



STRATEGIC PLAN

2016

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CONTENTS

THE JOURNEY TO OUR NEW STRATEGIC PLAN	3
WHAT MAKES COMPASS EARLY LEARNING & CARE UNIQUE?	6
VISION & MISSION.....	9
ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES AND BELIEFS	10
COMPASS ELC PROGRAM & PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE.....	13
STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS 2016.....	15
APPENDIX I.....	20
COMPASS ELC PROGRAM AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE	20



THE JOURNEY TO OUR NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

For more than thirty years, our organization has been growing and evolving. Over those years we've expanded our vision of early learning and child care, enhanced our learning environments to truly honour our belief in children as competent and full of wonder, deepened our understanding of the principles of organizational democracy that underpin our values and beliefs, provided care for thousands of children and their families, and experienced the growth of our organization from the three original



founders to over 230 people working together on behalf of children and families.

Over the past several years, there have been significant changes in the field of early learning and child care, particularly in Ontario. These changes provided an opportunity for us to consider our programs, services and organization, reflect on

where we are and where we aspire to be in serving children and families, and work to position our organization to respond with intention and focus over the coming years.

In our external environment, early learning and child care has been significantly impacted by initiatives introduced by the Government of Ontario such as Full Day Kindergarten, implementation of the Early Years and Child Care Act, and new pedagogical frameworks articulated through the release of the document, *How Does Learning Happen*. Our understanding of child development actively continues to be shaped by emerging research on brain development. Our stakeholders – funders, parents, and our communities – are all seeking increased accountability, transparency and reporting, and higher quality learning and care for children. Growth and demographic changes in our communities continue to present a variety of opportunities to serve families in new regions and in different ways. Advances in technology now serve as an enabler to growth in programs and services, facilitating new approaches to enhancing the administrative systems that underpin our operations and providing greater access to information.

Internally, Compass Early Learning and Care has grown in size and diversified in what we do. We've expanded our centre-based programs in new communities, doubled our home child care services in the past year, established consulting services to support other organizations on their journey to emergent curriculum, and worked to develop an organizational culture that operates from strengths and creates opportunities for growth and development for all of us. We've evolved as an organization – *and we will continue to do so*.

With these changes as a backdrop, it was timely to step back and collectively make sense of these forces and trends to understand our opportunities for the future. Over the past eight months, Compass Early Learning and Care has been engaged in different kinds of conversations within our organization about our journey, the changes that are impacting the way we provide early learning and care, and of our vision for the future. Our Board of Directors, our funders, our employees, parents and families,

and the children in our care have all helped to shape our aspirations and directions for the future.

WHAT MAKES COMPASS EARLY LEARNING & CARE UNIQUE?

Our children, their parents and families, and our employees all shared with us what they believe makes Compass Early Learning and Care unique.

Parents and families tell us they feel confident that our organization is living into its guiding principles, values and beliefs.



Our most recent survey of parents and families (2015), with more than 540 completed responses, indicates that our parents feel happy, satisfied and engaged with the care their children

Figure 1: Parent Experiences at Compass Early Learning and Care

receive in our programs and with our educators. Reflecting on the comments received, we affirmed that when we create a sense of belonging and listen and respond to children and their families, we build relationships of respect, understanding and trust.

At Compass Early Learning and Care, children are at the heart of everything we do and our strategic plan would be incomplete without their voices. We're honoured to share the voices of children, age six to eleven years old, throughout our plan, as they

reflect on the culture in their program room, the things that are important to them, what they like about their program, and what they are proud of.

To support families, nurture children, and deliver the high quality learning and care

"We have the freedom to do what we like to do and we are able to be very creative with lots of materials, and that's important to me.

~ Hailev. 10

that we continually seek to provide, we know that our organization must support, nurture and develop our employees, fostering a culture where employees feel a sense of joy, passion and purpose in their work. We know we must reflect on, and engage in, candid conversations about

what we are doing well as an organization and where there are opportunities to live more fully into our values and beliefs. We do this through surveys of our employees annually, as well as in an ongoing way through team meetings with employees, programs, supervisors and leaders. On April 9, 2016, we were grateful to have close to one hundred employees and board members come together for a day and a half of celebrating, thinking, collaborating, and working together to shape the direction of our strategic plan. Before commencing our planning retreat, we paused to ask our employees what they felt it was that made Compass

Employees Shared Their Thoughts on What Makes Compass Unique

Our culture respects people, values every role, and makes people feel valued for the work that they do.

Our values and strengths-based focus.

