

Training, Recruitment and Retention in the First Nations ECE Sector

Background Paper

Prepared for the First Nations Early Childhood Development Council

By

The BC Aboriginal Child Care Society

February, 2012

Introduction and Purpose

Various researchers have identified the challenges associated with recruiting, training, and retaining qualified Canadian early childhood educators to work in child care centres. The workforce challenges that are pervasive nationally also impact First Nations. However, there are additional factors that are unique to British Columbia's First Nations. This paper will address both sets of challenges: those shared with other communities and those specific to British Columbia's First Nations.

This project, supported by the First Nations Early Childhood Development Council (FNECDC), seeks to identify strategic actions and policy changes necessary to develop and maintain an effective, qualified early childhood development (ECD) workforce to deliver high quality services to all First Nations children and families in British Columbia.

At this time, services are unequally distributed and 46 First Nations have no early childhood education services.¹ This project builds on the goals and strategies contained in *The BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework*². Early childhood educators working in First Nations programs, instructors in training institutions, and other key community-based informants will be consulted and invited to share their opinions and experiences related to training and retaining early childhood educators (ECEs). This background paper is intended to provide a rationale for proceeding with the research component of this project as well as beginning to explore strategic actions towards meaningful change.

¹ BC First Nations & Urban Aboriginal Early Childhood Development Mapping Initiative, Final Report, December 2011.

² www.fnecdc.ca

The recruitment, training, and retention of ECD personnel are interrelated components of the problem of putting in place the human resources needed to deliver and administer programs. Although the issues overlap, for ease of understanding, they will be discussed separately. Each of the three components of the problem will be discussed from a Canada-wide perspective, from a British Columbia perspective, and from a First Nations perspective.

Canada-wide ECD Staffing Issues

Canadian child care advocates have been drawing attention to workforce problems for many years. In 2003, Child Care Connections, a Nova Scotia organization, reported the findings of a national study entitled *Attracting and Keeping Qualified Staff in Canadian Child Care: A National Environmental Scan*.³

The Child Care Connections research categorized the causes of recruitment and retention challenges this way:

Education issues such as:

- Accessibility and cost of post-secondary education
- Overloaded curriculum
- Difficulties finding suitable practicum experiences in exemplary centres
- Credit transferability issues between institutions

Policy issues such as:

- Underlying ideologies of individual choice and responsibility
- Classification of child care as just another marketplace commodity
- Variable training standards from province to province

³ See <http://www.cccns.org/ret/RR/DP/Nat.pdf>.

- High training costs
- Undervaluing of women's nurturing work

Standards issues such as:

- Child care practitioners' inability to self-regulate as a profession
- Government control of the certification of practitioners
- Training institutions not accredited by the sector

Workplace issues such as:

- Low wages and poor benefits
- Stressful working conditions
- Limited opportunities for advancement
- Aging workforce
- Fewer people entering the sector

Societal Attitudes such as:

- Belief that caring for children is natural and instinctive for women
- Belief that child care is a private family matter
- Assumption that child care is primarily a service for working mothers
- Lack of awareness of the educational value of child care programs
- Assumption that small home settings are preferable to centres

These challenges persist and many have become even more acute since 2003. Costs of post-secondary education have risen. The gaps between wages and costs of living have widened. Workplace stressors have worsened. The gaps have widened between child care sector wages and benefits and those available in other sectors.

The Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC) commissioned several more recent studies of the Canadian child care workforce.⁴ The CCHRSC research was published in 2009. Canada-wide, the following factors, in combination, contribute to difficulties recruiting and retaining early childhood educators:

- Low wages and poor working conditions
- Poor employee benefits
- Burnout and stress
- Dissatisfaction with employers/supervisors
- Inadequate preparation for the demands of the job
- Lack of incentives to pursue professional development
- Lack of access to professional development
- Lack of recognition/respect/status for the sector
- Difficulty balancing work and family life
- Limited opportunities for advancement

The Canadian child care workforce is in a state of crisis, characterized by rates of turnover that exceed other occupations, difficulties recruiting staff, and low job satisfaction.

For a number of years, Canada's ECD shortcomings have been publicized to a global audience by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).⁵ The OECD recommendations include, among other things, substantially increasing public funding of services for young children, improving current recruitment strategies and strengthening initial and in-service training of staff. Compared to 13 other OECD countries in 2004, Canada ranked last in public expenditures on early childhood

⁴ See <http://www.ccsc-cssge.ca/english/>.

⁵ See <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/42/34/33850725.pdf> and <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/41/36/33852192.pdf>

education and care services for children aged 0 to 6.⁶ These embarrassing OECD findings have not motivated policy-makers to address the many problems. In fact, conditions have deteriorated further since the OECD *Country Note* research was done in 2003.

