

# CITY OF STRATFORD

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VALUE-FOR-MONEY AUDIT OF  
ANNE HATHAWAY CHILD CARE  
CENTRE

DIRECTLY OPERATED BY THE CITY  
OF STRATFORD

JUNE 2025



**BEAM GROUP**

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**PREPARED BY**  
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## Executive summary

The City of Stratford is designated by the Province of Ontario as the Service System Manager (SSM) for child care and early years programs and services for the service delivery area of the City of Stratford, Town of St. Marys, and Perth County. The Anne Hathaway Day Care Centre (AHDC) is a foundational component of the City of Stratford's social infrastructure. It supports parents in balancing employment and caregiving responsibilities, while providing children with high-quality early learning experiences during a critical stage of development. As one of the municipally operated centres in the service delivery area,<sup>1</sup> the full day child care centre has a licensed capacity for 107 children. The City also operates a before and after school program at the adjacent Anne Hathaway Public School, licensed for 86 kindergarten and school age children.

To inform this value-for-money audit, data was collected through qualitative and quantitative sources including key informant interviews, two online surveys, a review of administrative data, child care operator financial information, and analysis of external data and literature on key issues and trends in child care.

The findings, analysis and recommendations are intended to assist the City in responding to emerging issues in the administration and delivery of the centre and fulfill the requirement of the Ministry of Education that SSMs that directly operate child care centres retain independent advice and conduct a value-for-money audit on their direct delivery of child care services.

AHDC has a strong reputation for its high-quality care. Feedback from stakeholders indicated that the Centre often provides more effective services than other child care operators. However, it also incurs higher costs associated with service delivery than some child care centres.

As a licensed child care operator enrolled in the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program<sup>2</sup> it has reduced child care fees from \$48 to \$22 over the past few years.

Against the backdrop of a shortage in child care services in the region, it has a wait list of 620<sup>3</sup> unique children and a timeline of approximately three years to access a space. While this high demand reflects its strong commitment to quality, family-centred

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<sup>1</sup> The City of St Marys and the Municipality of North Perth also operate child care.

<sup>2</sup> A federal initiative aimed at making child care more affordable and accessible for families across Canada by reducing fees and increasing the availability of spaces.

<sup>3</sup> This includes children that have been born, are toddler or preschool age and not already placed at another centre.

service, it also presents an opportunity to explore how the centre can capitalize on its strengths to make a stronger impact in the community.

This report identifies opportunities for strengthening equity and inclusion, increasing access, and improving accessibility.

While opportunities for improvement exist, the most significant finding is the important impact that the Centre and its dedicated staff continue to make for children and families in the City of Stratford.

## Introduction and Context for the VfM Study

The Anne Hathaway Day Care Centre (AHDC) serves children from 18 months to 5 years of age at its full day centre and a before and after school program serving kindergarten and school age children at Anne Hathaway Public School. Programs are delivered by Registered Early Childhood Educators and follow a play-based, child-centred approach aligned with provincial guidelines. Its main centre is licensed for 15 toddler, 80 pre-school and 12 kindergarten children. The secondary before and after school program is licensed for 26 kindergarten and 60 school-age children.

AHDC operates year-round and provides a structured learning environment that supports children's physical, cognitive, and social development. Services include indoor and outdoor play, guided learning activities, rest time, and nutritious meals prepared on site. The Centre also participates in the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) System, which has reduced daily fees for eligible children (up to age 6) and improved overall affordability. Fee subsidies are available for qualifying families.

Enrollment in all programs is managed through a centralized online waitlist system. The Centre is operating at full capacity and maintains a significant waitlist, reflecting both high community demand and broader system constraints.

The centre has an annual operating expenditure of approximately \$1.9m. There are 20 Full-Time Equivalent staff. It is financed through two main sources: funding from all three levels of government and revenue from the fees charged to families.

In addition to being the organization directly responsible for child care at the AHDC, the City of Stratford is designated as the Service System Manager (SSM) for planning and oversight of the child care and early years programs and services within the service delivery area. This includes the City of Stratford, the municipalities of North Perth, Perth East, West Perth and the Town of St. Marys.

As SSM, the City oversees eight operators that deliver child care services at 26 sites including licensed full day child care centres and before and after school programs, special needs resourcing, authorized recreation programs and camps, and EarlyON Child and Family Centres. All licensed child care operators in the area are part of the CWELCC program. They are either municipally-operated, including by the Town of St. Marys and Municipality of North Perth, or operated by not-for-profit organizations.

This value-for-money audit, conducted between March – June 2025, evaluates both financial and non-financial outcomes associated with AHDC. It reviews the efficiency and effectiveness of the AHDC and provides decision makers with evidence-based recommendations, including opportunities for service improvements.

## Auspice type

Child care services can be delivered by corporations of different types (or auspice), including not-for-profit, for-profit, and directly operated. The literature on the economic benefits of child care does not focus on auspice and there is very little evidence to suggest that the economic outcomes of directly operated programs differ dramatically from community child care operators. This is because the studies typically measure the benefits (e.g., increased tax revenues, wage increases, impact on the use of public services, etc) and costs (e.g., staff salaries and benefits, etc) and typically do not isolate for the impact that the auspice type had on the outcome. The return on investment ranges from approximately \$1.6 – \$5.8 and depends on the factors that are included.<sup>4</sup>

However, as identified elsewhere in this report, the AHDC appears to provide higher quality services which can in turn increase the benefits associated with the investment. On the other hand, as directly operated centres typically operate at a higher cost, this can reduce the net benefit. Given the focus of this value-for-money assessment, isolating the precise economic benefit and cost associated with AHDC was not part of the study's scope. If the City is interested in pursuing this, it could undertake a longitudinal study that tracks the socioeconomic outcomes of children in different auspice settings over time, or could collect data from all of its licensed child care operators to review the costs and benefits and control for the auspice type.

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<sup>4</sup> For a summary of these studies, see Early Learning and Childcare as Key Economic Infrastructure, April 2021, Deloitte

## Methodology

In order to evaluate the value-for-money of the AHDC, the study used a comprehensive evaluation framework that is informed by Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework.<sup>5</sup> It is organized around the following key dimensions and is used to identify any challenges, issues, strengths and opportunities.

**High-quality:** To what extent does the centre deliver high-quality services that optimize inputs (funding, staff, training opportunities, etc.)? This dimension looks at the impact the centre is making as well as levels of stakeholder satisfaction and the quality of staff.

**Accessible:** Are the programs and services easily accessible to clients? This component includes both physical accessibility and service availability.

**Inclusive:** Is the centre inclusive, anti-bias, and in alignment with the Province of Ontario's Access and Inclusion framework? This includes a focus on special needs and cultural awareness.

**Affordable:** Are parent fees set at a level that ensures the child care programs can operate and remain accessible to families? This looks at the cost of child care and its accessibility.

**Integrated:** Are child care services effectively integrated with other social services supports across the entire system? This section considers how the centre interacts with other health and human services to ensure that these services are organized around the needs of users.

**Family-centered:** How well do programs and services respond to family needs? This dimension looks at how well the centre understands and responds to user needs.

A mixed-methods approach was used to inform the analysis, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative evidence. Data collection activities included:

- Online surveys completed by 364 parents and caregivers and 91 staff members, capturing a range of perspectives on service quality, access, satisfaction, and system delivery. Of these, 36 parents and caregivers and 17 staff were directly commenting on AHDC.
- Ten semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including child care and early years staff from the City of Stratford, program supervisors, municipal representatives, and community partners.
- A facilitated workshop with approximately 25 staff members to gather input and perspectives on strengths, challenges, and improvement opportunities.

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://files.ontario.ca/edu-access-and-inclusion-framework-en-2023-07-07.pdf>



- Review of administrative and financial data, including operating budgets, licensing information, and policy documents relevant to the City of Stratford's child care and early years services.
- Analysis of external research and sector-wide literature, offering context and insight into trends and challenges in Ontario's child care environment.

The use of multiple data sources allowed for triangulation, enhancing the reliability of findings by validating themes across stakeholder groups and eliminating alternative explanations.

This is not a longitudinal study. It represents a 'snap shot' analysis of feedback from stakeholders and of available program data and information across several measures of performance. Further study and analysis are required to validate the following headline results. However, given the richness of the data collected, the analysis has produced observations that can inform service delivery considerations.

Given that the new child care funding formulas are being implemented, any updates and their implications should continue to be monitored. Future research and analysis initiatives that may be able to access a broader set of data should build upon and validate these findings.

# Key Findings

## Quality

The Anne Hathaway Day Care Centre was consistently recognized by stakeholders as delivering high quality services that create a nurturing, safe, and engaging environment where children thrive and develop essential skills. Interviewees cited a range of key strengths including supportive and engaged staff, nutritious meals tailored to dietary needs, and inclusive menu planning with parent feedback. There is also comprehensive support for children's physical, cognitive, and social development.

Stakeholders reported that the AHDC has a team of highly experienced, professional, and passionate educators that deliver high quality services. This includes lower turnover compared to other centres, contributing to stronger relationships and trust with families. Staff have opportunities for ongoing professional development (e.g., monthly workshops), leading to shared best practices and continuous improvement. It was noted that there is a positive workplace culture and higher morale due to the compensation and benefits that are in place.

## Family perspectives

AHDC was consistently recognized for high-quality care, stable staffing, and strong educator-child relationships. Families reported positive experiences across all classrooms and noted clear developmental benefits for their children. This level of consistent, reliable care was less commonly reported at other centres, highlighting AHDC as a model of quality that many families actively seek but cannot always access. Addressing system-wide gaps in capacity and consistency remains essential to meeting that demand.

Survey respondents repeatedly praised the educators for being nurturing, consistent, and deeply invested in children's well-being and development. Where some other child care centres were described as having staff who were "not suitable" or experiencing high turnover, AHDC was associated with long-standing, trusted relationships. For example, when asked for additional comments on the centre, several parents and caregivers stated:

*"Anne Hathaway has exceptional educators. Each room my child has been in has been a very positive experience."*

*"The staff are not just teachers; they're friends... we feel blessed that both of our children spent their early years at AHDC."*

*"I absolutely love Anne Hathaway Daycare. The staff are so friendly and professional and the care my child receives is above and beyond my expectations."*

It is important to note that AHDC was not the only centre to receive positive feedback. Some other programs were recognized for strong individual educators, engaging programming, or a welcoming environment. However, the consistency and depth of praise for AHDC from survey respondents was apparent.

In the thematic analysis of qualitative feedback in the survey<sup>6</sup>, respondents commented on the level of access for AHDC 21 times (for example, noting limited spaces or limited program offerings across younger age groups). However, the tone of feedback overall was positive with concerns raised about accessing the care, rather than the care itself. For example, respondents noted:

*“It’s the best daycare around... the reason the waitlist is so long is because of the quality care.”*

*“How does the only city-run daycare only have 10 toddler spots?”*

This feedback highlights a broader, recurring theme from survey respondents that were commenting on other centres: shortages of accessible, licensed child care across Stratford, St. Marys, and Perth County.<sup>7</sup> All licensed child care programs are legislatively required to have a wait list that describe the procedures for placement and that they can provide information as to the child’s position on the list to families. However, families commenting on both AHDC and other centres reported being on waitlists for several years, often without communication or updates, and described being unclear about how placements were determined.

Families reported more specific concerns about the quality of other centres. These included challenges such as high staff turnover, limited communication from providers, and occasional concerns about how well children with additional needs were supported. These issues did not appear in the open-ended feedback about AHDC. Families view AHDC as a trusted, high-quality provider that they strive to access.

#### *Satisfaction with care and education*

82% of respondents commenting on AHDC strongly agreed *they are happy with the quality of care and education*, significantly higher than the 58% reported for other centres. None of the respondents commenting on AHDC disagreed with this statement, while nearly 9% of parents using other centres did.

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<sup>6</sup> See the appendix for further details.

<sup>7</sup> There were 51 mentions of this as outlined in the appendix.

In open-ended comments<sup>8</sup>, 56% of respondents praised the quality of care at AHDC, with a particular focus on staff professionalism and the quality of early learning experiences. Approximately, one in five (21%) described specific examples of how their children had advanced socially, emotionally, and cognitively since attending. For example, respondents noted:

*“My child is thriving since coming to childcare... the care is above and beyond my expectations.”*

*“We are beyond blessed to be part of AHDC.”*

These findings reinforce AHDC’s status as a trusted and high-quality provider, meeting not only children’s needs, but also the expectations of families across a variety of backgrounds.<sup>9</sup>

### *Staff that families trust*

A central contributor to quality is the AHDC team itself. Families consistently used terms such as “exceptional,” “amazing,” and “professional” to describe staff across all roles, from early childhood educators to supply staff and the Centre’s cook. This high level of trust was supported by evidence of low staff turnover, which was frequently mentioned as a differentiator compared to other child care centres in the region.

Staff retention has contributed to strong relationship continuity, which in turn helps build secure attachments between children and their caregivers. Staff were also described as emotionally invested, consistently responsive, and deeply knowledgeable about individual needs.

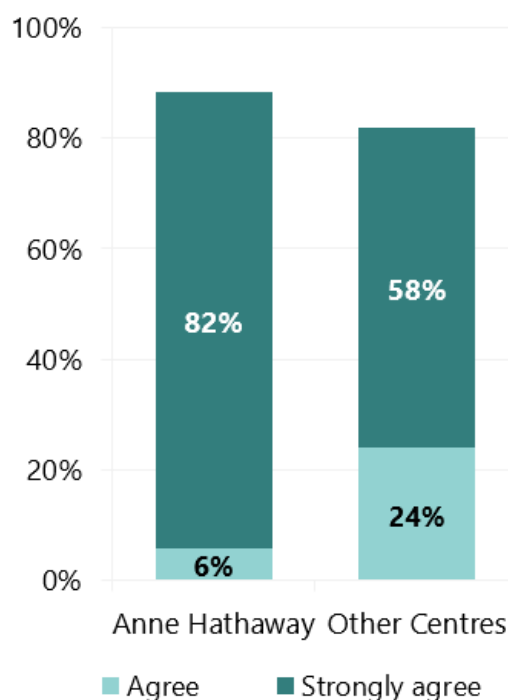


Figure 1: Parent and caregiver satisfaction with quality of care and education

<sup>8</sup> Survey respondents were asked “Please use the space below to share any additional comments you have about the child care you are receiving / or child care in Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County more generally”.

