

LEF Neighbourhood (Childcare Centre) Survey 2011

In 2008 LEF undertook our first assessment of our childcare centres. We asked childcare supervisors to complete a survey based on their knowledge of the families that we serve in the centres. Once again, in 2011 we have found that, based on their level of interaction with the families, the supervisors were able to answer the survey questions with a high degree of confidence. The 2008 and 2011 surveys were similar, although the new one had additional questions and some changes to the original set of questions. The reason for revisiting this survey is firstly to understand if there have been changes since the 2008 survey and secondly to understand if there are new needs or necessary supports which have arisen in the last two and a half years.

In the original survey we were both surprised and unsurprised by the findings. The survey revealed statistics that we knew intuitively, but we were still shocked to see the depth of barriers faced by the parents and the challenges that exist in our community.

In the updated survey we changed some of the questions due to confusion around questions, or changes in the issues. We also added questions because there are new issues on which we needed information or because questions we had asked previously lead to further inquiry.

The second iteration of this survey has revealed many changes since 2008, although there are also many statistics that have seen minimal movement. Some of the changes can simply be attributed to a change in the parents in our centres and general demographic shifts in the community, although many could also be due to changes and awareness raised through the previous version of the survey. The results of the first survey were shared through 7 staff workshops, which led to a number of new programs and efforts to change the statistics.

Of the 627 families with children in LEF Childcare Centres:

50% are single parent led

63% receive full childcare subsidies

75% can be identified as Canadian citizens

72% of the primary caregivers are employed

30% of the primary caregivers are currently in school or training

49% of the primary caregivers have a high school diploma or less

73% rent homes

22% of the children have diagnosed or recognized special needs

48% of the parents are consistently able to spend 5 minutes daily at the centre

21% of the parents lack social support networks

93% of the children who were enrolled in a centre in June 2009 were re-enrolled in June 2010 (excluding children who left due to age)

The Survey

There are 766 children in the 17 childcare centres that responded to the survey. These children are represented by 627 families. This is an increase over 2008 (603 children and 480 families), although we surveyed 17 centres, rather than 15.

Family Composition

The survey indicated that 50% of families were single parent led. This number is much higher than the average for the City of Toronto as only one in five families with children in the Toronto region are single parent led, although it is 11 percentage points lower than our 2008 survey. While our number is much higher than the city average, the Weston/Mount Dennis community's average number of lone parent families is 30% and York-South Weston's average is 39%, which is closer to that of our centres. In the Toronto region approximately 83% of single parent families are headed by a woman, so we can presume that a large proportion of the single parent families with children in LEF childcare centres are headed by women. The predominant age ranges of primary caregivers are 30-39 or 20-29, with 50% and 29% of parents fitting into these categories respectively. Unlike the common conception of lone parents, they are often not teenagers, but those in their late 20s and 30s. In our centres, parents under 20 years of age only compose 2% of all parents.

Subsidy Rates

Most of the families attending our childcare centres (63%) receive full subsidies. Based on subsidy rates, this figure means that 63% of the families accessing LEF childcare centres have net incomes of less than \$20,000 or the parents or children have special needs. An annual income of \$20,000 is well below the Low Income Cut-Off. The Before-Tax Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) in an urban area for a family of two people is \$27,674, which increases to \$34,022 for a family of three, and higher for larger families. The number of subsidies is 9 percentage points lower than the previous survey, but there are potential explanations for this occurrence. In our community, we have reached our maximum for childcare subsidies, meaning that to receive a subsidy another family must leave the subsidy system. This means that few parents are able to access subsidies for their children. Further, with the income level being so low for accessing subsidy and paired with the requirement that parents are employed, this means that many parents do not qualify for a full subsidy.

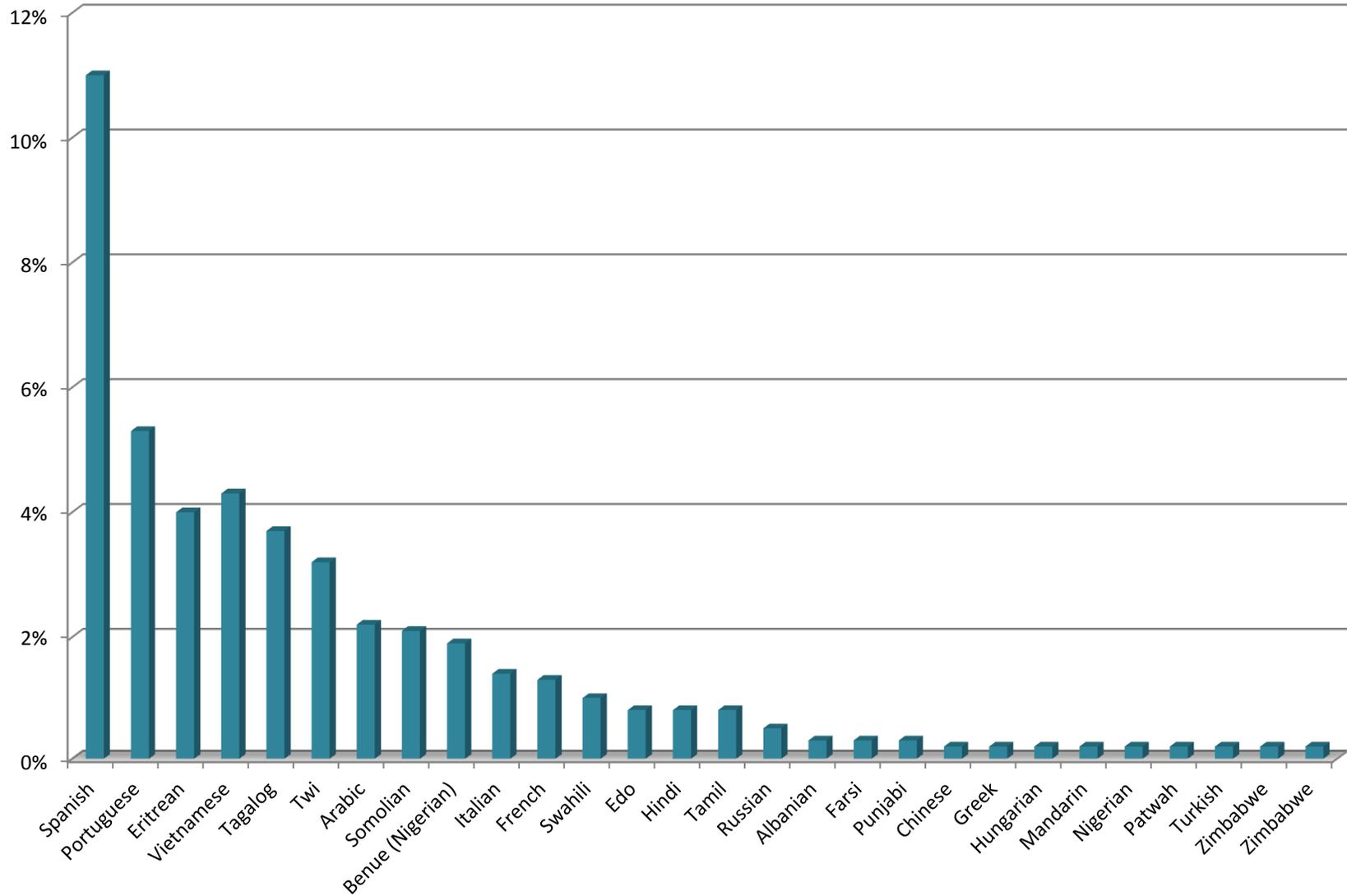
While the number of families with full subsidies does indicate a high level of poverty among the families that LEF childcare centres serve, it was also noted that only 61 families or 10% have no subsidies. This indicates that only a very small proportion of families have higher incomes or are unable to access subsidized childcare spots and can pay full fees.

