

## First Steps Early Learning Center

### Program Statement

*First Steps Early Learning Center is committed to following the “How Does Learning Happen” document. This document is Ontario’s pedagogy for the early years, 2014. The Child Care Early Years Act 2014(CCEYA) focuses on strengthening childcare programs and ensuring high quality care and experiences for children. The CCEYA is governed by the Ministry of Education, who issue policy statements regarding programming and pedagogy for the purpose of guiding licensee’s and their staff within childcare and early year’s programs.*

*The “How Does Learning Happen” document is a living and breathing resource, which is reviewed annually by the licensee, staff and volunteers of First Steps ELC. It is rich in pedagogical focus, indicating that the pedagogy is not prescriptive to any specific curriculum, but offers the opportunity to challenge the status quo, and investigate how learning happens for children.*

*Our Staff are dedicated to supporting each child’s learning, health, development and well-being through responsive, caring, and compassionate guidance. We focus on active learning, exploration, expressional play and inquiry. We welcome, acknowledge and respect all children as individuals; rich in potential, capable, curious, active participants in all areas of our program. We understand and embrace the importance of family. When a child starts their journey with us, the whole family becomes connected, and a new relationship builds between our homes.*

*“I am not a teacher, but an awakener” Robert Frost.*

*“I do not teach anyone; I only provide the environment in which they learn” Albert Einstein.*

*The “How Does Learning Happen” document is centered on four foundational conditions that are imperative for children to grow, flourish, and thrive. During a child’s first years of life, the brain develops at a phenomenal rate. Scientists now know this process is not just genetic but is considerably manipulated by the early experience’s children share with people and their surroundings. Evidence from diverse fields of study tells us that children grow in environments where adults are caring and responsive. The main principle sources for supportive relationships and learning are at home with early year’s programs playing an important joint role in assisting children’s development, learning, health and well-being.*

*The four foundations: **Belonging, Well-Being, Engagement, and Expression**. These foundations are a vision for all children’s future potential while with us at First Steps The foundations exist regardless of age, ability, culture, language, geography, or setting. Children naturally seek out these conditions for themselves. However, with our knowledge and understanding, we are able to provide a pathway for which each individual child can walk at their own pace and encounter their “First Steps” in our exemplary program*

## **Belonging**

*We strive to help every individual who enters our environment feel like they belong, that they have a place in our surroundings that they will feel welcomed, valued and respected. We provide the opportunity for connectedness to others and encourage children, staff, and parents to make contributions as part of a group. As each child joins us, it is not only the child who is welcomed into our little community, but the whole family. A sense of belonging is evident within our center; this can be seen through many photos, recorded accomplishments, and pedagogy documentation. This documentation is more than just a recording of events. It helps us as educators learn about how children think and learn, it is a way of listening to children, and learning through the course of their experiences. It also offers a visible learning aid to others, and encourages conversation between the educators as co-learners, alongside the children, their peers, and their families. We pride ourselves on the relationships we form with the children in our care and their families new and old. We gain relevant, background family knowledge which enables us to have a better understanding and form a platform on which for us to build upon.*

*Each child has their own private space within our room. Each of these cubbies has the child's photo displayed on the front, and they know that this is their spot, where they can place pictures and personal items. Photos of each child's family are displayed around the rooms and are in easy reach if required by the children. During the day to day experiences with us, the children are guided through play and inquiry, and they build relationships and teamwork alongside their peers. As educators we provide this environment as an open book to encourage inclusion, respect, and connectedness.*

*It is important for our families, and staff to feel their presence and voice is of relevance. Our staff liaises with families on a daily basis, and we work very closely in a joint partnership to provide time and opportunities to be available for any questions or concerns that they may have. Our staff maintain a positive, respectful, professional relationship with all. As a team we collaborate on a regular basis where each member feels they can make an important contribution to our team. We guide and support each other, as well as working diligently to constantly improve on our knowledge, by attending the many professional development opportunities First Steps offers its staff. After attending any professional development, the staff are invited to share their new knowledge with the rest of the team during staff meetings and general meeting times. We discuss learnt new strategies and ideas taken from professional development, any documentation and handouts are gathered, reviewed and utilized by all staff. Staff can reflect on this information by using the reference file for professional development located in the office. We also offer this knowledge to our families during a family information/gathering event, or through our daily interactions.*

