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**A Report on the Well-Being of  
Lambton County's Young Children  
2008**

# **Best Start**



**Today's Children...Lambton's Future**

Ensuring that children enter school ready to learn is a well-established goal of the Province of Ontario and the County of Lambton. Dramatic changes over the past three decades in the structure of Canadian families and the economy, as well as emerging research on the importance of early brain development, have increased the demand for public investments in the early years from conception to 6 years of age. This challenge requires a shared vision and cross sector, public and private commitment to services and programs that are equitable, coordinated, of high quality and sustainable over the long term.

In early 2005, the Province of Ontario signalled its commitment to children and families with the introduction of a comprehensive, evidence-based early learning and care strategy designed to help give Ontario's children the best possible start in life, and help them achieve success in school. This ambitious transformation agenda is called Best Start and forms the foundation of a broader based initiative to provide children with opportunities for health and well-being, and the chance to assume productive roles within their families and communities.

Best Start is well-positioned as a platform to help facilitate and play a leadership role in enhancing the capacities of communities to improve the environments in which babies are conceived and young children grow and develop. Best Start can provide important lessons learned to other parts of the province about what it takes to build a high performing early childhood system that can improve outcomes for young children and their families, and promote the development of healthy, educated, confident and productive adults. Investing in children is an investment in Ontario's future.



**The work of building positive and nurturing environments for children requires the buy-in and participation from all people in Lambton County including: businesses, service providers, political leaders, and decision makers. Everyone needs to understand the importance of early childhood for later school and adult performance. This is a transformational change that requires a shift in thinking and awareness, as well as an increased level of public engagement.**

In the Spring of 2008, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, released its strategic framework to address improving how services are provided to Ontario's children, youth and their families. This document is intended to galvanize partners towards a shared purpose and challenges them to achieve common aims for all children and youth. Lambton County, through the Best Start Network, is already engaged in this type of work. The network has assumed leadership and through collaborative relationships, has demonstrated its capacity to address multiple and interrelated challenges that require multiple and interrelated solutions. The Best Start Network has developed the infrastructure and developed the collaborative relationships to mobilize the strategic framework agenda.

Work has started on the part of the Province of Ontario to develop comprehensive poverty reduction strategies. What is known about the importance of the early years, clearly positions investments in children and families as one of the most powerful poverty reduction strategies. This document is a **call to action** for residents of Lambton County and a challenge to participate in creating a vital community, that has the capacity to support its children and families who are able to make positive contributions to society.





# What is Best Start?

Best Start in Lambton County offers children an opportunity to enhance their foundation in life because ***Today's Children are Lambton's Future***. Best Start programs and services are offered through the collaboration of community partnerships and are available throughout Lambton County.

Neuroscience and human development studies show that experience-based brain development in the early years of life affects learning, behaviour, and health throughout a person's life (McCain & Mustard, 1999). Best Start recognizes the importance of this research and puts the lessons learned into practice. Lambton County has embraced the Best Start vision, creating unique partnerships to transform our community into a healthy and nurturing environment for all children and their families. The community is united to ensure our children are given every opportunity to access early learning. We each have an important role in making this happen. This comprehensive approach to child development and early learning facilitates a successful entry to adulthood and work.



## Through the early learning and care hubs:

- children will be assessed for problems or delays with all aspects of their development
- children and parents will have access to a wide range of early learning and care services
- children who need more specialized services will be referred to services linked to the hub (i.e. developmental services, children's treatment services, child welfare services)
- parents will have access to flexible programs available at times that meet their needs

**“For a small child there is no division between playing and learning; between the things he or she does “just for fun” and things that are “educational”. The child learns while living and any part of living that is enjoyable is also play.”**

Penelope Leach



**“Research clearly illustrates that high quality community child care centres are effective in promoting the development of at risk and not at risk children. Living in a family that is supportive of children's development does not protect the child from the negative effects of poor quality child care.”**

Gillian Doherty



**Today's Children...Lambton's Future**

Communities play an important role in providing the supports necessary to foster, nurture and develop healthy children, parents, and families. The following information provides a snapshot of the County of Lambton provided by the Statistics Canada 2006 Census.

*The total population has slightly increased:*

- Total population of Lambton County in 2006—128,204, a 1% increase from 2001.
- Children between the ages of 0 to 6 are 7% of the total population.

*Female-led lone parent families remained the majority of lone-parent families reported in Lambton County during the 2006 census:*

- 5,355 of Lambton County's census families were lone-parent families—81.7% were female lone-parent families, similar to the provincial average of 81.6%.
- Average after-tax income in 2005 for female-lone parent families was \$31,579, \$2,627 less than the provincial average.
- Male lone-parent average after-tax income in 2005 was only \$534 less than the provincial average at \$43,438.
- Approximately 28% of private households (couple households with children) had an after-tax average income of \$75,472, \$1,377 higher than the provincial average at \$74,095.
- Percentage of Lambton County residents in low income after-tax for all persons was 6.5%, and 7.8% for persons less than 18 years of age. Figures for Ontario were 11.1% and 13.7% respectively.



*Educational Achievement: In comparison to the province, Lambton County reported:*

- higher percentages of residents having achieved a high school certificate or equivalent, an apprenticeship/trades certificate or diploma, and a college, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma.
- lower percentages of residents having achieved a university certificate or diploma below the bachelor level, and university certificate, diploma or degree.
- similar percentages of residents who had no certificate, diploma or degree.

