in dialogue with a view to developing an integrated strategy for children based on the communities' wisdom and understanding of what is required, and to determine which partners will work most effectively together to produce a holistic approach to children's needs at the community level.

Both Queen's Park and Ottawa have a clear message: governments will not be solely responsible for developing, managing or financing solutions or programmes for children. Future funding will be a combination of public and private investment with communities finding additional resources from within. Demonstration projects will show the way for innovation in collaborative design, structure and resources for models that work best.

What is missing is a long-term strategic approach to the broader problem of child care and parent supports in terms of policy and funding.

KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Day Nurseries Act: Regulations and Policies

Issues:

- The Day Nurseries Act (DNA) regulations and policies for centre-based and in-home child care were developed to address an urban need and do not reflect the realities of service delivery in rural areas, with the result that flexible child care programmes are difficult to establish and maintain.
- Rural programmes have the unique challenges of small, spread out populations, long distances and isolation, which make them more expensive to operate.
- Locations that conform to DNA regulations are difficult to find in many rural areas, resulting in fewer licensed centre-based programmes. Current regulations, such as those that define the number, height and specific use of sinks, make setting up licensed care difficult. Issues of safety, quality, early learning, child development and enriched socialization are constant. Parents would like the option of formal care.
- Where informal care is chosen, or where it is the only option available, there are issues of continuity of care, safety, quality of programming, training and monitoring of caregivers who do not operate under the auspices of a licensing agency.
- Inclusion of RSPs in the calculation of fee subsidy disqualifies many farming and other self-employed parents from receiving the child care subsidy.
- Self-employed operators in farming, tourism and other seasonal industries usually have high front-end costs at the time when they most require child care. The resulting cash-flow problem, together with disqualification of subsidy because of the RSP inclusion, reduces child care choices.
- Rural small business owners may experience cash-flow problems. Depending on the type of business, stock is usually purchased on a seasonal basis with recovery of the investment dependent on many variables. The cost of child care can be restrictive to small business owners throughout the year.

Recommendations:

1. Modify regulations and policies to reflect changing societal norms with respect to the family and workplace, including more options for licensing locations where care is provided. Allow for flexibility in order to provide the full range of services.
2. Review regulations and policies with a view to addressing the complexities of self-employed people with regard to eligibility for child care subsidies; the Ontario government should continue to work with the federal government to ensure that child care expense deductions reflect the true cost of child care.
3. Ontario should examine social support systems of other countries with similar rural situations for potential solutions.

Allow, with provincial approval, that parent fees are retained by the municipality for reinvestment in child/parent programmes . . .

- Recommendation #7

Realignment of Child Care Services and Municipal Responsibilities

Issues:

- Municipalities now have responsibility for a fragmented and complex mix of programmes merged with a system of child care, which is itself complex and variable in content across the province.
- Experience in the planning and management of child care services varies from municipality to municipality.
- Small rural municipalities with low density/geographic factors are and will be disadvantaged. The full spectrum of required programmes should be assured.
- Rural municipalities attached to urban areas will contribute to the regional child care system without necessarily seeing an improvement in services to rural areas.
- Silo funding to municipalities will mean a lack of flexibility and discretion in the allocation of funds between programmes. Base funding will be required to provide maximum flexibility and consistency in child care funding with service levels maintained at the level already approved by the ministry.
- Child care budgets will be calculated at 80% of the net cost rather than gross.
- Consistency in child care programmes across the area to be covered should be assured.

Recommendations:

Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSAB) have the responsibility to plan and manage all aspects of service delivery at the local level. The term "local level" has very different connotations in rural areas than in urban centres. With this in mind, the recommendations are as follows:

4. Encourage CMSM/DSSAB to use a coordinated approach to the delivery of child care programmes within an integrated model.
5. Ensure that child care budgets have consolidated base funding with flexibility to allocate funds as needed at the local level.
6. Ensure that municipalities have adequate financial and training resources to address the unique needs associated with child care planning and provision in rural areas.
7. Allow, with provincial approval, that parent fees are retained by the municipality for reinvestment in child/parent programmes, thus enhancing the ability of the municipality to develop or enrich programmes appropriate to the local context.
8. Review per capita funding via the province and develop equalization measures to ensure that low child populations, distance and isolation do not hamper meeting the distinct needs of rural areas.
9. Consider the timely transfer of child care licensing authority from the province to the municipalities, with appropriate provincial funding, to enable total service system management by CMSMs/DSSABs at the local level.

