# Case Study

# Bruce WoodGreen Early Learning Centre

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# Case Study 2: Bruce WoodGreen Early Learning Centre

**Ontario, Canada**

## Overview

Established in 2002, the Bruce WoodGreen Early Learning Centre is a not-for-profit child centre which serves children from 1 year 6 months to 12 years.

It was one of five pilot sites under the Toronto First Duty (TFD) program[a] that trialled and researched a new model of delivering early learning. The specific driver for the inclusion of Bruce WoodGreen as a pilot site was the imminent closure faced by the Bruce Public School due to low student enrolment number in 2002. The success of the centre led to its continuation beyond the initial pilot phase of the program[1].



Source: WoodGreen

## Context/setting

| Education | Community Services | Brownfield | Urban | Public/Private |
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| **Service mix** | **Education**, including a school, kindergarten, childcare centre, and a parent and family literacy centre[1,4]<br>**Community services**, including parental support and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes[4] |
| **Level of integration** | Integration took place at multiple levels, including both the integration of staff team between the Ontario certified teacher (OCT) and early childhood educator (ECE) and the integration of services among child care, education services, health services and parenting support[6] |
| **Site characteristics** | **Brownfield**, located in the Bruce Public School and having had a number of spaces repurposed to meet licensing requirements for childcare centres<br>**Urban** |
| **Funding** | **Public/Private**, the centre's building is located in the Bruce Public School, and is therefore publicly funded by Toronto District School Board. The centre was also granted a Purchase of Service Agreement by the City of Toronto, which allowed the centre to accept children whose families were eligible for fee subsidies, thus increasing the reach to populations who might not have attended otherwise.<br>Ongoing funding of the research was provided by the Atkinson Charitable Foundation from 2001 to 2011. Additional funding contributors to research included Human Resource Development Canada and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada |
| **Partners (inc. lead agency)** | **Lead agency:** Jointly led by the Toronto District School Board, the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, and the City of Toronto's Children's Services.<br>**Partners:** Other funding partners as listed above[3] |

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[a] The Toronto First Duty program was envisioned in 1999 by the Atkinson Charitable Foundation (ACF) and the City of Toronto through the Toronto Children's Advocate. The demonstration project's aim was to conduct a feasibility study on integrated early childhood programs.

**Foundations for success**

This hub exhibits five of the key success factors that were identified in the literature review.

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| *Leadership and management* | *Focus and vision* | *Collaborative and detailed planning* | *Measurement* | *Governance and culture* |

**Leadership and management**

One of the most significant successes of the integration (especially during the pilot phase) was the strong cohesive staff team in the kindergarten program which operated with teachers employed by the school board and ECEs employed by WoodGreen. Despite the notable differences in training and compensation for OCTs and ECEs, the staff team of OCT and ECE engaged in joint professional development activities in the area of curriculum development, child development, child management and other areas of mutual interest. Importantly, the ECEs were considered full and equal learning team partners and participated alongside the teachers in all areas including planning, child assessment and parent interviews.

This teamwork was facilitated and encouraged by the leadership team that was guided and supported by a Toronto District School Board Superintendent. The Superintendent was regarded as a transformational leader and ensured that the right people were in place to achieve the desired outcomes[6]. Challenges around leadership were identified as a key factor hindering integrative efforts among the other four TFD pilot sites, which consequently did not proceed to Phase 2[b].

**Focus and vision**

There was a clear vision shared by the project partners, which was to transform public policies on early childhood programs, by developing and researching a universal early learning and care program for children.

Central to the vision was also the premise that families are the first and most powerful influence on children's learning and development. This philosophy has determined the centre's approach in inviting families as partners in the early learning programs and creating a place that is owned by families as much as it is by teachers[7].

**Collaborative and detailed planning**

The centre took an intended collaborative approach to delivering and planning services. Curriculum were jointly planned by both OCTs and ECEs and services offered were continually adapted to changing needs of the families. The Parent Council has driven a number of decisions to expand the services to include children of other ages outside the existing age group. Targeted programs were also offered in response to family needs such as parental support and ESL classes.

**Measurement**

The ongoing support of funding from the Atkinson Charitable Foundation and a number of other research partners was of critical importance in ensuring the continuity of the evaluation research spanning across a decade. The research findings and evaluation outcomes were invaluable information that provided timely reflection and input into the ongoing improvement of the design and delivery of the pilot program.