Citizenship and Languages Spoken at Home

Newcomers to Canada comprise a significant number of families and individuals that LEF serves, although supervisors reported that they were able to identify 75% of the families in the centres as Canadian citizens and were able only to identify 10% of the families as having no Canadian Citizenship. Of the families in the centres, 3% of families immigrated to Canada within the last 3 years. This is a significant rise in Canadian citizens compared to our original survey. As this is an area in which it can be difficult to gain information, we began asking families about citizenship status on their intake form. This may have resulted in us having more information about our families. From the survey data we can conclude that there are potentially 83 families accessing LEF childcare centres with no Canadian Citizenship, and who thus may require settlement services. For those that have immigrated, the largest populations are coming from Africa and the Caribbean.

This diversity of backgrounds is reflected in the languages spoken in the homes of the families. A large percentage of families attending our centres speak English in their homes, totalling 81% of families. However families speak a total of 26 languages other than English in their homes. Languages that were highly represented were Spanish (11%), Portuguese, Tagalog, and Vietnamese (4%), Twi (3%) and 2% of the families speak each of Eritrean, Somolian, Arabic, and Benue (Nigerian). The percentage of Spanish speaking families is much higher in LEF's childcare centres than the percentage of Spanish speaking people in the communities where the centres are located; this trend is consistent with all programs offered by LEF.

Languages Other Than English Spoken in LEF Childcare Centres



Employment

Of the 72% of primary caregivers that are employed, the majority of all families are employed full-time (59%) and 14% are employed part-time. Of those working there are also fairly high numbers of primary caregivers who work on the weekends (12%) and 2% work multiple part-time jobs. These numbers are relatively consistent with the last survey, although the 35% of families that have more than one caregiver employed has increased from 22%. This is consistent with the decrease in single parents and the increase in parents paying a full fee.

