

Programs and Services Offered

Step By Step provides a comprehensive array of services and supports to children and their families which are culturally guided, evidence-based and associated with optimal child outcomes.

Daycare/Headstart: Children in the daycare programs are actively involved in sensory exploration, creating their own knowledge by direct, hands on interaction with materials, activities and people in their environment. Children respect themselves, each other, their teachers, and their environment. Teachers are guides, facilitating children's learning. They maintain a safe and healthy environment filled with stimulating materials and activities. Curriculum is planned to be appropriate for the age span of the children within the group and is implemented with attention to the different needs, interests, and developmental levels of those individual children. Teachers are respectful and empathic to children and parents as well as their co-workers. Interactions and activities are designed to develop children's self esteem and positive feelings towards learning. Formal goals are developed around social emotional, cognitive, psychomotor, creative, spiritual, and cultural objectives.

Early Childhood Program/Headstart

The underlying theoretical framework of the Pre Kindergarten program can be found in the following early childhood models: The Inclusive Model, the Developmental Learning/Cognitive Learning Model, the "Normal" Child Development Model, the Cognitive Development Model, the Early Intervention Model and the Headstart model. The curriculum content is based on targeted skills from the major developmental domains: Mohawk Culture, Mohawk Language, French, Self Help/Independence, Gross Motor, Play and Social Development, Communication, Math Readiness, Reading Readiness, Fine-Motor, Science and Creative Expression. The skills selection process includes scaffolding with the Kateri School Kindergarten Curriculum content. Play is the primary method of instruction. A variety of play based psycho-educational materials are used to teach the targeted skills.



Referrals and Special Needs / Headstart

Step By Step accepts referrals from both internal and external community social service and health organizations. Organizations may refer children and families based on their assessment or informed impression of risk factors present which without early intervention would have a negative impact on the development of the child.

The acceptance of a referral for a child and family expedites the delivery of service and enables a family to jump the long waiting list. As a result, the process of review and consideration of a referral is comprehensive and takes some time enabling us to understand and confirm risk factors and to build a partnership with parents that ensures their participation in a Child and Family Support Plan.

Presently, Step By Step is experiencing controversy when expressing the need for a collaborative form of support for families referred under the government criteria for institutional care and Headstart.

Other Services:

- Summer Mohawk Immersion Program
- Parent Resource Library
- Staff Resource Library
- Support Staff: Child and Family Support Worker, Visual Supports Technician
- Specialists: Speech Therapist, Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist, Psychologist, Inclusion Specialist, Nurse, Dental Hygienist
- Parent Meetings and Workshops
- Individual Counseling
- Training & Capacity Building
- Cultural Calendar Festival Celebrations (Kanien'keha:ka Aohsera)
- Fund-raising



Program Characteristics

The Step By Step model to providing service and support is a responsive, flexible, and fluid process. It is highly individualized and is shaped by each respective child and family situation.

Holistic curriculum:

Developmentally appropriate curriculum is based on spiraling skills, culture, Mohawk language, inter-related themes, inclusion, liaison with teachers and parent input and feedback.



Low adult-child ratios:

Each class has one full time certified teacher, one full time classroom educator and one or two full time or part time classroom assistants.



Qualified Staff:

At Step By Step, all Teachers are certified. Education Assistants are certified in early childhood. Classroom Assistants are either certified or in training. All staff participates in various professional development activities on an ongoing basis. There are planned activities for frontline workers including teaching staff to become experts in assessments and implementation of therapeutic activities.

Developmental Screening and Follow up: Upon admission to SBS, all children are administered developmental screens by the child's teacher to determine strengths and potential areas of concern. This screening process also includes informal observations. All parents are given a developmental checklist which includes a family assessment. Screens and parent checklists are administered upon entry to the program and evaluated at intervals as required. They are also used as a rough pre and post intervention measure. Regular parent gatherings to give information and receive suggestions and progress updates are scheduled.

Psycho-educational Assessments:

Identified children, including those who have been referred, receive further assessments by the center's interdisciplinary staff and by the child's teacher to determine specific areas of strengths and areas of concern. Family/Child psycho-social assessments are also implemented as required with on site counseling and parenting workshops offered.