*“What we instill in our children will be the foundation upon which they build their future” –Steve Maraboli.*

## **Well-Being**

*It is our goal to support a sense of self, health, and well-being for every individual who is part of First Steps. We provide healthy meals and snacks prepared by our in-house experienced cook. Family style dining is promoted, where staff members sit with the children, encourage good food practise, and awareness. Ample opportunity and time are given to work on self-help, and self-care skills within a positive environment that is responsive to children's needs. Families are often invited to come and join us for celebration lunches and share family recipes from their own cultural backgrounds.*

*Our wish is to allow children thrive in programs where they can engage in vigorous physical play in natural outdoor spaces which offer manageable levels of challenge. Safety is of high importance. However, we offer the opportunity for reasonable risk by making accommodations and adaptations which will allow each child to participate, and be challenged in a meaningful, personal, capable and competent way. Children are invited to participate in daily physical activities indoors and outdoors, and explore the world around them, each child that is in our care for more than 6 hours a day, will have the opportunity to be outside for 2 hours. Our educators strive to be good role models for the children in our care by displaying good health and well-being practises. Rest and sleep time are important, we make sure each child has a safe place to rest or sleep during their day with us, ample quiet/rest activities are on hand for non-sleepers. When the children do sleep, a sleep record is noted and reported to parents on collection. To promote the importance of taking care of our bodies, we visit local businesses in our community as a center, including Dentists, Doctors, and local senior homes. We also organize for professionals to come to us and share their knowledge and guidance for self-care and health skills.*

*Self-care skills and self-regulation can prove to be challenging, we are proud of our mentoring techniques and strategies which have been put in place, our goal is to role model, teach and encourage these lifelong required skills. The ability to self-regulate is a very important component of a child's development. This ability plays a crucial part in a child's long-term physical, psychological, behavioural, and educational well-being. We guide children to deal effectively with the daily stresses they face and help them learn the skills to recover from them in a calm and focused manner. When children can use this approach, they become better equipped to modulate their emotions, attention spans, and ignore distractions. They learn to understand that there are consequences for their actions and become aware of how others may feel or think. Our educators contribute and aid this learning by providing an environment with limited room for these stressors to arise. We build trusted relationships and gain an understanding and knowledge of children's ability and efforts to self-regulate; we are attuned with the children and develop the skill to anticipate individual's cues, arousal states, and responses to various stressors. We offer strategies which help calm and focus, and we are compassionate to each individual. We feel it is of great importance to monitor and record each child's health and well-being daily. We work closely with the families, gathering any important, relevant information that may affect any child's physical or mental health.*

*Our aim is to keep everyone's health and well-being a top priority. Upon induction all staff members are requested to read and adhere to our Health and Safety binder and policies, this binder includes a self-test for staff to monitor and carry out procedures for the benefit of themselves and others who they work closely with. When each child/family starts their journey with us, they are presented with a parent package. Within this package we offer a parent handbook which provides valuable information*

*regarding our daycare, also there will be a collection of in-depth forms to be completed and returned to us, providing ALL relevant information about each child. Before attendance commences, every staff member will read and understand the personal information regarding our new family member and their family. We understand and are compassionate that each child may have allergies some of which may even be life threatening. Policies and procedures are put in place to ensure optimum safety. We work closely together with our families so information can be shared at any given time regarding the child's health and well-being.*

*Our Families, Staff and children's health and well-being is of high priority and vital for life's long journey.*

*"Nurturing yourself is not selfish – it's essential to your survival and well-being" Renee Peterson Trudeau.*



## **Engagement**

*“Engagement” refers to a state of being genuinely involved and interested in what one is doing. Children express this through engaged play and inquiry; as well as active, creative, meaningful experiences provided in positive environments. A child’s natural curiosity allows them to explore with their bodies, minds and senses; therefore, stimulating them to ask questions, solve problems, test theories, engage in creative thinking, and make sense of their world. We strive to achieve this with the children in our care.*

