

Parent in the Lead

Samara Pruden is a little girl who recently turned four. She has attended a suburban child care program for the past two years. Samara entered the program on the advice of her pediatrician who had noted global developmental delays. In the past two years Samara has made substantial gains and is now developmentally at par across most of the domains. She still has some articulation challenges and is not yet showing interest in letters and numbers. She tends to spend more time with adults or with younger children who are more at her social level. Her attention span is somewhat limited. For example, she is often reluctant to come to circle time, and once there, prefers singing and active games rather than listening to long stories. She often leaves the lunch table before she has finished her lunch and may complain about still being hungry later in the day. Samara is easily frustrated during the outdoor transition, especially with the extra clothes needed in the winter, and becomes quite impatient waiting for her small group.

Before September (one year prior to school start) > Introduce Protocol

In the spring, the child care centre always develops a bulletin board of information about school, including posters of the various Kindergarten open houses as well as articles about what to expect in Kindergarten. Ms Hamilton, the director of the centre, notices Samara's mother, Ms Pruden, reading the display and stops to chat. She mentions that it would be a good idea for them to meet after the summer to discuss what supports Samara may need during her transition to Kindergarten the following year. Ms Hamilton also shares that there is a government protocol that will help guide their planning. Ms Pruden is initially quite surprised, questioning why there is such a rush when her daughter just turned four a few months ago. Ms Hamilton explains that the *Protocol for Early Childhood Transition to School for Children with Additional Support Needs* recommends that planning begin well in advance to ensure a smooth transition for Samara. She reassures Ms Pruden that at their first meeting, all they will do is review the transition protocol together and begin to think about the transition to kindergarten.

September (one year prior to school start) > Initiate Protocol

One day in September, Ms Hamilton approaches Ms Pruden during pick up time to initiate a conversation about transition planning for Samara who is due to begin Kindergarten next September. Ms Pruden has had the chance to think about her daughter and her move to Kindergarten, and states that she has lots of questions. One of these is whether child care will continue to be available. Ms Hamilton confirms that Samara may be eligible to stay at the centre, depending on what school Samara attends. She says that at their first meeting they will decide on the appropriate next steps and timelines.

October – December > Team Formation

In mid-October, Samara's mom and the director book a time to meet and they read through the protocol document together. They have a conversation about Ms Pruden's comfort about acting as her daughter's transition team leader. She seems very excited and willing to take on this role and has already begun

to explore the school division's website and read about the different schools and kindergarten options available. She is considering French Immersion which is not available at her neighbourhood school, but the neighbourhood school is quite close by and has both a morning and afternoon Kindergarten program. During this face-to-face meeting, they read through the section of the protocol that outlines the recommended timeline of tasks for the family/transition team leader. They also review questions on the transition planning form. They talk about section A, which asks for information about the child and family, and Ms Pruden highlights Samara's strengths and successes such as many gains in her overall development. When thinking back, Ms Pruden and Ms Hamilton can list many specific gains Samara has made. She now independently uses the toilet, verbalizes her needs, waits her turn, and is excited about coming to the centre each day. She is a happy and curious little girl. Ms Pruden agrees to continue looking into Kindergarten options and attend Kindergarten Open Houses, which will occur early in the new year.

Ms Hamilton suggests that Ms Pruden contact the school division so they are aware that Samara will begin Kindergarten next fall and will likely need additional support for the transition. She provides Ms Pruden with the name and contact information of the Student Services Coordinator, Ms Sinclair. The two agree to talk again after the Kindergarten Open House season is over. At that point, Ms Pruden will identify the school she has selected. They plan to invite representatives of the new school to their next meeting. Ms Pruden plans to use the weeks in between to work on the transition planning form. Samara has a check up scheduled with her pediatrician in late January, and Ms Pruden will discuss the protocol with her daughter's doctor at that time, and ask for input to the questionnaire. She confirms that she will bring the completed form with her to the next meeting. Ms Hamilton offers to help at any point along the way but Ms Pruden indicates she feels pretty confident in her ability to complete the questionnaire independently.

At the beginning of November, Ms Pruden emails Ms Sinclair, the Student Services Coordinator, with questions about the schools being considered and provides some general information about Samara. The same day, Ms Sinclair responds to Ms Pruden by phone to introduce herself, answer questions, and give dates of the open houses that will be held in February. Ms Sinclair explains that a school does not have to be chosen yet and assures Ms Pruden that similar supports and services are available for Samara in any of the three schools she is considering. She can take her time to attend open houses, along with other families, and make an informed decision. Ms Sinclair says she is available to answer questions anytime, and asks Ms Pruden to let her know which school she ends up choosing.

January – April > Information Gathering

In February, the Pruden family attends three different Open Houses. The Prudens carefully consider whether French Immersion is the right option for their daughter. In the end, they choose the school within their own neighborhood. Ms Pruden reasons that attending school in the neighbourhood will help her daughter make friends who she can play with after school and on the weekends and many of her 'day care' friends will attend too. Ms Pruden and Ms Hamilton pick a week in April that would be good for both of them for a second meeting to plan next steps (with the hope that someone from the school will be able to attend as well). Ms Pruden agrees to contact the school to officially register and to invite the Kindergarten teacher and the Resource teacher to attend their April meeting. Ms Pruden gets back to Ms Sinclair to confirm which school she has decided on, and to find out who from the school or school division can attend the meeting. Ms Sinclair puts her in touch with the school's resource teacher, Mr. Brown.