Individualized Education/Treatment Plans:

These plans are developed for identified children and are implemented daily in the classroom through one-on-one, small and large group activities. A matrix system is used to integrate the IEP/ITP in the daily schedule and structures are set in place for consistency in implementation and ongoing progress updates and adaptations.

Individual Education Plan (IEP) / Individual Family Plan (IFP):

- An atmosphere is created which enables the family to assume a leadership role in the development of the IEP/IFP's
- All specialists are required to invest maximum time in training staff and parents and minimum time in direct individual, out of class therapy sessions
- Specialists are provided with guidelines for reports so that families and frontline workers can understand and use the information.
- Templates are created for IEP/IFP'S and reports based on consultation with parents and staff and affiliated community organizations.
- IEP'S include goals the family chooses for the child to work on at the center and at home. The family and its team decide how each goal is going to be achieved, where, when, by whom, and how progress will be monitored.
- IFP'S include goals the family chooses for themselves to work on at the center and at home.

Transition:

- Transition process developed in partnership with other schools for children leaving Step By Step.



Program and Service Delivery

Background:

Some children who, despite the odds against them thrive and develop into well adjusted, functioning young adults, are considered to be resilient to negative social settings. Studies have shown that these children from both urban and rural settings, growing up under extreme conditions (poverty, parental stress during pregnancy, parental discord or mental disorder), have overcome such early disadvantages.

Many children become vulnerable as a result of certain factors which threaten their development. Research shows that children from such environments are likely to be unprepared for school or social learning and consequently do poorly in school and other social contexts. *Some of those factors include:*

- Poor care giving environment such as a family with parent(s) who abuse alcohol and drugs.;
- Behavioral problems such as very low or very high infant activity at age one;
- An environment which is not stimulating and where the child has little interaction with the caregiver and then only to attend to basic needs;
- Little or no physical contact such as hugs, kisses, and words of caring and love;
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Effects;
- Congenital defects, physical handicaps, learning disabilities, children with pervasive developmental delays, “autistic” characteristics, Asperger syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy, Downs Syndrome, etc.;
- Parent(s) raised in multi-generational family trauma environments (i.e. sexual abuse, physical abuse, drug and alcohol abuse (co-dependency, ACOA), residential schooling) and who therefore experience difficulties with child rearing and relationships;
- Teenage parents, Blended families, Divorced Families, Inconsistent primary attachment figures, multiple foster placements, parent literacy, parental socioeconomic status, parental criminal offence, parents experiencing the results of historical oppression and racism e.g. loss of culture, language, spirituality, identity;
- The more risk factors that a child is exposed to the greater the risk of poor development, poor school performance, juvenile delinquency, etc.

Prevention and Early Intervention

In the first five years of life, a child learns more than in any other five year period. Learning social interaction, to trust, to communicate and think logically are some of the essential steps in development. These become the building blocks for the foundation of future growth.

Studies of the long term effects of individually and developmentally appropriate early childhood programs reveal that such programs lead to positive academic achievements, decreased special educational placements and retention later in school.

For the vulnerable child, the child with a handicap, the child with a developmental disorder, the early years of rapid growth and learning are therefore critical periods.

The idea behind prevention and early intervention is often to expose “at risk” children to protective factors to increase their resilience. Step By Step takes a multi-pronged approach by including non-educational supports such as providing health care, involving parents in the program and offering specific services to the families of children enrolled.

Step By Step helps parents support their child’s physical, cognitive and social-emotional development. Clearly, the job of parenting cannot be reduced to eight lessons on specific skills. It depends as much on values and attitudes as it does on skills.

Each parent has a unique history that has formed in them an approach to parenting with both positive and negative aspects. The challenge is to begin where each parent is, supporting their strengths while helping them to examine their weaknesses.

To do this Step By Step presents alternatives for positive parenting, accepts parents with a non-judgmental attitude, facilitates discussion of the job that parents face, acknowledges the unique challenges faced by many parents, and assists parents in deciding what kind of parents they want to be. The success of this approach is evidenced by testimonials from parents who have experienced Step By Step.