I feel inspired to be here.

The children and families in our programs.

Relationships – with children, families, and each other.

The staff - we are like a family.

It's a welcoming and joyful environment.

We are part of a community.

Collaboration.

Our approach to emergent curriculum.

Professional development and opportunities within

Early Learning and Care unique. Their responses made us proud of the work we do together and the organization we have created.

VISION & MISSION

The planning process affirmed that our current vision for early learning and care and for the mission of our organization remain relevant today, and will continue to inspire us in the future. Our organizational principles, values and beliefs have been expanded to further strengthen our organizational culture, deepen our support for employees and the work that they do, and inspire all of us to pursue our vision with purpose, commitment, and passion.

"We have choices here...nobody tells us what we have to do. It's always our choice – and I like that. "

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| Vision | Compass Early Learning and Care envisions a place where children are valued as citizens of today; where the principles of democracy guide our relationships with children, families, colleagues and our community. |
| Mission | Compass Early Learning and Care is a progressive, non-profit organization where we work collaboratively to provide excellence in early learning and care. The richness and uniqueness of our learning environments are an invitation for adults and children to discover together the joy of learning. |

ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES AND BELIEFS

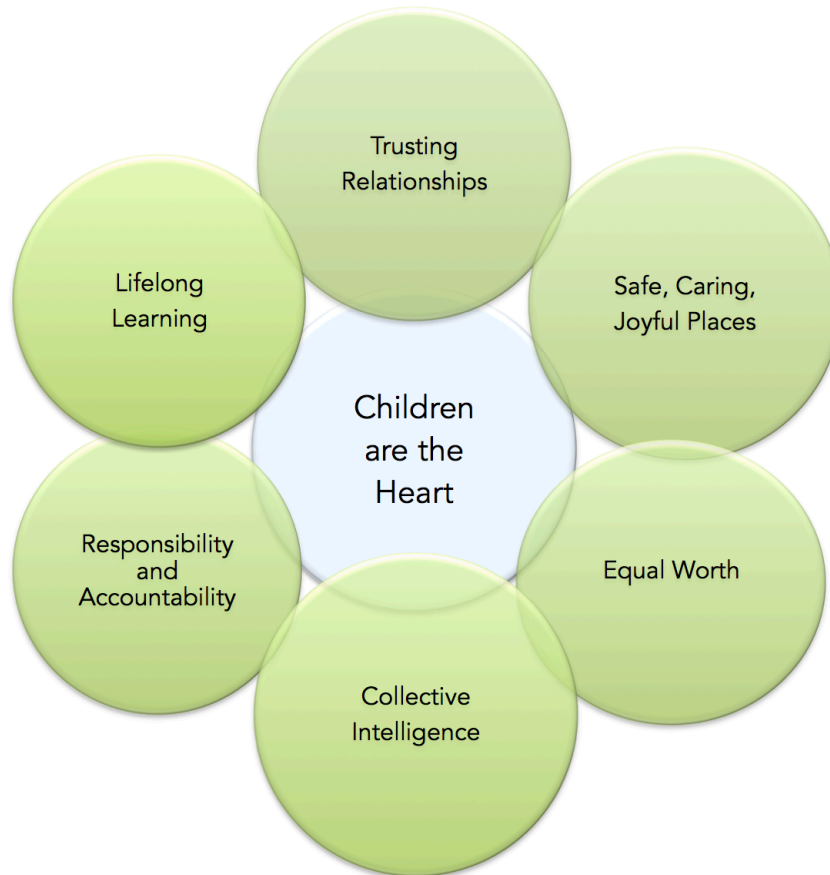
The work of our organization, as a whole, is guided by values and beliefs that shape the way we approach, and carry out, our work with each other, with children, families and in our communities.

Children are the Heart	Children are at the centre of everything we do. We hold a strong view of children as capable, competent, and curious about the world around them and this guides the way in which we design our environments, experiences and interactions.
Trusting Relationships	We believe that trust and relationships are the foundation of all we do, and we seek to build respectful, authentic relationships with our colleagues, children, families, and communities. We take responsibility to bring our best selves to our relationships and our work, and trust that those around us do as well.
Safe, Caring, Joyful Places	We recognize that we are all deeply interconnected. We strive to create joyful and safe environments, for children, parents, communities, and ourselves, where we can honour all parts of us: the cognitive, physical, emotional, and spiritual, and where each of us can be authentic.
Equal Worth	We believe that we are all of fundamental equal worth and encourage each member of our community to contribute in their distinctive way, appreciating the differences in roles, backgrounds, interests, skills, and points of view. We are committed to creating an environment where people feel free to fully express themselves, tapping into their passion and creativity.
Collective Intelligence	We believe in the power of collaboration, knowing that we will expand our thinking, deepen our understandings, and come to the best decisions by working together. We value transparency and believe that each of us has a right, and a responsibility, to

access information that contributes to the power of our collective intelligence.

