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For Immediate Release



NIAGARA INFANT MENTAL HEALTH PILOT PROJECT TO LAUNCH ON MARCH 3

A new pilot project designed to identify infant mental health strategies will launch with a special breakfast on Tuesday, March 3. The event will take place at the St. Catharines Museum Lock 3 Complex. It will feature a presentation by Dr. Chaya Kulkarni, Director of Infant Mental Health Promotion, Toronto SickKids Hospital. The keynote speaker will be Dr. Robin Williams, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health for the Province of Ontario.

The pilot project will continue from the kick-off breakfast through to the fall of this year. It will see thirteen Niagara-area early learning and child care programs trial the use of a screening tool designed to help identify infants who may be at risk for social or emotional difficulties called the *Ages and Stages®* and *Ages and Stages-Social Emotional®* questionnaires. The checklists are completed by early learning professionals with the support of a child's family member. It is believed that using the questionnaires may allow families and service providers to better identify the kinds of support services from which the child might benefit. Additionally the questionnaires will assist service providers in creating developmental program plans to identify key areas for strengthening a child's health and wellbeing. The goal of the pilot project is to assess the effectiveness and value of using the *Ages and Stages®* for Niagara Families.

The event and the pilot project are the result of an ongoing collaboration between Niagara Region Children's Services, Strive Niagara, The Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC), Niagara Child Care Sector Executive Committee and Toronto Sickkids Infant Mental Health Promotion Program (IMHP). Last year, these organizations partnered to offer a two-day infant mental health workshop facilitated by Dr. Kulkarni of IMHP. The workshop brought many of Niagara's community service agencies and licensed child care centre teams together to learn more about children's brain development, the identification of developmental milestones, screening for concerns, and best practices for prevention and early intervention.

Since that time, twenty other agencies dedicated to implementing best practices around infant mental health and eager to trial the *Ages and Stages®* questionnaires have come together to form a community based Infant Mental Health Advisory Committee. The following other agencies are part of the planning or are piloting the tools within their various sites; A Child's World, Family and Children's Services Niagara, YMCA of Niagara, Pathways Academy, Pathstone Mental Health, Niagara Region Public Health, Hannah House, Speech Services Niagara, District School Board of Niagara, Bethlehem Projects, Quality Child Care Niagara, Niagara Children's Centre, CAPC Niagara Brighter Futures, CPNP Healthy from the Start, Rosalind Blauer for Child Care, Niagara Chapter Native Women, Department of Family Medicine McMaster University, Toronto Children's Aid Society.

The Niagara Infant Mental Health Pilot Project Kick-Off event will begin at 8:00 am on Tuesday, March 3. Those interested in attending are asked to rsvp by contacting eccdc@eccdc.org or 905-646-7311, ext. 304.

For further information or to request an interview please contact Sandy Toth stoth@striveniagara.ca or Tracy Belcastro tbelcastro@striveniagara.ca of Strive Niagara.

