



“Ìlǎà negetsà-lia et’ìì
hoghàgetq̄q̄ xèhoòwì...
Teaching begins when
they are young.”

The Early Years

Early Childhood Strategy and Framework (ECSF)

Tìchq̄ Ndek’àoowo



Tìchq̄ Government

June 2017





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Tłichq̄ Government
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Acknowledgements

On May 16, 2017, the Tłıchǫ Government approved *The Early Years: An Early Childhood Strategy and Framework*. The Strategy and Framework is a guiding tool for the future that sets out aspirations and desired outcomes for the youngest Tłıchǫ children and the children of tomorrow.

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Executive Summary

Purpose of the Early Childhood Strategy and Framework (2017-2027)

The Tłıchq Government has set a priority for their youngest children, prenatally to age six years, regarding their health and well-being, and their ability to learn and be self-sufficient.

The Early Childhood Strategy and Framework (2017-2027), ı̀àà negetsà-lia et'ı̀ı̀ hoghàgetq̄ xèhòdwi, known as the “Early Years”, is a guiding tool for the future, which sets out aspirations and desired outcomes for the youngest Tłıchq children and the children of tomorrow, the structures and policies needed to realize these goals, the systems that need re-alignment, and the descriptions of innovative programming needed for the future.

The Strategy and Framework followed a planning process, with extensive community research with Tłıchq parents, grandparents, families and agencies who work with young children, to assess current and future needs, and changes for existing programs in place for young children and families. The Technical Report outlines the community research project, including the methods, data collection procedures, analysis, integration of findings and recommendations for the next 10 years in early childhood – 2017-2027, and is an Appendix to the Strategy and Framework.

The goals of the community research project were:

1. To seek input from Tłıchq people about early childhood programs and services currently offered, what is needed, and input for the Strategy and Framework.
2. To look at best practices in early childhood programming, approach and foundation to achieve positive outcomes for children, families and communities.
3. To look at innovative community program delivery models, systems and direction needed to plan, structure, implement and evaluate programs and services going forward for the Tłıchq’s youngest children, prenatal to school age (2017-2027).
4. To get input on the development of culturally relevant early childhood programs.
5. To communicate the findings and recommendations from the Tłıchq people in an Early Childhood Strategy and Framework (ECSF), Implementation and Evaluation Plan for 2017-2027.





Additional input for the Strategy and Framework was taken from best practices and included the following: what is cost-effective and what are efficient uses of funding resources for prenatal to school age children; and what are evidence-based practices that support young children in language development, health and social-emotional development for best health and educational outcomes.

Desired Outcomes for Children, Families and Tłıchǫ Communities

The desired outcomes for children, families and Tłıchǫ communities were consistent among the people in the four communities:

- Healthy pregnancies and birth outcomes;
- Child and family health, education and well-being;
- Positive parent-child relationships – “parents walk beside their children” and families to support lifelong learning;
- Family engagement in child health, well-being and learning;
- Family connections to community;
- Holistic health for children, from prenatal to school age;
- Effective partnerships that support and advocate for young children and families;
- Responsive governing system to meet the changing needs, building from the bottom up (birth to school age), and supporting Tłıchǫ communities; and
- New and innovative programming for children, families and communities to nurture young children in the Tłıchǫ language, culture and way of life.





Components of the Early Years Strategy and Framework

The core components of the Strategy and Framework were developed from the community research, best practices and Tłıchq guiding principles.

Considerations were included in the development of the core components of existing programs and services already in place, the changing dynamics and economic influences, and the strengthening governance in the Tłıchq Government.

1. Early Years Policy Development

Policy directives and legislation to provide the foundation for the Tłıchq Early Years programs, services and investments.

Areas where policy development is needed:

- Promotion of the Early Years to strengthen our communities, our people;
- New and/or adapted legislation for early childhood programming and licensing that is consistent with Tłıchq language, culture and way of life;
- Negotiate transfer of financial resources for programs and services; and
- Develop an evaluation approach for program quality monitoring and tracking that is culturally relevant and sensitive.

2. Early Years Programs, Services, Training and Partnerships

Strategic direction to support Early Years programs, services, training and relevant partnerships for Tłıchq people based on the foundation of Tłıchq language, culture and way of life, and best practices. New and innovative ways of program delivery will lead the way through the use of family resource centre model, community-based hub model, family engagement and continuum of supports, experiences and guidance for Tłıchq parents, families and community partners. Training and staffing models to be implemented that reflect program innovation, family resource role in the Tłıchq communities, and focus on health, well-being, learning and self-sufficiency.

Areas for Early Years programs, training and new partnerships:

- Promotion and integration of the Tłıchq language, culture and way of life in all Early Years programs and operations;
- Use of best practices in early childhood health promotion, early learning and family engagement (prevention versus remedial/fix-it approaches);
- New and innovative programming in Tłıchq communities through family resource centres/community-based hub that includes prenatal, oral health, speech language support, early childhood learning, family engagement and support;



- Re-structured childcare and preschool programs to meet new priorities and strategic framework;
- Re-structured partnerships with agencies who have responsibilities for services with prenatal, young children and families; and
- Development of new training and curriculum resources to match the new innovative programming in Tłchq communities.

3. Early Years Administrative, Management and Financial Systems

Re-design of the administrative, management and organizational system for the Early Years programs, services and operations is indicated. Guidance from best practices can provide direction for administration systems needed for innovative programming going forward, program quality, and responsiveness to the changing landscape in early childhood and community-based programming.

Areas for re-design in administrative systems:

- Early childhood department design, operation and monitoring based on best practices in the profession of early childhood and family engagement;
- Priority for Early Years funding resources, capital planning and human resource management consistent with best practices in early childhood; and
- Strategic use of early childhood resources for innovation and design to meet the changing landscape of health and education funding for prenatal, childcare and early childhood programming.

4. Early Years Implementation and Evaluation Plan – 2017-2027

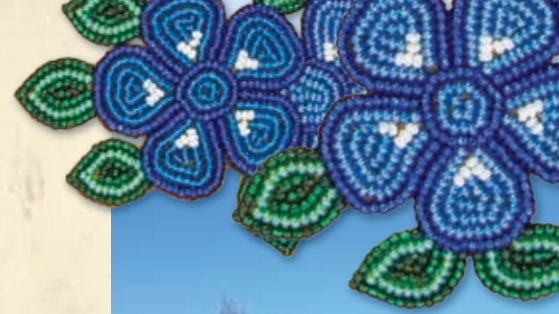
Implementation of the Strategy and Framework is indicated through best practices in program design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation, with built-in process/outcome evaluation indicators that are culturally relevant, sensitive and consistent with Tłchq guiding principles and OCAP™¹ (Ownership, Control, Access and Possession).

Areas and timelines for implementation:

- Complete policy development for start-up, new and innovative program design in family resource programming/community-based hub model, renewed partnerships and transition planning for existing childcare and preschool programs;
- Administrative system design to match early childhood practice and emerging legislation, innovative program implementation, early childhood management practices, and quality monitoring and evaluation; and
- Strategy evaluation – process, outcome and impact, and implementation review – “Start with the end in mind.”

¹ Toolkit for the Digitization of First Nation’s Knowledge (see indigitization.ca).





Next Steps

The next steps in the implementation of the Strategic Plan and Framework for Tłıchǫ children, families and communities includes communicating and sharing with stakeholders the views of the people and the 10-year plan.

Priorities in the near future include the re-structuring of the systems to support the innovative programming for Tłıchǫ children and families, establishing culturally relevant evaluation systems for ongoing monitoring, and addressing emerging challenges and realities in early childhood.

The words of Tłıchǫ parents and families, who shared their thoughts, dreams and goals for their children, best summarizes the Early Years Strategy:

“Our language, culture is our way of life.”

“What are we waiting for?”

“This Strategy will need the wisdom and efforts of all to bring the actions forward.”





1. Strategy

Introduction

Purpose of Strategy and Framework for the Early Years

A strategic framework is a systematic process where an organization, such as the Tłıchǫ Government, designs and builds commitment to have priorities that are essential to a purpose, which for this strategic framework, is children during the early childhood development years from prenatal to age six years, their parents, families.

A strategic framework is responsive to the people, the setting or communities and the emerging influences, both internal and external of the communities.

A strategic framework is a strong guiding tool for the future development, which sets out structures needed, aspirations and desired outcomes for the young children, and partnerships needed as well as details of planning, designing innovative programming, and re-structuring existing programs and services already in place.

Furthermore, strategic planning and framework development guides the programs, activities, resources/inputs (financial, staffing, organizational, program implementation) needed to achieve the priorities, and includes an evaluative and monitoring role to see if the desired outcomes were achieved.

A strategic framework is a masterplan for the short and long-term vision, operations, and program and service delivery for the early years of Tłıchǫ children, their parents and their communities.

The Tłıchǫ Government has set a priority for their youngest children and the children of tomorrow, their health, education and well-being, all within the Tłıchǫ way of life.

Process and Methods of Planning to Develop the Strategy and Framework

Following discussions and review of previous strategic framework documents, a process was designed to seek input from Tłıchǫ communities, parents, existing early childhood programs and services, and community partners.

This process started with looking at current strengths and challenges, organizational vision, scope of programs, staffing, infrastructure, and reviewing best practices and research-based information about what works, for whom and in what circumstances.

“Children, families and communities...”