<sup>9</sup> Survey respondents in the parent and caregiver survey self-identified across many age ranges (under 18: 3%, 25-34: 30%, 35-44: 65%, 45-54: 3%), ethnic/racial identities (White/European: 95%, Black/African/Caribbean: 3%) and reported having various total household income levels (\$15,000-\$29,999: 3%, \$30,000-\$49,999: 6%, \$50,000-\$74,999: 6%, \$75,000-\$99,999: 28%, \$100,000-\$150,000: 17%, over \$150,000: 36%, see: Figure 8).

### *Reliable hours and broader impact*

Most families also valued the Centre’s consistent year-round schedule (7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.), which enables parents to maintain employment. Several interviewees noted the Centre’s role in supporting health care workers, single parents, and others with limited informal support. In this way, AHDC can contribute not just to child development, but to economic stability and gender equity, allowing more parents to return to work. Research suggests that for every dollar invested in early childhood programs, there is a significant return on investment, with estimates suggesting returns as high as \$5.80 per dollar spent.<sup>10</sup>

### *Staff perspectives on quality*

The following section summarizes survey responses from staff at AHDC and other licensed child care centres in Stratford, St. Marys, and Perth County. These insights reflect the experiences and perceptions of educators and staff regarding child care quality.

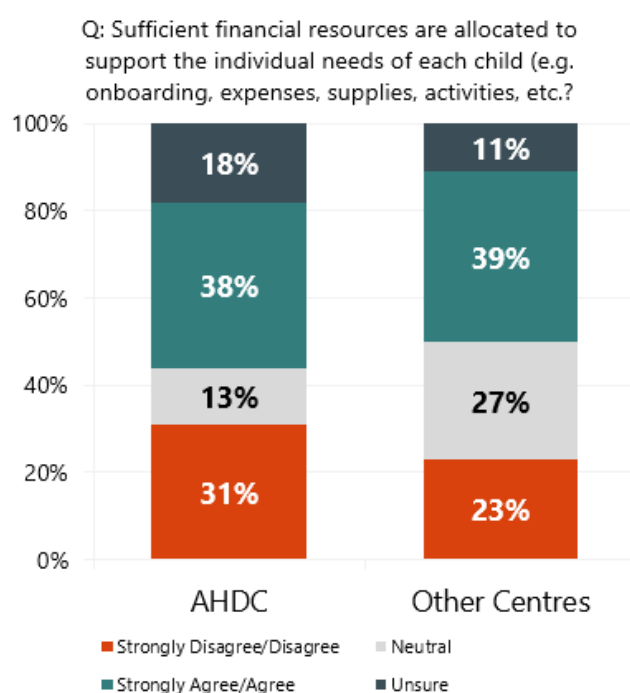


Figure 2: Staff perspectives on the allocation of financial resources

### *Mixed views on day-to-day materials and resources*

When asked whether financial resources are sufficient to support each child—for example, for onboarding, materials, supplies, and activities—38% of AHDC staff agreed or strongly agreed. 31% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The remaining staff were either neutral (13%) or unsure (18%).

At other centres, 39% of staff agreed or strongly agreed. 23% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 27% selected neutral and 11% were unsure.

These responses suggest a wide range of views at AHDC, with

notable uncertainty and disagreement. While overall agreement levels were similar across the system, AHDC staff were more likely to express concern or uncertainty. As a

<sup>10</sup> Conference Board of Canada – Ready for Life, October 2017, available at <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/product/ready-for-life-a-socio-economic-analysis-of-early-childhood-education-and-care/>.

result, there may be an opportunity to consult with staff to better understand what supports may be required.

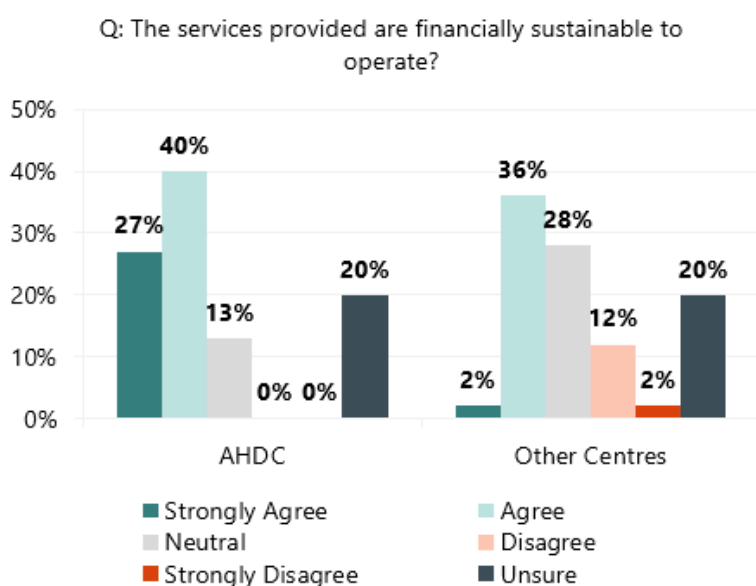


Figure 3: Staff confidence in financial sustainability

### Confidence in long-term sustainability

AHDC staff were more likely to view the centre as financially stable. 67% agreed or strongly agreed that the services are financially sustainable.<sup>11</sup> At other centres, 38% shared this view.

The data suggests that while some staff are concerned about immediate or classroom-level resource constraints, there is also

recognition of the Centre's broader financial sustainability.

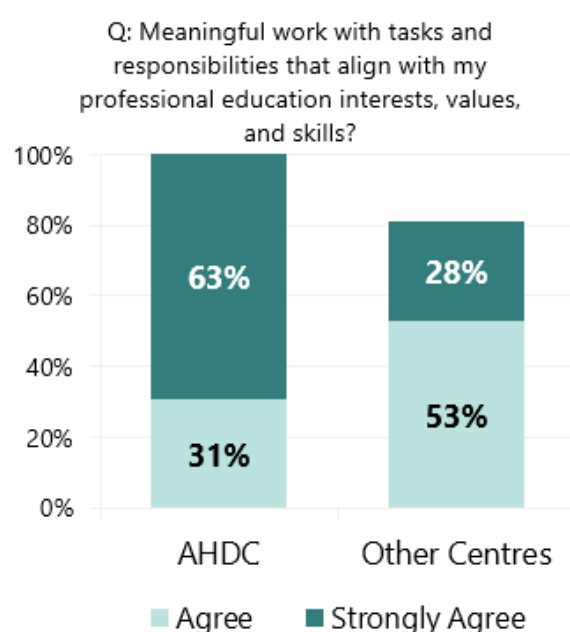


Figure 4: Staff satisfaction with meaningful work and responsibilities

### Staff perspectives on satisfaction and stability

AHDC staff reported a strong sense of alignment between their work and professional values. 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their responsibilities reflect their education, interests, and skills. At other centres, 81% percent of staff agreed or strongly agreed.

This sense of alignment contributes to professional identity and motivation. Staff who feel that their work matters—and matches their training—are more likely to stay, contribute ideas, and build lasting relationships with families and colleagues.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The remaining 33% of AHDC respondents selected "neutral" or "unsure" (13% neutral, 20% unsure); no staff disagreed with the statement.

<sup>12</sup> Robertson-Smith, G., & Markwick, C. (2009). *Employee engagement: A review of current thinking* (IES Report 469). Institute for Employment Studies. <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/employee-engagement-review-current-thinking>

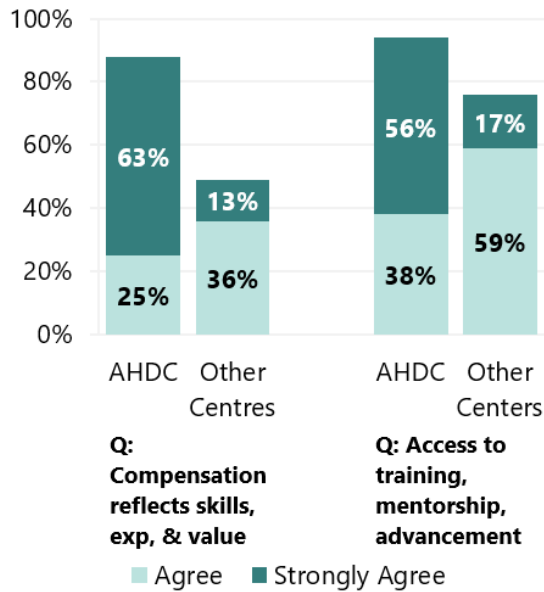


Figure 5: Staff satisfaction with competitive pay and career advancements

### Competitive pay and room to grow

88% of AHDC staff agreed or strongly agreed that their compensation reflects their skills, experience, and the value they bring to the organization. 49% of respondents commenting on other centres felt that way. The difference is most pronounced in strong agreement: 63% at AHDC, compared to 13% elsewhere.

Access to professional growth opportunities followed a similar pattern. At AHDC, 94% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that they have access to training, mentorship, and advancement. At other centres, 76% said the same. Again, the gap in strong agreement is notable: 56% of AHDC

strongly agreed, compared to 17% at other centres. These responses suggest that staff feel supported in accessing pathways for professional growth.

### A positive, predictable work environment

Respondents also highlighted the importance of workplace culture and balance. 94% of AHDC staff agreed or strongly agreed that they work in a supportive, respectful environment. At other centres, 76% responded similarly.

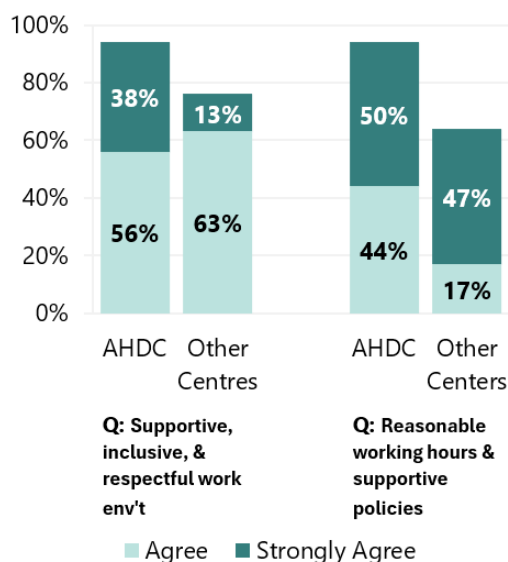


Figure 6: Staff confidence in financial sustainability:

The same share—94%—indicated that their working hours and leave policies support a healthy balance between work and family life. 50% of AHDC staff strongly agreed, compared to 17% at other centres.

These conditions matter. Staff who feel supported and valued are better able to support the children in their care. Predictable hours and a respectful culture reduce burnout and turnover—key factors that help maintain consistent, high-quality care over time.

## Affordable

The centre is enrolled in the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system.<sup>13</sup> The CWELCC system is designed to give families access to more affordable and high-quality child care options and to lower child care fees for parents and guardians of children under the age of 6.<sup>14</sup>

CWELCC has significantly enhanced the affordability of child care, with the full day toddler rate currently at \$22 per day. This has been reduced from \$48 since the introduction of CWELCC. It represents an annual savings of approximately \$6,370.<sup>15</sup>

While the system-wide reduction in fees is a positive development to improve affordability overall, lower fees have led to increased demand for licensed spaces, which has constrained low income families' ability to access a space. Currently, six children at Anne Hathaway are receiving a fee subsidy, representing approximately 6% of total Centre capacity.<sup>16</sup>

A similar pattern was observed in the family survey respondents. While 14% of respondents reported receiving a fee subsidy, none of the families with household incomes under \$50,000 annually reported accessing the subsidy.

While Anne Hathaway accounts for 9%<sup>17</sup> of all of the licensed child care spaces within the City of Stratford, it provides 3.5%<sup>18</sup> of the spaces used by children on fee subsidy.<sup>19</sup>

Families with greater access to information about child care options and increased capacity to sign up for their child's placement early on may be more likely to take part in the program. As a result, there may be more opportunities to raise awareness about the centre among families eligible for fee subsidy and to prioritize them on the waitlist.

## Family perspectives on affordability

The following section summarizes feedback from families with children enrolled at AHDC and other licensed child care centres in Stratford. Responses reflect caregiver experiences and views related to child care affordability.

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<sup>13</sup> The Canada-Ontario Agreement is available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/early-learning-child-care-agreement/agreements-provinces-territories/ontario-canada-wide-2021.html>

<sup>14</sup> The Canada-Ontario Agreement is available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/early-learning-child-care-agreement/agreements-provinces-territories/ontario-canada-wide-2021.html>

<sup>15</sup> This estimate is based on 245 days of care x \$26 per day. If inflation is taken into account, the savings would be even higher.

<sup>16</sup> 6 fee subsidy places out of a total licensed capacity of 107.

<sup>17</sup> 193 out of 2,126 licensed spaces

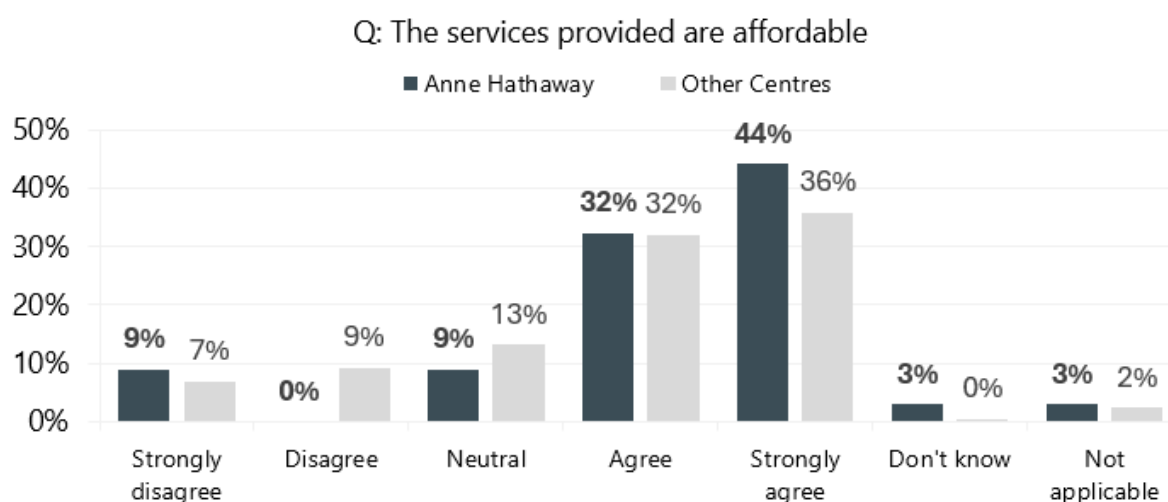
<sup>18</sup> 6 out of 172 fee subsidy spaces

<sup>19</sup> There are 2,126 licensed places. This includes 70 infant, 165 toddler, 480 pre-school, 571 JK/SK, 795 school age, and 45 family group places.