*Diversity in Lambton County:*

- 1,010 people immigrated to Lambton County during the period of 2001 to 2006.
- As of 2006, 3,105 people indicated French only and English and French as their mother tongue.
- 4.6% of the total population is of aboriginal identity, representing an 8% increase in population since 2001. The aboriginal population of Lambton County is approximately 2.5 times greater than the provincial aboriginal population.
- The average age of the aboriginal population in Lambton County is approximately 29 years, compared to 42.8 years for all of Lambton County.

*Employment and unemployment rates changed slightly from 2001 to 2006, mirroring provincial rates:*

- Employment rate in Lambton County was 60.1% in 2006 and 59.7% in 2001.
- Unemployment rate was 6.5% in 2006 and 6.6% in 2001.
- Primary occupations held by Lambton County residents were sales and service occupations; trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations; and business, finance and administration occupations.

#### **Did you know?**

**“The education level of a mother also has significant impact on child development. Recent research has demonstrated a strong link between maternal education and levels of vocabulary development”.**

The Well-Being of Canada's Young Children, Government of Canada Report, 2003.



# The Importance of Early Years

A quality early childhood system will ensure that children and their families get the best start in life. The phrase “it takes a village to raise a child” has never been more important than it is now. As a community, we need to invest in early learning experiences that provide strong foundations for families to succeed and reach their full potential.

**Leading economists have concluded that investing in young children may be the best way to stimulate economic growth. Getting it right when they are young is ultimately more effective and less costly, to society as well as the child, than trying to fix it. In addition, early education is the most cost effective way to decrease the number of future unskilled adults.**

Source: Heckman

The optimal and most important time for learning is between birth and age six. A child is born with 100 billion brain cells. Many of these cells are waiting to be connected. How these cells will be connected and strengthened depends upon a child’s first experiences. Positive early learning experiences influence a child’s capacity to handle stress, form positive social relationships and increases problem-solving abilities.

*“The brain is without doubt our most fascinating organ. Parents, educators and society as a whole have a tremendous power to shape the wrinkly universe inside each child’s head, and, with it, the kind of person he or she will turn out to be. We owe it to our children to help them grow the best brains possible.”*

Lois Eliot, PhD.



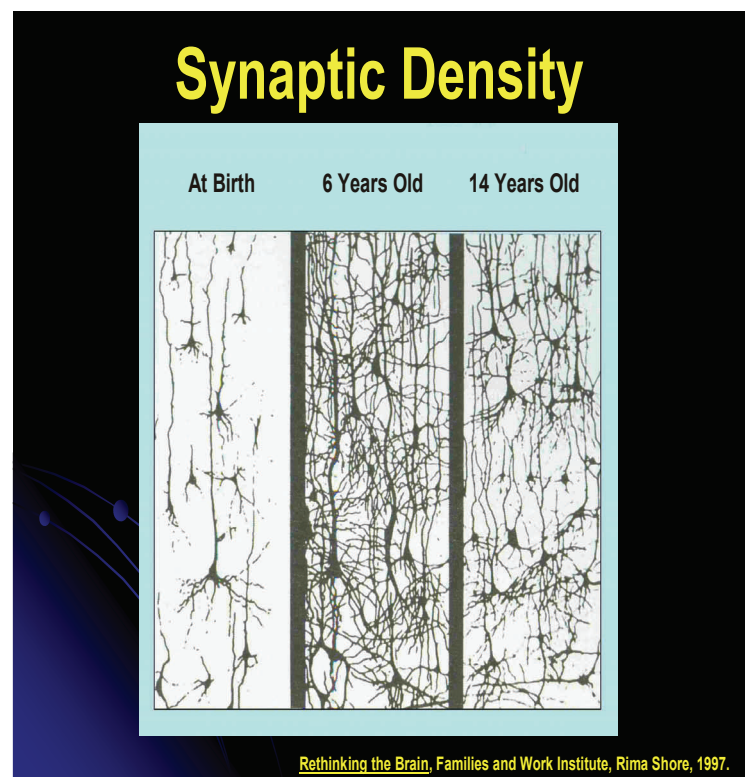
## Did You Know:

- Brain development is rapid and extensive.
- 90% of brain growth occurs from birth to five years.
- 25% of Canadian children from birth to 11 years are experiencing learning or behavioural difficulties.
- Children with early childhood education experiences are better prepared when they start school and 30% more likely to graduate from high school than their peers that did not attend an early learning program.
- “Your child learns more in their first three years than adults do in a decade” (zero5.org).

**“In today’s world, where education and skills determine future earnings, the economic and social costs to individuals, communities and the nation of not taking action on early childhood education are far too great to ignore, especially when the benefits outweigh the costs”.**

The Business Roundtable and Corporate Voices for Working Families, 2003

This graph shows the growth of brain connections between birth and age 6, and the pruning that takes place by age 14.



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# Parent/Caregiver Education and Family Support

Learning starts at home. The family plays the most important role in a child's life. Programs directed at helping parents/caregivers accomplish better outcomes for their children provide a significant opportunity to influence positive parenting/caregiving skills. Recent research tells us that parenting/caregiving is not necessarily a natural skill and most parents/caregivers benefit from some degree of guidance.

Parent/caregiver support programs:

- teach parents/caregivers how a child develops emotionally, socially and cognitively, and about effective parenting/caregiving practices.
- provide a social network for parents/caregivers through staff and other parents/caregivers.
- promote sensitive, responsive and warm parent/child, caregiver/child relationships.
- help link parents/caregivers to other services.