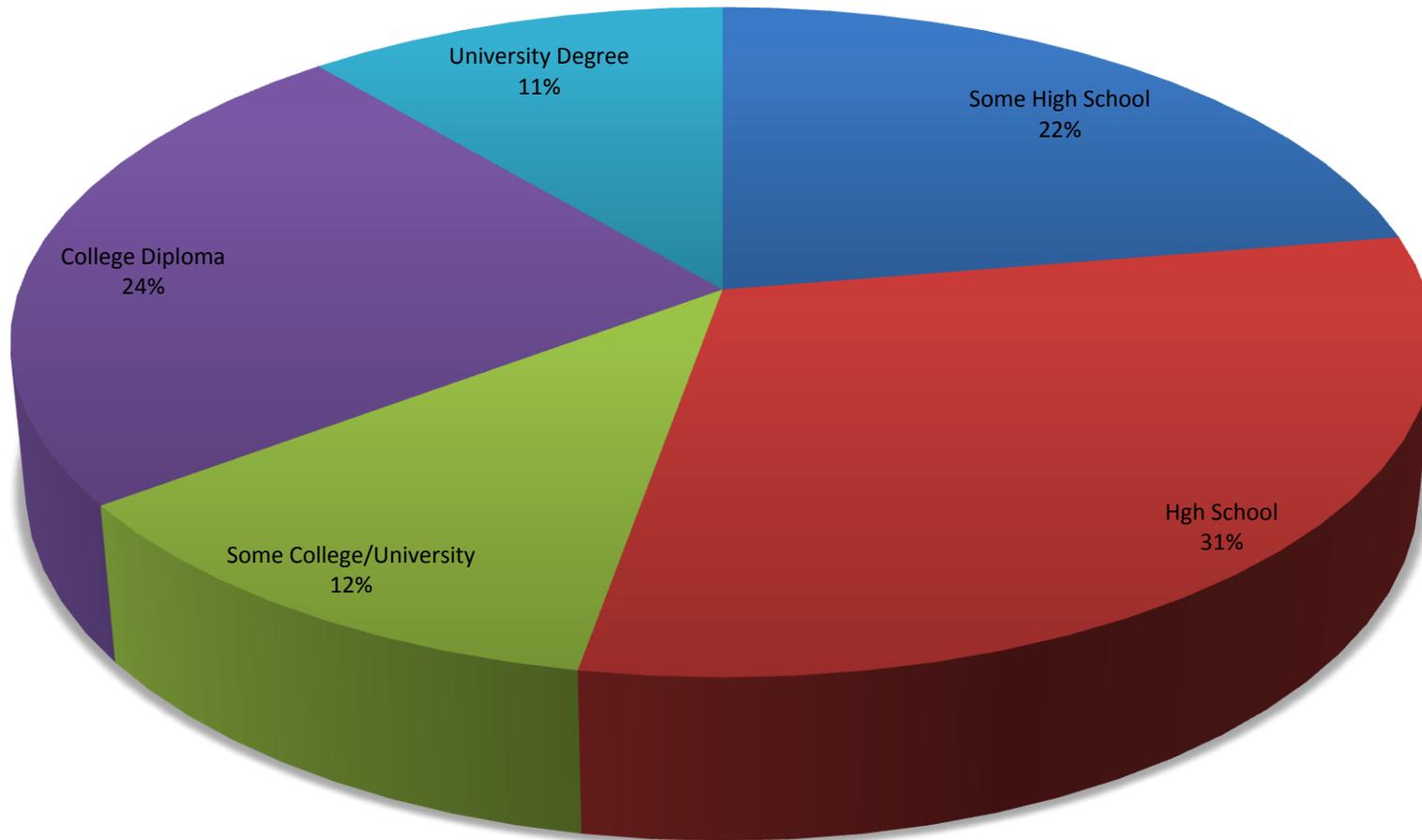
Education

A significant number of primary caregivers are currently pursuing school or training; 26% are in school and 4% are in training. These numbers have changed dramatically since 2008, with those in school rising 11 percentage points and those in training decreasing by half. This we can attribute to new incentive programs to return to school, like the Second Career program offered by Service Canada. Unfortunately, a similar incentive is not available for shorter training courses like those offered at LEF.

Nearly half of the primary caregivers' highest level of education is high school, as 21% have some high school and 28% have graduated from high school. Another 11% have some college or university, 23% have a college diploma and 10% have a university degree. While we are seeing some increases in those obtaining college or university degrees, we have seen very little change in those with only high school education or less. The educational attainment of caregivers remains much lower than the city average; in 2006, 39% of the population over age 24 in Toronto had attained a university degree. The educational attainment of parents is extremely significant as it is the strongest determinant of the future educational attainment of children, even more so than family income.¹

¹ Approx 88% of young adults who are no longer in high school and who had university educated parents pursued postsecondary education, compared with 68% who had college educated parents and 52% whose parents had a high school diploma or less. <http://www.statcan.ca/english/studies/81-003/feature/eqar2002008003s0a02.pdf>