Responsibility and Accountability	We value a sense of personal responsibility and believe that we share accountability for our organization, our individual practice, and for the work we do with children, families and communities. We believe that freedom and accountability are two sides of the same coin.
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Lifelong Learning	We value learning as an opportunity to engage both emotionally and intellectually, deepen our own practice, and enrich the quality of experiences for children, families, communities, and ourselves. We believe that every interaction is an invitation to learn and grow together.
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COMPASS ELC PROGRAM & PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

Our Program Statement (CEYA 2014, O. Reg. 137/15 s 46.1) is a living document that reflects our values and practices and those of the Ontario Pedagogy for the Early Years, *How Does Learning Happen?* It is implemented through parent and staff surveys, daily and annual staff reflections, and regular program and team meetings, fostering a culture of intentional practice that strengthens our commitment to the highest quality of care for our

At Compass Early Learning and Care our programs offer a place for exploration, wonder and rich learning opportunities discovered through children's play. In partnership with families and children we provide a child centered, emergent curriculum that fosters and promotes the development of the whole child. Our days are guided by the interests of the children and carefully framed and negotiated by our educators and staff. Our strong view of children as capable, competent and curious about the world around them, guides the way in which we design our environments, experiences and interactions. The inspiration for our work

comes not only from the children, but also from the educators of Reggio Emilia. We see curriculum as everything that happens in our days and consider each moment as an opportunity to build relationships and create an atmosphere that nurtures children and adults. We hold children and childhood in deep regard.

Seven themes guide our pedagogical practice:

Parents as Partners: Families know their children best and we believe their contributions are essential to their child's learning and development.

Environments: Our playrooms are designed to engage children's natural desire to explore and discover the world around

them. We hold a deep respect for our environment, offering children many opportunities to connect with nature.

- Expression:* We create a safe environment where the voices of children, educators and families are valued. We welcome all perspectives as an important part of building relationships and creating quality early learning.
- Community:* We promote and value a sense of personal integrity, social responsibility and respect for ourselves and others. We practice the principles of democracy and social justice in our organization and communities.
- Wellbeing:* We offer joyful days of learning and laughter and time to discover and experience the world. Our nutritious meals are an important part of creating a healthy lifestyle.
- Life-Long Learners:* Growing and learning together is a lifelong journey that happens every moment of every day. We provide time and resources so that each child can benefit from the latest research and best practice in early learning.
- Leadership:* As dedicated leaders, we are committed to advocating for the highest quality of care in our community and across the province.

A complete description of these themes is included in Appendix I.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS 2016

Compass Early Learning and Care identified four strategic directions that will frame our journey over the next three years, providing focus for our plans and actions. These four directions, aligned with our mission, bring increased visibility to our purpose, and offer support as we work to achieve our vision.

Each strategic direction is supported by a set of goals that clearly identify our objectives over the life of our strategic plan. Over the next three years, Compass Early Learning and Care will focus our efforts in four key areas to enable us to:

1. Build organizational capacity and develop employee potential.
2. Create rich and unique learning environments for children.
3. Develop community capacity.
4. Share our journey and approach.

To support us to make intentional and sustained progress on our goals and objectives over the next three years we will create annual operating plans, in collaboration with employees and other stakeholders, to outline key initiatives and actions, and will report regularly on our progress to our organization and our Board.

"I like that we have lots of choices of where we want to play and do things. We can choose the gym, the room or outside and we can change our mind and move around. ~ Nino, 8

1. BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY & DEVELOP EMPLOYEE POTENTIAL

Compass Early Learning and Care strives to develop an organizational culture that engages all of us in the achievement of our vision. We know that our strength-based approach, guiding principles, and ability to live fully into our values, creates opportunities for our organization to expand and grow, and for all of us to achieve our full potential. We will be intentional in developing all facets of our organization to support our evolution over the coming years.