## Did you know?

- In Lambton County, parent/caregiver support programs are provided in Best Start Hubs, which are conveniently located in communities across the area, and provide families with seamless access for a variety of early childhood services.
- Parenting practices have more effects on child vulnerability than income. Positive parenting practices are directly related to better behaviour and learning outcomes for young children.
- Transportation is available to assist parents and caregivers to attend programs at the Best Start Hubs.
- In 2007, 3,929 parents and caregivers accessed education programs through the Children's Services Department and the local Ontario Early Years Centres.

- Early Literacy Specialists are available to support community agencies.

Parenting programs and supports are available, providing families with what they need when they need it. Community awareness is key for local agencies to know what is available in their communities to better refer families to services.



Parents in our community have access to many tangible supports including libraries, licensed child care, Ontario Early Years Centre programs, recreational services and schools. Research suggests that parents want to feel supported and valued by society for what they do. Parents need a place to come together with other parents to feel a sense of community. Through parent engagement strategies, parents have a voice in how services are arranged and delivered. The need to involve parents and listen to their voice in all early childhood services is clearly recognized.

*“Family is the first school for young children, and parents are powerful models.”*

Alice Sterling Honig.



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# Promoting Healthy Children & Families

## Did you know?

Not all children in our community have access to a Family Physician (The Physician Recruitment Taskforce of Sarnia-Lambton, 2008):

- Approximately 32,000 people do not have access to a family doctor.
- Lambton needs 25 new family doctors to meet the needs of families in our community.

Preterm, low birth weight and infant mortality rates are slightly below the provincial rates (Lambton County 2007 Health Status Report: Reproductive Health):

- Approximately 7% of Lambton live births were preterm in 2004 (compared to 7.5% for Ontario births).
- For the 3-year period from 2002 to 2004, 3.8% of singleton births in Lambton County were low birth weight (compared to 4.5% for Ontario births).
- In 2004, Lambton's infant mortality rate was 3.4 deaths per 1000 live births (compared to 5.5 deaths per 1,000 live births in Ontario).



Increasingly, Canadian children are becoming more overweight and sedentary (Statistics Canada 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey on Nutrition):

- 27.5% of children aged 2 to 17 years of age are either overweight or obese.
- 58% of Canadian children eat less than the recommended 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day.

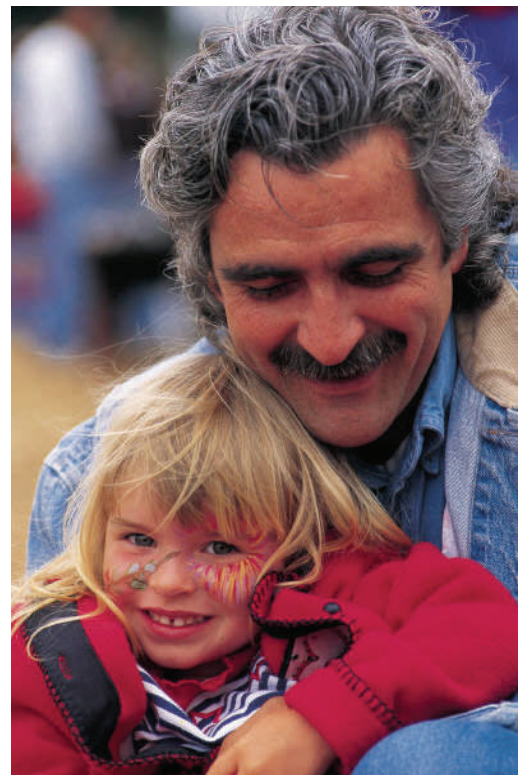
Immunizations are one of the best ways to put an end to the serious effects of certain diseases:

- Lambton County had 90% compliance for mandatory vaccines for all children in the 2nd Grade in 2007/2008 (Environmental Health and Prevention Services).

The two most preventable risk factors for respiratory disease are exposure to tobacco smoke and air quality:

- 25.7% of Lambton males and 23.5% of Lambton females reported to smoke daily or occasionally (Canadian Community Health Survey, Cycle 3.1, 2005).
- 19% of babies delivered at Bluewater Health in 2005 were delivered to women who reported smoking throughout their pregnancy.
- Lambton County has historically had elevated levels of various pollutants, including fine particulate matter, ground-level ozone and sulphur dioxide.
- While local data is not available for prevalence of asthma in children less than 12 years of age, 9.8% of Lambton residents aged 12 years and older had physician-diagnosed asthma compared to 8% provincially. In 2006/2007 there were 64 asthma-related hospitalizations among Lambton residents with more than half of these attributed to children birth to nine years of age (Lambton County 2008 Health Status Report: Mortality and Chronic Disease).

Early identification and intervention are critical for improving developmental outcomes.



# Promoting Healthy Children & Families

## Why is it important?

What happens in the first years of life, even prenatally, has a significant impact on who children become. Providing access to family doctors and primary care practitioners is one of the best defences against poor health and poor developmental outcomes. A healthy birth weight is the first precursor to lifelong wellness. Weight, nutrition, and activity level, alongside age appropriate experiences and a stimulating environment, are important for optimal development.