Level of Education Among Parents in LEF Childcare Centres



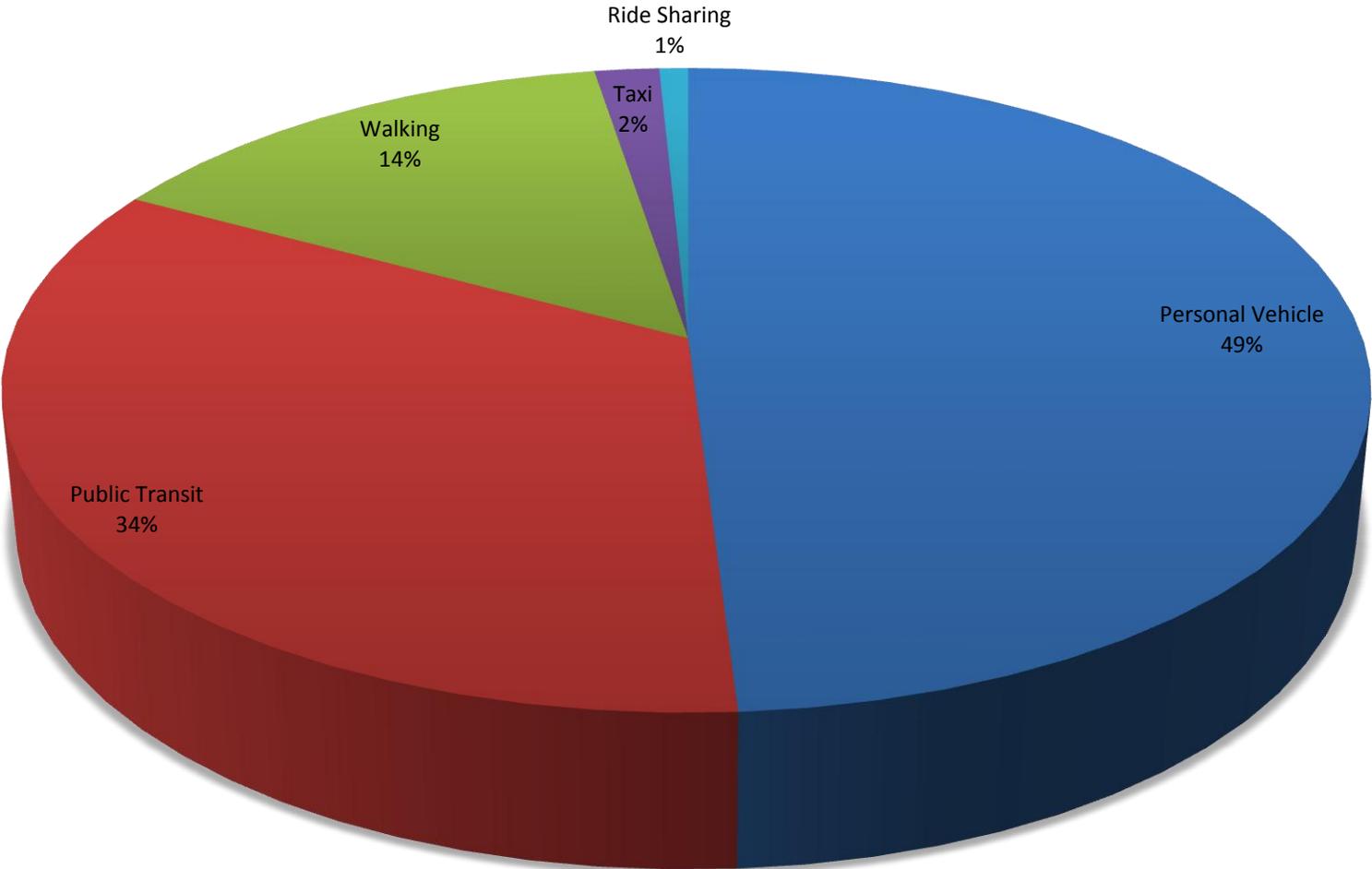
Food, Housing and Transportation

In the last 3 months, supervisors sent extra food or clothing home with families 1031 times. While in the first survey nearly every centre made referrals to food banks, in this survey not one centre mentioned referring families to food banks even though the number of times families were sent home with food has more than doubled. The reasons for this could be that food issues are not so severe that food banks are necessary and we are filling the need with our extra food, there are issues in using food banks and therefore staff are not referring clients, or we are simply not tracking these referrals. Importantly, it is unlikely we having increased how much food we are actually giving to parents by 500 items in a 3 month period, but this does indicate that we are better tracking this number. With better tracking into the future, we will be able to more fully explore this statistic in the future.

Similar to the clients of all other programs offered by LEF, the majority of families (73%) rent their housing; this is a high incidence of renters as only 46% of households in the City of Toronto rent their housing. Rented housing is a significant indicator of income and access to credit, and renters are often spending a larger portion of their income on housing. In 2006, 47% of renters in the City of Toronto paid 30% or more of their income on housing, compared to 28% of home owners. It was also noted that 13 families with children in LEF childcare centres live in shelters. This is not a significant increase over the last survey; what is significant is that in the previous survey this question was not directly asked, but was tracked in the “other accommodation” section. The occurrence of the use of shelters indicates the extreme level of poverty or other vulnerable situations faced by some families.

Primary modes of transportation of families differ from the majority of clients of all other programs offered by LEF. 50% of the families use a vehicle to drop off and pick up their children from LEF childcare centres, whereas 75% of the clients of other programs at LEF relied on the TTC. For the families involved in the childcare centres, public transit (34%) is now the second most popular mode of transportation, with many people also walking to the centres (15%). This is a change from the previous survey, as there were more walkers previously and 14 percentage points less taking transit. While there continue to be many walking to the centres, indicating that many families live close to the centres, it is possible that with more taking transit or personal vehicles that they are having to travel further. While fewer are walking, there are also fewer traveling more than 10 km to get to the centres, dropping from 20 families to only 8.

Transportation to Childcare Centres



Special Needs

The survey identified a high incidence of special needs that have been recognized by childcare centre supervisors but are not as-yet diagnosed; the supervisors indicated that 15% of the children in the centres have undiagnosed special needs. This number is lower than the previous survey by 8% percentage points. This is likely not indicative of a smaller number of children with special needs, but is rather due to workshops and training around special needs and special accommodations for children. We expect that we can attribute the drop to a better understanding of the differences between a diagnosable special need and children acting out for various reasons, particularly family breakdown, hunger, and dealing with stresses of time and poverty. We can see that there is a drop in the number of children that supervisors or staff are identifying as potentially having a behaviour disorder from 9% to 5.5%.

In addition to the number of children with undiagnosed special needs we also have 8% with diagnosed special needs. Among these, the most highly represented is sensory or speech disabilities (3%). Among the 15% undiagnosed special needs, 7% represent behavioural issues. Of the remaining 8%, the most highly suspected are sensory and speech disabilities (3%), learning disabilities (2%) and ADHD (2%). In 2008, the number of diagnosed and undiagnosed special of needs totalled 38%, while the new survey revealed only 22% special needs. However, the 2008 survey included 7% of children who had food allergies. Further, this change is mainly comprised of a decrease in the undiagnosed special needs which could be attributed to the education campaign we have done around this issue.

LEF provides optimal care for all children in the childcare centres by developing learning plans for each child based on their level of development. Centres access daycare consultation services through LEF and various community agencies and Intensive Resource Support or Child Care Support Funds provided by Toronto Children's Services to assist with programs for children with diagnosed or undiagnosed special needs. However, additional supports are available once a child is diagnosed such as counselling, rehabilitation, early intervention programs, financial assistance, health services and specialized programs and family supports which are beneficial for the child's development and thus make a diagnosis advantageous.

We removed food allergies from the special needs question, as our numbers sit in the average range for Canadians, according to Allergic Living (allergicliving.com). We have 7% of our children with a food allergy which is comparable to Canadian statistics of 6-8% of the population affected. Further, approximately 1% of the population is affected by anaphylactic allergic reactions, which is the same as our childcare centres.

Health

The majority of families have a family physician (81%) and very few families use the emergency room as a clinic. Thus, most families are receiving adequate health services. This statistic is not adequate, however, as all families should have access to a family doctor. Despite many people still not having a family doctor, there were only two supervisors who made referrals to medical services; these include dental services and medical centres. It is important that families have access to medical care, as most children had at least one sick day over a three month period, with a large number away for more than one day at a time.

Family Home Life

Supervisors noted that they suspect domestic violence in 3% of the families that access LEF's childcare centres. Within the childcare centres, 5% of the children have an active Children's Aid Society file and 5% of the children have a non-active Children's Aid Society file. While any number in these situations is too high, it is important to note that all three of the above statistics have fallen by half or more. Unfortunately, these numbers only represent those families where such problems were suspected or reported; with abuse rates continuing to remain high throughout Canada it can be assumed that there may be more unidentified cases.

The supervisors were aware of 126 families (20%) going on a day trip in the last 6 months, and 96 families (15%) going on an overnight trip. These numbers have both dropped since the first survey, particularly the number going on day trips. The ability to travel indicates a level of financial security. In the UK, holidays away from home one week a year is considered an essential activity and is used as an indicator of poverty and healthy families. In the UK, almost 50% of families that are in the poorest 20% of the population were able to afford one week of holiday away from home.² In LEF childcare centres, only 15% of families went on an overnight trip in the past 6 months; presumably this indicates that there is a large portion of families that cannot afford holidays away from home.

Many of the families have books available for their children (83%). A large number of families also have library cards (56%) although only 34% of families visit the library often.