### *Parents and caregivers' perspectives on affordability*

77% of families with children at AHDC agreed or strongly agreed that services are affordable compared to 68% across other providers in the region. Moreover, 44% of AHDC respondents strongly agreed with the affordability statement, higher than the 36% reported by families at other centres. None of the respondents from AHDC expressed disagreement regarding affordability, while nearly 1 in 10 parents at other centres indicated concerns (this perception exists despite the fact that rates are held to a maximum of \$22 per day under CWELCC). These findings suggest that families, on average, perceive AHDC as more affordable.



*Figure 7: Parent and caregiver perceptions of service affordability*

### *Family income influencing perspectives on affordability*

The income distribution chart reveals a key contextual difference between AHDC and other child care centres in the region, which may influence perceptions of affordability. Family survey respondents commenting on AHDC skew higher in income: a substantial proportion reported household incomes over \$150,000, while lower-income households (under \$75,000) were comparatively underrepresented. It appears that the other centres served a broader income mix, with greater representation from families earning under \$150,000. For instance, 36% of AHDC respondents reported incomes over \$150,000 compared to 25% of respondents at other centres.

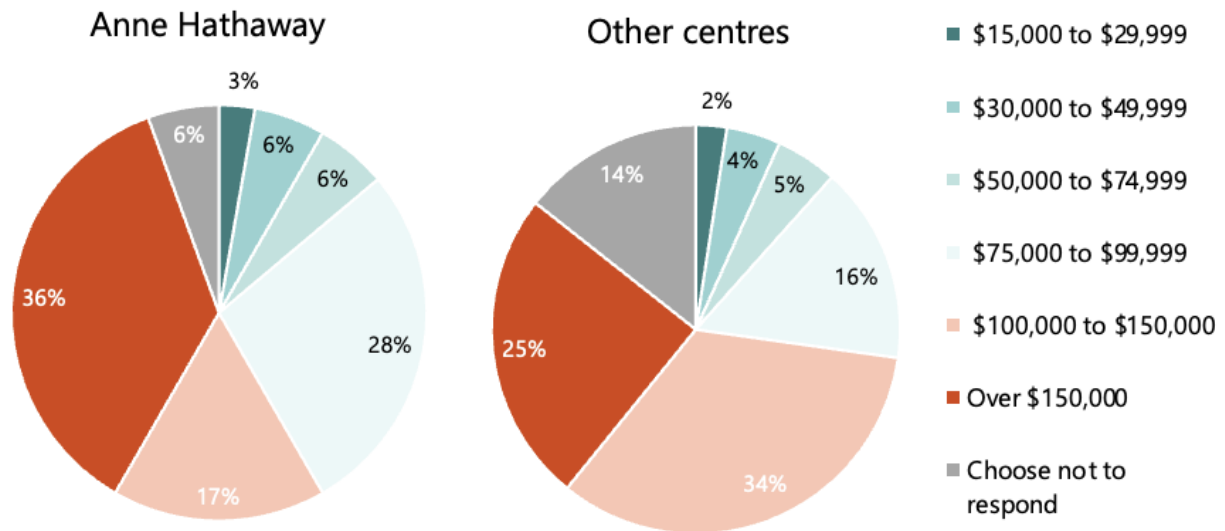


Figure 8: Income distribution of parents and caregivers

(Note: No respondents selected "less than \$15,000"; Anne Hathaway: 36 respondents, Other centres: 327)

The income distribution may help explain why AHDC families were somewhat less likely to report concerns about affordability – not necessarily because child care costs are lower at AHDC, but because a larger share of respondents reported household incomes over \$150,000.

However, it is important to note the significant difference in sample size. The smaller number of respondents from AHDC (n=36) means that the income distribution there may be more susceptible to skew or outlier effects than the larger sample representing other centres (n=327). While the trend suggests a higher-income user base at AHDC, caution should be taken in generalizing this pattern without additional data or a larger, more representative sample.

Other centres also had a substantial proportion of families earning above \$100,000 (59% compared to 53% at AHDC). This suggests that while income may play a role in shaping affordability perceptions, it is not the only factor. These patterns underscore the continued importance of expanding access to high-quality care for lower-income families and ensuring that affordability measures are reaching families across all income levels and provider types.

### Staff perspectives on affordability

The following section summarizes survey responses from staff at AHDC and other licensed child care centres in Stratford. These insights reflect the experiences and perceptions of educators and staff regarding child care affordability.

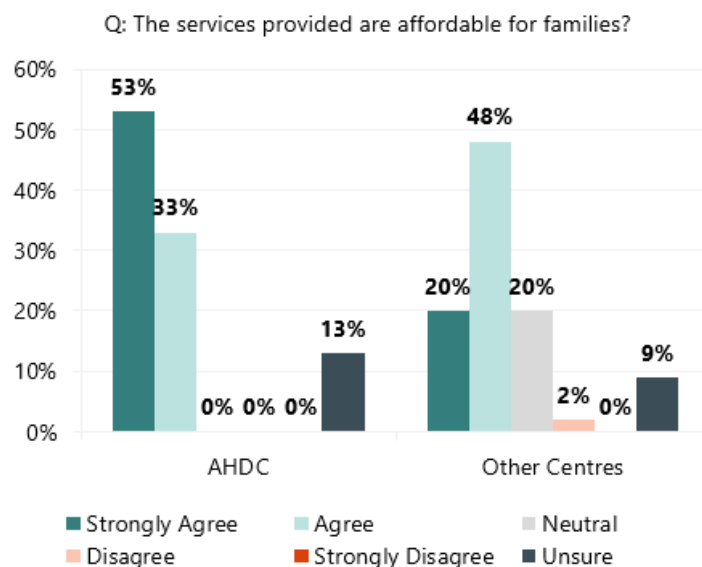


Figure 9: Staff confidence in affordability

### Confidence in affordability for families

Staff at AHDC expressed strong confidence in the affordability of services for families. A combined 86% agreed or strongly agreed that the services are affordable. Of those, 53% strongly agreed. In contrast, 67% of staff at other centres felt the same, with 19% strongly agreeing.

The remaining AHDC staff selected unsure, and none disagreed.

At other centres, 20% were neutral, 9% were unsure, and 2% disagreed with the statement. These differences suggest that AHDC staff view the centre's fees as more accessible to families in the community.

Staff perceptions of affordability are an important indicator of how frontline educators understand and experience the financial model underpinning service delivery. When staff believe that services are priced fairly and equitably, it can reflect clearer communication with families and better alignment between operational goals and community needs.

## Accessible

This section focuses on both physical accessibility as well as the availability of child care services and includes family and staff perspectives.

### Physical accessibility

The AHDC is committed to ensuring that all families can access high-quality early learning, regardless of ability, background, or socioeconomic status. The Centre's design includes features such as ramps, wide doorways, elevators, and accessible bathrooms, enabling children and caregivers with physical disabilities to navigate the space comfortably.

#### Family perspectives on physical accessibility

Survey results suggest that AHDC is generally well-regarded for its physical accessibility, with 71% of families agreeing or strongly agreeing that the facility is accessible. This is slightly lower than the 76% of families commenting on other centres

who felt their centres were accessible. It is important to note that 60% of families at AHDC strongly agreed that it is accessible, compared to 44% at other providers. This suggests that the Centre’s accessibility features may be more visible, familiar, or impactful to its community.

AHDC also had a slightly higher rate of strong disagreement (11%), compared to 4% at other centres. This may indicate that a small subset of families has encountered physical or procedural barriers—or perceive that certain needs (e.g., sensory supports, inclusive communication) are not always available. These findings suggest that while the Centre excels in many areas, there may be opportunities for more inclusive accessibility planning, especially for families navigating invisible disabilities or complex needs. This could be addressed by collecting parent feedback on opportunities to strengthen accessibility at the centre.

## Availability

AHDC’s commitment to accessibility exists within a broader regional challenge regarding available child care spaces. The licensed child care access rate across Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County is 15% for children ages 0–4, significantly lower than the provincial target of 37% for 0-5 year olds.<sup>20</sup> Access rates are particularly low for infant spaces (5%), suggesting that availability, not just affordability, continues to be a key barrier.

### Potential Rate of Access to Licensed Child Care Spaces by Age Group in Stratford, St. Marys, and Perth County<sup>21</sup>

Infant	Toddler	Pre-School	JK/SK	School-Age	Ages 0-4	Ages 5-12	Total Ages 0-12
5.0%	17.1%	20.2%	29.3%	13.9%	15.0%	17.8%	16.7%

All licensed child care programs in Stratford, St. Marys, and Perth County use a centralized online waitlist<sup>22</sup>. At the AHDC full day centre there are 620<sup>23</sup> unique children and the wait time is approximately 3 years. This significant demand underscores the

<sup>20</sup> The different categories listed here is due to the way data is reported: the City has calculated percentage of licensed capacity compared to Census 2021 population from ages 0-4, while the province has calculated the provincial target at age 0-5.

<sup>21</sup> This information was provided by the City of Stratford and noted limitations include: Infant population calculated as all children under 1, and 50% of 1 year olds, Toddler population calculated as 50% of 1 and 2 year olds, Pre-school population calculated as 50% of 2 year olds, all 3 year olds, and all 4 year olds. Family Group licensed spaces omitted.

<sup>22</sup> Available at [https://onehsn.com/stratford/ux\\_2\\_0](https://onehsn.com/stratford/ux_2_0)

<sup>23</sup> This includes children that have been born, are toddler or preschool age and not already placed at another centre.

access gap and highlights the importance of both system-level expansion and transparent communication about timelines and expectations.

## Staff perspectives on accessibility

The following section summarizes survey responses from staff at AHDC and other licensed child care centres in Stratford. These insights reflect the experiences and perceptions of educators and staff regarding the accessibility of the centre.

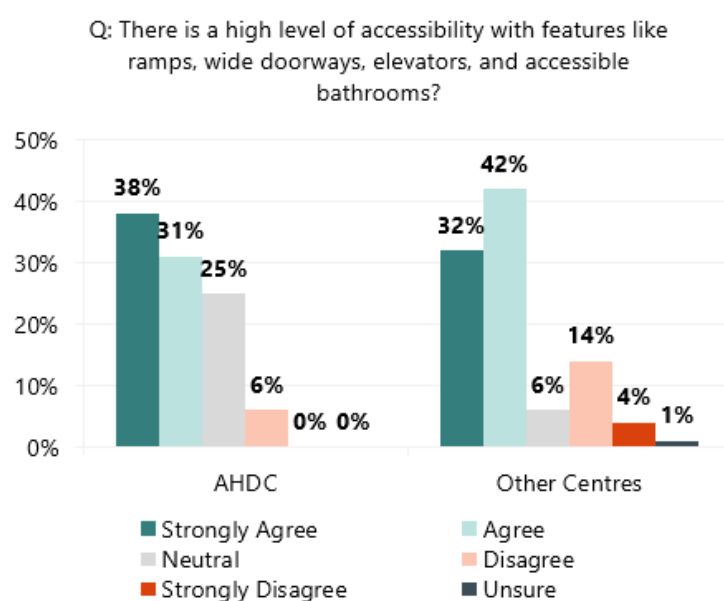


Figure 10: Staff confidence in accessibility

### Most staff confident in accessibility, some unsure

Staff were asked to respond to the statement: ‘there is a high level of accessibility with features like ramps, wide doorways, elevators, and accessible bathrooms’.

At AHDC, 69% agreed or strongly agreed. Of those, 38% strongly agreed, 31% agreed, 6% disagreed, and 25% selected neutral. At other centres, 74% of staff agreed or strongly agreed, with 32% strongly agreeing,

42% agreeing, 6% remaining neutral, 14% disagreeing, 4% strongly disagreeing, and 1% selecting unsure.

While a majority of AHDC staff confirmed the presence of accessible design features, the relatively high rate of neutral responses—one in four—suggests some staff are neutral about the extent or visibility of these features. This may reflect differences in how often staff engage with or observe accessibility-related infrastructure. Clarifying how the centre meets accessibility standards could improve overall confidence and ensure that all staff are equipped to support children and families with accessibility needs.

## Inclusive

Stakeholders reported that the program is highly inclusive and aligns with the Province of Ontario’s Access and Inclusion framework.<sup>24</sup> AHDC, as with other licensed child care programs, works with Resource consultants who support the inclusion of children with special needs. They may make connections with other service providers and support

<sup>24</sup> Available at <https://files.ontario.ca/edu-access-and-inclusion-framework-en-2023-07-07.pdf>

transitions. These consultants also support the program in creating and implementing individualized support plans (ISPs) outlining how the program will support the child to function and participate in a meaningful and purposeful manner while the child is in the care of the centre. ISPs also describe any supports or aids, or adaptations or other modifications to the physical, social and learning environment that are necessary and provide instructions relating to the use of such aids. Resource Consultants additionally provide training and professional learning to build the capacity of educators to address the needs of children in their programs and foster effective inclusive practices.

As a child care operator, the AHDC's services facilitate increased labour market engagement, and can lead to improved socioeconomic mobility and the reduction of poverty. For example, a 2017 study by the Conference Board of Canada found that by encouraging more women to enter the labour force, the introduction of an expanded Early Childhood Education program would result in about 23,000 families – many of them single-parent families – being lifted out of poverty.<sup>25</sup>

However, the impact can vary based on the socioeconomic status of families accessing the service. The shortage of CWELCC spaces can create accessibility challenges particularly for families that may not have the capacity and resources to navigate the system.