## What we are doing about it:

- The Physician Recruitment Taskforce of Lambton continues to actively seek out doctors for our community.
- Prenatal Health Fairs, 18 month Well Baby Clinics, Parent and Baby drop-ins, Child Check programs, and Ontario Early Years Centres family drop-ins and programs, are held throughout Lambton to provide information, developmental supports and referrals.
- “Let’s Grow” mail-outs continue to be sent regularly to families with young children. 1,008 new families were added to the distribution list in 2007 and 559 new families were added in the first 6 months of 2008.
- The Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives Task Force is moving forward with initiatives to educate and provide resources to our community.
- The Mortality and Chronic Disease Lambton County 2008 Health Status Report suggests further research is needed to determine the extent to which exposure to air pollutants in Lambton contributes to chronic disease.
- Best Start continues to pull together services for families with young children. Integrated service delivery, enhanced early learning experiences and parent supports are combining to develop a strong community commitment to early years child development.

## 18 Month Enhanced Well-Baby Visit

Community public health nurses and primary care practitioners are engaging with families in a thorough developmental assessment at 18 months of age. Education and supports are provided to families and referrals for support services are made.

## Autism Program-Southwest Region

Provides autism support services including an early intensive behavioural intervention program for preschool children and a program to facilitate the transition of children into the school system.

## Blind-Low Vision Program

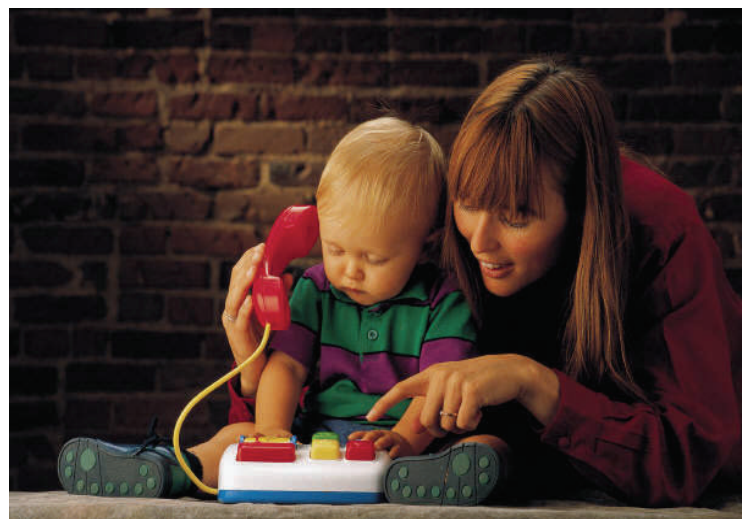
A program that provides education and supports for young children birth to Grade One that are diagnosed blind or with un-correctable low vision.

## Children’s Mental Health Services

Prevention, assessment and treatment services are available for children, youth and families with or at-risk for emotional, social, behavioural and mental health needs. Services also include prevention programs for at-risk children, as well as a family counselling adjunctive service.

## Children’s Treatment Centre Services

Services and supports for families and children birth through transition into adulthood. Services include audiology, augmentative communication, behaviour therapy, early childhood education resource support services, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, respite services, seating and mobility, social work, speech-language pathology and therapeutic recreation.



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# Promoting Healthy Children & Families

## Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program (HBHC)

A program designed to give information and support to families with children (birth to six years). HBHC includes universal screening, assessment and targeted services (in-depth family assessment, nurse and family visitor home visiting and service coordination). Also available are prenatal education, parent education and workshops.

## Family Counselling

Provides a variety of family support and professional counselling, prevention and coordination services. The Centre is the lead for the following programs: Family and Schools Together (F&ST) is an early intervention program designed for families with young children to enhance family functioning and promote success in school. Starting Point is a central point of access mechanism providing information and referrals for all children's services in Lambton County. Special Services at Home (SSAH) provides funding for in-home supports for children under 18 years with a physical disability to make life easier at home and in the community.

## Infant Development Program

Provides screening, assessment, and in-home support for infants and their families who are at risk for, or have been identified with, delays in development due to prematurity, syndromes, medical concerns, or social environment.

## Infant Hearing Program

Almost all newborns have their hearing tested at, or shortly after birth, through the Infant Hearing Program. If identified with a permanent childhood hearing loss, hearing supports and communication development supports are provided locally.



## Ontario Early Years Centres

Programs are designed to help children 0-6 years achieve optimal cognitive, physical, emotional and social development and provide support, education and referral services for their families. Services include: family drop-ins, early learning and literacy programs, parenting programs, and information and training for parents about pregnancy and parenting.



## Post Partum Adjustment Program

Offers a range of services to support mothers, fathers and families while they adjust to their life with a new baby.

## Preschool Speech and Language Program

Provides prevention, early identification and intervention services for children birth to senior kindergarten at risk for, or identified with, communication difficulties.



**Today's Children...Lambton's Future**

# Social/Emotional Well-Being

Early learning begins at home, in infancy, with the earliest relationship between parent and child. This relationship will actually pave the way for a child's subsequent development, especially in terms of social development and emotional well-being (i.e. mental health).

Very early on, a child develops a sense of security about the world based on the caregivers' responsiveness. How a parent responds to an infant's distress has lasting implications for how the child learns to function in the world. When a parent is consistently available, sensitive and receptive to an infant's signals, a baby develops a healthy attachment relationship. This, in turn, helps the child's brain make critical connections that pave the way for a child learning to interact with others, regulate emotions and behaviour, feel confident and competent.

**"It is widely recognized that infants' experiences with primary caregivers or attachment figures are most significant in developing their brains and influencing particular aspects of personality and behaviours."**

Dr. Sarah Landy

Sometimes a parent's care giving behaviours may be impaired due to a variety of factors such as significant life stressors or mental health issues such as maternal depression, addictions, or past trauma. Infants are particularly vulnerable when a parent's ability to respond is impaired. The impact on a child's development has far-reaching consequences for a child's social competence, emotional development, and readiness to learn. Life long learning is built upon a foundation provided by a positive social and emotional environment.