Merging Early Detection / Holistic Early Intervention / Headstart / Daycare / Early Childhood Program

It is generally recognized that interventions are more likely to be successful if they are implemented in the context of children's everyday activity. And so, an integral part of our professional practice is related to bridging the therapeutic, home, and school environment. To do this, Step By Step:

- Takes steps to make sure that the development of all children is progressing well through developmental screens and informal observations, with active parent involvement throughout.
- Takes steps to make sure that any suspected developmental delays or disabilities are identified as early as possible and the necessary child-family treatment plans are provided and monitored, with active parent involvement throughout.
- Takes steps to make sure that the holistic needs of children and families are addressed i.e. effect of multi-generational trauma, culture, language, parenting habits, stress management, counseling, enrichment, etc.
- Provides preschoolers and their families with comprehensive holistic enriched educational and health services so that children and their families receive a "headstart" within the family unit, at school and in the community as a whole.
- Intervenes early in a child's life: INVESTMENT PHASE
- Focuses on supporting and strengthening families.
- Integrates culture-language, inclusion, early intervention, enrichment.

"Our early life experiences shape the way we learn, the way we think, the way we feel and the way we behave for the rest of our lives. Our brains allow us to feel joy or despair, to respond to others in a loving or angry way, to use reason or to simply react. These capacities don't just appear magically. They result from interaction between the past and the present i.e. interaction between a child's heredity and experiences he/she has during childhood."

Inclusion

Inclusion is a value which is demonstrated in the way one plans, promotes and conceptualizes the education and development of young children. Inclusive programs accommodate, to the maximum extent possible, the diverse needs of all children within the general curriculum.

Step By Step began inclusive practices from its inception. Four weeks after the intervention program was set up for the initial seven developmentally delayed preschoolers, the center joined forces with a community daycare.

The impetus for this action came about from the beliefs of the founding Mohawk mothers, the unwavering support of these mothers in setting specific policies and procedures in order to accomplish integration, as a step towards inclusion.

Key non-economic strategies which contribute to the Center's ability to deliver comprehensive integrated services include parents and staff working together as a team to establish policies and procedures and implement ongoing program evaluation. The staff and parent board members work together to establish personnel policies and procedures, and administrative policies.

In addition, the staff work as a team to establish assessment strategies, curriculum, integrating individualized plans within the daily ordinary activities and routines, teamwork necessary to implement the daily planning, preparation and implementation of activities. Each year is an enriching experience when new families and sometimes new staff provide new challenges. The dynamics of working within an inclusive interdisciplinary team is an ongoing process which requires constant nurturing.

Setting Mohawk Culture and Language in an Inclusive Early Intervention

Culture and Language are included:

- By developing a curriculum guide in collaboration with parents and staff
- By using the guide when researching and planning developmentally appropriate activities for the daily schedule
- By deliberately weaving culture and language within daily teachings
- By teaching the parents about the curriculum
- By celebrating the Cultural Calendar including the Thanksgiving Address, the Harvest, Mid-Winter, Maple and Strawberry Festivals with children and families and continuously conveying their importance through role modeling
- By creating in-house materials when none are available e.g. legends and stories in big book format, culturally relevant tools and assessments
- By using community elders to teach the staff, children and parents traditional knowledge and behaviors e.g. social dance steps, their meaning; role of the longhouse and respect when one enters the longhouse
- By putting in place guidelines for classroom staff to continue these teachings on a daily basis
- By encouraging parents to continue these teachings at home
- By inviting elders into the center as much as possible for storytelling, language and wisdom teachings for staff, parents, and children
- By creating deliberate partnerships between Mohawk staff and non-Mohawk staff so that they may both value and learn about the commonalities and differences in their cultures
- By assuming an active and collaborative role in teaching the culture and language continuously fostering racial acceptance

Step By Step is a learning organization and as we continue to study, discuss, and reflect, we continue to make shifts in our practices. As has been identified in the literature on early intervention and cultural difference, we recognize the need to develop new practices specifically for our people; new screening and assessment tools; new education and intervention strategies; new tools for monitoring child development; and alternative ways of reaching out to parents and children.

Programs and Services Delivery Objectives

- 1) To ensure that inclusive early intervention and preventive educational and training services are guaranteed to children with challenging needs and those who are “at risk” or developmentally delayed, in order to prevent further degeneration and to accelerate the acquisition of developmental skills
- 2) To provide children with a rich and varied learning environment to promote the development of their emotional, spiritual, cultural, intellectual, physical, and social growth.