Supervisors often make referrals to recreation activities including parks and recreation, play dates with other families, and summer camps. There were also many referrals for community groups and organizations generally; these include special needs agencies, Community Living, libraries, Speech and Language Services, City of Toronto Resource Educator, community centres, Macaulay Child Development, subsidy, neighbourhood childcare centres, Parks and Recreation, and Children's Services. In the past 6 months, supervisors have made 51 referrals to

² New Policy Institute. The Poverty Site www.poverty.org.uk/05/index.shtml

outside organizations which is lower than in 2008, with the centres reporting that they had made 82 referrals over the same period of time.

Childcare Centre Community

The majority of parents (approximately 75%) are able to pick up their children from the centres within regular hours. A large percentage of parents (69%) also seem relaxed in their role as parents. However, only 48% of parents are able to consistently spend more than 5 minutes at the centre with their children per day. When parents spend at least 5 minutes at the centre, the child has time to adjust to their separation from their parent and the parent is able to learn about the child's development and current activities. The inability to spend more than 5 minutes at the childcare centre with their children indicates that the family could be struggling with busy work and family schedules. In addition to busy schedules and a lack of time, some families also lack support networks; 21% were noted to be lacking in support networks such as supportive friends and family.

The above numbers have mainly increased, with more parents feeling relaxed in their parenting role and more parents increasing their time spent at the centres. It is possible that these have increased significantly for two reasons. First, we have increased funding and encouragement to implement and run programs, workshops and activities that bring parents to the centres. This could have led to more parents engaging with the childcare centres, helping them feel more confident as parents, and increasing the time parents spend in the centres. The second reason for a change in this statistic could be due to the education and emphasis we have put upon this number. By raising people's awareness of the issue of engagement in the centre they have begun tracking this information formally and informally.

Many of the childcare centres noted that families provide support for each other in a number of ways. Ten centres reported families doing ride sharing, picking up and dropping off each other's children or car pooling. One centre had families providing care for one another's children. Five centres had families attending events together including: attending birthday celebrations, spending time together outside of the centre or arranging play dates, sharing nannies or a meal, going to swimming, dance, etc. lessons, or simply getting together in the evenings. Despite these positive connections forming among parents in some centres, many centres listed that they did not know of any sharing among parents. Further, the responses included far fewer examples of sharing among families than given in 2008. This does not necessarily indicate that there is less sharing than in the past, although does suggest that this has not increased substantially.

Of the children who were enrolled in LEF childcare centres in June 2009, most have remained enrolled at LEF childcare centres or have left the centre due to reaching the upper age limits of the centre as of June 2010. Only 7% of the children who were enrolled in the centre in June

2009 left the centre for reasons other than age. This is a drop of more than 25% percentage points in our turnover rate since the previous survey. This was already a statistic we were attempting to understand to keep more families in the centre. Such a decrease seems exceedingly high to be simply due to our efforts to keep parents in our centres, indicating that once again this number will require further inquiry.

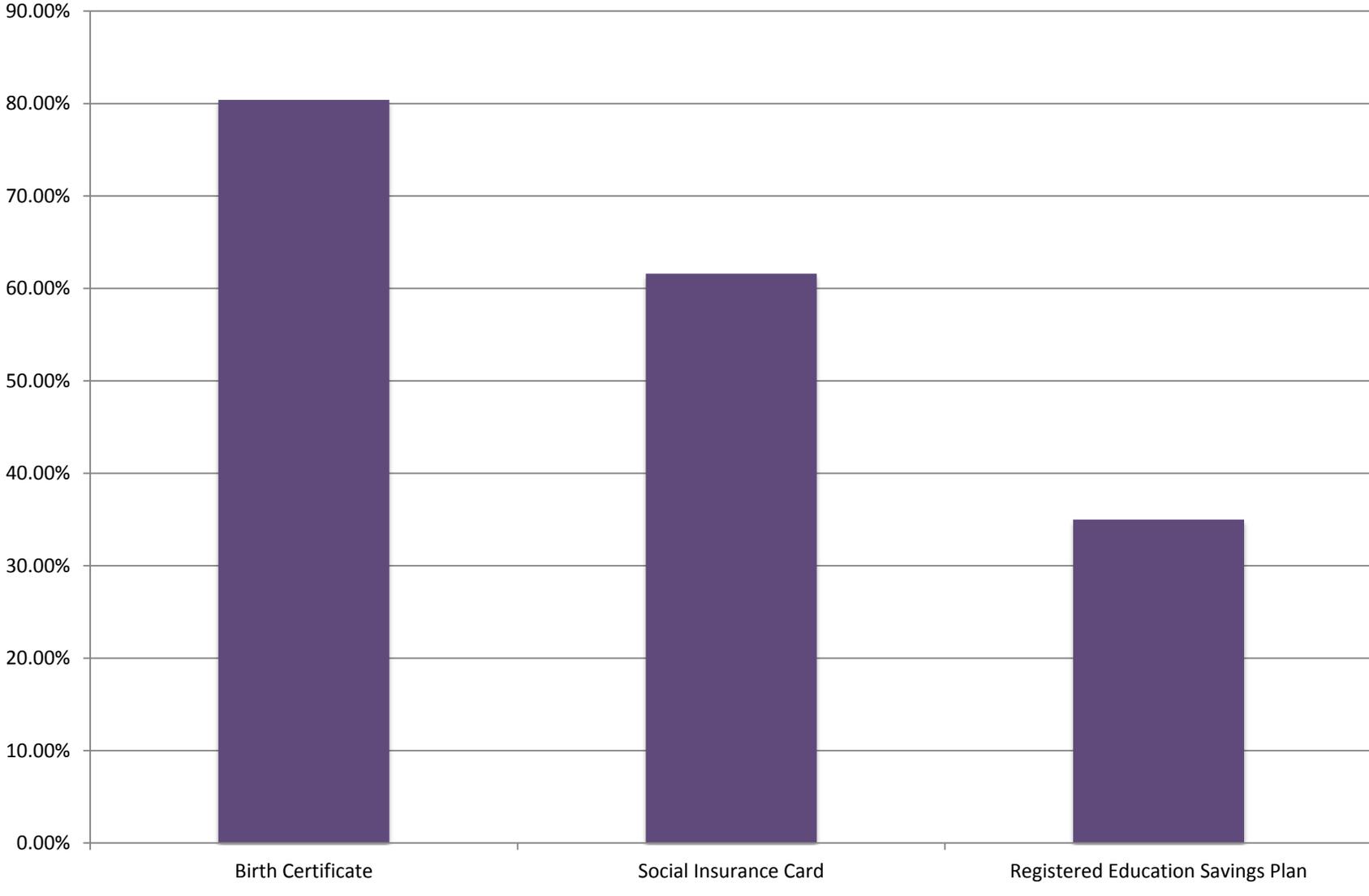
New Information

Since the first survey, there were a variety of new questions that have arisen about our childcare centres. These new questions are based on new program offerings at LEF, questions that arose because of the first survey, and changes in childcare policies and programs.