**"Relationships, not things, make brighter babies".**

Dr. William Sears

## **"Post Partum Mood Disorder—When the Blues don't go away"**

Approximately 50-80% of new mothers experience the "blues" during the first few days or weeks after the birth of their baby. The "blues" usually go away after 2 weeks. 3 to 20% of women may experience a deep and ongoing depression that lasts much longer. This is called Postpartum Mood Disorder. The Province of Ontario recognized the need for additional community resources and has provided funding through Best Start. St. Clair Child and Youth Services provides intensive support to families experiencing PPMD as this affects the entire family.

## **Did you know?**

- Approximately 7 out of 10 families referred to CAS are single parent mother-led households. 1 out of 5 women have been diagnosed with, or described as, having levels of clinical depression that interfere with their parenting abilities.
- Of the types of maltreatment experienced by Lambton County children, 66% were due to exposure to domestic violence.





# Early Care and Education

In June 2008, the Canadian Labour Congress gave the federal government a failing grade on child care for its lack of action in providing working parents with more access to affordable, quality child care spaces. Ontario was given a D grade.

- In Canada, 65% of women with children under age three work outside the home.
- In Canada, 75% of women with preschool children are in the paid workforce.



Since the inception of Best Start in 2005, Lambton County has taken significant steps to provide parents with greater access to quality, affordable early learning and education. For the first time, families in Sombra and Alvinston, have access to licensed full-day child care centres directly in their community, operated by qualified early childhood educators. Prior to 2005, these families were required to drive long distances to access centre-based child care, or may have placed their child in the care of an unlicensed child care provider.

## Did you know?

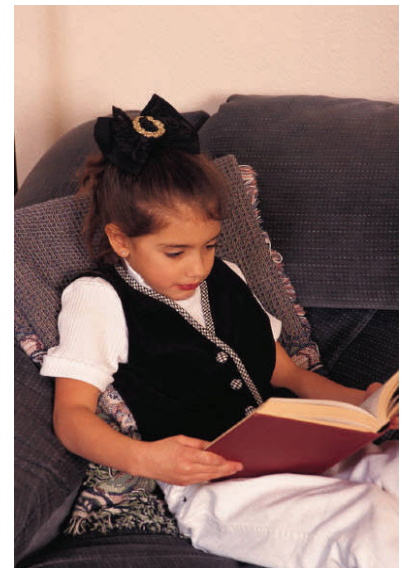
- Children who receive high quality early care and education will have stronger language, learning and social skills when they enter school.
- The Best Start Network supported Lambton College's efforts to be designated as a provider of the ECE Apprenticeship Program. In September 2007, twenty-two child care workers, presently working in early care and education, enrolled in this program. They will graduate in 2009.

- Beginning in 2005, wage enhancement dollars for early childhood educators were provided by the provincial government. **Even with these grant dollars, and in spite of the critical role of these professionals, the average wage of an Early Childhood Educator remains \$13/hr.**

“The single most critical factor affecting the quality of early learning and care programs is the knowledge, skills and stability of the early childhood workforce—the early childhood assistant, educators, resources teachers, supervisors, directors and home child care providers working in regulated child care and the teachers in kindergarten classrooms—are highly committed people who value and want to work with young children and families”

Human Resources Expert Panel

As part of Ontario's Best Start Initiative, the first regulatory College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE's) in Canada has been created. The College will monitor and support high standards in early childhood education and ensure Ontario's children attending early care and education programs are cared for by qualified professionals.



Lambton County has made significant strides to ensure young children in our community get the best start in life, but much work still needs to be done by the provincial and federal governments to ensure that our young children are cared for by trained and knowledgeable staff.



## Today's Children...Lambton's Future

# Basic Needs and Child Safety

## Basic Needs:

The adverse affects associated with living in poverty are tremendous on children and their families. The stressors that accumulate due to the inability to put food on the table or make the rent payment coupled with isolation and diminished mental health, take a toll on parents' ability to effectively interact and care for their children (Lamb, 1999). Children living in poverty are more likely to experience health problems, developmental delays, and weakened social, physical, and cognitive development, which affect their ability for success in school and in life (Singer, 2003). "There are 6,840 low income families and single individuals in the County of Lambton (14,290). Of these low income families, 3,390 are families with children" (County of Lambton, Social Services Department, 2006).



The Inn of The Good Shepherd reported that in 2007 they served 9,258 households, 12,241 adults, and 8,047 children.

Approximately 40% of those served at the Inn of The Good Shepherd are children. Moreover, 778 children were serviced by the Soup Kitchen in 2007 (Inn of The Good Shepherd, 2007). In 2006, over 1,350 Good Food boxes were ordered. This program is a type of food buying club providing seasonal fruits and vegetables at a lower cost. The 2 English and 2 French school boards also participate by offering breakfast and snack programs throughout Lambton County.

## Child Safety:

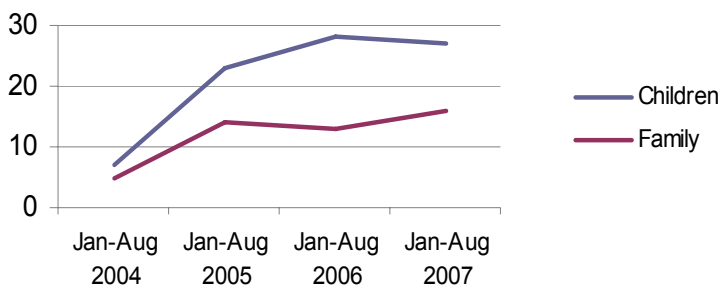
The referral rate to Lambton Children's Aid Society (CAS) has increased by 47.8% for 2003 in comparison to 1997 (Rodger and Leschied, 2008).