Environmental Scan and Words from the People

Input for the Strategy and Framework

A working group, guided by the Healing Wind Advisory, was assembled to assist in the gathering of Tłıchq views, ideas and goals for their young children. A list of semi-structured questions was used to guide each individual interview as well as summarizing the material for review by the working group and use as the foundation of the strategy work. Analysis was within the working group members who had knowledge of the Tłıchq communities.

In all, a number of lines of inquiry were used as a comprehensive review process or needs assessment and included the following specific areas:

- Community interviews with parents of young children and grandparents;
- Community meetings with Tłıchq community members and parents of young children;
- Interviews with existing early childhood programs and services;
- Interviews with partners such as health, education, language and culture, Tłıchq administration;
- Review of Tłıchq organizational and administration systems and financial levels for programs and services;
- Review of relevant research and best practices for culturally appropriate early childhood development, program implementation, innovative programming, and holistic ways of early childhood programs and services;
- Review of emerging issues of importance to early childhood development – health and education/junior kindergarten/preschools – shared use of current facilities in Tłıchq communities with community programs; and
- Current direction in community programs regarding the role of language and culture in early childhood and community programs.

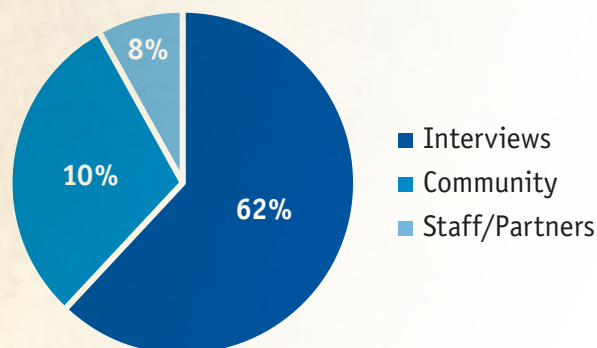
The following graphs summarize the total number of Tłıchq parents who were interviewed by local Tłıchq staff for this Early Childhood Strategy and Framework in the spring, summer and fall of 2016.

Over 350 people were part of the individual and community interviews, which is an excellent sample size for the four Tłıchq communities, and provides strength to the strategic framework, its priorities and recommendations. Sixty-two percent of the input for this strategic framework was from individual interviews with Tłıchq people. Thirty percent of the input was also from Tłıchq community members during sessions done in the public in the spring and summer of 2016 in each of the four Tłıchq communities. See Figure 1 next page.

“Our way of raising our children... is about supporting parents to be better parents.”



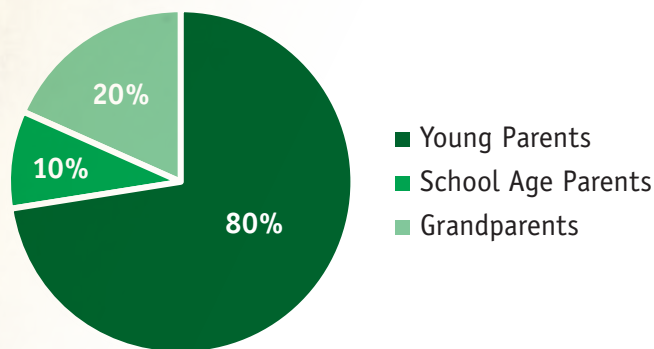
Figure 1:
Early Years Input from Parents, Community Members, Staff and Partners (2016)



A further breakdown of those Tłıchǫ parents and grandparents/caregivers interviewed was done as the target group was to reach parents and caregivers of young children with the age span of ages prenatal to age six years.

Figure 2 outlines this breakdown, which includes 80% of those interviewed (individual and community) from the target group of families with young children.

Figure 2:
Breakdown of Early Years Input – Young Parents with Children Under Age Six Years, School Age Parents and Grandparents (2016)



“The children and babies that are growing now will be our future.”

– Translated from the Oral Record.
Harry Simpson (1990)
in Strong Like Two People,
page 14



Additional input used in the community research included early childhood program reviews with evidence-based methods such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales or ECERS and the Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scales or ITERS. Each childcare and preschool program was observed and reviewed with the program rating tools, commonly used in North America as well as the Northwest Territories.

In addition, the use of the ECERS and ITERS was done through procedures used in NWT Aboriginal communities, which includes program review methods designed for culturally distinct communities. Details of the review, methods used, key findings, summaries of the interviews, and recommendations from the community research and literature reviewed is included in the supporting document to the Strategy and Framework, *The Technical Report – To the Early Years Strategy and Framework 2017* (see Appendix).

As part of the community research, a number of selected literature review summaries were done to guide the Strategy and Framework.

Selected literature reviews summaries included:

1. Literature Brief: New and Innovative Programming – Family Resource Centres/Community-based Hub in Tłıchǫ Communities
2. Literature Brief: New and Innovative Programming – Oral Health Initiatives in Tłıchǫ Family Resource Centres
3. Literature Brief: Early Experiences Build the Brain
4. Language Development: Dual Language Learners – The Language-Culture Connection
5. Literature Brief: Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation for Innovative Early Childhood Programming – 2017-2027



“We are born Dene, so we have to live in the Dene way. Our mothers and fathers spoke in the Dene language. We have to keep their language. Our language is what makes us a people.”

– Translated from
the Oral Record.
Elizabeth Mackenzie (1990)
in *Strong Like Two People*,
page 44



In Tłıchǫ Unity...

Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles

The Tłıchǫ Government's vision, mission and guiding principles were used in the Strategy and Framework, and community research, and provided guidance for this important work for the youngest Tłıchǫ; the children and their families.

Our Vision... In Tłıchǫ Unity... “which speaks to being one people, one nation, where we continue to celebrate our shared language, culture and way of life into the future.”

Our Mission is to preserve, protect and promote our land, and our language, culture and way of life.... “as long as this land shall last.”

Guiding Principles from the Tłıchǫ Constitution:

- The expression of our relationship with the creator and respect for the interconnectedness of all living things.
- To act as custodian of our lands, water and resources.
- To protect our language, culture and way of life.
- To strive for representative and work towards consensus.
- To act with respect and fairness, without discrimination or abuse.
- The importance of cooperation and working together.
- The importance of healing, harmony and self-sufficiency.
- The full free expression and participation of Tłıchǫ citizens in their government.
- Respecting the needs and interests of other people.

“So if children are taught
in both cultures equally,
they will be strong like
two people.”

– Translated from
the Oral Record.

Elizabeth Mackenzie (1990)
in Strong Like Two People,
page 43



2. Framework and Intentions

Underlying Considerations

The strategic directions outlined in this Early Childhood Strategy and Framework (ECSF) provides a masterplan for going forward by looking at what programs and services exist, what did the people say, and what does research and best practices say about supporting, caring and nurturing children, and their parents and caregivers, in the early years.

The desired outcomes for children, families and Tłıchq communities are:

- Healthy pregnancies and birth outcomes;
- Child and family health, education and well-being;
- Positive parent-child relationships – “parents walk beside their children” and families to support lifelong learning;
- Family engagement in child health, well-being and learning;
- Family connections to community;
- Holistic health for children, from prenatal to school age, including oral health and speech/language support services.
- Effective partnerships that support and advocate for young children and families;
- Responsive governing system to meet the changing needs, building from the bottom up (birth to school age), and supporting Tłıchq communities; and
- New and innovative programming for children, families and communities to nurture young children with the Tlıchq language, culture and way of life.

The strategic directions for the Early Childhood Strategy and Framework are as follows:

- **Early Years Policy Development – Best Practices and Tłıchq Way of Life**
- **Early Years Programs, Services and Partnerships**
- **Early Years Administration, Management and Financial Systems** (includes training and professional development and education)
- **Early Years Implementation and Evaluation Plan – 2017-2027**

These strategic directions were developed from the Tłıchq intentions of 2013-2017 and best practices in early childhood and child development. The community research and current program review provided starting points for the administration, and implementation and evaluation planning needed to go forward.

A number of considerations and principles provide the context and understanding for the strategic directions, priorities, outcomes and key activities/initiatives.

Considerations

1. The Tłıchq language, culture and way of life are the foundation of the Early Years Framework, as included in the Tłıchq Constitution, and as a determinant of health and well-being.
2. The range of ages and children considered for this Early Years Framework is inclusive of their parents, families and community members who support their growth, development and learning the Tłıchq language, culture and way of life.

“Residential schools have made a big impact in the way we parent our children, but we can change that. In a child’s life, it is the parent who is the first teacher. It is there that we teach our language and culture. Being on the land gives meaning to our lives. On the land healing is a way to connect to who we once were. As a child’s teachers we have to promote it. We have to live it.”

– Anita Daniels, TG Director of Social Programs from Behchokq at a meeting to plan for the 3rd Assembly, November 26, 2013



For this Early Years Framework, there are three key age groups:

- Prenatal-post-natal and up to three years of age (prenatal, infant and toddler);
 - Young children ages three years to six years (preschool and kindergarten age children); and
 - Transition from the early years to school age.
3. Many early childhood programs and child services are in place and have been operating for many years. There is a need for a transition planning approach prior to formal/ informal changes to support continued programing and service delivery.
 4. The place for children with special needs and their parents is evolving and changing within local, regional and territorial partnerships. Further integration of children with special needs and the supports needed by their parents and families will require further consideration with those partnerships in health and education, and in ways that support parents and families who choose either a western assessment/diagnosis/treatment model or Indigenous view of holistic health, well-being and use of local knowledge, or a combination of the two approaches.
 5. There are increasing uses of technology, social media and internet in Tłıchǫ communities that influences what parents, community members, staff and partners read, see and hear of the early years. The change in how information is shared and received will need consideration for future policy, program planning and implementation.
 6. There are changing dynamics in the economic influences and opportunities for the Tłıchǫ people and communities; impacts of poverty, trauma, housing and other social-economic factors.
 7. Strengthening of Tłıchǫ governance, institutions and organizations, with increasing organizational strength and application of a governance framework based on Tłıchǫ language, culture and way of life.