BC ECD Staffing Issues

In 2007, First Call conducted an ECE staffing survey in British Columbia.⁷ Almost 90% of the respondents reported experiencing difficulty with recruitment and retention. When asked why it was difficult to hire and retain staff the following themes were noted:

- Low wages and lack of benefits (cited by 75% of respondents)
- Competition with employers offering better wages and benefits
- Inability to live on the wages paid in ECE
- Burnout and stress
- Shortage of substitutes for sick days, vacations, or professional development
- Long hours
- Lack of recognition
- Staff see no future in early childhood education

This discouraging picture of the child care sector has not led to any significant changes to public policy. Much like their federal counterparts, provincial government policy makers have failed to act. Child care advocates and researchers continue to make governments aware of the issues, but the political will to seriously address the issues has been lacking. Child care is almost invisible as a topic of public discussion.

⁶ See http://www.oecd.org/document/63/0,3746,en_2649_39263231_37416703_1_1_1_1.00.html

⁷ See <http://www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/EarlyChildhood/1-staffing%20survey.pdf>.

The requirements for becoming a licensed ECE in British Columbia are less demanding than in most other Canadian jurisdictions. Applicants need only complete a Basic training program from an approved training institution.⁸ A Basic certificate can be completed in one academic year of full-time study.

First Nations ECD Staffing and Training Issues

Personnel training problems were first identified in 2003 at the Aboriginal Leadership Forum on ECD convened by the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society. Training issues were also the focus of a follow-up meeting in 2004 when delegates from throughout British Columbia met to discuss ways of better serving Aboriginal children and their families. The delegates identified concerns and made thoughtful recommendations intended to inform policy and program development. These foundational meetings produced two *Many Voices, Common Cause* reports.⁹

One of the concerns identified in 2003 was the lack of trained Aboriginal practitioners. Smaller, remote communities were having difficulty attracting qualified people and in larger communities almost all qualified early childhood development practitioners came from outside and lacked understandings of cultural and community protocols.

Participants in the 2004 planning session advocated that post-secondary institutions develop training programs in partnership with Aboriginal communities to reflect their unique traditions, customs, languages, and other local characteristics. They called on the institutions to develop holistic programs, include Aboriginal values, hire more

⁸ See <http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/ece/training.htm>.

⁹ See: http://www.acc-society.bc.ca/files_new/pdf_documents/PuttingChildrenFirst.pdf and http://www.acc-society.bc.ca/files_new/pdf_documents/Addressing%20Training%20Needs%202004.pdf.

Aboriginal instructors, and involve Elders in the instruction. Delegates recommended the creation of an Aboriginal ECD training consortium, Aboriginal ECD advisory councils in post-secondary institutions, and sharing of curriculum resources among institutions.

The *Many Voices, Common Cause* reports were not critical of the products being offered by the training institutions. The reports shared an underlying assumption that the institutions have programs that would be of use to First Nations communities and the primary challenge was seen as finding ways of gaining easier access to those programs, either closer to home or with more support systems in place for students who are able to go to the institutions.

The *Many Voices, Common Cause* reports saw distance education as a possible solution to the identified ECD training needs. Today, the list of “approved” training institutions includes six distance education programs, three of which offer “an Aboriginal perspective.” The present project will investigate how well these distance education programs are serving First Nations learners who want ECE training. It will also seek to clarify whether there are any reported differences in the work readiness of students who acquire their credentials on-line and students who acquire their credentials in face-to-face classes.

Implementing the solutions advocated in the *Many Voices, Common Cause* reports would have required significant investments and commitment on the part of all stakeholders. Developing and delivering locally-appropriate training programs are costly undertakings. To date, significant financial investments have not been made by either the federal or provincial governments and the overall approach to training has been ad hoc and piecemeal. The University of Victoria’s First Nations Partnership Program, with

its track record of success, has been dormant for many years. Accessing culturally-appropriate ECD training remains a challenge for First Nations learners.

The spotlight returned to human resources issues in September, 2008 when a day of dialogue was held to plan an Aboriginal ECD strategic framework. The decision was made at that meeting to develop two frameworks: one for children living on-reserve and another one for children living off-reserve.

In 2009, the first edition of *The BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework* was published. The *ECD Framework* represents a milestone. For the first time, BC First Nations-specific ECD issues were addressed collaboratively on a province-wide basis. Community consultations held in 2009 and 2010 found widespread consensus for the *Framework's* vision, guiding principles, and goals. The goals contained in the *Framework* focus on ECD programs, services, and supports. Achieving these goals, necessitates recruiting, training, and retaining personnel to deliver the desired programs, services, and supports. Many of the strategies for reaching the goals address recruitment, training, and retention issues.

