

# Program benefits children: Region

By Melanie Hennessey  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Thousands of lives have been touched by a program that aims to ensure quality of care for Halton children, a Region official said last week.

The Quality First initiative was celebrated by early childhood educators (ECEs) from across Halton during a conference at regional headquarters in Oakville.

Halton Director of Children's Services Mary Beth Jonz told the ECEs in attendance that the program launched in 2005 has been a great success with almost 2,000 children benefiting. "You have all accomplished so much in such a short time. The momentum is growing — the Halton childcare providers are committed to this community-driven approach to quality childcare."

Quality First offers a continuum of quality improvement processes and tools for children's programs in Halton. Those who participate in the program learn new skills on things like curriculum, adult-child interactions and administration/supervision.

"One of the goals of Quality First is to enhance children's experience in quality childcare to ensure success both now and in the future, which in turn will help in their school years and into adulthood," Jonz said.

"Quality First is doing this through clear program and early learning standards that are play-based, holistic and developmentally appropriate."

She added that Quality First is helping ECEs build their knowledge base and expand on their positive interactions with children.

There are more than 200 childcare professionals and 63 childcare centres across the region taking part in the program, such as Future Scholars Daycare in Georgetown.

Sally DaSilva, a team leader at Future Scholars, attested to the benefits of Quality First at the conference.

"It taught me to come up with new challenges for the kids," she said, noting after being in the early childhood education field for seven years, it's easy to get into a rut. "It (Quality First) gets you thinking."

Jonz said she hopes once parents learn about Quality First they'll start to ask for it by name, making more childcare centres across the region want to take part.

Quality First is managed by the Halton Resource Connection, with support from the ECE community. It evolved in response to the Halton early childhood education community's recognition of the need to develop and support a high level of quality care and education for young children and their families.

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