While the waiting list policy prioritizes children who require care based on therapeutic referral,<sup>26</sup> there may be an opportunity to ensure that the child care centre reflects the demographic population of the city, or that underserved, vulnerable and children from diverse populations are prioritized.<sup>27</sup>

### Family perspectives on inclusivity

The following section summarizes feedback from families with children enrolled at AHDC and other licensed child care centres in Stratford. Responses reflect parent and caregiver experiences and views related to inclusivity.

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<sup>25</sup> Conference Board of Canada – Ready for Life, October 2017, available at <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/product/ready-for-life-a-socio-economic-analysis-of-early-childhood-education-and-care/>

<sup>26</sup> See Appendix C: Waiting List Policy on <https://www.stratford.ca/en/inside-city-hall/resources/SOCIAL-SERVICES/DAYCARE/Anne-Hathaway-Day-Care-Parent-Handbook-2025-AODA.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework 2023 notes that underserved and vulnerable children and children from diverse populations include but are not limited to: children living in low income families, children with special needs and those needing enhanced or individual supports, Indigenous children, Black and other racialized children, children of newcomers to Canada, and official language minorities.

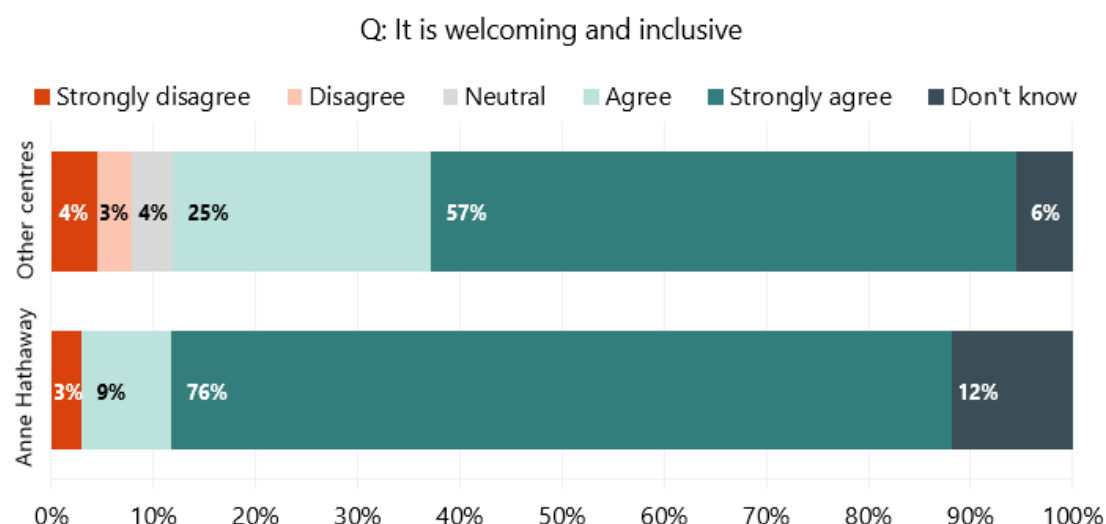


Figure 11: Parent and caregiver perceptions of inclusivity and welcoming atmosphere

Respondents commenting on AHDC reported more positive experiences with inclusivity than other centres. For instance, 85% of AHDC respondents reported that the centre is welcoming and inclusive, slightly higher than the 82% that were commenting on other child care centres. However, AHDC had a much higher proportion of respondents who strongly agreed (76% vs. 57%), suggesting a deeper sense of confidence in its inclusive environment.

#### *Perceptions of cultural inclusion and support*

Stakeholder interviews and survey feedback indicate that AHDC's programming is culturally inclusive and supportive. Among family survey respondents, 77% agreed or strongly agreed that staff are inclusive of diverse cultural and language backgrounds, significantly above the 66% reported on at other centres. Over half (56%) strongly agreed, reflecting high confidence in the Centre's cultural responsiveness. 6% (representing two respondents) disagreed with the statement, indicating some concern around inclusivity. Given the concern expressed by these two respondents (strongly disagree), there may be an opportunity to continue to monitor parent feedback, and probe specifically for input on opportunities to strengthen inclusion at the Centre.

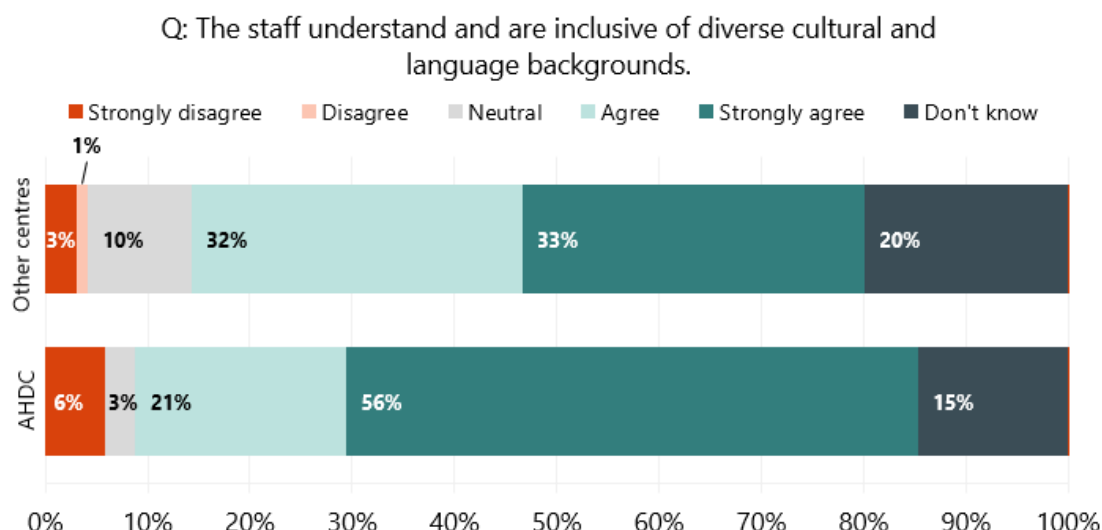


Figure 12: Parent and caregiver perceptions of staff inclusivity toward cultural and language diversity

### Engagement with families with disabilities

Among AHDC respondents, 6% (2) identified as having a child with a special need, compared to 8% (21) of respondents from other centres.

Of the two AHDC respondents, one selected mostly “don’t know” responses to items related to accessibility and inclusivity, while the other indicated some disagreement regarding whether their family’s needs were adequately met.

This limited representation makes it difficult to draw broad conclusions about the experiences of families with disabilities at AHDC. However, the responses may point to potential gaps in reach, awareness, or service alignment for families with diverse needs.

While the majority of AHDC feedback reflects perceptions of strong accessibility and inclusion, these results suggest there may be value in further engagement with families of children with special needs to better understand barriers to inform inclusive practices.

### Staff perspectives on inclusivity

The following section summarizes survey responses from staff at AHDC and other licensed child care centres in Stratford. These insights reflect the experiences and perceptions of educators and staff regarding inclusivity.



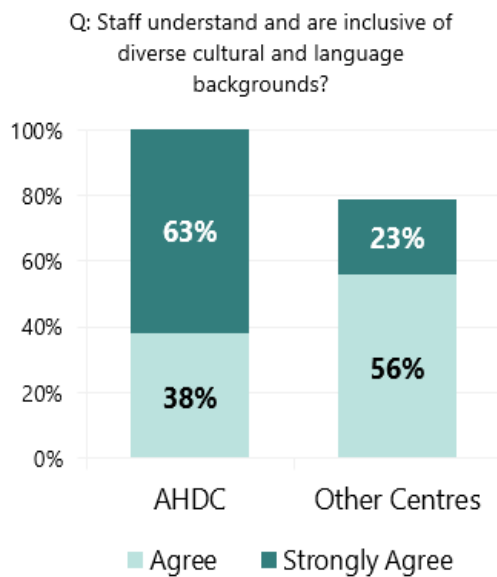


Figure 13: Staff confidence in inclusive cultural practices

### *Inclusive practices across cultures and languages*

Staff at AHDC reported a high level of cultural awareness and inclusion. 100% of AHDC staff agreed or strongly agreed that staff understand and are inclusive of diverse cultural and language backgrounds (within this group of respondents, 63% strongly agreed).

At other centres, 79% of staff agreed or strongly agreed with the same statement (within this group of respondents, 23% strongly agreed). These results suggest that AHDC staff are more confident that they can recognize and prioritize inclusive practices in day-to-day interactions with children and families from varied cultural or language groups.

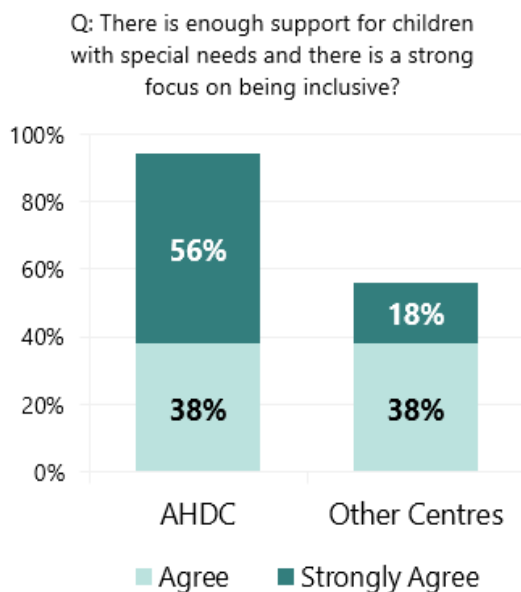


Figure 14: Staff confidence in support for children with special needs

### *Support for children with special needs*

AHDC staff also expressed broad confidence in the support available for children with special needs. 94% agreed or strongly agreed that there is adequate support and a clear focus on inclusion. At other centres, 56% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

These responses reflect staff perceptions that AHDC is equipped to meet a range of developmental needs and fosters inclusive environments. It suggests that staff feel confident in the Centre's ability to assist children requiring additional support.

### *Outreach to vulnerable families*

Survey respondents were asked whether information sessions are regularly held to engage vulnerable groups, such as low-income families and newcomers. At AHDC, 19% of staff agreed with the statement. None strongly agreed, 25% disagreed, 13% strongly disagreed, 19% were neutral, and 25% were unsure.

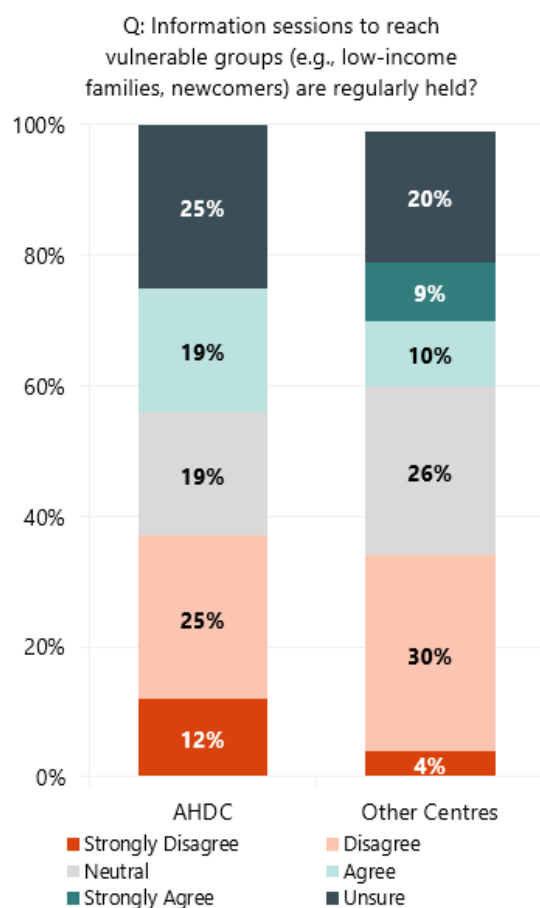


Figure 15: Staff confidence in outreach to vulnerable families

At other centres, 10% agreed and 9% strongly agreed. 30% disagreed, 4% strongly disagreed, 16% selected neutral, and 20% selected unsure.

While the findings at other centres were broadly similar, AHDC's absence of any strong agreement and higher combined disagreement suggest that that staff may perceive outreach to vulnerable communities as either inconsistent or not clearly visible in day-day operations. This suggests there may be an opportunity to build stronger engagement with families who may not otherwise access care at AHDC.

## Integrated services

The City of Stratford's Social Services Department is responsible for administering social services in the City. It helps residents who require assistance with accessing income supports, housing, homelessness services, and child care

supports. The Department provides information sessions for AHDC staff so that they are aware of what social supports exist.

While there is no formal data on the amount of referrals between the centre and the department, staff indicated that they help to connect families with local community services and partners for additional support and services as required. In addition, staff involve children in supporting local community initiatives such as Christmas Hampers, Food Bank collections and Clothing Drives.

The AHDC also engage local community partners to support the children, their families and staff. For example, the City's children's librarian makes frequent visits to AHDC with the mobile book unit, with a goal of fostering a love of reading through engaging programming such as story time and maker kits. There are also referrals to public health and therapeutic providers to deliver Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Speech training services for children that require these services.

## Family perspectives on integrated services

The following section summarizes feedback from families with children enrolled at AHDC and other licensed child care centres in Stratford. Responses reflect parents' and guardians' experiences and views related to integrated services.

