



January 8, 2018

**Councillor Gary Crawford, Chair
Members of the Budget Committee**

2nd floor, Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Councillor Gary Crawford and Members of the Budget Committee,

Re: Supporting a budget that prioritizes children 6-12 in Toronto

Middle Childhood Matters Coalition Toronto (MCMCT) is an active group of concerned social service agencies and community members with a long-standing commitment to working together with parents. MCMCT has worked for more than 14 years to make Toronto a city where all children 6-12 years old and their families have equitable opportunities and resources to thrive.

There is increasing evidence in research, policy and service evaluations that middle childhood (ages 6-12) is a foundational period for child development and health and wellbeing. In 2012, City Council played a leadership role and made a commitment to ensure that children ages 6-12 have access to high-quality, appropriate, and locally-situated supports by adopting the *Middle Childhood Strategy*. Children's Services' *2015-2019 Service Plan* and *TO Prosperity: Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy* further supported this commitment by identifying the need to improve access to high quality programs for children and youth.

Access to out of school time programming is one key support to help children aged 6-12 to achieve developmental milestones and thrive. It also assists parents to participate in the labour force by caring for these children after school. However, many families and equity-seeking neighbourhoods struggle to access these programs. There are approximately 22,000 licensed children care school age spaces, about half of which have subsidies. The unaffordable rates and lack of access to subsidies is compounded by the inequitable distribution of program spaces for children. Better support and integration of programming opportunities for children 6- 12 will mean that more Toronto parents can be more productive between the hours of 3-6:00 p.m. and during the summer, knowing their children are well-cared for and safe.

We urge you to make choices to prioritize children and their families in the 2018 budget. We recommend that you adopt the following budget enhancements:

- **Toronto Middle Childhood Strategy:** We urge you to ensure that the 2018 budget includes at least one full-time staff person dedicated to overseeing the implementation of this Strategy and related policies and initiatives. Middle childhood is an important stage in a child's life and the City has a valuable role to play in ensuring children receive high-quality supports and services. We are worried that progress in this area has been stagnant in recent years.
- **TO Prosperity: Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy:** Fully fund the commitments outlined in TO Prosperity in 2018 and develop targeted action plans to help children, youth and families who are most affected by poverty (indigenous families, racialized families, newcomers, and single parent families). Implementation of this strategy will ensure that children and youth have access to the necessities that they are entitled to and lead fulfilling and meaningful lives.
- **Recreation programs:** Additional recreation spaces are desperately needed to address the unmet demand represented in the growing waitlist. Following the goal of City Council, we support adding 20,000 new recreation spaces in 2018. While recreation programs serve residents of all ages, their benefits directly and indirectly impact children ages 6-12.
- **Welcome Policy:** While we were encouraged to see that the budget included an inflationary increase to the Welcome Policy, we were surprised that it also included a \$600,000 decrease to reflect historical service levels. According to Children's Services' 2015-2019 Service Plan, access to programming for children 6-12 is particularly challenging for newcomer families. We feel this issue should be further investigated to understand why there is not more significant uptake of the Welcome Policy.
- **Student nutrition:** The preliminary budget does not include funding for year six of the expansion and enhancement of the student nutrition program. Toronto continues to be the child poverty capital of Canada, and every day children go to school hungry. When children are hungry they struggle to concentrate, suffer from headaches and stomach aches, and may withdraw or act out. This affects their ability to thrive and reach their full potential.
- **Child care subsidies and related programs and services:** 825 new child care subsidies in addition to several other programs and services related to child care amounting to \$48 million were referred to the budget process for consideration. Most of this funding has already been committed by other orders of government and the City absolutely must contribute their share of \$2.1 million. Toronto families spend more on child-care, up to \$20,000 a year, than other major cities. These funds would allow more families to have access to affordable, high-quality child care.



- **Child care occupancy grant:** We were encouraged to see that the preliminary budget includes funding for the child care occupancy grant provided to school boards, however are concerned that this may be a temporary solution. We hope that as you move forward with city planning and budgeting, you will work with the Province and school boards to develop a long-term solution that satisfies all parties.
- **Community grants:** Many non-profit organizations that provide important community services, including before and after school programs, rely on city funding through community grants programs, like the Community Partnership and Investment Program, the Toronto Urban Health Fund and arts grants administered by the Toronto Arts Council. In addition to inflationary increases, we urge you to include additional funding to support non-profits to meet Bill 148 legislative requirements. The minimum wage increase and two personal emergency leave days are important benefits that all workers will enjoy, however, the city has a responsibility to adjust funding and support non-profits in making this transition.

The 2018 budget is an opportunity for you, members of City Council, to deliver on your promises to support children and their families.

On behalf of the more than 180,000 children 6-12 in Toronto, we thank you in advance for making the decisions that will allow Toronto to be a fair and prosperous city for all. For more information about Middle Childhood Matters Coalition Toronto or to meet with us, please contact our project coordinator, Shaden Jabahi at shaden@middlechildhoodmatters.ca or 647-210-4105.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ian Edward", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Ian Edward

Chair of Middle Childhood Matters Coalition Toronto

Website: www.middlechildhoodmatters.ca

Twitter: [@MCMCToronto](https://twitter.com/MCMCToronto)