- More and more children being seen at CAS are for reasons of neglect, representing approximately 6 out of 10 children referred (Rodger and Leschied, 2008).
- Approximately 33% of children referred to CAS were in the care of an individual who was living in poverty (Rodger and Leschied, 2008).
- The most recent available data reports that 944 investigations were completed in 2007 by CAS; 387 children were in care and 1,613 families were served for the period of April 1, 2007 to March 31, 2008 (COMMUNITY PROFILE 2008-2009—LIFE in Sarnia-Lambton).

## Did you know?

- "Students do better and behave better in school when they eat properly".  
Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2007
- Families looking for emergency shelter is on the rise. "Between January and August 2007, 153 people (including children) were housed in emergency shelter for 1,602 nights. The average length of stay was 13 nights".  
COMMUNITY PROFILE 2008-2009  
—LIFE in Sarnia-Lambton
- "...children in poor circumstances who are given access to excellent early child development centres, with parenting support and involvement, have better outcomes than children in similar circumstances who are not".  
McCain and Mustard, 1999

## Requests for Emergency Shelter



Community profile 2008-2009—LIFE in Sarnia-Lambton





Rural Ontario presents a complex set of challenges with its diverse socioeconomic make-up of farming, tourism, small business, distinct social structures and community values. They are:

- small populations and geographically vast areas.
- lack of public transportation, including taxis. If available, these services are very expensive. Parents/ Caregivers demonstrate a reluctance to “drive more than 10 to 15 kilometres for childcare” (Doherty, 1994).
- isolation may be experienced by “stay-at-home parents” who lack the means for transportation. Thus, the need for services for those parents and children increase (Doherty, 1994).
- “Accommodating fluctuations in need, including seasonal demands for child care, shift work, and transportation” (Brownell, 2000).
- increasing number of women participating in the workforce.
- increasing number of residents traveling to urban centres for work (Brownell, 2000).

As a rural demonstration site, there is a need for affordable, easily accessible, flexible, and seasonal child care alternatives for families in rural communities where the family residence may be located in close proximity to the workplace. There is also a need for information to be provided to farm families regarding safety for children, and age appropriate tasks.

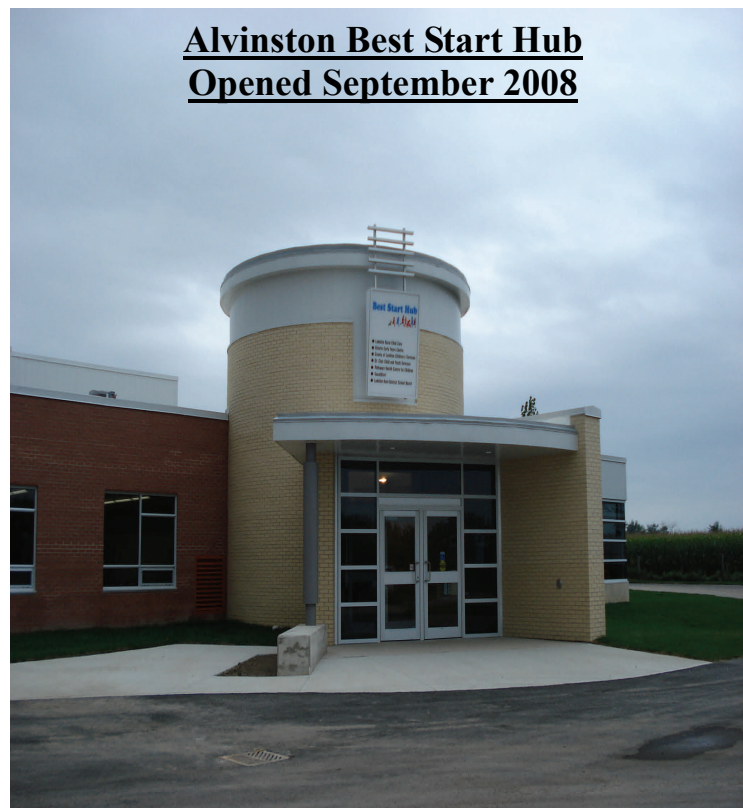


## Did you know?

Three causes of injury in young children account for three-quarters of all fatalities:

- Bystander being run over by farm machinery
- Being an extra rider on a tractor and then being run over after falling from the machine
- Drowning

The Fatal and Hospitalized Agricultural Injuries among Children and Youth in Canada has analyzed fatal agricultural injury data from 1990 to 2003. They found that agricultural injuries are not random or isolated “accidents”. There are many recurrent patterns of injury. 274 children and youth from one to nineteen years old were killed in agricultural injury events. Almost two-thirds (66.1%) of all fatal agricultural injury events among children and youth involved agricultural machines.



Annually in the County of Lambton, presentations are held for children on such topics as hydro safety, lawnmower safety, flowing grain hazards, sun and weather safety, emergency response planning, coping with accident disabilities, tractor safety, and a 911 simulation.