Ms Pruden connects with Mr. Brown, the school's resource teacher. The Kindergarten teacher has not yet been assigned for the next school year and so Mr. Brown indicates that he will be taking the lead role as the school representative during this stage of the planning process. He is very interested in attending a meeting and they confirm a date in April that will work for him too. Mr. Brown asks Ms Pruden for permission to observe her daughter in her natural environment (at her child care centre or at home). Ms Hamilton agrees to an observation at the child care centre as it will allow Mr. Brown to see Samara in action, as well as some of the strategies that the centre has developed to support her. His attendance at the April meeting will help to ensure the school staff receives all the important information Ms Pruden has been gathering about her daughter.

Mr. Brown arrives at the child care centre prior to the April meeting to allow for the observation. Later that day, Janie, the lead Early Childhood Educator (ECE) of Samara's program joins the meeting to share strategies that have been working well at the centre, to help answer specific questions Mr. Brown has, and to add supplementary information and examples to the Transition planning form. For example, Samara has become increasingly interested in the letter 'S' now that she has realized it's in her own name. She has been making many S's in the sand in the sensory table, and with play dough and has been noticing S's in the playroom environment. Ms Pruden agrees, recalling that Samara points to the letter S when she notices it on signs they pass at the store. Mr. Brown asks questions about Samara's comfort with routines, and how she initiates play with peers. Janie shares some of the strategies that are supportive. She intentionally selects shorter stories and ensures finger plays and active movement games are a part of each circle time. She provides Samara (and other children) with a fidget toy to hold during circle time. Janie also describes cues and prompts the staff team uses during free play time to help Samara interact with her peers.

The team decides that no further action is required at this point. Mr. Brown agrees to share this information about Samara with the new Kindergarten teacher and indicates he will be available to support Samara, her family and the Kindergarten teacher in the fall.

As the meeting draws to a close, Ms Pruden indicates that she will contact Mr. Brown at the end of summer to confirm Samara's start and update any information as needed. Because Samara's mother has selected the neighborhood school, Samara can continue to attend the same child care centre, allowing for consistency. Mr. Brown provides information to Ms Pruden and Ms Hamilton about the school bus so arrangements can be made for Samara to be transported back to the child care centre after kindergarten each day. Ms Pruden agrees to sign consent forms so the child care centre and school can continue to be in touch with each other to discuss Samara's progress and to coordinate their strategies.

May – June > Transition Planning and Implementation

Samara's school has a Kindergarten classroom visit day in late June. Samara and her mom excitedly attend, along with the other families, so she can meet her new Kindergarten teacher, Miss Monique, and see the classroom. Meanwhile back at the centre, the ECEs continue to read Kindergarten stories with the children who are starting school in the fall. They turn their dramatic play centre into a Kindergarten classroom around the same time so the children can play "school". Based on a suggestion from Mr. Brown at the April meeting, the ECEs have added clipboards and pencils to the play environment to encourage Samara and others in their emergent writing.

July - August > Transition Planning and Implementation

After a family vacation at the beginning of July, Samara attends the child care centre throughout the rest of summer. Staff members continue to work with Samara on her individual goals, but creatively incorporate them into the unique outdoor activities and outings offered during this time of year.

At home, Samara's mother reads stories from the recommended book list provided at the June classroom visit and talk about the Kindergarten teacher often. They point out toys of Samara's that are similar to those in the Kindergarten classroom such as Lego, puzzles and play dough.

Last Two Weeks of August > Transition Planning and Implementation

At the end of August, Ms Pruden gets in touch with the school to provide some small updates to the information provided on the transition planning form. She also plans a short visit with Samara to walk through the school to find the library and gym, and where she will wait for the bus. Mr. Brown reassures her that the school is ready for Samara and they all excitedly wait for the first day of school.

Beyond School Entry > Ongoing Collaboration and Planning Across Care Settings

Information sharing continues between the child care centre and the Kindergarten teacher. Miss Monique shares information about Manitoba's Kindergarten curriculum with Ms Hamilton, the centre director. As a result, the ECEs find ways to support specific numeracy and literacy skills through play during the half-day Samara spends with them at the child care centre. Ms Hamilton, in turn, tells Miss Monique about new strategies that have been engaging Samara with peers during circle time and small group activities. This allows Miss Monique to provide continuity as she uses some of those same strategies with Samara and her friends at Kindergarten. The ability to transfer knowledge in this way, between school and preschool systems, helps ensure a seamless transition for Samara.

Characters in Order of Appearance

Samara Pruden > Four year-old girl

Ms Hamilton > Child care centre director

Ms Pruden > Samara's mother

Ms Sinclair > Student services coordinator

Mr. Brown > Resource teacher

Janie > Early Childhood Educator

Miss Monique > Kindergarten teacher

Characters in this story are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons is purely coincidental.