*We as educators and co-learners demonstrate interest and involvement with the children in our care, we understand that children are more likely to participate and engage in complex, lengthy time periods of play when educators welcome and value their contributions and ideas to the classroom and group. We collaborate, offering support when investigating new ideas, questions and “bumps in the road” rather than acting as the expert. This encourages the children to become involved and engaged in creative problem solving, discovery and shared thinking. Our staff acknowledges that each child is an individual and their abilities vary. As educators, our attitudes are very important when fostering children’s engagement. We fully believe and allow each child to participate and have the right to do so by using inclusive approaches and creating the environment and experiences that are meaningful and engaging. We are also mindful when creating such environments of our children who may have individualized plans. Our educators’ model, encourage and implement positive guidance; it takes individuals many years to learn appropriate ways to express strong emotions and positive interactions with others. Knowing that children learn by repetition, our staff maintain daily routines and set clear limits, thus helping children to internalize positive strategies and promote the individual development of each child’s self-help, and self-regulation skills. Children also learn by cause and effect. From these actions, and from other reactions, staff respond by reasonably discussing the situation with the child/children and redirecting by offering alternative words or behaviours that will encourage the children to express themselves in a more positive, and calm manner. When children feel they are understood, valued and belong, they tend to develop positive self-concepts. We make every effort to build trusting, supportive relationships with each child in our care. Corporal punishments, the use of verbal or emotional threats, shaming or name-calling are never used in our program and are responses that will not be tolerated.*

*We strongly feel that the children’s environment is a critical component in the quality of their exploration and play. We provide nurturing, and inviting indoor and outdoor spaces, with quality furnishings, materials, and staff that spend careful time planning and preparing the programs environment. Our staff make sure the classroom flows to ensure equitable learning opportunities and participation for all. The children will have the choice to engage in rich, well equipped and interesting open-ended play, which has a no rush emphases. This creates and supports an understanding of concepts associated with literacy and numeracy, encourages engagement with others, and helps the children to collaborate, negotiate, communicate ideas, feelings and experiences. The staff are guided by the children through play, what inspires them, what their interests are, and feed from this to further their own knowledge and understanding as well as the child’s. Every child is valued; every child is heard and respected.*

*We aim to use the environment and its materials can be used in a variety of ways; staff will offer invitations and provocations for the children, which encourages investigation and complex play and inquiry. Our large natural outdoor space provides ample opportunities for our children to explore and investigate with their bodies and minds; physically and mentally. Our educators play a huge roll indoors*

*and outdoors, thinking carefully when asking and answering questions, offering exploratory questions and answers. We are passionate, interested, and engaged co-learners providing a space for each child in our care to express themselves within their encounters with their environment, other people and the natural world around them.*

*“Quality is never accident; it is the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution, it represents the wise choice of many alternatives” – Willa A Foster.*



## **Expression**

*Our goal at First Steps is for every child to be capable communicators who can express themselves in various ways. Our educators strive to foster communication, expression, and connectedness.*

*As educators, we are aware of the many language's children use to communicate. We fully respect that each child has a voice regardless of ability or age. Every child's home language and culture are supported and valued through various ways; books and signs in different languages are displayed. We also invite families to come join us, such as coming in to cook with us, introducing food from their cultural background, as well as their language and traditions. We reach out into our community, thus furthering our knowledge and understanding of the world and people outside of First Steps.*

*When communication exchanges happen, particularly conversations with others, it builds a sense of connection which can only enhance children's social conversational skills, language skills and cognitive activity. Conversation can occur with even the youngest toddlers, we see all children as powerful communicators, recognizing them as little social partners who are competent to initiate, and partake in communication exchanges. We are attuned and respond to the subtle cues and gestures from our children, who have little or no verbal skills yet when they interact with us in "serve and return" exchanges. We recognize and understand how we are wiring the child's brain for successful learning. Through genuine, authentic conversations, we show respect for what the child is trying to communicate. We role model and encourage them to share their excitement/interests/feelings in a meaningful and positive way. This practise is also demonstrated when communicating with our families, co-workers and visitors.*