As LEF has been offering Educational Savings Incentive information, we wanted to find out about the documentation children possess and programs in which children were enrolled. This included looking at Social Insurance (SIN) cards, Birth Certificates, and Registered Educational Savings Plan (RESP) levels. This revealed to us that 80% of children have a birth certificate and 62% have a social insurance number. The number of children with an RESP is much lower, with only 35% possessing this account. For many children opening an RESP also opens up options for accessing government contributions and access to college or university. Our low statistics mean that many people are not accessing these contributions.

The number children without important government documents indicates that there is the potential to invite Service Canada to the centres giving families the opportunity to get SIN numbers and birth certificates. It is important to families that they possess this documentation as it provides access to current and future programs, in particular government RESP contributions.

Children With Documents



LEF has been actively been working on the integration between our childcare centres and our other services, as we identified communication and referrals across locations to be a challenge for many. To track the referrals from the centres to other LEF programs, we asked supervisors to report the number of referrals made in the previous 6 months. There were only 115 referrals made in this time period with the majority of referrals made to Employment, Skills Advancement and Language training, although far fewer to Settlement, Entrepreneurship, and Youth programs. This indicates that we still have significant work to do around our internal communications to increase the interaction between departments.

With the implementation of All-Day Kindergarten, a number of new questions arose, as we needed to understand how parents would react, the impact upon families, and the impact upon LEF and our centres.

Childcare staff are highly involved in facilitating the interaction between parents and teachers or principals. In one school year, childcare staff relayed notes from parents to teachers or principals 526 times and from teachers or principals to parents 625 times. This high rate indicates a low level of interaction between parents and educational staff. With the implementation of full-day learning and the removal of childcare staff as an intermediary, parents will have to interact with educational officials. To help transition parents into this new system, we will be offering training workshops for parents informing them about the school system, how to interact with school staff and how to help their children succeed.

In September 2010, more than 200 children moved into kindergarten. This was comprised of 94 going into junior and 110 into senior kindergarten. Of those moving into school, there were only 13 who moved into the all-day learning program, although this does not take into account the children in St. Angela Child Care Centre which closed due to the transition. While this number will grow through each year of the transition, the gradual transition will allow us to better understand how best to work with the changes and adapt our childcare centres.

In addition to workshops specifically geared to working within the school system, we are also looking at developing a parenting curriculum which will discuss issues of nutrition, as well as child development and behaviour. This will respond to the large number of supervisors who reported that parents would benefit from parenting classes (31% of parents). Classes listed by supervisors included: Budgeting, hygiene, food planning/nutrition, behaviour management, developmental stages, discipline/setting limits, communication, positive reinforcement, raising sexually healthy children, spending quality with children, toilet training, importance of physical exercise, and time management.

Childcare Centre Groupings

We have divided our childcare centres into 3 different groupings, and each grouping has a unique demographic make-up and challenges that parents and staff face. While these groupings are mainly split along geographic lines, the North Etobicoke centres have been divided among them.

Grouping 1	Grouping 2	Grouping 3
JR Wilcox Day Care Centre	Immaculate Conception Child Care Centre	Romero Bears Child Care Centre
Fairbank Memorial Day Care Centre	George Harvey Child Care Centre	York Humber Child Care Centres
Vaughan Road Child Care Centre	Keelesdale Child Care Centre	Roseland Day Care Centre
Hughes Child Care Centre	Silverthorn Child Care Centre	St. Andrews Child Care Centre
Humewood Child Care Centre	St. Roch Child Care Centre	George Syme Child Care Centres
	Donald C. McDonald Child Care Centre	St. Dorothy Child Care Centres

Group 1

This grouping contains approximately 37% of the children in our childcare centres and 39% of the families, which is the largest of the three groupings. This grouping has many numbers which are not consistent with the overall outcome of the survey; this is because this area of our community contains pockets of higher income, especially at Humewood Child Care Centre. Below, we have examined the numbers excluding this centre, as this centre can skew the overall data.

In this grouping, 48% of the families are single parent families, although 53% of the families have two caregivers which is far above the overall average of 32%. Further, there are only 47% of families receiving full subsidy, compared to the 63% average, and 19% of families paying full fees compared to 10% overall. In this group 25% of families own their homes, compared to 15%, although this grouping also has 77% of the families living in shelters. The shelter statistic can partly be explained as Hughes is co-located with a women’s shelter, but should be a statistic which is re-examined in future surveys. As two-parent families are more likely to have a higher overall income, it is logical that this group would have a higher number of parents paying some or all for childcare and would own their homes. In this grouping 85% of parents are working, which is higher than the average, and a much a higher number of families that have multiple caregivers working, all of which contributes to the overall increased stability of families that is represented through the numbers.

There is also a difference in the major languages among this group compared to the overall. While most (70%) speak English in the home, the other most highly represented languages include: Tagalog and Eritrean (9%), Spanish (7%), Arabic and Portuguese (5%), and Hindi (2%). In this area there are also 11 other languages spoken. There are fewer families with English as a first language, as well as a far smaller population of Spanish speaking families and higher number of Eritrean speakers. Families from this grouping also constitute nearly half of all Caribbean families across our childcare centres, as well as a large percentage of those from Asia. This indicates that the cultural diversity of the communities surrounding these centres is quite high.