Q: When required, my family is connected with other supports, such as parenting programs, or health and social services

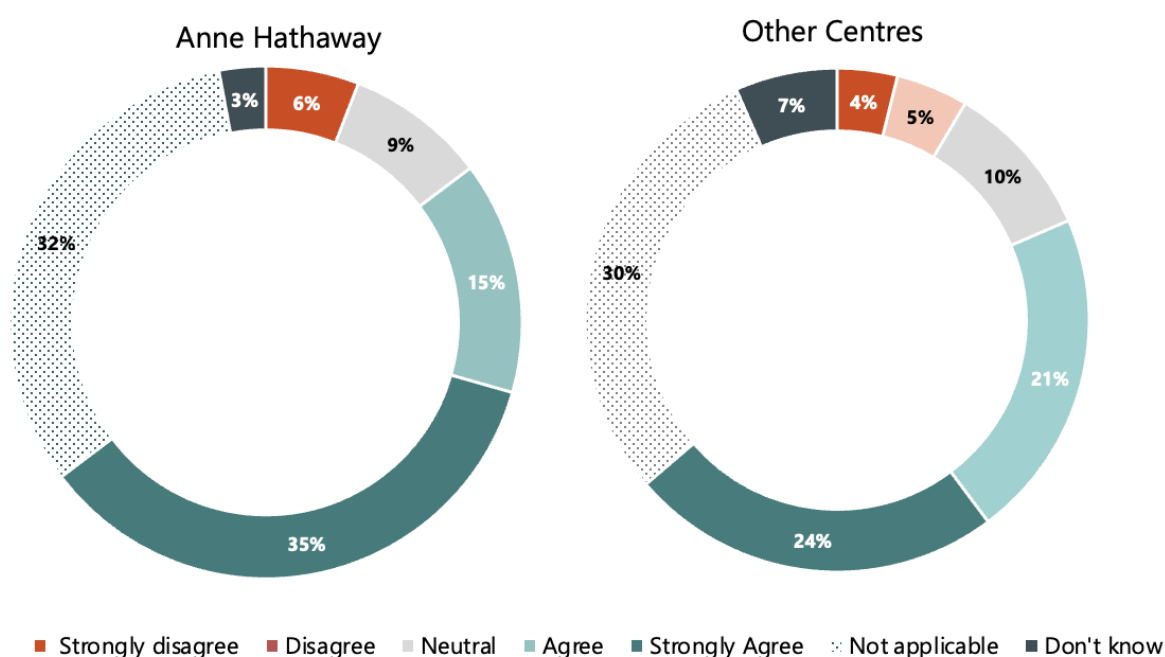


Figure 16: Parent and caregiver perceptions of support referrals to parenting, health, and social services

Survey results indicate that families at AHDC reported modestly higher levels of satisfaction with integration into other services compared to those at other centres. Among AHDC respondents, 50% agreed or strongly agreed that their family was connected with additional supports when needed, a slightly higher rate than the 45% reported across other providers.

While responses at both AHDC and other centres show relatively low levels of disagreement, a notable portion of families did not feel the question applied to them: 32% at AHDC and 30% at other centres, potentially indicating they had not required referrals. A slightly higher share of “don’t know” responses at other centres (7%) compared to AHDC (3%) may reflect differences in awareness or familiarity with available supports rather than gaps in service.

Overall, the data suggests that when service integration was needed, most families across the region felt reasonably well-supported, with AHDC showing somewhat stronger perceptions of clarity and connection. At the same time, the results highlight

the value of continued focus on communication and coordination on integrated social services in all settings.

### Staff perspectives on integrated services

The following section summarizes survey responses from staff at AHDC and other licensed child care centres in Stratford. These insights reflect the experiences and perceptions of educators and staff regarding integrated services.

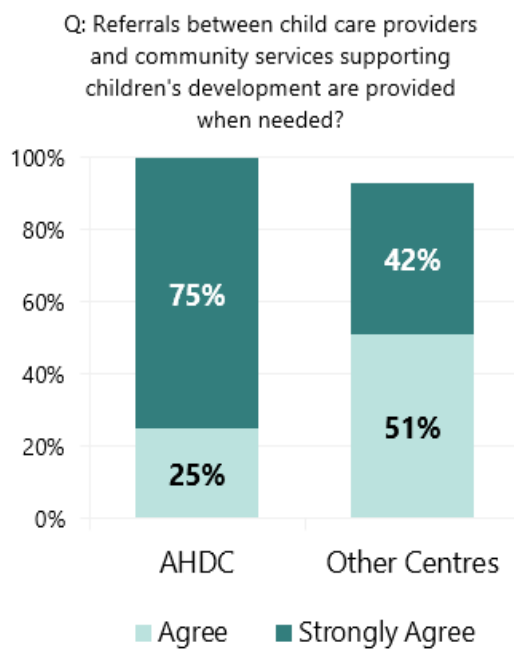


Figure 17: Staff confidence in ability to connect families with external supports

#### *Collaboration with community services*

AHDC staff reported a high degree of confidence in the Centre's ability to connect families with external supports. 100% agreed or strongly agreed that referrals are provided when needed. This includes referrals to health services, EarlyON centres, and child development agencies. It is important to note that 75% strongly agreed with this statement.

At other centres, 93% of staff agreed or strongly agreed, with 42% strongly agreeing. While both groups reported strong collaboration, AHDC staff were more likely to express clear, confident views about these referral processes. This may reflect stronger integration practices

among staff or more consistent use of referral pathways at AHDC.

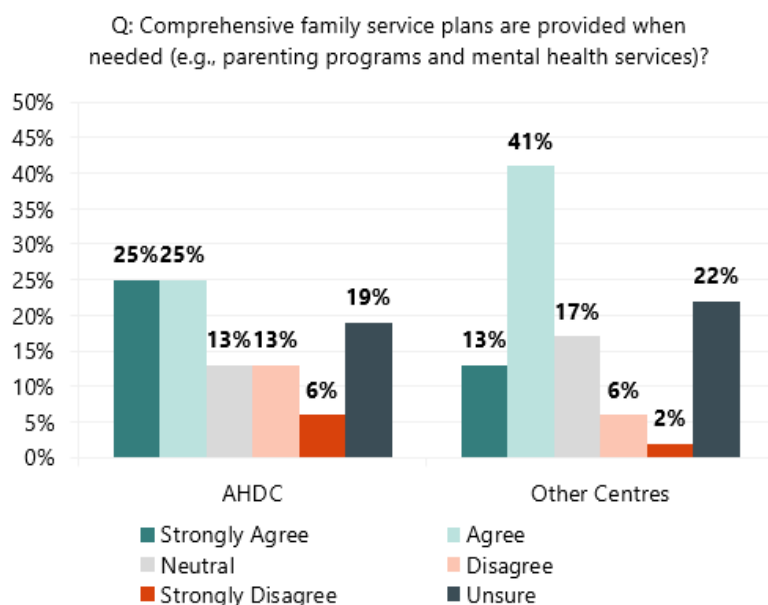


Figure 18: Staff confidence in ability to provide comprehensive family service plans

### Broader family supports

Views were mixed on whether families receive comprehensive service plans—such as connections to family support programs or access to mental health supports—when needed. At AHDC, 25% of staff agreed and another 25% strongly agreed. 13% selected neutral, 13% disagreed, 6% strongly disagreed, and 19%

selected unsure.

Staff at other centres reported a similar mix of views. 41% agreed, 13% strongly agreed, 6% disagreed, 2% strongly disagreed, and 17% selected neutral, and 22% selected unsure.

The high rates of uncertainty at both AHDC and other centres may point to a broader issue: while referrals to individual services may be common, staff may not consistently see or understand how those services are coordinated into a more comprehensive support plan for families. These findings suggest an opportunity to conduct further analysis on the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improving integrated care.

### Family-centered care

Stakeholders reported that parents and caregivers are provided with regular communication in person and via email. Staff also engage parents / caregivers in their child's learning. This includes opportunities to share their ideas, experiences, traditions, talents, favourite stories or special skills. Special events are also organized for families to encourage participation throughout the year, including a Christmas Social, Summer BBQ, and Mother's Day Tea.

In addition, staff provide support and coaching to new parents who require assistance and advice. Topics can include appropriate structure and discipline for nurturing their children's development.

## Family perspectives on family-centered care

The following section summarizes feedback from families with children enrolled at AHDC and other licensed child care centres in Stratford. Responses reflect parents' and guardians' experiences and views related to family-centered care.

### *Parent and caregiver involvement*

Survey data show that most families, across both Anne Hathaway and other centres, feel involved in decisions about their child's care and education. At AHDC, 71% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I am involved in decisions about my child's care and education". While families at other centres also reported high agreement overall, Anne Hathaway had notably fewer respondents who disagreed or were neutral.

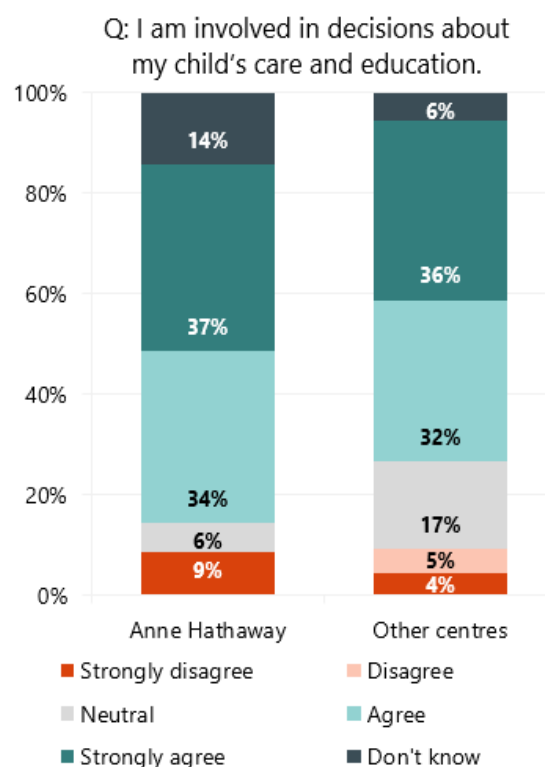


Figure 19: Perceptions of involvement in decisions about child's care and education

These results suggest that overall, families at Anne Hathaway are not only offered structured opportunities to participate, but also feel that their input is meaningfully incorporated. However, given that a portion (9%) of the respondents indicated they strongly disagreed with the statement, there appears to be an opportunity to continue to engage parents about ways they can be involved in decisions about their child's care and education and address any concerns.

### *Family perspectives on communication and information sharing*

Survey responses related to the availability of regular information sessions offer a more mixed picture. At Anne Hathaway, feedback was more evenly distributed across response options, with approximately one-third of families either agreeing or strongly agreeing that such sessions are held and accessible. However, a notable portion (34%) selected "Don't know," suggesting that while some families may be aware of information-sharing efforts, others may not be fully engaged or informed about these opportunities.

At other centres across the region, results followed a similar pattern, though with a larger share of disagreement. One in four respondents (26%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that regular information sessions are held. Additionally, 60 (22%)

respondents selected "Don't know," indicating potential gaps in communication or visibility across multiple settings.

These findings suggest that while communication efforts are present, there may be opportunities across the sector, including at AHDC, to enhance outreach and increase clarity about the availability and purpose of information sessions. Ensuring that families are not only invited but also feel welcomed and aware of these opportunities could help strengthen overall engagement and transparency.

### Staff perspectives on family-centered care

The following section summarizes survey responses from staff at AHDC and other licensed child care centres regarding experiences and perceptions of family-centered care.

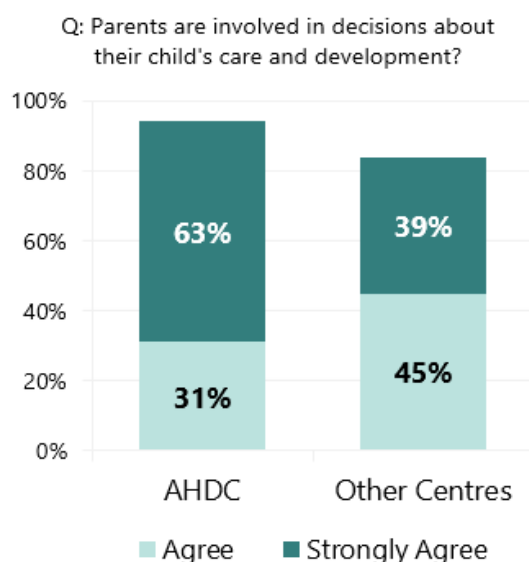


Figure 21: Staff confidence in parental involvement

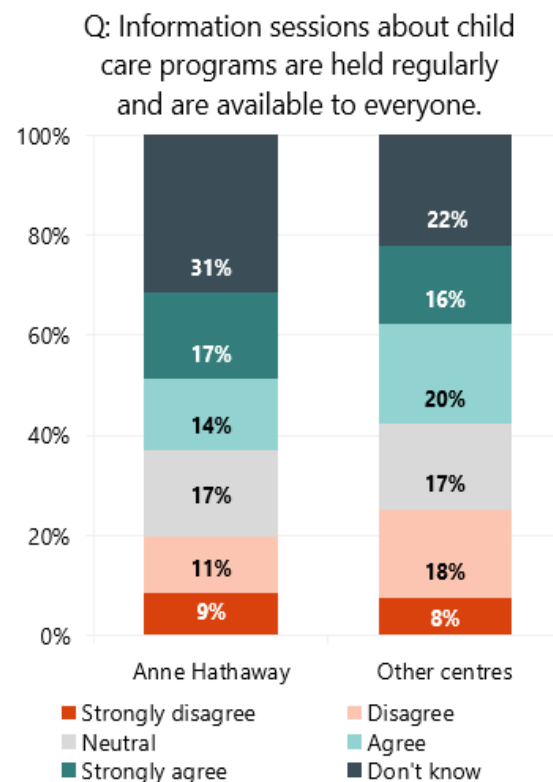


Figure 20: Parent and caregiver perceptions of communication and information sharing

### Parents as active partners

Staff at AHDC reported high levels of parental involvement in decisions related to children's care and development. 94% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "parents are involved in decisions about their child's care and development". At other centres, 84% of staff agreed or strongly agreed.

These results suggest that AHDC staff feel their work involves fostering strong partnerships with parents, positioning families as active participants in shaping their child's learning and development.