*Creative expression is a wonderful form of communication. We invite children to explore and manipulate materials, engage in music and movement, imaginative expression and dramatic play. While participating, design and creativity bring to life the emotional, cognitive and physical areas of development; feeling, thinking, and doing. We use a variety of materials to enhance children's learning, creative problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Educators offer opportunities for the children to explore language, and literacy through play. We support emerging literacy skills by providing open ended materials that allow for growth of imaginative and symbolic play. Signs, props, symbols, books, art tools, songs and rhyme all support print awareness, expression, and the development of strong language and cognitive abilities. As we facilitate successful communication between children and others, we document these interactions to help the children revisit their thoughts and ideas, thus extending their understanding. Staff offer coaching rather than speaking for them. We help the children find the right words and approach to interact in productive communication exchanges. Time and space are available so the children in our care can be as expressive as they so wish.*

## **Closing Statement**

*At First Steps, our passion for children and their learning is tailored to each child in our care. We endeavor to create an environment that is welcoming, enriched, safe and full of possibilities which will allow each child's unique abilities and interests to flourish. Not only are we a child centered program, but also family centered. We aim to create strong, trusted partnerships with parents and caregivers. We encourage and welcome them to share their culture, language and experiences with us. We believe that families are an integral part of our team, and this connectedness is reflected in the richness of our program. We take pride in ensuring all children can attend and benefit from the high-quality childcare experiences we offer. Children and their families are offered support if required through the County of Wellington Child Care Subsidy office, Inclusion support services and agencies such as; Canadian Mental Health Association, Kids Ability, Speech and Language Pathology, Family and Children Services. If the need should arise and a child requires such a service, we offer availability for meetings and child sessions/ assessments within our program. To ensure inclusion practices are maintained, children work with the specialist whilst remaining in their familiar environment. We demonstrate an ongoing commitment to integrate an anti-bias approach into every aspect of our program. We promote the skills to identify and respect diversity by interacting with others in cultural and social diverse environments. This proactive approach is modelled and encouraged to reduce prejudice and promote inclusiveness. We commit to practise the value of diversity in a way the children can relate to and developmentally understand. At First Steps, our teaching staff are qualified Registered Early Childhood Educators or equivalent. Also, within our team are unqualified staff with a background knowledge and passion for childcare. All staff members are carefully chosen. They are knowledgeable regarding aspects of caring for young children, including child development. Each staff member has an understanding of the Child Care Early Years Act (CCEYA 2014) and the "How Does Learning Happen" document, Ontario's pedagogy for the early years. [www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare) Our staff are offered many opportunities to further their knowledge by attending ongoing professional development workshops, seminars and conferences. To enable us to maintain our high-quality care standards, and evaluate, monitor and assess our program we meet as a collective throughout the year. We also come together and collaborate, review and discuss our program statement annually. We are an Equal opportunity employer; all employment activities will be conducted in a safe manner to ensure equal opportunity for all regardless of; age, national origin, sexual orientation, pregnancy or disability. Being able to understand who we are and meet our expectations helps staff embody our commitment to high quality care and represent our program in a positive way. We are committed to the health and safety of all our employees and the prevention of occupational injuries and disease. It is our responsibility to be the benchmark in effectively managing and communicating our program regarding health and safety, whilst maintaining compliance with the Ontario Occupation Health and Safety Act and related regulations. Thus, all staff are expected to read, understand, and embrace our health and safety handbook, complete the health and safety training booklet and sign and acknowledge all of First Steps ELC policies and procedures. Our staff are also required to be certified Standard First Aid responders and provide First Steps with a valid original police vulnerable sector check (PVSC). Our human resource binder is readily available for all our employees to read and digest.*



*We believe that together in connectedness with children, parents, staff, volunteers, and our community we offer a program rich in high quality, providing the necessary tools for every individual to grow and flourish under the blanket of First Steps Early Learning Center.*