Objectives

- 1.1 To continue to develop CELC as an employer of choice within the early learning and child care sector.
- 1.2 To create and maintain sustainable and effective operational structures, systems and processes to accommodate growth and build organizational capacity.
- 1.3 To support the continued emergence of an organizational culture that reflects our guiding principles and pedagogical themes in our day-to-day work and practice.
- 1.4 To support our employees to develop to their fullest potential – personally and professionally.
- 1.5 To be responsible stewards of our organization and the environment.

“We all get along and are respectful to each other almost all the time. It’s important to be that way.” ~ Dylan, 9

2. CREATE RICH & UNIQUE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR CHILDREN

Our programs offer a place for exploration, wonder and rich learning opportunities discovered through children's play. Our learning environments, both indoors and outdoors, are designed to inspire children to explore and engage with others and build meaningful relationships. Our educators provide intentional, beautiful spaces that invite children into play.

Objectives

- 2.1 To fully live into our program statement, honoring our pedagogical themes, and ensuring our learning environments nurture children to feel joyful and safe to explore and develop.
- 2.2 To support the social and emotional wellbeing of each individual in all aspects of our programs.
- 2.3 To support families to feel valued as part of the learning process.
- 2.4 To facilitate ongoing connections across programs to better support each other, share practices, enhance collaboration and thinking together, and to understand our successes and lessons learned.
- 2.5 To continue to develop documentation protocols to make visible how children think and learn.

"I'm proud of the things me and my friends build with Lego and that we have pictures of them to keep." ~ Grayson, 10

3. DEVELOP COMMUNITY CAPACITY

As a key resource and partner, Compass Early Learning and Care will be responsive to the changing needs of the communities and families we serve, working in collaboration with key stakeholders, and offering new programs and services to ensure that all children have access to high quality early learning and care.

Objectives

- 3.1 To be a key resource and partner within our local municipalities, strengthening early learning and care in our respective communities, and proactively contributing to community success.
- 3.2 To explore and offer administrative services to other early learning and child care centres.
- 3.3 To seek new funding opportunities to build capacity in our communities, organization and programs.
- 3.4 To creatively grow our home child care, and centre-based programs, responding to community need.
- 3.5 To grow our early learning consulting services in a way that is self-sustaining within our organization, contributes to the early learning community, and provides an opportunity for growth, development and innovation within our own practices and services.

"I love how we all sit together on the carpet and communicate about what we are doing on the weekend and all the stuff that's going on with us." ~ Hailey, 10

4. SHARE OUR JOURNEY & APPROACH

We believe that all children and families should have access to high quality early learning and care. We feel a sense of responsibility to share our knowledge, successes, and lessons learned, and to mentor other programs in our collective journey to emergent curriculum.

Objectives

- 4.1 To share our approach, values, guiding principles, and our lessons learned to help other early learning and child care organizations on their own journey and evolution.
- 4.2 To grow our social media presence, making visible the journey of our employees and organization, through sharing and story telling.
- 4.3 To continually challenge ourselves to be innovative thinkers, practitioners, partners, and community members.

"I'm proud of how we all get along and have friendships in this room." ~ Molly, 9

APPENDIX I

COMPASS ELC PROGRAM AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

At Compass Early Learning and Care our programs offer a place for exploration, wonder and rich learning opportunities discovered through children's play. In partnership with families and children we provide a child centered, emergent curriculum that fosters and promotes the development of the whole child. Our days are guided by the interests of the children and carefully framed and negotiated by our educators and staff. Our strong view of children as capable, competent and curious about the world around them, guides the way in which we design our environments, experiences and interactions. The inspiration for our work comes not only from the children, but also from the educators of Reggio Emilia. We see curriculum as everything that happens in our days and consider each moment as an opportunity to build relationships and create an atmosphere that nurtures children and adults. We hold children and childhood in deep regard.

Parents as Partners

We know that parents are the child's first and best teacher. We believe that partnerships with families and their contributions are essential to each child's learning and development. We celebrate and honour the uniqueness of families and invite them to be a part of the life of the classroom. Positive relationships with families lead to secure relationships with children.

Children's sense of trust and security is strengthened when there are connections between home and our programs. We invite families to be active contributors to the life of the school and learn about their children's experiences during our family nights, daily communication, blogs, journals, portfolios and documentation panels. Families are invited to share their hopes and dreams for their children and

contribute to all aspects of the program in a ways with which they are most comfortable.