Principles

1. Children and their families are at the centre of research, design and development, and implementation of programs, services and partnerships.
2. Communities and extended family, elders and Tłıchǫ resource persons are part of the system of supports for young Tłıchǫ children to grow and develop.
3. Community-based programs and services build local capacity and provide the foundation of Tłıchǫ language, culture and way of life. Partnerships with health, education and other programs, services and supports are embraced within the community-based circle of caring for all children and their families.
4. Tłıchǫ views, perspectives and methods are respected, honoured and included in Early Years policies, directives, programs and services, systems of operation, implementation, and evaluation.

“Culture is one of the 12 social determinants of health according to the Public Health Agency of Canada. We believe strengthening our culture will promote physical and mental well-being for all ages.”

– In Tłıchǫ Unity, A Strategic Framework and Intentions 2013-2017



Early Years Policy Development

The community interviews, review of documentation and programs and services revealed an informal approach to policy development when it comes to the early years, early childhood programs and services, activities for children, families and communities, and ways of working with partners in health and education.

In addition, a number of legislated documents from the Government of the Northwest Territories provide licensing directives for the daily operation of childcare services, and more loosely, early childhood programming in the early years. Specific programs such as Prenatal Nutrition or Aboriginal Head Start and First Nations Inuit Childcare have program guidelines, funding requirements and their own respective reporting and monitoring functions.

Strategic Direction

Support Early Years policy development, directives and intentions, which provide the foundation for all Tłıchǫ programs and services that support the early years.

Policy Development	Outcomes – Child, Family and Tłıchǫ Communities
1. Promote the importance and relevance of the Early Years throughout the Tłıchǫ communities.	1.1 A whole government and community approach to young children and their families. 1.2 A knowledge and evidence-based centre that is available for all to access policy information on best practices in the early years and as relevant for the Tłıchǫ. 1.3 Written policy directives on what is the Early Years, a developmental approach to the age span of 0 to 6 years (0-3 years and 3-6 years), and child development information for all Tłıchǫ government personnel to use. 1.4 Public information on the benefits of supporting development in the early years.

“This Strategy will need the combined wisdom and efforts of all to bring the actions forward...”



“It is all about the parents... give them the tools and supports.”

Policy Development	Outcomes – Child, Family and Tłchq Communities
<p>2. Develop Tłchq Government legislation on the Early Years and adapt current early childhood legislation to be consistent with the Tłchq language, culture and way of life.</p>	<p>2.1 Relevant legislation developed with Tłchq in early childhood programming, early childhood care and early childhood practitioners.</p> <p>2.2 Tłchq participate in legislation development to ensure language, culture and way of life is honoured and respected.</p>
<p>3. As a self-governing authority, the Tłchq government will negotiate the transfer of financial resources for programs and services geared for children in the Early Years – 0-3 years and 3-6 years – “transition years”.</p>	<p>3.1 Tłchq Government will have completed legislative and intergovernmental negotiations for full control, direction and responsibility for resources and program design, delivery and evaluation for the Early Years.</p> <p>3.2 Tłchq Government will have processes to preserve, protect, enhance Tłchq language, culture and way of life in all it does in the early years – programs, services, staffing, training, research and development, work with partners.</p>
<p>4. Develop a continuous monitoring and evaluative approach with services to support quality enhancements, strength building and program review.</p>	<p>4.1 Evidence-based decision making will result from use of an evaluative lens to all investments in the Early Years.</p> <p>4.2 Tłchq have regular and quality reviews of programs, services and partnerships that serve their young children.</p> <p>4.3 Stakeholders have benchmarks and tracking of key successes and challenges.</p>



Key Activities and Initiatives

1. Promoting the Early Years.

- Information centre (online resource as well) for Early Years information; credible research that is relevant to Tłıchǫ communities and easy to access.
- Have yearly reports and presentations on Early Years programs and services to leadership and communities.
- Integrate an information centre on the Early Years, with the day-to-day programming and new initiatives, family resource centre or community-based hub.

2. Developing new legislation.

- Three Tłıchǫ Acts and Legislation: Early Years Act, Early Years Care and Services Act, Early Years Practitioners and Early Childhood Educators Act.
- Culture, Language and Way of Life Advisory Group for legislation design, development and possible adaptation from GNWT legislation.

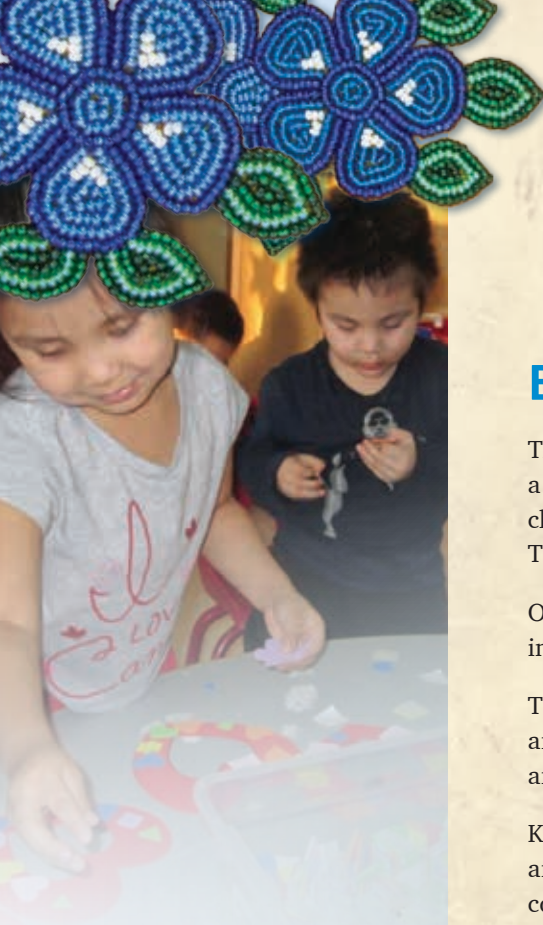
3. Transfer of financial resources for programs/services for children in the Early Years.

- Streamlined funding resources for programs and initiatives within a centralized system of accountability for programs and services in the Early Years – prenatal to school age.
- Advocate for increased funding to a continuum of programs and services for the Early Years, taking into consideration population, social-economics and cost-benefit of earlier investments in early childhood programs and services – zero to three years.

4. Develop a monitoring and evaluative approach for the Early Years programs.

- Secure culturally competent evaluation and monitoring knowledge, skill and practices to be used with Early Years programs and services, and overseen by community-based Tłıchǫ stakeholders and resource persons.
- Develop traditional evaluation, assessment and monitoring criteria for all programs, services and activities that address the continuum of children in the Early Years.
- Implement a review policy and process for all measures, tools and assessment instruments used with children in the Early Years – prenatal to six years – to ensure appropriate and applicable reliability and validity for the people in the Tłıchǫ communities.
- Implement a policy and process for the culturally competent selection, administration, analysis and communication of findings to children's parents and caregivers as part of reporting to Tłıchǫ leaders.
- Implement an informed consent process and policy for all procedures and measures used with young children in the Early Years, prenatal to six years, in Tłıchǫ communities.

“Everything starts at home, with the parents and families...”



Early Years Programs, Services and Partnerships

The community interviews, review of documentation and programs and services revealed a system of programs and partnerships with two distinct early childhood settings – childcare and preschools. Additional prenatal and family programming is provided in some Tłıchǫ communities, with limited connection to other programs.

Overall, current early childhood programs are divided among two services, with most interviews and agencies seeing early childhood as either childcare or preschools.

The limited range of programs provides a good place to start to build an evidence-based and current best practice in early childhood, which is in addition to childcare centres and preschools.

Knowledge sharing is needed in Tłıchǫ communities and with partners of what are best practices in early childhood, funding requirements, and how partners and community agencies share the responsibility of working with community-based early childhood systems of delivery.

Strategic Direction

Support Early Years programs, services and partnerships, which provide the foundation for all Tłıchǫ programs and services that support the Early Years.

Programs, Services and Partnerships	Outcomes – Child, Family and Tłıchǫ Communities
<p>1. Living the language as the foundation of Early Years programs and services.</p>	<p>1.1 Promoting Tłıchǫ language use in all Early Years programs, services and partnerships. Tłıchǫ children, parents and communities experience their language throughout daily interactions in prenatal, childcare, family drop-in play programs, kindergarten, and transition and new initiatives.</p> <p>1.2 Tłıchǫ knowledge and evidence-based resources are created/available for all to access information on best practices for parents and children in the early years.</p>
<p>2. Use of best practices in early childhood health, education and family engagement.</p> <p>Family resource centre model/community-based hub model</p>	<p>2.1 Improved connection of parents, families and community to care, health, support and nurturing of young children.</p> <p>2.2 Evidence of best practices throughout Early Years programming.</p>



Programs, Services and Partnerships	Outcomes – Child, Family and Tłıchǫ Communities
3. Developing new initiatives and programs. Family resource centres – oral health community program – hub model of Early Years – speech language support	3.1 Young children, families and Tłıchǫ communities have access to full range of supports from prenatal to transition out of early childhood time period – 0 to 3 years and age 3 to 6 years. 3.2 New initiatives provide added benefit to holistic health, education and well-being of Tłıchǫ young children and their families.
4. Re-structure childcare and preschool programs and services to meet developmentally appropriate practice, program quality and continuous improvement.	4.1 Existing early childhood programs and services brought into department that is solely dedicated to Early Years, with foundation in Tłıchǫ way of life and best practices. Program quality a priority to achieve best possible outcomes for child health, education and well-being.
5. Developing and facilitating respectful partnerships.	5.1 Shared responsibility and support to Early Years children, families and communities to provide seamless and accessible services.
6. Development of Tłıchǫ Early Years curriculum, family and parent resources, and linkages to health and education programming and transitions.	6.1 Program content supports quality and evidence-based practice, which is the foundation of proven outcomes for children.

