



MILLION DOLLAR EARLY YEARS CHALLENGE

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

1. Introduction

As a society, we are becoming more and more aware of the importance of providing our children with everything they need to succeed in life. We want them to grow up in quality environments, to achieve their full potential, and to grow into adults who are active, healthy contributors to society.

At the same time, we recognize that children are not isolated individuals—they are part of a family unit. We want the adults in that unit to enjoy both the peace of mind and economic opportunity that can only come from knowing that their children are in stimulating, caring, and supportive environments—whether at home, or in early childhood development settings.

If we are to truly honour our responsibility to children and their families, we must give families and other caregivers the support they

need to promote the best possible development of children. All families—both those with stay-at-home parents and those with parents working outside of the home—must have access to a seamless network of community supports.

Today, while some families receive that support, many do not. Some parents receive pre- and post-natal counselling and nutrition support—many do not; some children have an early opportunity to develop the foundation for later language and learning—many do not; some children take part in the stimulating environment of a licensed setting—many do not. Some children benefit from the early diagnosis of problems and remedial support offered by community agencies—many do not. Some children have regular access to quality recreational programs and facilities, many do not. For some children, formal schooling builds on a solid foundation of earlier learning and healthy social development—for many, it does not.

Even those families who are fortunate enough to receive some or many of these supports, tend to experience them as isolated, disconnected services, instead of as part of a broad, integrated, community-based network of family supports. For many, it's like trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle where few of the pieces interlock. It's just too easy for families to fall through the cracks.

In recent months, there has been a great deal of public dialogue about the need for integrated early childhood development programs. The McCain-Mustard study and other similar reports have shone a new spotlight on this need. At the same time, the Province of Ontario has sent out encouraging signals concerning future action.

As welcome as these signals may be, *The Atkinson Charitable Foundation* (ACF) believes that it is time to move from talk to action. We are prepared to provide \$1 million dollars over a multi-year period to support community-based demonstration projects that show the benefits of a seamless approach to early childhood development programs. We believe that the success of these demonstration projects can lead to the province-wide adoption of an integrated approach.

We are hopeful that, after meaningful discussions, this money will lever further contributions from the Province of Ontario, the Government of Canada, corporations and labour unions.

2. What is the *Million Dollar Early Years Challenge*?

The ACF agrees with a core recommendation of the *Early Years Study* that early years programs should be seamlessly and universally available to all children and all families. For this to happen, there must be substantial and sustained government funding. In the final analysis, only government has the resources to make sure that all families have access to such programs.

At the same time, we believe that this will happen more quickly when the public and government can see and understand the benefits of a universal approach. There is a significant role now for voluntary and private sectors of our society to collaborate with governments to support the capacity of communities to create early years programs, and to demonstrate the value of such programs.

The Atkinson Charitable Foundation is putting up at least \$1 million over five years to finance one or more demonstration projects. In turn, we are challenging:

- **communities:** to develop and implement new approaches to providing seamless early years programs;
- **the Ontario Government:** to provide the demonstration projects with matching funds;
- **the Government of Canada:** to match funds provided by the province; and,
- **corporations and unions:** to contribute financially to the *Challenge*.

The more money that we are able to raise through the *Challenge*, the more projects we will be able to fund.

3. Who is Eligible to Apply for Funds?

Any community in Ontario is eligible to apply for funds to operate a demonstration project. The term “community” may be self-defined i.e. it could be a municipality, county, neighbourhood, school catchment area or any other unit that regards itself as a community. Your community must, however, show it is ready to mount a seamless



approach to delivering early childhood development programs. Your readiness can be shown through:

- the involvement of a wide variety of partners in developing the proposal; **this must include school boards, municipalities and public health units**, and could also include: parenting centres, family resource programs, early intervention programs, child care providers, nursery schools, community agencies, hospitals and other health care providers, parks and recreational services, public libraries, unions representing child care staff, teachers, etc.; and, any other local authorities that assist in the healthy development of children (*we recognize that different partners will have different capacities and roles, and encourage you to involve the broadest range of partners*);
- a commitment to the project by all agencies necessary to its implementation;
- a high level of parental involvement;
- a clear and thorough plan to implement the project;
- a plan to evaluate the project and communicate its results (*the Atkinson Charitable Foundation can assist, if necessary, by making the advice of experts available and may also conduct its own overall evaluation of all of the projects funded and communicate its findings*); and,
- a willingness to devote community resources to the project.

4. What Age Children Should Your Project Serve?

Our main focus is on children 0–6, since that is where the primary need exists. At the same time, we recognize that when children reach the age of seven and older they can still benefit from seamless programs. We also appreciate that there may already exist some mature, seamless programs for children aged 6–12.

So in addition to projects for children 0–6, we will also consider funding programs that involve children up to 12, or that involve taking existing seamless programs for children 7–12 and expanding them downward to 0–6.

5. What is Meant by “Seamless”?

Our own vision of “seamless” includes:

- offering a single “window of access” to a wide range of services that are currently either unavailable or available only separately through: pre- and post-natal nutrition programs, parenting centres, family resource programs, child care, community agencies, hospitals and other health care providers, parks and recreation services, junior kindergarten and kindergarten, public health services and libraries;
- delivering some portion of the services seven days a week, 12 months a year, and in hours beyond the traditional 9–5.
- the delivery of some/many of these services in a common location, by common staff, and following a common set of standards;
- breaking down the barriers that now exist to families needing more than one service, or needing to move from one service to another;
- offering universal programs that are available and affordable to all families (i.e. not just to families in a certain income group or to families with all parents in the labour force);
- tailoring programs to meet the needs of all children in the community, including children with special needs; and,
- supporting parents’ participation in their children’s early learning.

