

NEW ECCDC PILOT PROJECT WILL BRING CHILDREN & SENIORS TOGETHER

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The Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC) is excited to launch a pilot project to support early learning and child care programs and seniors residences in their efforts to offer unique intergenerational experiences. Beginning in January, the ECCDC will provide Niagara area child care programs and seniors residences with tool kits of ideas and resources designed to facilitate fun and meaningful engagement between children and seniors.

The project has been made possible by a \$25,000 grant from the New Horizons for Seniors Program (NHSP). The New Horizons for Seniors Program is a federal initiative that supports projects led or inspired by seniors who make a difference in the lives of others and in their communities. Through the NHSP, the Government of Canada encourages seniors to share their knowledge, skills and experiences to the benefit of others.

Entitled Building Strong Community Connections in Niagara through Seniors and Children, the project will link people in seniors residences to children enrolled in child care programs so the seniors may share their knowledge, skills and experiences with the younger generation. The project aims to promote improved life satisfaction and a sense of purpose and connectedness in the community for seniors, while helping young children develop meaningful relationships, an image of aging that is healthy and active, and a sense of Niagara's natural and cultural history.

The toolkits the ECCDC will provide will include a strategy handbook for designing effective intergenerational programs, resources and an outline to help prepare seniors and children for the excitement of visits, a backpack of interactive activities that children may share during their visits, and an informational pack of materials to help seniors spark conversation.

Many community partners have been involved in the development of the toolkits and the advisory committee has been working steadily to design evaluation methods to measure the effectiveness of the tools, and to prepare the materials that go into each kit. Some of these evaluation materials include: photo cards of seniors and children, dramatic play materials highlighting seniors, vocabulary cards and stories. Additionally, a tool kit of unique art supplies, cooking materials, children's literature and gardening resources has been developed. The advisory committee welcomed the addition of Avron Foods as a partner in the project through their generous donations of aprons, art materials and other supplies. The pilot will culminate this spring with a tree planting and musical ceremony for the seniors, children and families who participate in the project.

This collaborative effort is being piloted



from January to March in three seniors' residences across Niagara. A group of 8 to 10 preschoolers will visit each residence to engage in musical activities, art projects, cooking experiences, growing activities and literacy-based group opportunities. Each of the planned sessions has been designed to meet the hopes articulated by the seniors' residences and to reflect emergent practice theories of early learning and child care. This allows children and seniors a range of choices through the selection of materials that are of most interest to them. The project will strengthen the four foundational principals of engagement, belonging, wellbeing, and expression as outlined within *How Does Learning Happen*, Ontario's pedagogy for the early years.

The ECCDC is excited for the visits to begin and looks forward to having an opportunity to further develop the community tool kit after receiving feedback from the seniors programs and child care centres. The ECCDC also wishes to extend its sincere gratitude and appreciation to the following partners for bringing wisdom to the planning committee, for participating as pilot sites and for supporting the project through donations; A Child's World Family Child Care Services, the Ontario Early Years Centre-Niagara Falls, Niagara Nursery School and Childcare Centre, Fort Erie Regional Child Care, Chartwell Niagara, Lookout Ridge Senior Residence, Niagara Region Seniors Services – Gilmore Lodge, the Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara, Niagara Child Care Sector Executive and Avron Foods.