“We, the parents of the children, have to teach them so they can live right and work well in this world. We must teach them because they will not turn out well if someone else teaches them for us. That is why we have children.”

– Translated from the Oral Record.
 Jimmy B. Rabesca (1990)
 in Strong Like Two People,
 page 19



Key Activities and Initiatives

1. Living the language as the foundation of Early Years programs and services.

- Promoting Tłıchǫ language use in all Early Years programs, services and partnerships. Tłıchǫ children, parents and communities experience their language throughout daily interactions in prenatal, childcare, preschools, kindergarten, and transition and new initiatives.
- Knowledge and evidence-based resources are created and available for all to access information on best practices for parents and children in the early years.

2. Use of best practices in early childhood health, education and family engagement.

- Best practices used in early childhood health promotion, family engagement and early childhood education throughout all Tłıchǫ Early Years programs and services, inclusive of innovative use of family resource centres or hub model, oral health initiatives, speech language support and partnerships with integrated service delivery/health promotion.
- Complete professional development to increase knowledge and skill in best practices and evidence-based early childhood learning.
- Compile and keep updated best practices and knowledge resources for staff reference and review.

3. Developing new initiatives and programs.

- Designing and delivering a continuum of Early Years programs and services under one department – Children, Families and Community – prenatal to three years, three to six years, transition of early childhood years to school age; a family resource centre or community-based hub model of early childhood.
- Re-design and development of prenatal to age three programs and services, including prenatal, post-natal and child-family programs, oral health, speech language support, home visiting, and family resource centres inclusive of all Early Years programs and services.
- Innovative programming in the community – installation of benches, community playgrounds for younger children, and choices in family activities for younger children, with priority for prenatal to three years of age.
- Innovative preschool and kindergarten programming in all Tłıchǫ communities – design, develop and pilot test joint preschool and kindergarten programming based on Tłıchǫ language, culture and way of life, with early childhood and developmentally appropriate best practices.

“Our language, culture
is our way of life...”





4. Re-structure childcare and preschool programs and services to meet developmentally appropriate practice, program quality and continuous improvement.

- Training and mentoring system for staff development, quality improvement and connection with Tłıchǰ cultural and language integration in child care and Early Years programs.
- Ongoing Early Years coaching program to address program quality and improvement (ITERS, ECERS and CLASS).
- Professional development planning for individual staff members for retention and best practices in quality early childhood programming. Staff for family resource centres certified through Family Resource Certificate Program (example: BC training model), explore partnerships with Grant McEwan College in Edmonton (existing programs) to develop training programs, resulting in employment of Tłıchǰ citizens as speech language and oral health aides.
- Develop linkages and supports with new Early Years initiatives and community programming.

5. Developing and facilitating respectful partnerships.

- Develop and enhance partnerships with health and education (kindergarten to grade 12) partners to support children in the Early Years, and their parents and families.
- Create systems of long range planning (programs, services, alignment with research and practices for children and families in culturally distinct communities) for the benefit of young children, their parents and families in Tłıchǰ communities.
- Build timelines for joint program and service design and development that are consistent with the Tłıchǰ way of life and the needs of children and families, and efficient use of financial resources based on best practices.

6. Development of Tłıchǰ Early Years curriculum, family and parent resources.

- Research, design and develop local resources for the Early Years – prenatal to three years, preschool years, transition to school years (grades 1-2) and childcare centres.
- Look to existing culture-based early childhood curriculum for NWT or Aboriginal Head Start, and adapt for language and cultural considerations of Tłıchǰ communities. (No need to re-invent.)
- Pilot test and revise resource materials following implementation and evaluation process for cultural responsiveness, suitability and ease of use in early childhood programs.





Early Years Administration, Management and Financial Systems

A review of the administrative and financial platform that currently supports the range of early childhood, prenatal, and child and youth programs was completed to assess the relevance and efficiency of the system and whether the current system can support the forthcoming Early Years Strategy and Framework.

It was found that the current administration system was established at a time of rapid change in the organization and that it meets basic functions to run general programs. What is lacking is connection of the current operations systems to early childhood programs and community programming, program design/development, and monitoring and evaluation functions.

A business administration model, plus additional early childhood and social programming expertise, is needed to go forward to support the proposed strategic directions and new initiatives.

These administrative and organizational supports are needed to support the implementation of new initiatives as proposed, and with a transition timeline from the previous systems and organizational arrangements.





Strategic Direction

Re-design the administrative, management and organizational systems for the Early Years programs, including funding allocations to meet the range of programs and services in the Early Years continuum.

Key Activities and Initiatives

1. Operationalize the Early Years Framework with innovative administration systems based on best practices in the early childhood profession.

- A new administrative, management department is recommended within the Tłıchq system of governance for health and education programs that is solely dedicated to deliver Early Years programs and services. One option could be the Tłıchq Community Services Agency (TCSA) deliver the programs on behalf of the Tłıchq Government, with staff being Tłıchq Government employees.
- Research, design and development of this new Early Years department requires dedicated time and resources to align what was there, what is needed and how to get there.
- Management and program supervision staffing requires re-structuring to continue with day-to-day programming, and to be responsive the new initiatives and organizational models of running early childhood programs.

2. New department – Child, Family and Community Programs (CFC).

- New organizational department, chart and reporting structure. Recommended structure based on evidence-based literature.
- Adopt best practices models of early childhood departments and divisions, and integrate with a Tłıchq perspective that supports the Strategy and Framework.
- Secure sufficient organizational funding for the range of new initiatives (beyond childcare and preschools) as the strategic framework encompasses the full range of the early years – prenatal to six years, and their parents, families and communities.

3. Complete infrastructure planning on a yearly basis, with capital replacement planning for building and space allocations in all Tłıchq communities.

- Prioritize Behchokò childcare space as needing a full replacement/re-design, with possible change in location within the short-term, based on existing space unable to meet the full range of childcare services needed with multi-age groups.
- Complete yearly capital plans for each of the Tłıchq communities.
- Complete space review for new initiatives, including Early Years Implementation and Evaluation 2017-2027.

“Our Tłıchq parents and families are the most important resource for our children.”



Early Years Implementation and Evaluation – 2017-2027

Implementation of the Strategy and Framework is indicated through best practices in program design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation. Different levels of monitoring and support with process/outcome evaluation indicators provides for best practice that are culturally relevant, sensitive and consistent with Tłıchǫ guiding principles and OCAP™ – Ownership, Control, Access and Possession principles.¹

The Early Years Strategy and Framework can act as a unifying influence (based on “In Tłıchǫ Unity”) and direction across agencies, services for different programs and for different age groups. Further, the Strategy and Framework can provide for agreed upon values, principles and directions for Early Years programs and services in an implementation plan that includes transition with existing services and staffing, provides for planned installation and implementation, provides continuous monitoring and feedback, and makes adjustments along the way for quality programming.

Strategic Direction

Areas and Timelines for Implementation

- Policy development for start-up, new and innovative program design in family resource and hub model Early Years programming, renewed partnerships and transition planning for existing childcare and preschool programs.
- Administrative system design to match early childhood practice and emerging legislation, innovative program implementation and early childhood leadership practices, and quality monitoring and program evaluation.
- Strategy evaluation – process, outcome and impact, and implementation review – develop culturally relevant indicators, and use methods consistent with proven and accepted procedures, validated measures for the local population, and analyzed with cultural competence and knowledge – “Start with the end in mind.”
- Provide all implementation activities within Tłıchǫ ways of supporting children, families and community members to have shared involvement in caring and nurturing young children.
- Provide co-located and integrated services, with the Early Years as the central location for care and development programs, also referred to by Canadian experts in early childhood as “community-based hub” (Jessica Ball work in British Columbia First Nations communities)

¹ Toolkit for the Digitization of First Nation’s Knowledge (see indigitization.ca).

“Children need to know their language as this is their foundation for who they are.”



Year 1 – Implementation 2017-2018

Priority	Activity/Task
1. Policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written policy directives, approach and programs and services – Tłıchq way of life. • Early childhood work regarding relevant legislation development for Tłıchq communities. • Funding schemes for existing programs and services to be re-aligned for strategic framework.
2. Administration, department re-structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New department structure design, transition for existing programs. • New staff positions created for Early Years department – Children, Families and Community – with training and support for Early Years management staff to support Strategy and Framework. • Training and orientation to match Strategy and Framework – community-based hub/family resource centres. Tłıchq speech language and oral health trained resource personnel.
3. Infrastructure and program transition –start-up of new innovative programs – family resource centres/ community-based hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review existing locations, places for new programs – family resource centres – suitable, renovations or relocation. • Re-align existing prenatal, healthy families and other programs under new department, supervision and program implementation. • Implementation and monitoring plan for new initiatives – family resource centres.