Environments

Our environments, both indoors and outside, play an essential role in our curriculum and are designed to inspire children's desires to explore and engage with others and build meaningful relationships. Our educators provide intentional, beautiful spaces that invite children into play. Our classrooms are designed with open-ended experiences such as blocks, art materials, recycled loose parts, books, dramatic play props, sensory experiences and more. These materials engage children in the natural exploration of literacy, numeracy, scientific discovery, and imaginative play. Educators take great care and responsibility for not only creating spaces but also in supporting, extending and deepening children's learning. Educators see themselves as co-learners alongside children, carefully listening and observing so that their environments and experiences are responsive and reflective of children's interest and ideas. The flow of our days is in response to children's desires to have long stretches of time for exploration both indoors and out. Our environments and schedules honour children's natural rhythms and need for time for active play, rest and quiet time.

Expression

Children are born learning and are powerful communicators right from birth. Through careful observations of children's verbal and non-verbal cues and gestures we create a responsive curriculum that engages and challenges children's thinking and deepens their understandings of the world around them. Communication also happens through creative expression. We encourage children to express their feelings, ideas and interests through the exploration of art, music and movement, and imaginative play. Educators collect visual traces of children's experiences and document their understandings and theories through photos, journals, documentation panels and learning stories. This documentation serves as a way to reflect, ask questions and make decisions about future explorations. We value documentation as a way to learn about how children think and learn. Our observations also serve as a way to develop questions for research in our classrooms. How do children show empathy to others? What approaches

do children use for problem solving? Where are children exploring math in their play? Our questions help us to see the competencies of children and grow a curriculum rooted in building on strengths. Documentation also plays an important role in our relationships with families; by engaging together we learn more about each child.

Community

We promote and value a sense of personal integrity, social responsibility and respect for ourselves and our communities. Within our programs we promote the principles of democracy and social justice. We actively participate in and support local initiatives, early learning networks and school communities in each of our municipalities. We engage with local partners to provide support and resources for our children and families. Our children are active members of their communities and can often be found exploring their local neighbourhoods. We value opportunities to bring visibility to the competencies of young children and share stories and experiences from our classrooms through our blogs, newsletters, and the connections we make with people in and around our communities.

Wellbeing

We understand that the foundation for life long health and wellbeing is established in the early years. Nurturing children's physical and emotional wellbeing plays a pivotal role in shaping the architecture of the brain in the first few years of life. Children thrive in environments where they actively engage their minds and bodies. Active play provides not only physical benefits but is also proven to enhance children's focus and attention, build problem solving skills, encourage creative complex thinking and fosters independence. Our environments both indoors and out are created to offer this important vigorous play. Learning happens best when children feel a sense of belonging, feel safe and have trust in their environment and when they are provided with opportunities to fully engage their lively minds.

We nurture that feeling of trust and emotional wellbeing and honour each child's unique ways of exploring their ideas and building relationships. The children's safety is our first priority; we also know the importance of children building risk competence and invite children to take safe reasonable risks.

Children in our care are treated with respect and dignity. Each child's unique personality is nurtured in our programs. Building and learning about relationships is an important part of growing up. We strive to provide spaces that reduce children's stress, and support children's abilities to self-regulate so that they can fully engage in learning and growing together. We respect each child's learning journey and provide consistency and developmentally appropriate limits and practices to support each child's learning and development.

We provide nutritious and delicious foods that not only meet the needs of every child and family but also surpass those required of us in the "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide" and "Nutrition for Healthy Term Infants". Dining with children is a time to not only nurture physical wellbeing but also nurture relationships and build a sense of community. Children and staff dine together family style, serving themselves and contributing to the dining experience. The building of independence is an important part of the daily life of the classroom.

Life Long Learning & Leadership

We believe that growing children deserve growing educators. We hold a deep commitment for learning for both children and adults. Our staff and providers participate in ongoing professional learning opportunities that engage them in reflective thinking and build on our solid understanding of child development. As professionals we believe in continually seeking out the latest research and best practices as they emerge in our field. Our ongoing reflection of our work allows us to be more intentional and in turn, provide a curriculum that is responsive to the children and families. We offer a pedagogical orientation series for all employees that sets the foundation for their understanding of all aspects of a child centred emergent curriculum. Staff and providers regularly participate in book

studies, program focused learning opportunities, action research, organizational communities of practice, conference and institutes internally and externally. Compass ELC is seen as a leader in our province for quality early learning and open our doors to many study tours and institutes from visitors from across North America.

Our program statement is a living document that is implemented through parent and staff surveys, daily and annual staff reflections, and regular program and team meetings. Our dedication to our values and those of “Ontario Pedagogy for the Early Years, How Does Learning Happen?” fosters a culture of intentional practice that strengthens our commitment to the highest quality of care for our children, families and educators.