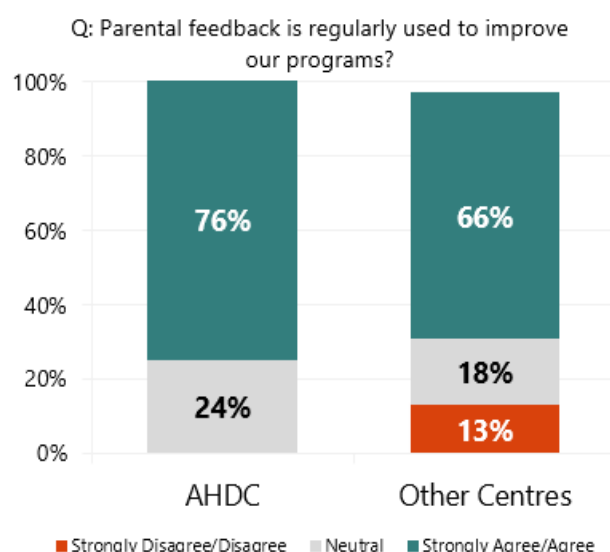


Figure 22: Staff confidence in parental feedback integration

feedback integration: Anne Hathaway vs. other centres

decision-making. Strengthening communication about how parent input is applied could help reinforce a more transparent, responsive culture within the centre.

### Listening to feedback

When asked whether parental feedback is regularly used to improve programming, 76% of AHDC staff agreed or strongly agreed. For staff at other centres, 66% agreed or strongly agreed and 13% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

While the majority of AHDC staff reported that feedback plays a role in shaping programming, the remaining respondents (24%) selected “neutral.” This suggests that even where feedback is collected, not all staff report having visibility into how it informs

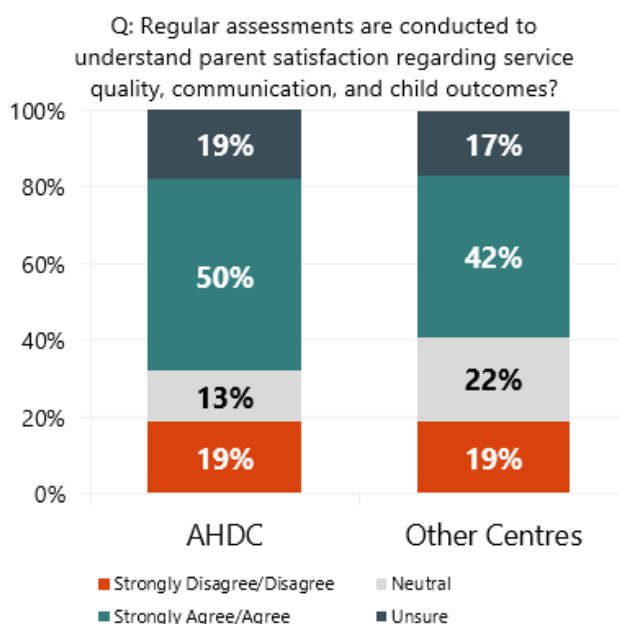


Figure 23: Staff confidence in parent satisfaction assessments

formal feedback systems are consistently applied to monitor service quality.

### Gauging satisfaction

50% of AHDC staff agreed or strongly agreed that regular assessments are conducted to understand parent satisfaction. 19% disagreed, 13% selected neutral, 19% selected unsure, and none strongly disagreed. At other centres, 42% of staff agreed or strongly agreed, while 19% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

These responses suggest an opportunity at AHDC to strengthen the frequency or visibility of parent satisfaction assessments. Staff report being more confident that parents are engaged in day-to-day decisions, but less certain that



Strengthening these systems could help reinforce a continuous feedback loop between families and staff.

# Efficiency Analysis

Efficiency involves maximizing outputs such as the volume of child care services provided and / or minimizing inputs such as the amount of resources or capital required to produce the services. Efficiency can be measured by how much it costs to deliver a program compared to previous years or compared to peer organizations, or the outcome that is achieved from a given level of expenditure.

To evaluate the level of efficiency, this report considers four key metrics: expenditure per child, employment costs as a percentage of total expenditure, employment costs per child, and total supplies, materials and equipment as a percentage of total expenditure.

## **Expenditure per child**

Expenditure per child is the total costs of providing child care services divided by the number of available full-time child care spots. The total expenditure includes salaries, wages, benefits, supplies, materials, equipment, maintenance, purchased services, insurance, and other costs.

## **Employment costs as a percentage of total expenditure**

This measures the proportion of expenditure on staff salaries, wages, and benefits. This recognizes that employment costs are typically one of the largest cost drivers in child care.

## **Employment cost per child**

Staffing expenses are compared with available full-time spaces to show the employment cost per child. This measure helps assess whether centres are optimizing their staffing expenditures relative to the number of child care spaces.

## **Total supplies, materials and equipment as a percentage of expenditure**

Supplies, materials, and equipment as a percentage of expenditure measures how much of the budget is allocated to key resources required for service delivery. This can include food and kitchen supplies, program and office supplies, and requirements for janitorial, plumbing, and cleaning purposes.

## **Measurement considerations**

It is important to acknowledge that child care costs vary based on the age groups served. For example, infant spaces are considerably more expensive than toddler or preschool spaces due to higher staff-to-child ratios and other resources that are required.

Also, the licensed capacity may not always reflect the number of spaces actually being used by children, or able to be used by children. Operating capacity refers to the capacity of children that a child care program is staffed to accommodate, up to its licensed capacity. The operating capacity may vary, and is dependent on the available staff and children to be enrolled. The licensed capacity is more stable as changes to licensed capacity require a revision to the license by the Ministry of Education. These nuances should be considered when interpreting cost efficiency findings.

Due to data availability, only 5 centres were included in the comparison. The names of the centres have not been disclosed in this report to maintain confidentiality of the child care operators that shared their financial information.

All licensing space data presented is from 2025. For financial data, all centres provided data from the most recent year available.

The following charts illustrate key aspects of the analysis.

<b>Centre</b>	<b>Licensed capacity</b>
Anne Hathaway Day Care	107 <sup>28</sup>
Centre A	30
Centre B	73
Centre C	105
Centre D	170
Centre E	121
Centre F	68

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<sup>28</sup> This figure includes licensed capacity for the primary centre. The secondary centre also has 86 licensed places. The estimated cost of the school age program is between 1.5 and 2 FTE or 10% (approx. \$170,000) of the amount reported in the Total staff cost.

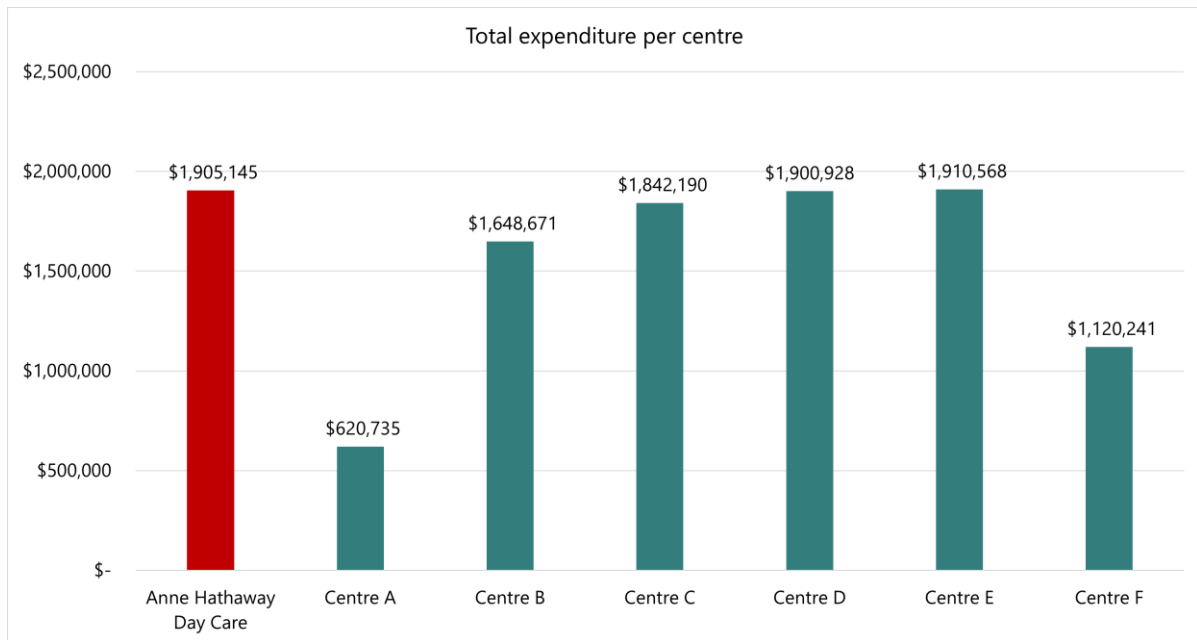


Figure 24: Total expenditure per centre

The figure reported for the AHDC is for both centres with a total licensed capacity of 193 places. The estimated cost of the school age program is between 1.5 and 2 FTE or 10% (approx. \$170,000) of the amount reported in the total staff cost.

AHDC's reported annual expenditure is the second-highest across all centres. However, it is important to note that expenditure across auspice type appears relatively consistent, with the exception of two outliers (Centre A and Centre F), both of which reported significantly lower expenditure. This consistency suggests that AHDC's annual expenditure is typical of high-capacity centres, regardless of auspice.

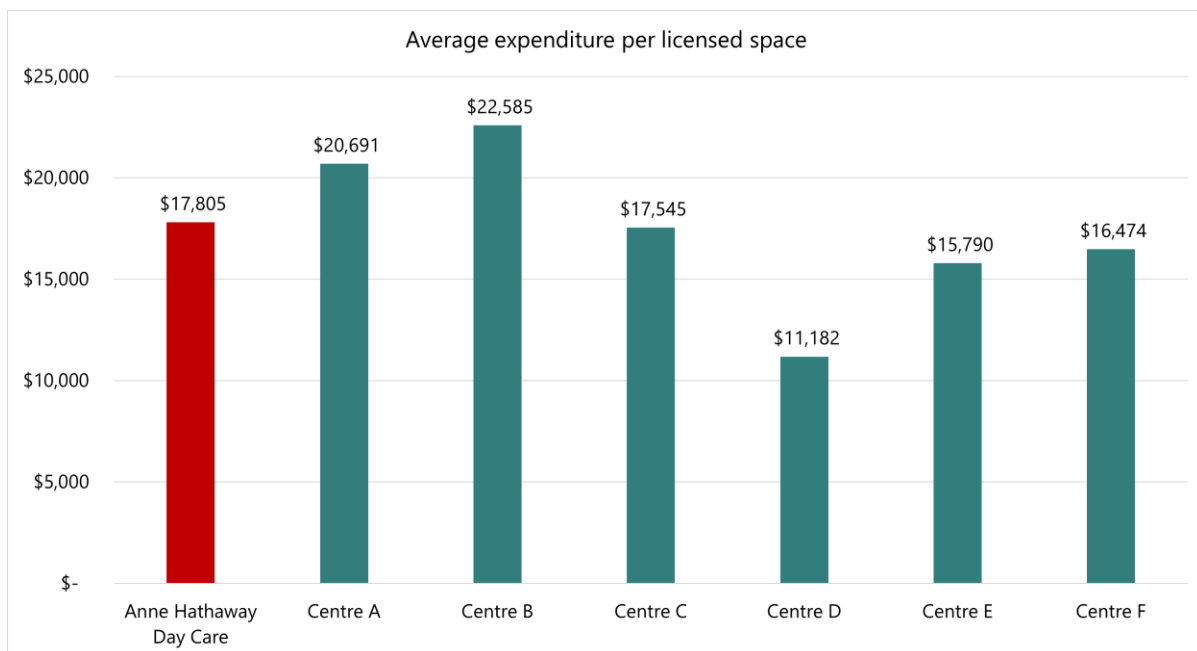


Figure 25: Average expenditure per licensed space

It is important to note that the licensed capacity may not always reflect the operating capacity of the centre. For example, a lower operating capacity would make the child care centre appear more efficient than the ratio in the chart suggests.

AHDC reported an average annual expenditure of \$17,805 per licensed space, placing it in the mid-range of all centres included in this analysis. While its per-space cost is lower than that of some municipally operated centres, such as Centre B (\$22,585) and Centre A (\$20,691), it is higher than other centres, which range from \$11,182 to \$17,545.

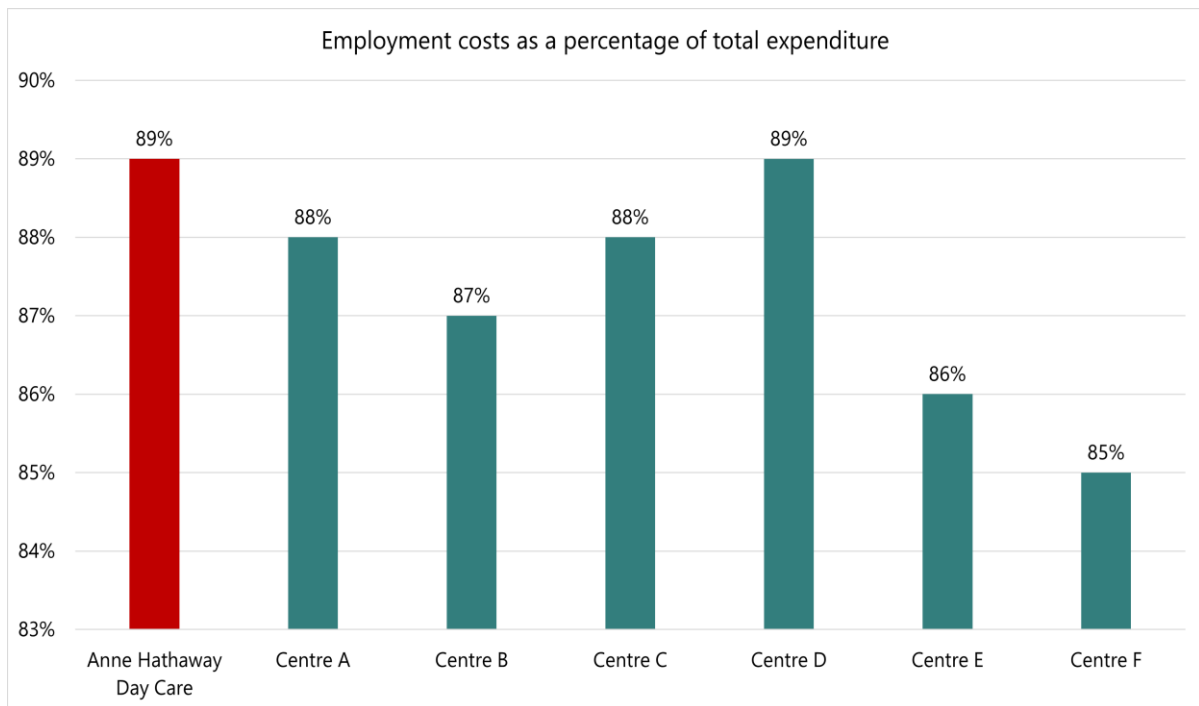


Figure 26: Employment costs as a percentage of total expenditure

AHDC allocates 89% of its total expenditure to employment costs—placing it at the top of the range among all centres included in this review. This aligns closely with Centre D, which also reports 89%, and is only marginally higher than the lowest-reported value of 85% at Centre F.