“What are we waiting for?”

Year 2-5 – Implementation 2018-2022

Priority	Activity/Task
1. Early Years programs and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New initiative – family resource centre. • Linkages to community Early Years programs and services – preschools, childcare centres; prenatal, home visitation. • Best practice and culturally competent programming based on Tłıchǫ way of life... language and culture. • New initiative – oral health and health promotion, positive parenting programming – best practices – speech language support by Tłıchǫ trained citizens in partnership with Grant McEwen or other colleges/universities. • Transition programming with Early Years – preschool/kindergarten and formal school entry.
2. Administration and organizational systems, staffing and mentoring, infrastructure and building/space management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New department support and review/revise for operation of Early Years programs and strategic framework. • Continued staff mentoring and development of local workforce for family resource centres/oral health and speech language aide programs. • New staffing training program in Tłıchǫ communities to provide ongoing support and encourage local employment, local training and education. Possible online options, as adapted from BC Family Resource Certificate Program, Grant McEwen speech language aides and oral health aides. • Funding schemes for existing programs and services, and new initiatives.
3. Program evaluation – process and outcome, monitoring and implementation review – “Start with the end in mind”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Evaluation Plan.



“The children are our future and we must do everything we can to support them in reaching for what they want to do in life.”

Year 5-10 – Implementation 2022-2027

Priority	Activity/Task
1. Early Years programs and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Family resource centre/hub model, with linkages to community Early Years programs and services – preschools, childcare centres. • Best practice and culturally competent programming based on Tłıchǫ Way of life... language and culture. • Support health promotion initiatives – evidence-based decision making, and demographic and social-economic conditions in 2022. • Continued support of Early Years programming and emerging trends in 2022 – technology, digital health and education records, automated resource design and development, online training options. • Online resource options for parents and community members.
2. Administration and organizational systems, staffing and mentoring, infrastructure and building/space management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued department support and review/revise for operation of Early Years programs and strategic framework in digital era. • Continued staff mentoring and development of local workforce for family resource centres. • Ongoing training options for online programs – colleges and degrees. • Funding schemes for existing programs and services, and new initiatives.
3. Program evaluation – process and outcome, monitoring and implementation review – “Start with the end in mind”... outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Evaluation Plan.



Summary Early Years Evaluation Plan – 2017-2027

“It has taken the input of 100s and 100s of people to create this Strategy... I hope we do it...”

Objectives	Evaluation Questions/ Methods	Indicators/Outcomes
Phase 1 – 2017-2018		
1. Policy development and implementation plan	<p>What were the target activities?</p> <p>What are the methods for reviewing Early Years implementation plans for best practices?</p> <p>Was this effective?</p> <p>Who was involved?</p> <p>Short term achieved? If not, what was done instead?</p> <p>Successes, challenges, lessons learned?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people included; partnerships • Review of documentation • Target activities have foundation support, policies and directives Tịch, and best practices
2. Department set-up, design, staffing and infrastructure preparation for innovative programs in early childhood	<p>What were the target activities?</p> <p>What was the method used? Was this effective?</p> <p>Who was involved?</p> <p>Short term achieved? If not, what was done instead?</p> <p>Successes/challenges, lessons learned?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people involved, job descriptions, organizational chart, roles and responsibilities – NEW STRUCTURE • Operational supports in place



“Now is the time to invest efficiently for our children... The economic impact of putting money in the young children is out there...”

Objectives	Evaluation Questions/ Methods	Indicators/Outcomes
Phase 2 – 2018-2022		
3. Early Years implementation	<p>What methods were used and were they effective?</p> <p>Who was involved? Effective?</p> <p>Was the target group of children/parents?</p> <p>How will success be measured?</p> <p>What was the satisfaction?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people reached, program specific outcomes for age of children • Review of documentation • Social determinant indicators – program quality measures, child outcomes, culturally relevant
Phase 3 – 2022-2027		
4 Continued Early Years implementation	<p>What methods were used and were they effective?</p> <p>Who was involved? Effective?</p> <p>Was the target group of children/parents?</p> <p>How will success be measured?</p> <p>What was the satisfaction?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people reached, program specific outcomes for age of children • Review of documentation • Social determinant indicators – program quality measures, child outcomes, culturally relevant
Ongoing		
5. Project documentation and participatory evaluation	<p>What cultural competence and safety indicators were used? Effective?</p> <p>Partner satisfaction?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All documentation, interviews, stories, reports (informal/formal), engagement sessions – yearly
6 Cultural and linguistic realities	<p>Inputs/outputs met?</p> <p>Lessons learned?</p>	



Outline of Tłıchǫ Programs for Young Children, Families and Communities – Strategy and Framework

Program Description	Target Group	Space Needed	Resources/Staffing	Outputs/Desired Outcomes/Policy
<p>1. Family Resource Centre/Child and Family Centre*</p> <p>Knowledge/skill-based with experienced staff – health promotion focus, prevention, parent-focused, primary health care model for children and parents</p> <p>Includes prenatal, healthy families, oral health aides, speech language aides, community programming for families and home visiting options – see below</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/caregivers and young children prenatal to age six years • Group and individual support programming – daily, evenings, weekend options • Universal – all can attend, no referral needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralized location in community – small/large space for young children – suitable for range of programs for infants, prenatal/post-natal, parenting programs, child and parent • Different programs, services under one building – health staff use family resource centre • Parents bring young children for sensory play (sand and water, painting, and cultural activities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapted from “Hook and Hub” and family resource centre model of BC Aboriginal centres • Resources for children/parents • Staff receive training in family resource programming – four courses – BC Model/Grant McEwan model (Edmonton); speech language/oral health programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support role of parents as first teachers and attachment for young children; child outcomes improved by supporting parents and child development • Encourage health, learning, culture and language development • Improved physical, mental, emotional and holistic child development • Culture and language enriched in early years of Tłıchǫ families
<p>2. Prenatal/Post-natal Program</p> <p>Prenatal includes health, support, nutrition, nursing support with information on birth, caring for infant, exercise classes, pregnancy yoga, infant massage, traditional parenting skills, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/caregivers, young children • Group and individual support • Universal for all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use existing community space or new family resource centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring educational resources, materials, toys, games, etc. • 2-3 staff, with training in prenatal and family resource centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community engagement • Community involvement/awareness of play, needs of young children • Sharing of community values, traditions, group setting for parents • Policy implication: building priority of early childhood, parenting support



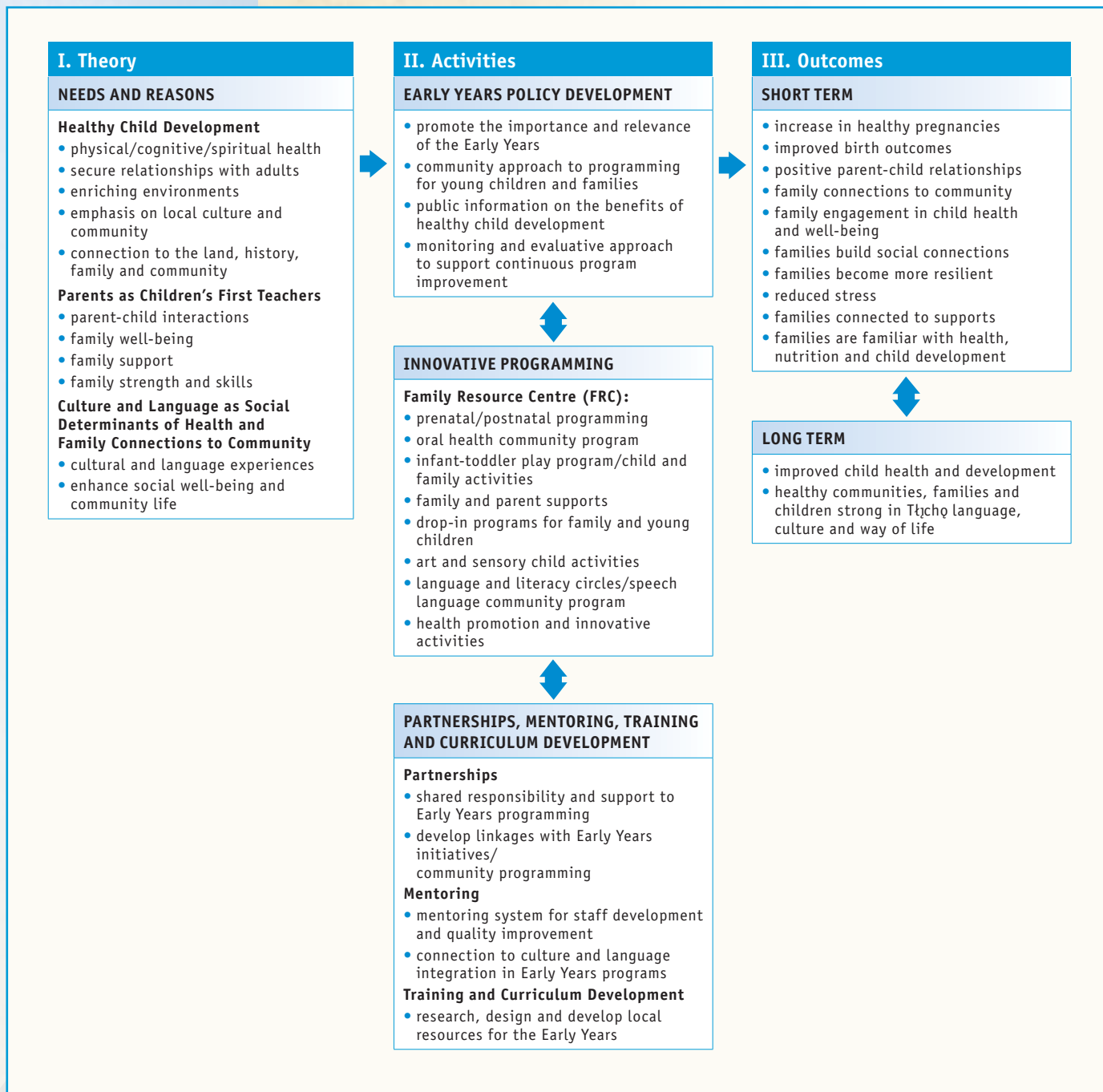
Program Description	Target Group	Space Needed	Resources/Staffing	Outputs/Desired Outcomes/Policy
3. Oral Health Program/ Speech Language Aides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents/ caregivers, young children Group and individual support Universal for all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home visitation/ family resource programming/ health centre, based on partnerships with existing daycare/ early childhood programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Materials for health and well-being, healthy snacks, education Dental health Speech language support and education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community engagement// awareness of play, needs of young children Sharing of community values, traditions, group setting for parents Policy implication: priority for oral health to support child development
4. Play Group/ Drop-in/Moms and Tots/ Targeted Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents/caregivers and children Set times, set agenda, time limited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centralized location in community Can share space; new family resource 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff dependent on numbers of children; could be more or less-part of “Hook and Hub” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for parents of young children Encourage health, learning, brain development for infants/toddlers
5. Early/ Aboriginal Head Start/ Kindergarten* Targeted ages, child-led program mostly, with variations in pace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children grouped by age/needs – 3-6 years for safety and licensing; Early AHS/Family Drop-in Play Programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centralized location in community – small or large – possible new family resource centre locations Some communities rent/use space in school – mostly licensed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High staff needs to meet licensing ratio and training needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on ECE, child-centred curriculum Encourage holistic learning and care Policy implication: early intervention, quality ECE program, education/health
6. Child Care Centres*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on community, space and ages space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on community