- 3) To provide the children and parents with learning activities so that they can begin to develop a sense of identity and pride as Kanien'kehaka.
- 4) To provide the children with learning activities so that they can begin to develop values of respect, confidence, trust-cooperation, sharing, responsibility, and independence.
- 5) To continue to advocate for inclusion through the life span in partnership with the family and the community.
- 6) To provide an individualized stimulation/treatment plan for the child and his family based on input from family and an interdisciplinary team on a developmental basis and within an inclusive and cultural milieu.
- 7) To provide an individualized stimulation/treatment plan which specifies the goals for the child, goals for the family, strategies to achieve each goal, person responsible for implementing the strategies to achieve each goal, person responsible for monitoring progress.
- 8) To provide an interdisciplinary team approach, so that the specialized consulting professional can share their skills with other staff, parents, and team members. Quality service is thus delivered without the daily involvement of the entire professional team.
- 9) To give priority to children who are referred.
- 10) To mobilize community resources to serve children with challenging needs.
- 11) To involve parents in the following ways:
 - provide a planned program of activities which help parents expand their knowledge and skills as parents, as child advocates, as the most important teachers of children i.e.
 - * direct involvement in decision making in various levels of the organization i.e. board, planning committees, etc.
 - * participate as volunteers, observers and paid employees
 - * participate and work with the child with the staff.
 - * work with staff/other parents in personal development.
 - * hands on opportunities to understand issues pertaining to inclusion, child and family development, early intervention, collaboration, teamwork, networking, advocacy, administration, etc.
 - develop within parents a sense of self-worth so that they can provide their child with a stimulating home environment
 - * build a partnership between parents, family, and staff working towards a common goal
 - * support parents in their daily living situation
 - * provide parents with factual information through literature, guest speakers, and videos so that they better understand the child and themselves



- 12) To expand children's services to inclusive programs for school-age children with challenging needs, including gifted children, so that they may receive quality educational programs within their own cultural milieu.
- 13) To create job opportunities in Kahnawake for professional and para-professional Mohawk people and provide incentives to enter such careers through high school programs with supervised in-service training.
- 14) To provide community awareness in the following manners:
 - practical in-service training for high school students as part of the curriculum of the course offered in the high school.
 - to motivate high school students to pursue future careers in the helping professions.
 - to provide for inter-agency co-operation by working closely with other agencies in the community and outside.
 - to collaborate in the education of children in the elementary school about children's challenging needs.
- 15) To educate the community regarding pre-conceptual and prenatal health.
- 16) To provide counseling around issues of multi-generational trauma, addictions, genetics, etc. as a means of prevention.
- 17) To promote the Mohawk language at the earliest age possible.
- 18) To promote and incorporate Mohawk values and culture at the earliest age possible.
- 19) To provide parents with:
 - opportunities for respite;
 - quality, educational, year round, affordable, flexible childcare service, and;
 - act as extended family when parents do not have family or an in-house childcare provider.
- 20) To provide developmental and educational childcare for:
 - working parents;
 - parents returning to school;
 - parents who attend therapy;parents who need respite.
- 21) To promote "quality" childcare in the community through collaboration, networking, education and publicity.

Karihwanoron Mohawk Immersion

Karihwanoron, an independent Mohawk Immersion school in Kahnawake, was founded in 1988 by a group of parents who were concerned about the loss of our language. Karihwanoron's founding principles were that the best way for young children to learn was in a home environment and have Kanien'kéha speakers with them at all times so that they could hear and eventually understand and speak the language as their first language. Step By Step saw that Karihwanoron's principles were very similar to Step By Step's in that they wanted to offer quality programming to all children. In 2005, Step By Step partnered with Karihwanoron and applied for funding as a home daycare. This partnership reflects how community organizations can work together to benefit while respecting their own mandates.



Seven Generations Daycare

As coordinating office, Step By Step Child and Family Center is responsible for funding accountability and program support.

Avery's Playhouse

In 2004, Step By Step learned that Avery's Playhouse, a privately owned home daycare in Kahnawake was going to close. Step By Step offered to buy the building and property from the owner with the intention to continue services as a daycare facility. Step By Step applied and received satellite funding in order to maintain the daycare as an extension of our programs and services for children aged 12 months to 2 years. Children who attend Avery's benefit from a "home-environment", while at the same time, having access to all services offered at the main building. Extensive renovations have been done to the building, and we currently offer services for up to 20 children.