In these centres, we see a higher level of education than that from across the childcare centres with more than half having at least some college or university, although this is the area with the fewest parents in training or school. Higher levels of education often lead to better employment and income, as well as giving children more opportunity to excel in school and move on to post-secondary education themselves. These statistics indicate that children in these centres have greater opportunities to succeed and fewer barriers in their path.

While these centres seem to have statistics that would indicate that there is a higher quality of life than across all of our centres, there are a significant number of statistics that show the challenges that children continue to face. In this grouping are a much higher number of diagnosed special needs than in any other grouping and it is tied with another grouping for the highest number of diagnosed and undiagnosed special needs across all areas. This area also has the largest proportion of diagnosed food allergies and anaphylaxis. This could be because these families have more income and education, making them more likely to have their children tested for special needs. But this could also be connected to having one centre in a women's shelter and one centre that has accepted a large number of children with diagnosed special needs.

These centres have the highest number of suspected cases of domestic violence, and children with active and inactive Children's Aid Society files. These families are more likely than those in other groupings to visit a clinic or use the emergency room as a clinic. These centres have the lowest number of children going on a daytrip, but the highest number of families going on an overnight trip. Further, these centres have the largest number of children with a birth certificate, but the lowest number of families with a SIN number or RESP. Finally, these centres recorded the largest number of occurrences of staff sending children home with extra food and clothing. We did not divide the communities by these groupings in the first survey, but these statistics will be important to look at in future iterations of this work to understand better the mix of challenges and opportunities that exist for this grouping.

Parents in this grouping are likely to spend time at the centre, with more than 70% making the time commitment of at least 5 minutes daily. In addition to this, more than 40% spend time talking to staff about child-related issues, 72% feel confident in their roles as parents and only 17% seem to lack support networks. While parents may have the necessary supports to raise their children, supervisors still reported that nearly 40% would benefit from parenting courses.

Group 2

This grouping includes the Keele/Edlington area, which is a community that is challenged by issues of poverty and some of the lowest EDI (Early Development Instrument) scores in the province, which is a measure of school readiness. The challenges that this community faces are apparent in the following statistics. These centres contain approximately 31% of the children in our centres and 31% of the families.

This grouping has an average number of single parent families, although a higher proportion of families live with extended families (42%). Those in this area receive a high number of full subsidies, with 77% receiving these and only 5% of families paying full fees. Among these families, a great majority rent their housing (96%), which is higher than any other grouping, although it fits with the overall statistics of the community. Only 5% of this grouping own their own housing, which is much lower than any of the other groupings. Further, these centres provided the second highest number of food and clothing items to families. The above statistics indicate the instability and barriers that exist in people's lives in this area, which aligns with the information that is known about this community through City of Toronto data.

While there is a diversity of languages spoken among this group, there are fewer than among other groupings. Most families speak English in this area, and more than 2% of the population speak the following languages: Spanish (14%), Portuguese and Twi (8%), and Italian and Edo (3%). There are also 8 other languages spoken. There are a large number of families from Africa and the Caribbean, which aligns with the number of families that speak African languages.

The educational level among these families is lower than grouping 1, with 57% possessing a high school education or less, although there are a higher number of parents with a college diploma or university degree than grouping 3. This grouping has the highest number of parents that have returned to school or training, much like grouping 3. Low educational levels can be correlated with the high numbers of those in part-time work, the lowest numbers of those working full time, and high numbers of those working on weekends and working multiple part-time jobs.

While the challenges for children are high given the number of barriers that they face, this grouping has a relatively low number of diagnosed special needs, with only 19% of all diagnosed special needs. However, while there are few diagnosed special needs, there are

nearly double the undiagnosed special needs of any other grouping. This number needs to be interrogated to understand if this is a misrepresentation of children who are dealing with issues of poverty, family breakdown, parental stress, hunger, etc., or if there are actually special needs which must be identified. In addition to the challenges that come with special needs, children in this area have the highest number of days absent due to illness, though most have a doctor or paediatrician and very few use clinics or the emergency room for medical aid. Supervisors also reported that these centres have a higher than average proportion of families in which they suspect domestic violence, although in opposition to this there is a lower than average number of children with Children's Aid Society files. While the children in these centres have a large number of challenges, they do have the highest proportional number of SIN cards, birth certificates and RESPs.

Among these centres, there is also a very low number of parents who are able to spend more than 5 minutes at the centre (40%). Further, there is a high number of parents who the supervisors thought would benefit from basic parenting classes and a number of parents that seem to be lacking in support networks. Despite these challenges, parents spend time talking to staff about parenting issues and generally feel confident in their role as parents.

This is a unique group of centres as they are facing a number of challenges, yet continue to fare better in some areas than our other groupings.

Group 3

This grouping contains approximately 32% of the children in our childcare centres and 30% of the families. It lies in the middle for many of the statistics, often falling near the average, although this does not mean that the families are facing any fewer challenges.

In this grouping there are 79% single parents families which is very high, and only 29% families with two caregivers. 70% of the families receive full subsidy, which is higher than average, and 3% of the families pay full fees compared to 10% overall. In this grouping there are an average number of parents working and who have multiple caregivers working.

The languages spoken among this group are also distinct from those of the other communities. While most speak English in this area, more than 2% of the population speak the following languages: Vietnamese (14%), Spanish (13%), Benue (Nigerian) (7%), Italian (5%), Portuguese Tamil and Swahili (3%) and French (2%). There are also 7 other languages spoken. There are a higher than average number of families without Canadian citizenship with a large number of families which are from Central America and Asia, which is logical given the high number of Vietnamese and Spanish speaking families. As with the other groupings, the cultural diversity is high, with families represented from across the world.

The educational level among these families is lower than our other centres, with 57% possessing a high school education or less and only 18% having a college diploma or university degree. While these numbers may indicate barriers for parents, there are a high number of parents who have returned to school or training. Low educational levels can contribute to the higher numbers of those in part-time work, those working on weekends, and a slightly higher than average number of caregivers working part-time.