*Community-based hub or family resource centre – as determined for each Tłıchq community.



3. Logic Model

Early Years 2017-2027





Appendix

Technical Report: Methods/Findings/Recommendations





1. Purpose of the Early Childhood Strategy and Framework (2017-2027)

The guiding work to develop an Early Childhood Strategy and Framework was started with the priority to look at what is currently being done, to consult with the people in the four Tłıchǫ communities and to develop a guiding tool for the future, which sets out aspirations and desired outcomes for Tłıchǫ children.

The Strategy and Framework followed a planning process, with extensive community research with Tłıchǫ parents, families and agencies who work with young children, to assess current and future needs, and changes for existing programs in place for young children and families.

This Technical Report outlines the community research project, including the methods, data collection procedures, analysis, integration of findings and recommendations for the next 10 years in early childhood –2017-2027, and is a supplementary document to the Strategy and Framework.

The goals of the community research project were:

1. To seek input from Tłıchǫ people about early childhood programs and services currently offered, what is needed, and input for the Strategy and Framework.
2. To look at best practices in early childhood programming, approach and foundation to achieve positive outcomes for children, families and communities.
3. To look at innovative community program delivery models, systems and direction needed to plan, structure, implement and evaluate programs and services going forward for the Tłıchǫ youngest children, prenatal to school age (2017-2027).
4. To get input on the development of culturally relevant early childhood programs.
5. To communicate the findings and recommendations from the Tłıchǫ people in an Early Childhood Strategy and Framework (ECSF), Implementation and Evaluation Plan for 2017-2027.

Additional input for the Strategy and Framework was taken from best practices and included the following: what is cost-effective and what are efficient uses of funding resources for prenatal to school age children; and what are evidence-based practices that support young children in language development, health and social-emotional development for best health and educational outcomes.

This technical report includes the following:

- Methodology of the Community Research
- Summary of Findings from the Community Research
- Recommendations to Guide the Strategy and Framework



2. Methodology

2.1 Purpose of Community Research

The purpose of the Ṭḥq̣ community research for the Strategy and Framework was to gather community input for a chosen work, such as the Early Childhood Strategy and Framework, 2017-2027, in Ṭḥq̣ communities. Needs assessment work is another term used for seeking input about where programs, services and systems are at a given time, and what is desired going forward.

A design of participatory action research was used to guide the Strategy and Framework design in the four Ṭḥq̣ communities of Behchoḳ, Gamètì, Wekweètì and Whatì.

In recent years, the use of participatory action methods is preferred in community settings where there are language and cultural considerations, so as to do respectful work.

2.2 Methods

Approach and Design

The approach used for the community research and needs assessment work for the development of the Strategy was one of participation, exploring possibilities and ideas of what could be, respecting traditions and values of the local culture and community, and seeking areas for development and innovation going forward.

This model of research is consistent with community-based practices where organizations are involved in the process from start to finish, and participate through input and consultation, assistance with data collection, review of findings and support in sharing the findings within communities (WHO, 2003).

Participatory action research methods came from the transformative approach to evaluation, as led by community organizations, cultural groups and those far from decision making. Many works from the literature support the use of participatory action to assist in program development that are respectful of different cultures and to provide information for program enhancements of existing programs (Mertens, 2005).

The persons who collected and transcribed the community research were project team members, who know the traditions, values and way of life, and served important roles in documenting the voices of Ṭḥq̣ parents, caregivers and family members.

Additional methodology and data collection was done by contracted persons with specific expertise in culturally relevant research methods and early childhood, and whom worked side by side during community focus groups, agency interviews and findings analysis and integration work.



The community research data was collected in the spring of 2016 and transcribed in the months that followed through to October of 2016. Thereafter, the project team members completed a review of the community research and presented their initial findings to the Healing Wind Advisory in October of 2016. Further work on the integration of the extensive database of individual interviews, community focus groups and community assessments of early childhood programs was done from November to February 2017. Final integration of this extensive community research was completed with review by Tłchq personnel as the final editing and inclusion of key points.

Community Research Questions

A number of questions were used throughout the individual, community and partner group/staff interviews in the community research and needs assessment work. A summary of these questions are listed below that were used informally with individuals, community meetings and sessions with partner groups to review current and future needs for the young children in Tłchq communities:

1. What ages of children do you have? Support as family/community, including grandparents, aunt/uncle, family members?
2. What services in early childhood have you used, and can you tell us about what you think about these current services and activities? (Staffing, location, buildings/spaces, hours of operation...)
3. What services are needed in early childhood for health, well-being and to help you as parents, family and community members?
4. What challenges did you have with the programs and services for young children, including health, education and lessons learned?
5. What role do you think Tłchq language and culture have on early childhood programs and services?
6. What supports do parents and families need in your community? Did the project work effectively with partner organizations?
7. Other suggestions for strategy in early childhood?
8. Comments on strategy and framework for early childhood?

Analysis Procedures

Data integration, summary and coding to each community was a lengthy process completed by Tłchq staff and provided for team members to review and consider when doing the Strategy and Framework documents.

The community research also provided a means of communicating the relevance and importance of early childhood to community members by making it a priority to reach all parents and caregivers who care for young children in the four Tłchq communities.

- Qualitative summaries of community research by each person interviewed.
- Further analysis of summaries, with themes, points in common and specific factors for consideration by each Tłchq community.





- Qualitative summary of early childhood constructs, best practices, core services and areas for future development and innovation.
- Qualitative summary of early childhood strategy points and content for framework based on best practices and Tłchq language, culture and way of life.
- Qualitative summary of program quality ratings for each ECERS/ITERS preschool and childcare centre in each Tłchq Community.

2.3 Lines of Evidence

Data Collection Sources

The lines of evidence used for this Technical Report were as follows:

1. **Program Observations** – Actual observation and integration with early childhood activities in each of the Tłchq communities.
2. **Early Childhood and Infant/Toddler Rating Scale** – Summary and full rating scales of each program in each Tłchq community in May and June of the community research timeline, 2016. Published tools for documentation of program quality, strengths and areas of challenge, with recommendations for capital planning and replacement.
3. **Document Review** – Involved reviewing available documents, previous frameworks, demographic and social indicator reports, early childhood data as available in public format, and forms used in early childhood and childcare programs. A limited scope of financial documents were reviewed, mostly in terms of sources of childcare and preschool funding. Some community-based funding documents were reviewed for linkages and partnerships. Staff interviews provided some basis for interpretation of staffing, materials and infrastructure management.
4. **Community Research Profiles** – Interview summaries done by Tłchq interview team members in spring of 2016.
5. **Key Informant Interviews** – These interviews were conducted by invitation of those Tłchq or community partners who share responsibility for child and family programs, or as part of health and education services. Tłchq personnel involved with direct service to early childhood through administration were interviewed.

Literature Review, Comparative Analysis

6. **Literature Review** – Relevant prevention and best practices research and evidence-based practices were reviewed for this work, with emphasis on innovation.
7. **Comparative Analysis** – The literature review, specific program data collected within systems of early childhood and childcare were reviewed to gain perspective on where do Tłchq services stand currently compared to similar Aboriginal and mainstream systems of delivery and what are gaps and challenges.



