

NORTH LAMBTON CHILDCARE CENTRE

Message from the Executive Director– 2021

2021 was year two of operations during the COVID-19 pandemic and North Lambton Childcare Centre (NLCC) remained steadfast in its commitment to safely operate child care and early years services. I witnessed an unwavering commitment and dedication from all levels of our organization. NLCC continued to adapt quickly and find innovative solutions in the face of adversity. This was evident in our child care programs adjusting to the ever-changing operating guidance provided by the Ministry and local public health or in the EarlyON Child and Family Centres responding and supporting families in unique ways.

Our educators and support staff continued to demonstrate resilience and flexibility as we navigated the unknown. Our staff's skills and expertise are invaluable contributions to the success of NLCC.

Saying thank you may not seem adequate. Board members, thank you for your leadership, governance, and guidance supporting management, staff, families, and the safe operations of NLCC. You have all volunteered your precious time to find solutions as we continue down this road to recovery. To our educators and staff, thank you for keeping one another safe and our children well cared for. I have said this many times over the years, NLCC simply would not be without the passionate educators who provide learning experiences with children that encourage play, exploration, and inquiry. Thank you to our families for your patience and trust you have placed with us. COVID-19 restrictions have resulted in very untypical experiences for our families. We have begun refocusing on creating environments that welcomes families into our programs in meaningful ways.

Looking back on 2021, the Board of Directors have supported staff with additional paid COVID-19 sick days and supported families by not charging fees for any child absences related to COVID-19. NLCC provided free Emergency Child Care to those who qualified at three sites when schools were ordered to close in January and March 2021. EarlyON Child and Family Centres had a roller coaster of a year, having to close for indoor programs most of the year. Our educators are amazing in how they adapted to offering a wide variety of virtual programs throughout this pandemic. Also, outdoor programs were offered rain or shine, promoting the well-being of children and their families as they all enjoyed the positive benefits of being outside and connecting with nature and each other. For a very brief time at the end of 2021, we quietly celebrated the re-opening of EarlyON at our new and beautiful location at Lambton Central Collegiate and Vocational Institute in Petrolia.

The evidence is clear. Quality early learning and child care supports children and families, whether these families live in rural Lambton County or in the city of Toronto. Quality early learning and care can only be delivered by a team of well-supported registered Early Childhood Educators and staff. The pandemic has only intensified an already emerging issue – it is difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff. Unfortunately, NLCC is not immune to this crisis, even though the organization has been proactive in providing competitive wages and unique benefits. Ontario has taken a crucial step and signed on to the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care plan. Ultimately, parent fees will reduce to \$10 per day for children under the age of five. There is also a commitment to increase the number of child care spaces in the province. As important, the province must also ensure that wages earned are competitive and attractive to entice our work force to stay working in the early years. I look forward to seeing the province's promise of a well-supported and stable compensation for early Childhood Educators in licensed child care come to light.

I look forward to 2022 and witnessing NLCC as it thrives through adversity. Alongside amazing educators and support staff, NLCC can stand proud because of our core values and beliefs, continuing to provide high quality child care and early years services to families in our communities.

Respectfully Submitted,

Claire Giles

Executive Director