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Fragmentation

Issues:

- The system is a patchwork of programmes developed to address a wide variety of needs identified over a number of years.
- The family is not recognized as a unit with needs that vary or fluctuate with circumstances.
- Families have to fit the system rather than the system fit their needs.
- Lack of readily available information about child care, available child care choices and parenting supports causes confusion and frustration.
- Associated but distinct services may not be coordinated.
- Fragmented services, policies and funding streams create difficulties for families with multiple needs attempting to navigate their way through the system.
- Distance and transportation are major factors in accessibility to programmes and services.
- Better coordination between all ministries involved with children's programmes and the Children's Secretariat is needed.

Recommendations:

The province should enable municipalities to unify the child care system at local levels by:

10. Allowing for integrated case management for families with multiple needs and encouraging local strategic partnerships for planning and consensus building regarding what models will work best and service delivery. The ideal would be a single point of contact for the parent. This will also make for more effective use of funding.
11. Encouraging further inter-ministerial collaboration to remove barriers that impede the smooth transformation of a complex system to one that is seamless at the local level for end users and managers.

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CONCLUSION

Under the leadership of CMSM/DSSAB, local communities together with partners can play their part in undertaking a local planning process to find local solutions in a truly collaborative way to move beyond the existing infrastructure. Studies have been done, pilot and demonstration projects have been implemented and many lessons have been learned. There is a growing body of information and practical experience, which provides a basis for initiating the next steps. These include the CMSM/DSSAB doing the following:

- Taking a step back from what exists now and assessing the current legislative and regulatory framework in the light of circumstances that pertain to rural areas.
- Rethinking and regrouping the existing and potential human and financial resources to create value added for the rural communities and for the funders, both private and public.

Creating strategies for implementing a new framework for rural child care is a daunting task. Realignment has presented the opportunity to revisit many issues and concerns regarding child care in rural Ontario. Whatever structures are created should be adaptive in order to accommodate fluctuations in need, including seasonal demands for child care, shift work and transportation. Flexibility should be built into service provision with changes to the Day Nurseries Act regulations, which will remove current blocks to setting up licensed care in rural areas. Standards of health, safety and quality of care provided should not be compromised by modified regulations.

Flexible models should be considered as a means of providing information on and access to the spectrum of services, along with the capacity for monitoring and training of in-home child care providers. Information on all child and parent related programmes and services should be integrated and made available in a variety of formats, including sign language and Braille.

Consideration should be given to a more comprehensive use of rural schools, thereby increasing the access to and efficiency of programmes and services to children.

The four pillars of affordable, accessible, flexible, quality child care should be incorporated into planning models.

Finally, previous learning and the experience gained through pilot projects that have demonstrated workable solutions to the provision of child care in rural areas should be incorporated into the planning process.

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Elaine Ball, Ontario Rural Child Care Committee
Barbara Brownell, Ontario Rural Council
Jackie Canning, Ontario Farm Women's Network
Bette-Jean Crews, Ontario Federation of Agriculture &
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Tim Frakes, Ontario Federation of Agriculture (research)
Jean Kellogg, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association
Pat Morgan, Farm Safety Association
Ellie Renaud, Rural Ontario Municipal Association
Mary Robertson, Ontario Rural Council*
Brenda Wilton, Ontario Rural Child Care Committee

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GLOSSARY

Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO)
Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM)
District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSAB)
Farm Safety Association (FSA)
Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC)
Junior Farmers' Association of Ontario (JFAO)
Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA)
Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation (MCCR)
Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS)
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH)
Ontario Farm Women's Network (OFWN)
Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA)
Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA)
Ontario Rural Child Care Committee (ORCC)
Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) – rural caucus of AMO
The Ontario Rural Council (TORC)

CHANGING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Province

- Sets legislative framework, standards, policy objectives and policy directions/priorities
- Issues directives and guidelines
- Reviews delivery agent's budget and enters into service contract with delivery agent
- Monitors: budget; service contract; compliance with directives
- Develops child care service planning framework (including performance measures) and approves local child care plans
- Promotes linkages to other children's services
- Funds development of the Ontario Child Care Service Management System
- Continues to license, inspect and enforce standards
- Funds 80% share of programme costs and 50% share of administrative costs attributed to municipalities
- Funds 100% of costs attributed to territory without municipal organization

Municipalities

- Participate in policy forums and joint working groups
- Provide information, consultation and advice
- Enter into service contracts with MCSS
- Manage implementation of service contracts
- Manage the delivery of child care services consistent with MCSS directives and guidelines
- Develop local child care plans
- Install and maintain an information technology system required for service management, and to meet provincial reporting requirements
- Fund 20% of programme costs and 50% of administrative costs attributed to municipalities
- Enter into agreements with service providers for child care services
- Manage fee subsidies (take client applications, administer eligibility test, place children, manage waiting list)