2.4 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Limitations

A number of methodological limitations are noted for this work:

- A limited review of the funding for current systems and partners provided general guidance for going forward. More detailed financial inputs and available resources, including program partners in health, education and community programs, would be helpful in the next steps of strategy planning and implementation.
- Informant interviews were semi-structured, with consistent procedures, and could lead to confirmatory bias in answering the questions.
- Community focus group interviews were time limited (one date), and attendance and input was general and limited to those who attended.
- The partnership interviews were limited to a set time and a few areas of discussion for the Strategy and Framework. Also, considerable change (implementation of universal junior kindergarten across the NWT) was at the forefront of the partner's program delivery planning in the next year. This emerging program delivery change in all Tłıchq communities by education partners had little community discussion or consultation during the community research, or as part of the research.

Ethical Considerations

All community-based work needs to operate within an ethical frame of reference that is consistent with accepted practices, relevant laws and procedures that are in place within community settings such as the Tłıchq communities.

Furthermore, the respective Strategy and Framework team followed their professional ethics and boundaries in working with language and cultural differences, relying on local partners and personnel for guidance and direction in the work. Ethical issues for this work included:

- **Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity** for all data, and limits placed on reproduction of community-based data in reports.
- **Use of informed consent** with participants, mostly through oral procedures for community focus groups and interviews.
- **Consideration for quality of data collection, issues of validity and reliability** for data reviewed, including general information provided for community context of the current status of Tłıchq children and quality of those data collection measures.
- **Issues of cultural competence and responsiveness** – measures and data collection procedures for culturally distinct populations considered in review of literature and all data collected, including broad ratings and program ratings. Consideration needed for all standardized measures used with Tłıchq communities due to language and cultural diversity issues and ethical standards in data interpretation and responsibilities.





3. Findings

What did we learn?

1. Findings: Language, culture and way of life is the foundation for the Early Years.

From the community interviews, program observations and ECERS/ITERS data, it was evident that the Tłıchq language and culture needs to be the foundation of all future work with Tłıchq children, families and in early childhood, family and community programming.

It has been said from the community research (interviews with parents, meetings with Tłıchq people and the program evaluation of early childhood services – 2016) that Tłıchq language, culture and way of life remains important in the Tłıchq communities.

The Tłıchq Government Strategic Frameworks and Intentions 2009-2013 and 2013-2017 cite language, culture and way of life in the guiding principles and throughout the works and mission of the Tłıchq Government.

Good practice in policy and program development builds upon what has been done successfully in the past and provides direction going forward, and is well cited in research around the world.

Language and culture is essential to improve health outcomes and well-being, and cultural continuity can build individual and community resilience and mitigate poor health outcomes. Researchers have found that children “found their voice” and performed better academically when immersed in their Indigenous languages in the early years. Improved academic performance empowers Aboriginal children, and provides them with more life choices and benefits their social development.

The health of the land and the health of the community are connected, as relationships to the physical settings nurture the spiritual, economic and social roots of culture.

Culture and language are considered social determinants of health, with language being a conveyor of culture.

Therefore, the information gathered in the community research is consistent with guiding principles for the Tłıchq people, where language, culture and way of life is the foundation for the Early Years strategic framework and Early Years work going forward.





2. Findings: Children, families and communities – services and programs fragmented and defined by budgets and funding availability versus need and context.

From the community interviews, program observations and ECERS/ITERS data, it was evident that the Tłchq value and respect the importance of the early years, child development, families and communities.

There are currently a range of programs that serve childcare needs and preschool for four-year-old children. Some prenatal programs are offered as well.

The interviews revealed a lack of integration, year to year focus and centralized system of program operations. Different programs are offered under different departments, budgets and program guidelines.

3. Findings: Implementation of early childhood programs and services are good quality and could use further development.

From the community interviews, program observations and ECERS/ITERS data, it was evident that the Tłchq have quality programs in some areas and less than ideal services in other areas. The ECERS and ITERS database reveals some programs are following best practices, using resources for children and providing needed services such as childcare.

There is room for improvement in service delivery of childcare and early childhood programs that are dependent on well-funded systems of monitoring, quality assurance, capital replacement, training and mentoring, and early childhood specific administrative, human resources and program expertise.





4. Findings: Administration and structure of programs and services are meeting current needs at a baseline level for funding tracking and reporting, and less so for innovation, and long-term sustainability.

From the community interviews, program observations and ECERS/ITERS data, it was evident that the current administration and structure of how early childhood programs are delivered was established at a time of rapid change in the organization.

Administrative systems in place are missing key components of evidence-based and program quality monitoring functions, are missing sufficient management roles for all of the programs and sites, and are unable to grow and develop further according to innovative early childhood design and development.

Funding alignment, planning for capital replacement, and priority for safe and modern day facilities is greatly needed for long-term focus.

Expertise exists within the four communities for these enhancements of administrative systems that require dedicated early childhood trained personnel, management and administrative expertise. Early childhood is an established field of practice, such as nursing, education and dedicated management systems, and more than one or two people are required.

5. Findings: Partnerships and collaboration exist within early childhood programs, and are in need of dedicated strategic program development among larger systems in health, education and wellness.

From the community interviews, program observations and ECERS/ITERS data, it was evident that program partners are present from education, health and wellness.

However, these partnerships were only evident at an organizational level and in shared use of facilities such as community schools.

For future strategic planning and long-term health, well-being and education, a complete re-work is needed with the administrative systems to align valuable health and education supports from a child and family perspective. Also, an evidence-based and best practice approach is needed to work with community partners, which requires dedicated time, resources and strategies due to different models of delivery, professional affiliations and structural considerations such as legislative and privacy issues (health and education).





6. Findings: Lessons learned and challenges for innovation.

From the community interviews, program observations and ECERS/ITERS data, it was evident that a number of strengths, challenges and opportunities have been maximized in recent years. Going forward, it is even more critical to address lessons learned from this community research, review successes and challenges, and seek evidence-based research and guidance going forward.

Lessons Learned

1. There is a lack of knowledge of early childhood, influence of birth to age three, cultural impacts on children’s development and timelines for language development. Discussions and feedback throughout the community research focused solely on daycare spaces and preschool, which are centre-based early childhood services. There is much, much more to early childhood programming than childcare and preschools.
2. There appears to be a loss of understanding and knowledge in core practices, approaches and services of how young child grows and develops, learn language, and use the first years to explore and develop. A lesson learned is that early childhood is about growth and development and is best served from this approach versus disease and diagnosis. Parents are children’s first and most important teachers.
3. A lesson learned is that there are rapid changes occurring in the Tłıchǫ communities due to competing demands on young families, with change in wage economy, women/men working outside of the home and use of technology. At the same time, there are concerns of loss of language, culture and way of life, and desires to preserve them.
4. Emerging pressures to be “ready for school” may be overshadowing the real needs of young children – caring, nurturing and safe living arrangements. The forced use of external models of child-rearing and school readiness programming that are ill-suited for small, isolated communities, where a traditional way of life occurs, are not indicated and not necessary. Accurate interpretation of the research is needed for going forward with early childhood investments.
5. Innovation is needed, but not at the expense of evidence-based, research-based practices for young children living in Tłıchǫ communities.





4. Recommendations

4.1 Develop a new “Early Years” department – Expansion and re-design of administration systems, programs and services to support Early Years programming for young children, families and communities.

Expansion and development of a new department is recommended, with the focus on the earliest years of children’s development, with their parents, families and programs/ services that support them. This is a focus on the prenatal to school age timeline of the early years, based on the gaps in programming for this age group, the community research and current research on the benefits of earlier investments in children. This recommendation is made to improve the starting points for all young T̄chq children, from the earliest time (prenatal), for a strong foundation.

Source of recommendation: This recommendation was developed from the findings of the community research, and the review of current T̄chq systems and structures of early childhood services (daycare and preschool). Suggestions were made by community agencies and staff in going forward to address gaps in programs for the youngest, and to be consistent with best practices, where earlier investments provide for the greatest results in long-term health, well-being and self-sufficiency.

4.2 Use evidence-based decision making in early childhood policy development, program design, implementation and evaluation.

Use of evidence-based early childhood knowledge and research, including social-cultural perspectives, are recommended for the future work in the Early Years in T̄chq communities.

Educating decision makers, community partners and stakeholders on what are best practices, what are social determinants of health for young children, and what are good financial investments in the early years is evidence-based decision making.

Evidence-based decision making is “*Connecting what we know, with what we do...*”

Source of recommendation: This recommendation was developed from the findings of the community research, review of current systems and structures of early childhood services, suggestions made by community agencies, and best practices in early childhood program development.



4.3 Innovation in Early Years program development – design, develop and implement innovative programming to meet the emerging needs of young children, families and Tłıchǫ communities.

New innovative approaches to programs and services for the different ages and stages of Tłıchǫ children are recommended that are responsive to the changing times and consistent with healthy child development. A developmental focus, from prenatal to school age (bottom up) approach based on health and well-being, Tłıchǫ culture language and way of life is recommended in place of current systems of remediation, intervention and catch-up. Starting off strong and supported has been proven to be cost-effective and efficient for language and cognitive development.

Source of recommendation: This recommendation was developed from the findings of the community research, review of current systems and structures of early childhood services in Tłıchǫ communities, and best practices in early childhood policy development.

4.4 Funding alignment, investments and capital planning for the Early Years.

It is recommended that Early Years funding (human resources, capital investments, administration/management) be aligned with where it is designated for the early years, families and community programming.

Also, a community by community capital investment plan is recommended in the near future due to failing and low quality childcare infrastructure of facilities in some Tłıchǫ communities.