This grouping has the lowest number of diagnosed or undiagnosed special needs among the three groupings, although there still 23% of the special needs in these centres. In addition to this, there are also a lower number of CAS files, suspected cases of domestic violence, fewer children missing days due to illness and a high number of families with a doctor or paediatrician. Further, the supervisors also reported the lowest number of food and clothing items sent home with families. While the children in these centres have fewer challenges than those in other centres, they only have an average number of SIN cards, birth certificates and RESPs.

While these families face fewer barriers than those in other groupings, there is a serious lack of parent engagement among these families. This is the grouping with the lowest number of parents picking up and dropping off their children within regular hours. Further, this is the grouping with the highest proportion of parents either picking up children late or at the very end of the day, and where supervisors reported that parents could pick up children earlier, but do not. This is also the grouping with the lowest number of parents who are able to spend more than 5 minutes daily at the centre (30%) and parents that spend time talking to staff about parenting issues (33%). Either as a result of low engagement or the small number of parents lacking in social networks (7%), this is also the centre with supervisors reporting the smallest need for parenting classes.

As with the other groupings, these centres face their own challenges, although this area has overall fewer barriers with which families must contend. This grouping has two centres from the North Etobicoke region and this may explain some of the differences in the overall statistics, but we expect that the next iteration of the survey will provide a greater understanding of what these differences actually mean.

Childcare Centre Statistics Excluding Humewood Child Care Centre

Humewood Child Care Centre is located in an area with many middle income families and therefore has a different demographic make-up than that of our other centres. It contains 56 children and 52 families. We opted to pull this centre out, as it can skew the numbers slightly. It is interesting to look at the data without Humewood, as in many ways this did cause the numbers to shift as we would expect or caused very little variance, although there are a few anomalous shifts that are more difficult to explain.

The changes in demographics of families were seen among single parent families with this number rising from 50% to 52% when Humewood is excluded. There was also an increase in full subsidy parents from 63% to 67% and a decrease in those parents paying full fee from 10% to 5%. Those renting increased from 73% to 76%, while employment decreased from 72% to 69% with full-time decreasing to 55% and part-time increasing to 16%. There was also a slight drop in the number of families that supervisors could identify as having Canadian citizenship from 75% to 72%.

The educational levels also shifted, with a higher number with high school or less 49% to 53% and a lower number with college diplomas and university degrees from 33% to 28%. While there are fewer people with higher levels of education across the other centres, there were a number working to increase this with 28% in school (a rise from 26%) and 5% in training (a rise from 4%).

In addition to the changes in demographics, there were other changes in the numbers including a higher number of suspected cases of domestic violence (3% to 4%). There was also an increase of 1 percentage point of both active and inactive CAS cases from 5% to 6%.

The number of people accessing the library also decreased with a smaller number of people with library cards (56% to 52%). There were also fewer therefore visiting the library, with this proportion dropping from 34% to 29%. In addition to the library card, children were also less likely to have a variety of other documents including a SIN card (62% to 59%), a birth certificate (80% to 79%) and RESPs (35% to 34%).

The numbers that were most surprising were those around the pick-up of children. The number of people picking up children within regular hours increased from 75% to 77%, although the number of families picking up children late or at the very end of the day rose from 18% to 19% and the number who could pick up earlier but did not rose from 20% to 24%. The number of parents who talk to staff about their children and parenting issues increased significantly from 41% to 47%. Further the number of parents who were reported to feel confident in their role as parents also increased from 69% to 76%. These numbers are surprising as Humewood is a centre where families are on average better off economically, but the above numbers indicate low engagement of parents and the challenges that especially these parents are facing.

The statistic that was impacted most significantly by removing Humewood was the number of families that have access to a family doctor. This number dropped from 81% to 70%. This indicates that access to family doctors is something that LEF should be facilitating for parents.

While there were not gaping differences without Humewood, this did provide a better understanding of the challenges in our childcare centres. This also allowed us to understand

some of the specific issues that are arising for Humewood, looking at each of the centres independently maybe a useful endeavour for the individual centres.

Conclusion

The survey has highlighted several key challenges for the families with children in LEF childcare centres. Staff involved with the childcare centres have always been aware of these challenges, however the survey has given us a chance to record these so that we can understand the extent of the issues and track the trends over time.

In the first survey we identified three key issues. Since this time, the first has not changed, the second has improved and the third has altered significantly. First, the majority of families with children in LEF childcare centres continue to have low incomes; this we have always known, as many families have full childcare subsidies. However, there is evidence of more severe levels of poverty in some families, as some are accessing shelters and many receive food and clothing from the childcare centres.

Second, as identified in the first survey, families continue to struggle with what LEF has recognized as the poverty of time and relationships. Single parents are straining to balance full-time work and caring for children, leaving little time for recreation, holidays and spending time at the childcare centres. While this is a challenge, we did see improvements between the two survey periods; we will still, however, continue to work to engage the families with the centres.

The third identified issue was the transience of families and the poverty of time which had had an effect on the development of supportive social networks among parents. LEF recognized this issue as the poverty of relationships. Since this time the issue of transience has dropped from 33% to only 7%. This was an area we planned to investigate and actively worked to improve through engagement and helping parents build relationships, but it is unlikely we could have this level of impact in only two and half years. This is a number we will need to track again in the future.

While we have seen the change in transition out of the centres, we continue to have a higher average number of parents lacking social support networks, and parents not spending time at the centres than in 2008. This indicates that parents are still not accessing the range of supports available at the childcare centres, although even these numbers have improved, albeit less dramatically than transience. Many families do pick up or drop off each other's children and some arrange get-togethers; however, not every centre noted these types of connections. Often the relationships are only between a few parents and one noted that there is no community among parents even when they are from the same ethnic backgrounds or live in the same apartment buildings.

Additional challenges include lower than average levels of education, a high incidence of special needs, domestic violence and challenges associated with settlement. Yet, as with other statistics, we have seen these improve and change with fewer special needs and fewer families being identified as non-Canadian citizens.

As LEF moves forward, we will be looking to develop strategies for offering additional supports for families. Supervisors noted referrals for LEF services including language, training, job search and settlement; however, there is potential for increasing relationships with these families. This could mean increasing opportunities for social networking or offering targeted services developed in a flexible manner to increase access for these families.