# Best Start at Work in the Community

## *Highlights from 2005-2008*

Lambton County has made great strides in implementing the Best Start Initiative throughout the county. As a result, the community has increased its capacity for sustainable early childhood development and care. The increased parenting supports, child supports, early identification and intervention, and public health services, has led to increased quality and accessibility of services for all children and their families. Since 2005, partners have been putting systems in place to achieve a common goal and the results are demonstrated below.

### **Ontario Early Years Centre (OEYC)**

- Expanded evening and weekend hours at OEYC Main and Satellite sites within the County.
- Implemented the first School's Cool program in 2007 in Forest.
- Each OEYC Main site was provided with \$5,000 of additional funding for transportation throughout the County to increase accessibility for rural families.



### **French Language Hub**

- The French Preschool and Francophone hub is a full service early learning and care hub, sensitive to the culture and traditions of the francophone population.

### **Aboriginal Hub**

- Little Friends Child and Family Development Centre and Best Start Hub will be completed January 2009. This site will be a full service early learning and care hub, sensitive to the culture and traditions of the urban aboriginal population.

### **Healthy Babies Healthy Children**

- There has been a 9% increase in referrals to the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program since 2005.
- Registered Nurses and Home Visitors provided support to 155 families in the home visiting program in 2007.
- The number of home visits have increased by 13% since 2005 to 1,843.

### **Children's Treatment Centre Services**

- Pathways Health Centre for Children provided services to 1,025 children from birth to age 6 in 2007 in the areas of audiology, augmentative communication, behaviour therapy, seating and mobility, social work, respite services, feeding, speech language pathology, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, early childhood education resource support services, and therapeutic recreation.
- Referrals to Pathways for children between the ages of 0 and 6 have increased by 15% since 2005.

### **Preschool Speech and Language**

- 254 children received services in their neighbourhood Best Start hub during the 2007/2008 year.
- 742 children between the ages of 0 to 5 received services during the 2007/2008 year.
- 316 children attended "SoundStart" drop-in programs during the 2007/2008 year.
- Identification age has dropped from 37 months to 34 months since 2006, the lowest age of identification in 9 years.
- Referral rates have increased by 83% for children 2 and under since 2005.
- Regular visits are made by a speech-language professional to Best Start, OEYC main, satellite and outreach sites, and childcare centres.





# Best Start at Work in the Community

## Infant Hearing Program

- 78 infants were screened at Best Start hubs.
- 232 children were screened at the Children's Services Department.
- 6 hubs have the specialized screening equipment in conjunction with a Public Health Nurse to provide infant hearing screening.
- Public Health Nurses provided infant screening at satellite and outreach sites upon request.

## Blind-Low Vision Program

- 8 Lambton County children 0 to 6 years of age have been identified as blind or having uncorrectable low vision and are receiving developmental supports.

## Post Partum Mood Disorder (PPMD)

- Referrals to PPMD have doubled since 2007.

## Early Childhood Education Resource and Support Services

- All licensed childcare agencies have an ECE Resource Teacher assigned to them.
- 61 children received specialized supports from an ECE Resource Teacher in Best Start Early Learning environments.
- Workshops and presentations have been offered for Early Childhood Educators and Parents.



## Fee Subsidy for Child Care

In 2005, \$3,373,071 was available for families for child care fee subsidy, serving 1,226 children. In 2008, funding increased to \$5,458,222, an increase of 61.8%, serving 1,509 children.

## Early Learning and Care Hubs

- Ongoing development throughout Lambton County:
- ⇒ **January 2007:** St. Joseph Early Learning and Care Hub, Corunna; St. Philip Early Learning and Care Hub, Petrolia
  - ⇒ **February 2007:** Ecole Les Rapides Francophone Early Learning and Care Hub, Sarnia
  - ⇒ **September 2007:** Coronation Park Hub, Sarnia
  - ⇒ **April 2007:** Kinnwood Early Learning and Care Hub, Forest; Riverview Public School, Sombra
  - ⇒ **September 2008:** Brooke-Alvinston Early Learning and Care Hub, Alvinston
  - ⇒ **January 2009:** Little Friends Child and Family Development Centre and Best Start Hub, Sarnia



## Early Learning Framework (ELF)

As a result of Best Start, the Early Learning Framework (ELF) initiative came to fruition in 2006. The number of childcare agencies offering the Early Learning Framework (ELF) program in Lambton County has increased to 24 agencies.

The number of children attending ELF has increased. In 2006, 577 children attended an ELF program in Lambton County. This number is expected to increase to 600 children for 2008.

## Child Care Spaces

From 2005 to 2008, the number of full time child care spaces has increased by 825 spaces to 2,164. In 2008, Lambton County is operating with an additional licensed Home Child Care agency.

# Continued Investments and Future Returns

The future of a society depends on the potential of its children. Through the Best Start movement and the transformation agenda it underpins, we have a historic opportunity to make

investments in child and family well-being that will pay off for decades to come. The returns on this investment will not only accrue to our children and their families, but to the benefit of the community,



the province, and the nation. For the community to continue to make decisions that will affect future generations, the current status of the youngest children needs to be explored. This report represents the current status of the Best Start momentum in eight areas, each contributing to the optimal brain development, early learning and well-being of the youngest children. As evidenced in this report to the community, Best Start is positioned to play a leadership role in this transformation.