Using mixed methods, case studies and quasi-experimental methodologies, the research design for the TFD program included both process and outcome evaluation. The formal evaluation of the program was undertaken over three phases (Phase 1 2002-2005, Phase 2 2006-2008 and Phase 3 2009-2012), and collected a large amount of qualitative information and quantitative data[1].

Tools for tracking and measuring processes included: *Indicators of Change (IoC)[b]* for service integration, *Intake & Tracking (I&T)* for family background and program use, *EC Envir Rating Scale (ECERS-R)* and Child Obs Framework (COF) for program quality, and EC Parent Daily Hassles (EC-PDH) for parent-EC service interface. Measurements for outcome was primarily undertaken using the Early Development Instrument (EDI)[1,2].

**Governance and culture**

The overall governance of Bruce WoodGreen is through an onsite management committee comprised of various stakeholders including the school principal, school board superintendent, project coordinators and city staff[1].

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[b] Phase 1 of TFD spanned the years from 2002 through to 2005, Bruce WoodGreen was only one of the five TFD sites deemed sustainable to move forward into Phase 2 as a prototype.

[b] The Indicators of Change was designed to guide, track and assess the progress of TFD sites on the path to integration of programs and services including child care, early childhood education, family support programs and kindergarten. The tool was developed to measure the degree of integration across a continuum, or five stages of integration. The initial tool included a total of nineteen program indicators, with four in local governance, three in seamless access, five related to learning environment, four for the early childhood staff team and three for parent participation[5].

The inclusion of the early childhood portfolio under the Ministry of Education was also a key factor in enabling an integrated response to early child education.

## Outcomes
### Health, social and physical outcomes
Improvements related to physical and social wellbeing were observed as a result of the TFD program[5]. For example, evidence for short-term positive effects of the TFD model were found on children's social-emotional development on the EDI. Improvements in outcomes were also observed in parents; various lines of evidence showed gains for parents from the TFD experiment that went beyond client satisfaction. For example, the quasi-experiment, comparing parents from the TFD program with parents from schools with only kindergarten, showed that the TFD parents were more likely to feel empowered to talk to their child's kindergarten teacher.

There were also outcomes observed for educators, in that educators benefit from an environment that is less isolated and gain professional satisfaction from opportunities for collaboration and joint learning. Also the quality of early years education increased.

These associations were seen in both pre-post comparison within TFD sites and in quasi-experimental comparisons with demographically-matched communities. In addition, there was also observed patterns of these children and parents outcomes being positively correlated to the level of service integration.

### Educational outcomes
Evidence was also strong in terms of improved educational outcomes for children. After applying various demographic controls, it was found that more intense involvement in the TFD programs predicted children's cognitive, language and physical development; this linkage also held across maternal education levels and language status. These changes were measured and reported through the EDI[5].

**Lessons**
- During the pilot phase, there was concentrated effort to support integration between the kindergarten and child care staff teams. However, the level of integration tapered off post pilot phase, mostly as a result of the challenges faced by the two separate teams when it comes to differences in workforce arrangement, legislative framework and union organisations under the business-as-usual operating parameters. This highlights the fact that integration is not a steady state achieved by introducing a model or program; rather it is a continuous work-in-progress journey.
- Central to the effective integrated curriculum framework was the opportunity for all educators to participate in consistent and joint program planning.
- Measuring both processes and outcomes are relevant for tracking the success of the program and continuously improving the service delivery. This was particularly the case given the demonstrated evidence that there is a noticeable connection between process and outcomes for this model.
- Strong leadership was crucial to the initial and ongoing success of the hub.
- There was substantial organisational changes required with mergers of the two teams and integration of services, and there were challenges associated with this such as space constraints, staffing changes, and lack of a clear shared vision[1]. Setting aside the time to meet regularly and enable joint planning was important to align goals and objectives and achieve buy-in from both teams[2].

## References
1. Corter et al, 2009, Toronto First Duty Phase 2 Final Research Report
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5. Corter et al, 2012, Tools and learning from Toronto First Duty
6. Levy, 2016, From Toronto First Duty Vision to Policy Reality: Scaling Up, Watering Down in the Provincial Implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten at the Bruce/WoodGreen Demonstration Site
7. Toronto First Duty, 2011, Bruce/WoodGreen Early Learning Centre A Toronto Frist Duty Site, https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson/UserFiles/File/Events/2011-06-01%20-%20Summer%20Institute/SI2011_BWELC-TFD.pdf

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