

Toronto looks to expand child-care services for Indigenous families ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

As part of its response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, Toronto is looking to improve child-care services for Indigenous families.

A report adopted at Monday's community development and recreation committee meeting details a plan to increase the number of "culturally relevant" child-care spaces. The Ministry of Education has earmarked up to \$93 million for this expansion across the province over the next two years, according to the report.

Toronto Children's Services is currently working in partnership with the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council to assess the needs of the community before submitting the proposal for funding to the Ministry of Education.

Based on initial feedback, the plan is to open Indigenous early-years centres in four parts of the city with a higher concentration of Indigenous families: Mount Dennis, West Don Lands, East York and Scarborough. There would also be a centre focused on serving two-spirited children and families in the downtown core, as well as mobile child and family programs across the city.

The final project proposal will be submitted to the Ministry of Education at the end of the month.

Expanding these services would be important for increasing cultural safety, said Crystal Basi, a parent and executive director of the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council.

"We have a significant two-spirit population, for example, families that need very specific services to feel safe and included," she said. "They can't necessarily find that in the mainstream organizations."

It's important that families and children get access to programs that are led and governed by members of Toronto's Indigenous communities, said Karen Gray, director of planning and policy development at Toronto Children's Services.

She said the city has only one Indigenous-governed child-care provider: the Native Child and Family Life Centre in Scarborough, where staff speak Cree and Ojibway languages. There are only about 40 spots for children aged 0-6.

"If you think of how large our urban Indigenous community is, we really have a long ways to go to address the access for our Indigenous people," she said.

-reprinted from Metro

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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