The spread between the highest and lowest centres is just 4 percentage points. This indicates a high degree of consistency in employment-related spending across all

centres. Any variations may reflect differences in wage levels, staffing models, or allocation of funds to non-salary programming.

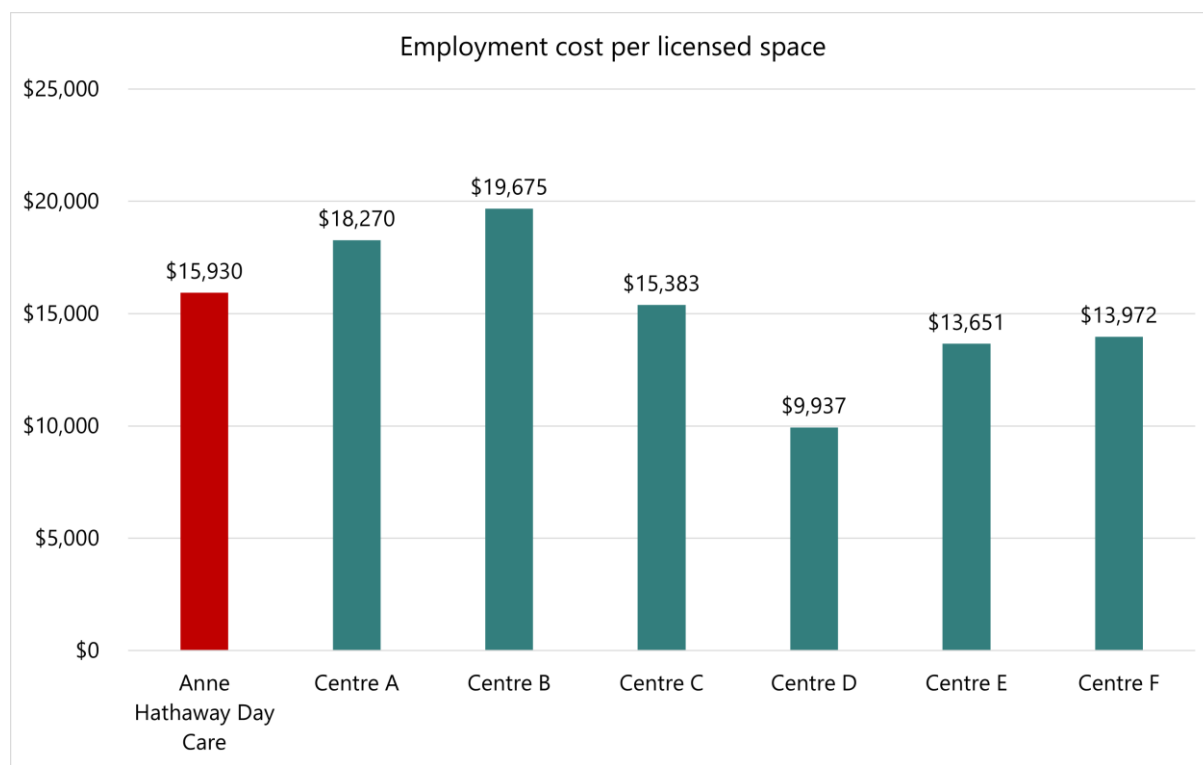


Figure 27: Employment cost per licensed space

AHDC reported employment costs of \$15,930 per licensed space, positioning it near the midpoint of the centres. This is higher than the employment costs per licensed space reported by two comparators, though not significantly.

Centre D appears to be an outlier among the centres, reporting approximately half the employment costs per licensed space compared to Centre B.

AHDC reported a relatively high allocation of expenditure to supplies, materials, and equipment—accounting for 10.5% of its total expenditure. This is the second-highest allocation among all centres.

## Recommendations

This study's primary focus has been the assessment of the value-for-money of the AHDC. While the report recommends the City continue to deliver child care services directly through AHDC, it has also noted several key improvement opportunities. These should be reviewed in collaboration with delivery partners.

### Strengthening equity and inclusion

The City is committed to belonging and inclusion, with a key corporate value focused on creating inclusive environments by continually asking who isn't "at the table" and how they can be engaged.<sup>29</sup> Equity emerged as a central theme in the research, particularly in light of the strong demand for child care and AHDC's extensive waitlist. As the Centre operates at full capacity, concerns were raised about whether access is equitably distributed, particularly for families experiencing social or economic vulnerability.

To maintain a strong focus on this, the City should consider exploring opportunities to raise awareness about the centre among families eligible for fee subsidy and consider prioritizing them on the waitlist. There are a range of ways that the AHDC could address this. For example, other jurisdictions such as the Region of Waterloo<sup>30</sup> are working to refine local access guidelines, and exploring a 20% target for subsidized spaces at child care centres. As part of a further review, the following could be considered:

- Development of a formal referral pathway that allows trusted service providers to identify children who may benefit from prioritized placement due to developmental risks, family instability, or socioeconomic disadvantage.
- Establishing equity-based access criteria within the waitlist system (e.g., through tiered priority flags), particularly for children connected to social services or living in high-risk circumstances.
- Conducting regular data reviews to monitor access patterns and identify whether families facing systemic barriers are underrepresented among enrolled children.

The City should also continue to monitor parent feedback, and probe specifically for input on opportunities to strengthen inclusion at the centre.

Recommendation 1: Survey parents on opportunities for strengthening equity and inclusion at AHDC. For example, when conducting outreach to parents, a survey

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<sup>29</sup> See City of Stratford A Roadmap for Inclusive Growth, Strategic Priorities 2024-27, available at [https://www.stratford.ca/en/inside-city-hall/resources/CAO-MAYORS-OFFICE/Strategic-Priorities-2024\\_2027.pdf](https://www.stratford.ca/en/inside-city-hall/resources/CAO-MAYORS-OFFICE/Strategic-Priorities-2024_2027.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> See Region of Waterloo's Children's Services Access and Inclusion Plan, January 2024, available at [https://www.omssa.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Access-and-Inclusion-Plan-Final-Access\\_Dec2023.pdf](https://www.omssa.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Access-and-Inclusion-Plan-Final-Access_Dec2023.pdf)

question could be: “What, if anything, could the AHDC do to better support equity and inclusion for your child and family?”

Recommendation 2: Review the current protocol for outreach to families that are on the wait list and evaluate whether the level of communication provides the appropriate information to families. This could include clarifying how placements are determined and where to obtain further information.

Recommendation 3: Collect socioeconomic data on the composition of families at the AHDC and compare to region’s population demographics to identify any underrepresented groups.

Recommendation 4: Conduct a study to assess the feasibility of a 20% target for subsidized spaces at AHDC.

## Increasing access

As the AHDC is operating at full capacity and maintains a significant waitlist, there is an opportunity to explore expanding physical space on site or at an additional location. The limited number of spaces creates a situation in which some families may not attempt to apply, discouraged by the Centre’s reputation for long wait times. Families may also miss critical application windows due to lack of awareness, particularly on how early registration is required.

If there are constraints with this approach, it may be possible to explore the potential for partnering with other operated licensed programs aligned with the Centre’s values and standards to strengthen system capacity. With almost one-third (32%) of families surveyed identifying the need for more licensed spaces at Anne Hathaway or in Stratford, St. Marys, and Perth County overall, this is a particularly salient issue for the community.

Recommendation 5: Conduct a study to assess the feasibility of expanding the capacity of the AHDC at its current location or at a new site.

## Improving accessibility

In the parent survey, while most respondents were content with the physical accessibility of the centre, there were some respondents who indicated some concern. To better understand this, the AHDC should consider gathering parent feedback on opportunities to strengthen accessibility at the Centre.



Recommendation 6: Survey parents on opportunities for strengthening physical accessibility at AHDC. For example, when conducting outreach to parents, a survey question could be: “What, if anything, could the AHDC do to better support physical improvements that would help make the child centre more accessible for your child or family?”

## Enhancing impact through capacity building

A key theme in this study is the strong skills and capabilities of the early childhood educators at AHDC. Parents value their input and perspectives, and staff have provided support and coaching to parents on key issues such as belonging, engagement, expression and well-being.<sup>31</sup>

In order to build upon the informal guidance and support provided to parents at the Centre, staff members offered a suggestion that the AHDC should consider piloting “office hours” to support new parents. This could involve having 1-2 ECEs available at designated times (e.g., 1 hour per week), and allowing parents to visit without needing to schedule an appointment in advance. This is a more flexible approach where parents can drop in when they have questions or need advice on a child rearing matter.

Recommendation 7: Conduct a pilot project to offer capacity building supports to parents at established times.

## Strengthening alignment on required supports and resources

In the staff survey, it was noted that some staff do not feel they have access to all the materials or funding needed to fully support each child’s experience. While the AHDC has a policy in place to cover reasonable expenses incurred by staff to provide classroom resources, there may be an opportunity to consult with staff to better understand what additional in-classroom materials and resources may be supportive to the early learning environment.

Recommendation 8: Consult with staff to determine what additional in-classroom materials may be required to support the early learning environment.

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<sup>31</sup> As outlined in the How Does Learning Happen framework, available at <https://files.ontario.ca/edu-how-does-learning-happen-en-2021-03-23.pdf>

## Improving integration

It was noted in the staff survey that there was some uncertainty on whether families receive comprehensive service plans (including connections to family support programs or access to mental health resources) when required. As a result, there may be an opportunity for conducting further analysis on the opportunities for improving integrated care including special needs resourcing. This could include clarifying the process, identifying any challenges / pain-points from the perspective of staff and families, and developing solutions.

**Recommendation 9:** Develop an accessible inventory of the social services programs and supports that may be applicable to families in the child care centre and the pathways that they can use to access those services. Ensure that staff and families are aware of the process and review the effectiveness of the service experience for families and staff.

## Parental feedback

Current pedagogical approaches emphasize child-led inquiry and learning. This forms part of AHDCs goals in the parent handbook.<sup>32</sup> While the majority of AHDC staff reported that feedback plays a role in shaping programming, approximately ¼ indicated that they were “unsure.” This suggests that even where feedback is collected, not all staff may have visibility into how it informs the delivery of services. Strengthening communication about how parent input is applied could help reinforce a more transparent, responsive culture at AHDC. As a result, there may be an opportunity to clarify for all staff, how parent feedback is being used to improve the delivery of services (e.g., as a standing agenda item at regular staff meetings).

**Recommendation 10:** Engage with staff to clarify how parent feedback is being used to improve the delivery of services at AHDC.

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<sup>32</sup> To provide child-initiated and adult supported experiences while planning for and creating positive learning environments and experiences in which each child’s learning and development will be supported

## Summary and Next Steps

This value-for-money audit has concluded that AHDC is delivering on its broad goals and objectives. There is a continued need for affordable child care in the City of Stratford, and the AHDC remains relevant in addressing that need. The AHDC is aligned with the City's priorities including its vision to become "a flourishing city propelled by inclusive growth and innovation, a community that works together to ensure everyone thrives".<sup>33</sup> In particular, the importance the City places on social connectivity, economic development and belonging and inclusion is being promoted through the child care delivered at AHDC.

AHDC has also been effective in meeting child care objectives across a range of dimensions including quality, affordability, accessibility and family centred care. However, the service is being delivered within an evolving context of child care. There are an increasing number of families who require child care including those with complex needs.

In order to respond to these challenges and address opportunities for improved service delivery, this report has provided several key recommendations. This includes exploring opportunities for strengthening equity and inclusion, increasing access, improving accessibility and enhancing the impact that the dedicated child care staff are making at AHDC.

As highlighted in this report, it is important to interpret the findings and recommendations within the context of the scope of the study. As further data and information is available, the findings and recommendations should be reviewed and refined as required.

In the short term, the City should review the report and consider the recommendations, and build upon the findings of the study in its ongoing service system planning initiatives. While this report is intended to help assess the value-for-money of the AHDC, it also aims to support greater dialogue about how child care service delivery can be improved in Stratford.

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<sup>33</sup> See City of Stratford A Roadmap for Inclusive Growth, Strategic Priorities 2024-27, available at [https://www.stratford.ca/en/inside-city-hall/resources/CAO-MAYORS-OFFICE/Strategic-Priorities-2024\\_2027.pdf](https://www.stratford.ca/en/inside-city-hall/resources/CAO-MAYORS-OFFICE/Strategic-Priorities-2024_2027.pdf)

## Appendix A: Management's Response to the Audit Report

The City of Stratford will establish a working group to action recommendations of the audit report.

Management's response and action plans to the recommendations of the Value-for-Money Audit are provided below.

### Strengthening equity and inclusion

**Recommendation 1:** Survey parents on opportunities for strengthening equity and inclusion at AHDC. For example, when conducting outreach to parents, a survey question could be: "What, if anything, could the AHDC do to better support equity and inclusion for your child and family?"

**Management Response:** ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree

**City of Stratford Comments/Action Plan:**

- The City of Stratford in its next survey of parents will assess perceptions of and opportunities for strengthening inclusion. Direct consultation will also be considered in addition to the survey.

**Recommendation 2:** Review the current protocol for outreach to families that are on the wait list and evaluate whether the level of communication provides the appropriate information to families. This could include clarifying how placements are determined and where to obtain further information.

