



## **Better Together: Building Stronger Early Learning Systems Through Collaboration**

November 15, 2025

Greetings,

Over the years, people have often asked me, “What is Better Together?” and “What do you do?” At times, it can be hard to describe our work, but we feel its impact every day. After three years of dedication and energy, I’m thrilled to share this letter to describe who we are and what we have become.

Better Together (BT) is a collaborative network that brings together Children’s Service System Managers (SSMs) to strengthen Ontario’s early learning and child care (ELCC) system through shared knowledge, evidence, and innovation.

At its core, Better Together creates a space for collective thinking, problem-solving, and innovation across regions, recognizing that sustainable system change occurs when research, policy, and practice inform one another. Through regular dialogue and shared inquiry, SSMs (Service System Managers) identify and refine best practices and promising models to address common challenges in ELCC delivery, including workforce stability, accessibility, inclusion, and quality improvement. Better Together exists to facilitate peer-to-peer leadership capacity - described by our partners as a dedicated space for “big thinking, with big thinkers.”

To further deepen understanding and engagement, BT develops knowledge mobilization tools including webinars, podcasts, and learning modules that connect SSMs with researchers and practitioners for continuous professional learning. The collaborative also participates in panels and conference booths of influential sectors, such as Economic Developers Association of Canada (EDAC) and Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI), creating new relationships to advance shared community goals.

Through the BT exchange, participants gain insights that strengthen local systems while propelling a shared provincial vision for high-quality, equitable, and publicly accountable early learning and child care.

For more information, please contact Michelle Schurter, [michelle@millennialstrategist.com](mailto:michelle@millennialstrategist.com)

[www.bt4ey.ca](http://www.bt4ey.ca).



A key strength of Better Together is its ability to bring in external expertise and tools to inform and support its work. The initiative partners closely with researchers at the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, whose resources, analytic capacity, and national and international networks amplify the reach, evidence base, and credibility of the collaborative.

Better Together has also served as the launch platform for [Knowing Our Numbers \(KON\)](#), an initiative that revealed previously unseen gaps in service delivery across regions. KON's findings prompted targeted innovations in special needs resourcing, professional development, and workforce planning, demonstrating the power of collaborative data and shared analysis to drive systemic improvement.

The collaborative hosts the ECE Workforce Roundtable, bringing together SSMs, post-secondary institutions, academics, and sector leaders to explore workforce challenges and opportunities. This forum examines pathways into the profession, evaluates professional learning strategies, and surfaces actionable solutions for recruitment and retention.

Better Together is more than a network; it is a platform for collaboration, evidence, and innovation. It demonstrates that when Ontario's early years leaders work together and connect with research expertise, they can build a stronger, smarter, and more equitable system for children, families, and educators.

And there's more work to be done. We welcome municipal, county, and regional children's services staff, along with partners in economic development, planning, and federal child care leadership, to engage with Better Together. By engaging with The BT collaborative, you are contributing to building stronger, more connected systems that advance equity, quality, and innovation in early learning and child care and beyond. Together, we can amplify impact across communities. We invite you to connect with us to be part of this important work.

In collaboration and commitment,

Michelle Schurter

Better Together Founder and Lead

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