We are looking for highly-creative programs that challenge conventional wisdom and modes of delivery—projects that point the way to a better future.

We encourage you to describe for us your vision of how a “seamless” approach to delivering early childhood development programs would work in your community. Your actual project could involve the realization of that vision, or a movement to the next stage(s) in realizing that vision.



6. Tell Us About the Benefits Your Program Will Bring

As part of your proposal, your community should outline the benefits that you expect your project will bring to:

- children;
- families;
- communities; and,
- providers of children's programs.

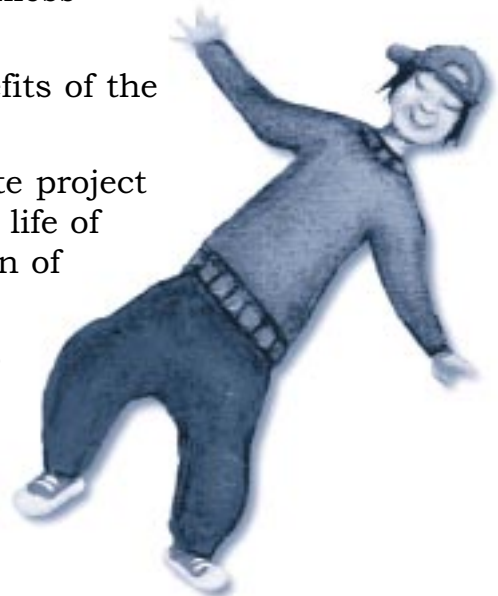
A key goal of the *Million Dollar Early Years Challenge* is to show policy makers how a seamless approach will be more beneficial than the current approach.

More information on our vision of seamless early childhood development programs can be found in two *Atkinson Letters* available on our Web site at www.atkinsonfdn.on.ca

7. What Can *Challenge* Funds be Spent On?

Funds provided by the ACF through the *Million Dollar Early Years Challenge* may be spent on work such as:

- research activities;
- community development activities that bring partners together to design and implement seamless modes of activity;
- evaluation activities to assess the benefits of the new approach;
- communication activities to disseminate project activities and benefits, both during the life of the project and following the completion of the project; and,
- other *new* operating costs necessary to carrying out the project, e.g. building partnerships, re-designing services, ensuring continuity and a smooth transition to a new delivery model, staff development, etc.



ACF funds are not intended to pay for the entire cost of demonstration projects. Communities will be expected to express their commitment by dedicating resources to the project as well. These resources may come from the partners operating the project, from other outside funding sources, or some combination of the two.

8. How Will We Decide Which Projects to Fund?

Projects will be judged by a panel of experts appointed by The Atkinson Charitable Foundation together with those representing other funding partners. The panel will make recommendations to the ACF Board of Trustees, which will make the final decision.

9. The Role of the Atkinson Charitable Foundation

The ACF intends to be a significant, active and helpful partner in this project. In particular we see our role as:

- providing a financial grant for up to five years; and,
- providing access (if needed) to our experts in:
 - community development, mobilization and partnership building;
 - evaluation; and,
 - communications.

10. The Next Steps

If your community is interested in operating a demonstration project, we invite you to follow these steps:

I. Submit a Letter of Intent by June 23, 2000

The letter of intent is your indication to us that you intend to develop and submit a formal proposal. The letter should contain the following information:

- the name(s) and contact numbers of the organization(s) making the application and a preliminary list of potential partners in the project (a brief description of each would be helpful); *remember, we are interested in “community readiness”, so the more partners who are signed on in the letter of intent, the more favourably we will view your interest;*

please designate a tentative “lead partner” with which we should communicate and which can serve as the administrative centre for the project;

- a brief outline (approx. 2 pages) of the type of project that you would like to operate; please include in this your vision of what a seamless early years program will look like in your community; if your project is just for children 0–6, please also describe for us how the next stage would work i.e. what is your vision for children 7–12;
- an assessment of your capacity to do evaluation work and whether you will need help to prepare an evaluation plan;
- identification of any rules or regulations that will need to be suspended in order to operate the demonstration project;
- the length of time it will take you to prepare a formal proposal and whether:
 - you are now ready to prepare a proposal; or,
 - you will need developmental funding to prepare a proposal, the amount of funds that you will need, and what the funds will be used for.

Please make sure that your letter of intent reaches us by June 23, 2000. Do not submit a formal proposal at this time.

The **Letter of Intent** should be mailed to:

Charles Pascal
Executive Director, The Atkinson Charitable Foundation
One Yonge St., Fifth Floor
Toronto, Ont. M5E 1E5

If you prefer, you may send your **Letter of Intent** by e-mail (cpascal@thestar.ca) or by fax (416) 865-3619.

Once we have reviewed your letter of intent, we may ask to meet with you to clarify your approach, or we may invite you to submit a formal proposal.

II. Submit a Formal Proposal

Once our expert panel has reviewed all of the letters of intent, we will advise you regarding submitting a more in-depth proposal if you are selected.