**Management Response:** ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree

**City of Stratford Comments/Action Plan:**

- Assess utilization of parent communication tools through City of Stratford, St Marys and Perth County centralized child care registry and waitlist, which utilizes the OneHSN platform.
- Review the City of Stratford website and centralized child care registry and waitlist and update as needed to ensure that adequate and appropriate information is available for families, including the wait list policy and how to contact the City to ascertain their place on the AHDC wait list.

**Recommendation 3:** Collect socioeconomic data on the composition of families at the AHDC and compare to population demographics of the service delivery area to identify any underrepresented groups.

**Management Response:** ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree

**City of Stratford Comments/Action Plan:**

- As part of its ongoing service system planning processes, the City of Stratford will undertake review of Census data, and its survey of parents will ask parents to voluntarily report on socioeconomic indicators.
- AHDC will also evaluate the feasibility of collecting such data through its registration processes.

**Recommendation 4:** Conduct a study to assess the feasibility of a 20% target for subsidized spaces at AHDC.

**Management Response:** ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree

**City of Stratford Comments/Action Plan:**

- As part of its ongoing service system planning processes, the City of Stratford will assess the feasibility and prospective impacts of prioritizing families eligible to receive of fee subsidy, with a target of placing subsidized families into 20% of spaces at AHDC.

## Increasing access

**Recommendation 5:** Conduct a study to assess the feasibility of expanding the capacity of the AHDC at its current location or at a new site.

**Management Response:** ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree

**City of Stratford Comments/Action Plan:**

- As part of its ongoing service system planning processes, the City of Stratford will assess the feasibility and prospective impacts of expansion of AHDC.
- As per Ministry of Education guidelines, the City will ensure that opportunities for community-based delivery participation are exhausted prior to any expansion of direct child care delivery.

## Improving accessibility

**Recommendation 6:** Survey parents on opportunities for strengthening physical accessibility at AHDC. For example, when conducting outreach to parents, a survey question could be: “What, if anything, could the AHDC do to better support physical improvements that would help make the child centre more accessible for your child or family?”

**Management Response:** ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree

**City of Stratford Comments/Action Plan:**

- The City of Stratford in its next survey of parents will assess opportunities for strengthening physical accessibility at AHDC.
- It is noted that AHDC is already fully accessible, including accessible entrances and washrooms, and the City is interested in exploring perceptions of physical accessibility and understanding where parents and staff may see opportunities for enhancing accessibility.

## Enhancing impact through capacity building

**Recommendation 7:** Conduct a pilot project to offer capacity building supports to parents at established times.

**Management Response:** ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree

**City of Stratford Comments/Action Plan:**

- It is not feasible for AHDC to pilot “office hours” as suggested by staff. This would require release time, and associated costs not attributable to the provision of child care. In addition, parents are often working or have other responsibilities while children in child care.
- AHDC will seek opportunities for staff to offer capacity building supports and education at family appreciation or community events.

## Strengthening alignment on required supports and resources

**Recommendation 8:** Consult with staff to determine what additional in-classroom materials may be required to support the early learning environment.

**Management Response:** ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree

### City of Stratford Comments/Action Plan:

- AHDC staff will be engaged at staff meetings to share and explore what additional in-classroom materials might further support the creation of positive early learning environments, and foster inclusion, exploration, play, and inquiry.

## Improving integration

**Recommendation 9:** Develop an accessible inventory of the social services programs and supports that may be applicable to families in the child care centre and the pathways that they can use to access those services. Ensure that staff and families are aware of the process and review the effectiveness of the service experience for families and staff.

**Management Response:** ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree

### City of Stratford Comments/Action Plan:

- Information about programs and supports provided by the Department of Social Services and other community partners and agencies will be shared with AHDC staff to build their capacity to share information about these programs and services, and make referrals and information available to families where applicable.

## Parental feedback

**Recommendation 10:** Engage with staff to clarify how parent feedback is being used to improve the delivery of services at AHDC.

**Management Response:** ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree

### City of Stratford Comments/Action Plan:

- AHDC staff will be engaged at staff meetings to review and discuss opportunities to enhance parent feedback and participation in daily programming, and share with families how their feedback has informed the delivery of services.

## Appendix B: Survey Methodology and Respondent Profile

### Purpose and Scope

As part of the Value-for-Money (VFM) audit process, two complementary surveys were administered to gather direct input from key stakeholders engaged with licensed child care services in Stratford, St. Marys, and Perth County. The surveys were developed to assess the quality, accessibility, and equity of child care services from the perspectives of both service users and providers.

The parent and caregiver survey was designed to capture experiences related to inclusivity, accessibility, family engagement, affordability, and the quality of service delivery.

The staff survey aimed to understand working conditions, service integration, care standards, and overall job satisfaction from the perspective of early years professionals.

Together, these instruments were intended to inform evidence-based recommendations, identify areas for improvement, and support the development of a more responsive and equitable child care system.

### Parent and Caregiver Survey Structure

The survey was organized into six pages, covering a total of 14 questions, grouped around respondent information, child care experience, and operational considerations:

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. Which of the following best describes your ethnic and cultural background?
4. Do you identify as 2SLGBTQIA+?
5. Do you or your child identify as a person with a disability / have special needs
6. What was your total household income before taxes last year (2024)?
7. Do you receive a fee subsidy to support the cost of child care?
8. In what type of household do you live in?
9. Which municipality do you live in?
10. Please select all of the following that apply to you:
  - I have a child in child care currently
  - I previously had a child in child care
  - I will have a child in child care in future
11. What is the name of the child care centre / provider you would like to provide feedback on?
12. To what extent do you agree with the following statements:



- The staff understand and are inclusive of diverse cultural and language backgrounds. - Strongly disagree
- The staff understand and are inclusive of diverse cultural and language backgrounds. - Disagree
- The staff understand and are inclusive of diverse cultural and language backgrounds.
- It is welcoming and inclusive.
- I am involved in decisions about my child's care and education.
- It is accessible and has features like ramps, wide doorways, elevators, and accessible bathrooms.
- Information sessions about child care programs are held regularly and are available to everyone.

13. To what extent do you agree with the following statements:

- The child care centre takes care to meet my family's unique needs
- When required, my family is connected with other supports, such as parenting programs, or health and social services
- The costs of child care are clear to me
- The services provided are affordable
- I am happy with the quality of care and education provided
- I have an opportunity to give my opinion on the quality of services

14. Please use the space below to share any additional comments you have about the child care you are receiving / or child care in Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County more generally.

## Response Summary

A total of 364 parents and caregivers completed the survey. Of these, 36 respondents (approximately 10%) provided feedback specifically on Anne Hathaway Day Care (AHDC). The remaining responses reflected a range of other licensed child care centres and providers throughout Stratford, St. Marys, and Perth County.

## Staff Survey Structure

The staff survey consisted of seven pages and included seven questions, structured around Respondent Profile, Workplace Experience and Job Satisfaction.

1. What early learning environment are you working in?

2. What is the name of the child care centre / provider that you work for?
3. What is your role?
4. To what extent do you agree with the following statements:
  - Staff understand and are inclusive of diverse cultural and language backgrounds.
  - There is enough support for children with special needs and there is a strong focus on being inclusive.
  - Parents are involved in decisions about their child's care and development.
  - Parental feedback is regularly used to improve our programs.
  - There is a high level of accessibility with features like ramps, wide doorways, elevators, and accessible bathrooms.
  - Information sessions to reach vulnerable groups (e.g., low-income families, newcomers) are regularly held.
5. To what extent do you agree with the following statements:
  - Comprehensive family service plans are provided when needed (e.g., parenting programs and mental health services).
  - Referrals between child care providers and community services supporting children's development are provided when needed (e.g., health services, social services, and EarlyON Child and Family Centres).
  - Sufficient financial resources are allocated to support the individual needs of each child (e.g. onboarding, expenses, supplies, activities, etc.)
  - The services provided are affordable for families. The services provided are financially sustainable to operate.
  - The current child-to-staff ratio facilitates sufficient attention and care to each child.
  - Regular assessments are conducted to understand parent satisfaction regarding service quality, communication, and child outcomes.
6. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statement. My job offers:
  - Meaningful work with tasks and responsibilities that align with my professional education interests, values, and skills.
  - Fair and competitive compensation that reflects my skills, experience, and the value I bring to the organization.

- Opportunities for professional growth and advancement including access to training programs, mentorship opportunities, and the potential for taking on new challenges and responsibilities.
  - A supportive, inclusive, and respectful work environment that has effective communication, and strong relationships with colleagues and supervisors.
  - Reasonable working hours, and supportive company policies regarding vacation time and family leave.
7. Please use the space below to share any additional comments you have about where you work and / or child care in Stratford, St Marys and Perth County more generally.

## Response Summary

A total of 91 early years staff completed the survey and three didn't identify which centre they were from (their responses were excluded when making comparisons of centres). 16 respondents (approximately 18%) provided feedback specifically on Anne Hathaway Day Care (AHDC). Responses included a broad representation of roles and program types from across Stratford, St. Marys, and Perth County.

## Appendix C: Stakeholder Consultation Guides

The following interview questions were intended to be a semi-structured guide and tailored and adapted based on the interests and expertise of the interviewee:

- Please tell us about your role and responsibilities in relation to early child care and learning at the City of Stratford?
- From your perspective, what are the key strengths of the City of Stratford's directly operated centre? What are the key challenges?
- To what extent is the centre tailored to individual learners' and families' needs?
- What impact does child care have on children and families in Stratford? Does the program meet the current needs of the community?
- How well-integrated are the services with other key community and social services? e.g., newcomer services, public health, etc.
- How efficient is the centre to administer, deliver, and monitor? How does that compare to centres that are not directly operated by the City?
- Do you have any observations on specific "best practices" at centres that are not directly operated by the City that could be adopted by the directly operated centre?
- Looking ahead, how does the centre need to adapt to continue to be successful in one, three, and five years from now? What key initiatives and opportunities should the centre focus on in the next 3-4 years?
- Do you have any other observations regarding children's services in the City you would like to share?

The following facilitation questions were used to conduct the staff consultation on April 28<sup>th</sup> as a semi-structured guide. Feedback was recorded by the facilitators using flip charts and sticky notes.

1. What are the benefits of the Anne Hathaway Day Care centre for children, families, and the community?
2. How does the Anne Hathaway Day Care compare to other centres?
3. How could the delivery of child care by Anne Hathaway Day Care be improved?
4. If Anne Hathaway Day Care were to close, what would be the impact?

There was a focus on identifying implications for:

- Children and their families;
- For staff, including ECEs, who are responsible for delivery; and
- For the municipality and taxpayers who are responsible for funding.

## Key sources consulted

Anne Hathaway Day Care Parent Handbook Date Created: January 2024 Date Revised: May 2025. Available at <https://www.stratford.ca/en/inside-city-hall/resources/SOCIAL-SERVICES/DAYCARE/Anne-Hathaway-Day-Care-Parent-Handbook-2025-AODA.pdf>

City of Stratford A Roadmap for Inclusive Growth, Strategic Priorities 2024-27, available at [https://www.stratford.ca/en/inside-city-hall/resources/CAO-MAYORS-OFFICE/Strategic-Priorities-2024\\_2027.pdf](https://www.stratford.ca/en/inside-city-hall/resources/CAO-MAYORS-OFFICE/Strategic-Priorities-2024_2027.pdf)

City of Stratford, St Marys and Perth County child care registry  
[https://onehsn.com/stratford/ux\\_2\\_0](https://onehsn.com/stratford/ux_2_0)

City of Stratford, Waiting List Policy on <https://www.stratford.ca/en/inside-city-hall/resources/SOCIAL-SERVICES/DAYCARE/Anne-Hathaway-Day-Care-Parent-Handbook-2025-AODA.pdf>

Conference Board of Canada – Ready for Life, October 2017, available at <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/product/ready-for-life-a-socio-economic-analysis-of-early-childhood-education-and-care/>

CWELCC Canada-Ontario Agreement is available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/early-learning-child-care-agreement/agreements-provinces-territories/ontario-canada-wide-2021.html>

Deloitte, Early Learning and Childcare as Key Economic Infrastructure, April 2021

Government of Ontario Access and Inclusion Framework, 2023  
<https://files.ontario.ca/edu-access-and-inclusion-framework-en-2023-07-07.pdf>

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## Appendix: Thematic analysis methodology

Open-ended survey responses from parents/caregivers were reviewed and analyzed using a thematic coding approach. Responses were systematically read and sorted into thematic categories based on recurring topics, concerns, and positive reflections.

Each response was reviewed line-by-line and assigned one or more thematic codes corresponding to the main issue(s) or sentiment expressed. These codes were then grouped into higher-order themes to allow for consistent comparison across centres and to support identification of common system-wide priorities.

Themes were developed inductively (based on the content of the responses) but aligned with pre-established areas of interest for this audit, including access, program quality, equity, and operations.

Responses were coded by "mention" each time a distinct issue or topic was raised, it was counted once under the relevant theme.

Theme	Mentions	
	AHDC	Other centres
Praise for staff, educators and quality of care	21	29
Need for more daycare spots / capacity [AHDC]	14	28
Not enough licensed/full-time care [Other centres]		
Positive feedback on programming	10	18
Waitlists (long waitlists, lack of transparency)	9	51
Impact of care on family stability and work	6	
Positive experience with specific programs (e.g., meals, crafts) [AHDC]	6	25
Positive experiences at specific centres [Other centres]		
Costs and subsidies (high child care costs, no subsidy access for unlicensed care, lack of transparency on fees)	–	32
Facilities not fully utilized; Loss/reduction of programs (e.g., summer or nursery) [AHDC]	6	10
Lack of before/after school program spaces [Other centres]		
Concerns over fairness of access / prioritization	3	
Requests for funding and staff expansion	3	
Lack of communication from centres	–	15
Demand for home daycare licensing	–	14
Inflexibility with schedules/policies	–	11
Safety concerns with unlicensed care	–	9
High staff turnover	–	8
Need for more staff training/professional development	–	7

Inadequate support for children with special needs	–	6
Concerns over child-to-caregiver ratios	–	6
Poor management at specific centres	–	5
Requests for more inclusive practices	–	4