In the last decade, economic experts have realized that the best investments in children are within the first three years, which is a good return on investments.

Currently, there are resources invested for basic programs and services, but are in great need of further enhanced to match best practices models of support for the youngest, and to respond to the challenges in Tłıchǫ communities.

Source of recommendation: This recommendation was developed from the findings of the community research, review of current funding of community programs, early childhood spaces and future capital needs.





4.5 Build a system of training, monitoring and mentoring for the Early Years.

It is recommended that a comprehensive training, monitoring and mentoring system of staff development and building capacity be developed at the same time as the Strategy and Framework for the Early Years.

A plan for building community capacity for staff and managing going forward Early Years programs and services is a vital part of the long-term investment for Tłıchǫ communities.

Source of recommendation: This recommendation was developed the findings of the community research, review of current human resources and staffing systems in place, what has been effective in past investments in creating local jobs, and what is needed for the future of Early Years programs and systems.

4.6 Develop partnerships with programs, systems and agencies with shared values and practices regarding the development of children.

Multiple partners are necessary to re-build the system of early childhood program delivery that is currently in the Tłıchǫ communities. A broader vision of community supports and use of shared resources, including funding, staffing, buildings and infrastructure needs to be implemented.

Source of recommendation: This recommendation was developed from the findings of the community research, review of current partnerships with health, education and community programs, and what are best practices for supporting healthy families and communities to have healthy children.

4.7 Use of technology for communication, program monitoring and evaluation.

It is recommended that new systems of technology and communication for the Early Years work, program monitoring, evaluation and staff support be prioritized in Tłıchǫ communities.

New ways of reaching parents and families through technology outreach, and in sharing, are occurring and can be an effective means of reaching out to parents and families.

Source of recommendation: This recommendation was developed from the community research as well as the review of emerging practices to support improvement in remote community settings.





Summary of Individual and Community Interviews in Tłıchq Communities

Spring 2016 – Behchokò, Gamètì, Wekweètì and Whatì
Early Childhood Responses Data

Methods and Lines of Inquiry – Environmental Scan and Words from the Tłıchq People

Over 350 people were part of the individual and community interviews, which is an excellent sample size for the four Tłıchq communities and provides strength to the strategic framework, its priorities and recommendations.

- 62% of the input for this strategic framework was from individual interviews with Tłıchq people.
- 30% of the input was also with Tłıchq community members from sessions done in the public in the spring/summer of 2016 in each of the four Tłıchq communities.

Below is a summary of this extensive database of community-based early childhood ideas, feedback and goals for the future generations of Tłıchq citizens.

Comments have been integrated from the four communities, with adaptations made to protect the confidentiality of those interviewed.

An extensive community by community spreadsheet was designed and completed to enter all individual interviews done in each of the four Tłıchq communities from recorded information.

Each interview sheet was entered, question by question and interview by interview. All comments were recorded in the spreadsheet for use in the strategic planning work and framework design.

An analysis of the four communities revealed a considerable sample size difference for the Tłıchq communities and a good basis for use in strategic planning work.

The use of a participatory action research is a preferred method in community settings where there are traditional language and cultural considerations and practices.

The findings from the Community Research were as follows:



1. Common Themes from Community Research Interviews

Target Groups for Early Childhood Strategy

- Parents, caregivers, grandparents of young children prenatal to age six years were interviewed. Program and services providers, including health and education personnel, were also interviewed.
- Young parents, teenage parents and all parents of young children were interviewed.
- Most parents interviewed had younger children, newborns and younger children/older children family systems.
- Most parents interviewed had more than one child; many had two to five children under age five years.
- Suggestions in interviews were for child only programs and services (childcare), child and parent programs and services, and community infrastructure or equipment needs for young children and parents.
- Activities for child and parent were focused on being more physical, being outside and with community spaces, playgrounds free of hazards, and community enhancements to support child and parent outdoor activities.
- Activities for youngest children emphasized healthy foods for the infants and young children.
- Activities for parents and adults emphasized cooking healthy food and recreation for families as a target of activities.

Language, Culture and Way of Life

Tłchq language and cultural activities needed – 92% of those interviewed:

- Families learn from one another in small communities.
- Young children learn from listening and observing in their families.
- Families need support of traditional ways, teachings about respect.
- All programs, services and school need more language and cultural activities.
- Tłchq to be spoken in all programs for children and families (school too).
- Programs are isolated from others – few ones that are cultural are for parents of young children.
- Young children like to speak their language, Tłchq.
- All Tłchq staff can use more Tłchq language in their work.
- Communication activities for families and talking to each other.
- Teach infants and youngest children Tłchq words, language and way of life; teach them younger and then they can learn more and keep the language.
- To hold onto our language, need more people in community and schools to speak Tłchq Yati to the children.
- Do traditional activities while speaking Tłchq like cleaning fish and other activities.



- Have elders tell stories in Tłıchǫ language and speak basic words to children who may not know many Tłıchǫ words.
- Important to have our language to keep our culture and traditions going.
- Having elders talk to children about values and traditions of right and wrong.
- Oral language programs in Tłıchǫ for young children and for parents to know how to speak to their young children.
- Support in communities for young child and baby to be around family and experience trust, caring and love from own people, in own language.
- Encouragement of community members to help in raising and supporting our youngest – “It takes a whole community to raise a child.”
- Systems to encourage families helping other families – relatives or others, as used to be traditional to help others in the community.
- Traditional ways of elders and families guiding the next generation, use of traditional knowledge and re-teaching.
- Learning two languages – Tłıchǫ and English – young children can learn both.
- Outdoor learning in Tłıchǫ way, for young ones.
- More teaching of the Tłıchǫ language, singing songs and with the youngest ones at home and not just at school.
- History of Tłıchǫ is dependent on our way of life and how talk in Tłıchǫ Yati of culture and ways of being on the land; teach language by doing the activities – setting tent.
- Challenge in changing community as most children learning English, too, and if speaking to them in Tłıchǫ, they may not understand; hard to know what to do – guidance on how to learn two languages.

Programs, Services and Facilities

- Consistent focus in wanting all four communities with good childcare facilities.
- Consistent focus on having gathering places, locations, buildings, play areas for family and younger children and infants/toddler age children.
- Family literacy supports, book exchange programs, circles and teachings for young parents.
- Indoor gym activities for young children and families, and physical activities/ games for right ages – mats, equipment for younger children.
- Prenatal programs have limited attendance and depend on available staffing – needs consideration of how prenatal programming can be done in remote communities.
- Prenatal programs to be more consistent and include range of activities to help parents be ready for infants and children.
- Supports for parents at home – new types of programs – indoor activities, crafts and art for younger children – mom and child at home, dad and child at home.
- Services and supports for home-based sitters – knowledge, courses, materials and supplies to use when caring for young child at home.



- Programs to help with child guidance and how to address challenging behaviours – by ages.
- Health and wellness sessions for young children – how to deal with sick children so do not have to go to health centre, healthy foods to eat.
- Support for dealing with children with language delays.
- Breastfeeding and nursing young babies, weaning and how to introduce other foods.
- Caring for young children programs – bedtimes, dealing with tantrums, potty training and other areas for young children and parents.
- Food hamper and supports for families in need of help to feed their children.
- Addiction (including gambling) supports for young parents having children – at community level, and with kindness and focus on healing; treatment services in community would be good.

2. Specific Program or Community Themes

- Morning program for preschool.
- Community workshops, sessions, drop-in programs, different topics and locations. and for different ages of children (toddler yoga, early learning, parenting support, etc.).
- Early childhood spaces are much too small for programs (two communities).
- Community specific program comments on scheduling, staffing, space limits.
- Early childhood events and activities during summers, holidays.
- Programs for parents raising children on their own.
- School community libraries small and little content for young children.
- Safe playgrounds in communities for younger children and parents.
- Consistency in community support positions.
- Staffing levels for programs need to be reviewed – more than one person.
- Parents staying at childcare or preschool for short times – like parents learning what they do in daycare and preschool.
- More supports for young parents to want to look after their young children, for children to be healthy and happy.
- Sleep good, stay home with children; they need their parents.
- Big building for daycare and preschool, where kids or a child can be in a healthy area.
- Family healing workshops for parents of children and youth.
- Dealing with changes in technology, cell phones, cyber bullying and need for forgiveness.

Over 350 people were part of the individual and community interviews, which is an excellent sample size for the four Tłıchq communities, and provides strength to the strategic framework, its priorities and recommendations. Sixty-two percent of the input for this strategic framework was from individual interviews with Tłıchq people. Thirty percent of the input was also with Tłıchq community members during sessions done in the public in the spring of 2016 in each of the four Tłıchq communities.



3. Other Early Childhood Themes/Comments

- Health, dental and immunization are challenging to access in some of the Tłıchǫ communities; may be insufficient access and consistent services for best practices in supporting parents and families with questions about immunization, dental services and health for youngest.
- Supports for single parents with young children (not just income support).
- Time for changes in Tłıchǫ communities.
- Support for store to have wider selection of healthy foods for young children.
- Changes to how community programs are supported.
- Awareness and information at community level of what is an early childhood approach; knowledge and skills in providing settings for young children; misinformation at community level about elementary/high school teaching and early childhood education

The words of Tłıchǫ parents and families, who shared their thoughts, dreams and goals for their children, best summarizes the Early Years Strategy:

“Our language, culture is our way of life.”

“What are we waiting for?”

“This Strategy will need the wisdom and efforts of all to bring the actions forward.”