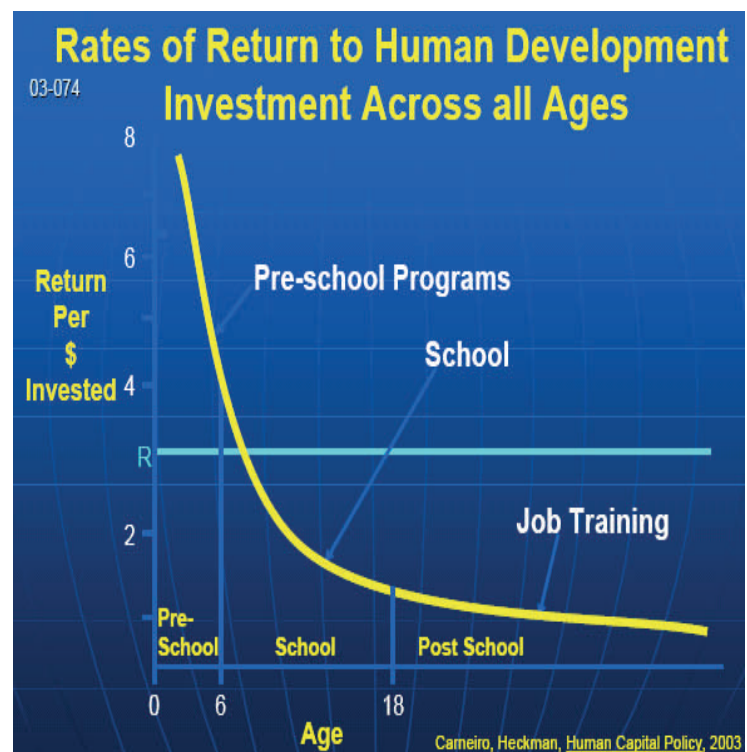
**All citizens** should appreciate the importance of early childhood for later school and adult performance. The real promise of Best Start is its potential to optimize the development of *all* children, not just those that are the most at risk for problems. One of the most important lessons to emerge from recent research on brain development is that all children can be expected to benefit from a nurturing, enriched, and supportive environment. Successful implementation of Best Start should reflect the fact that the development of children is a concern that cuts across sectors, income levels, and groups. Such a strategy has the greatest potential to ensure that all children enter school ready to learn and to move along a path that leads to high school and graduation, to post-secondary education, and to adult success.



Programs geared to support children and families in the early years can save so much money in terms of future reductions in treatment costs, that they more than pay for themselves. Economists and business people would characterize this as an “investment” - an outlay of funds now that would produce a future return.

## Did you know?

- Research shows that while 85% of the brain develops in the first three years of life, only 5% of public investments in children occur during these years (RAND Corporation).



**“It is never too early to start investing in children and we cannot wait until they reach school—a time when it is often too late to intervene”**

Nobel Prize-winning economist:  
Dr. James Heckman 2000

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## If you are a parent, here's what you can do:

- Learn about the Best Start activities in your neighbourhood and participate or get involved
- Get connected with other parents and families through Best Start hubs
- Visit your nearest Ontario Early Years Centre

## If you are a politician, here's what you can do:

- Learn how Best Start can benefit the children and families in your area
- Create policies in your community that benefit safe, healthy environments for children to live, grow and play
- Invest in children by supporting families in your community



## If you are an educator/teacher, here's what you can do:

- Learn how Best Start prepares children for school before they arrive in Junior Kindergarten
- Be connected to your nearest Best Start hub
- Educate your parents with smaller children about Best Start

## If you are a neighbour, here's what you can do:

- Learn about the Best Start initiative in your community
- Get to know the families in your neighbourhood
- Volunteer at your nearest Best Start hub or community centre

## If you are a member of a service club or community group, here's what you can do:

- Learn about the Best Start initiative in our community by requesting a presentation for your next meeting
- Help invest in the future by supporting children in the present
- Become a part of a growing movement and become a supporter of Best Start

## If you are a child care provider, here's what you can do:

- Learn about the benefits of Best Start and how you can be a part of the initiative
- Participate in professional development workshops available through Best Start
- Reinforce through action the importance of early brain development

## If you are a business owner/member of the local industry, here's what you can do:

- Learn how Best Start will build a sustainable workforce for Lambton County
- Learn how Best Start attracts families to the community
- Talk to public officials, fellow business leaders, employees and the public about the vital role quality early childhood care and education plays in current and future workforce development



# Best Start

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# Best Start



## Lambton Children's Planning Network:

- Aamjiwnaang First Nation
- Best Start Child Care—Children's Services Department
- Bluewater Health
- Children's Aid Society - Sarnia-Lambton
- Conseil scolaire de district des écoles catholiques du Sud-Ouest
- Conseil scolaire de district du Centre-Sud-Ouest
- County of Lambton
- Family Counselling Centre
- Lambton Child Care Supervisors Network
- Lambton College of Applied Arts and Technology
- Lambton County Library
- Lambton Rural Child Care
- Lambton Kent District School Board
- la ribambelle centre de la petite enfance
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services—South West Region
- Ministry of Community and Social Services
- Ministry of Education
- North Lambton Community Health Centre
- Ontario Early Years Centre—Sarnia-Lambton
- Ontario Early Years Centre — Lambton-Kent-Middlesex
- Pathways Health Centre for Children
- St. Clair Catholic District School Board
- St. Clair Child and Youth Services
- United Way of Sarnia-Lambton
- Walpole Island Social Services
- YMCA Sarnia-Lambton

To learn more about specific services and information contained in the document, contact:

Children's Services Department  
519-383-8331 ext. 3591 & 3592  
1-800-667-1839

E-mail: [beststart@county-lambton.on.ca](mailto:beststart@county-lambton.on.ca)

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[www.lambtononline.ca](http://www.lambtononline.ca)

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