



Celebrating Inclusion in the Early Years- Behavioural Interventions in a Child Care Context

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Research shows that with early behavioural interventions, children with ASD are much more likely to make gains in development and independence during their school years and into adulthood (Carr & Leblanc, 2007) than children who do not receive behavioural interventions. Hence, in New Brunswick, children with ASD are offered access to programs and supports to help them succeed and develop in their early years. Families with preschool-aged children with ASD have the opportunity to enroll in the Preschool Autism Program. The Preschool Autism Program offers up to 20 hours per week of behavioural interventions and supports for a child and their family. This program aims to decrease the barriers that are preventing children from learning in their natural environment through behavioural interventions that are customized for each child. The Preschool Autism Program is delivered by an organization called Autism Intervention Services (AIS).

Is there a perfect place for the intervention?

The emphasis of this program, as often as possible, is to work in the child's natural environment. Behavioural interventions are usually offered in a family's home, where the children spend most of their waking and learning hours. However, the reality of today's society is that families with one parent at home is rare, therefore home-based interventions are not always feasible and are even considered a luxury to some. Many families have two working parents, and therefore, other locations of intervention are needed. When home-based services are not possible, the AIS team and the family work together to select a location for interventions that is in the child's best interest.

Often, an intervention team and a family select an early learning and childcare facility as the location for intervention. This decision is sometimes made because a child's intervention goals are focused around social skills and group learning, so this location is ideal, and sometimes the decision is also made based on the family's need for child care services. Providing behavioural interventions in a child care facility creates many opportunities for high quality learning, while meeting a family's needs for quality child care at the same time. This location of intervention requires that a partnership is developed between the team at Autism Intervention Services and the team in the Child Care Facility, this partnership also creates a wealth of opportunities for inclusion of children ASD in the classroom environment.

The magic of collaboration

Melissa MacCullum and Sara Thornton of Little Geniuses Day Care in Fredericton, New Brunswick, have worked in partnership with the team from Autism Intervention Services on many occasions. Although these organizations are regulated differently, one with a mandate to provide high quality, safe child care and the other to provide highly individualized, behavioural supports, "the regulations are cohesive" says MacCullum. MacCullum and Thornton believe that their organization is stronger as a result of their ability to develop a collaborative working relationship between both programs, making for a high quality and inclusive experience for a child with ASD.

Nicole Turnbull is a Clinical Supervisor for Autism Intervention Services. Turnbull has worked with 9 years experience developing behavioural intervention services for children in an inclusive environment and feels that communication is the most important part of developing a strong collaboration. Parents, child care facility employees and agency employees need to communicate openly and frequently, to make sure that all of the **children's' needs are being met**. Turnbull acknowledges that those working for these two different organizations have a wealth of expertise in different fields of practice, and bringing this knowledge together is key. Turnbull recommends that each program's willingness to learn from each other has been an important feature in successful collaboration.

What makes this program work?

When asked why this collaboration works so well MacCullum, identifies the key to successful inclusion is her **team's mindset**. She describes that her team values diversity and inclusion and as a result they have many opportunities to feel proud of their success in including children with various needs. The team takes pride in having diversity as a norm in their classrooms and as a result, the organization is filled with accepting and compassionate children and staff.

The teams at Autism Intervention Services and Little Geniuses agreed that the following concepts are key to the continued success of their ongoing partnerships:

- ✓ Open and ongoing communication: as a team, consistently communicating openly about successes and challenges and working together to address the challenges.
- ✓ Recognizing the importance of each program: as in many jurisdictions, these two programs are regulated differently and have different mandates. In addition, these two programs are incredibly important to families with young children, with and without a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- ✓ **Focusing on the child and family's needs before the needs of each organization: each child, regardless of diagnosis, has a unique set of needs.** Both Autism Intervention Services and Little Geniuses operate with the needs of the children at the core of their consideration and planning. As long as these needs are at the heart of each organization, the organizations will always remain motivated to work together.

About Us

Autism Learning Partnership, a branch of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) in New Brunswick (Canada), is the sole provider of the Provincial Autism Training curriculum for preschool autism agency and educational personnel in New Brunswick. The Autism Learning Partnership provides bilingual, evidence-based, high-quality professional learning and resources to support families, preschool agency personnel and educational personnel in the province, and has a mandate to establish partnerships with organizations nationally and internationally.