The following strategies to reach Goal 2, “Enhanced quality of ECD programs, services and supports” relate to recruitment, training, and retention of personnel:

For First Nations Communities:

- Set realistic targets for increasing the number of qualified early childhood educators
- Identify ECD training and professional development needs
- Identify specific student supports for potential students

- Develop recruitment and retention plans for ECD practitioners
- Identify First Nations specific practice performance measures

For First Nations Leadership:

- Lobby for ECD First Nations specific education and training

For Provincial and Regional Organizations and Agencies:

- Explore and identify pros and cons of ECD training delivery options
- Work with communities to ensure student supports ... are available to potential students
- Collaborate with communities to develop recruitment and retention plans for ECD practitioners and staff
- Conduct research on indicators of quality
- Advocate for equitable funding to ensure quality ECD programs and services

The following strategies to reach Goal 3, “Improved integration and collaboration at all levels of a First Nations ECD system” relate to recruitment, training, and retention of personnel:

For First Nations Communities:

- Establish relationships with ECD education and training programs to ensure availability and accessibility
- Establish linkages between ECD programs and services and the formal education system’s K-12 Enhancement Agreements

For Provincial and Regional Organizations and Agencies:

- Facilitate relationships between First Nations communities and community colleges, universities, and other training institutions

- Advocate for the inclusion of First Nations cultural and linguistic content into ECD programs and course curricula

Acknowledging the need to have First Nations-specific ECD training available as a means of enhancing the quality of ECD programs, the *Framework* assumes the training currently being offered by the existing institutions is adequate enough to fulfill the needs of a new generation of First Nations post-secondary students. It does not advocate that First Nations assume control of the content and manage the delivery of training programs in the immediate future. Rather it seeks to build relationships between First Nations communities and the training institutions as well as the addition of First Nations cultural and linguistic content to the curricula.

Addressing First Nations Training Issues

A community survey conducted in 2009-2010 to elicit responses to the 2009 edition of *The First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework* found human resources to be the third most significant challenge for communities seeking to create or deliver ECD services. Human resources issues were a major challenge for 61% of the respondents. Funding levels for ECD services ranked first and funding proposal processes ranked second among the challenges communities face in creating or delivering ECD services.

The inadequate funding of ECD programs for First Nations children and their families compounds human resources challenges. Underfunded programs are unable to pay employees a living wage or provide good benefits, which leads to difficulties recruiting and keeping staff. Underfunded programs are unable to offer financial incentives to encourage employees to pursue post-basic certificates or other additional training that could increase their job satisfaction and reduce turnover rates. Action plans to address

the human resource issues in First Nations ECD programs will necessarily involve addressing all three problems: recruitment, training, and retention of qualified personnel.

In addition to the problems identified by Child Care Connections, CCHRSC, and First Call, there are issues unique to staffing First Nations ECD programs. First Nations ECD personnel need specific knowledge and skills and aptitudes in order to deliver high quality, culturally-appropriate services. The BCACCS *Quality Statement on Aboriginal Child Care* and the “Guiding Principles for Quality First Nations ECD Programs & Services” in the *Framework* reflect a vision of excellence. In order to deliver services that reflect First Nations visions of quality, the First Nations ECD workforce requires training that differs from the programs presently available in most of the training institutions “approved” by the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).¹⁰ While some of the approved institutions offer programs that include “an Aboriginal perspective,” there is considerable variation in the adjustments made to the programs to reflect “an Aboriginal perspective.” It is unclear what criteria must be met by training institutions in order to be identified as offering “an Aboriginal perspective.” The available training options do not prepare students to deliver quality programs consistent with First Nations definitions of quality.

There are significant differences in the training offered by the approved training institutions. Inclusion on the list of approved training institutions is not equivalent to meeting standards such as those used by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Approval by MCFD is not a guarantee or indicator of quality. Instructors vary in their credentials, experience, teaching skills, knowledge of the ECD research base, mentoring abilities, and effectiveness working with First

¹⁰ The list of “approved” institutions is available at http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/ece/pdfs/training_institutes.pdf.

Nations adult learners. The curricula they deliver vary as well. Selecting a training program is a matter of “buyer beware”. Potential students, interested in ECD careers, do not have access to published rankings of training facilities such as those available to students interested in some other sectors.

The training marketplace has not filled the niche of meeting the training needs of First Nations students who seek accredited, locally-appropriate courses that prepare them to deliver high quality ECD programs, using the definitions of quality cited above.

First Nations and groups that advocate on behalf of First Nations children and their families may conclude that policy changes to address the human resources issues identified above are improbable in the near future. Public policy-makers have been aware of the problems for years yet accessing culturally-appropriate ECD training remains a challenge for First Nations learners. Assuming that a quick change of direction on the part of policy-makers is unlikely, given current economic conditions, it is timely for First Nations to consider alternatives.

In the interim, does it make sense to continue to advocate stronger relationships with the approved ECE training institutions in order to encourage them to modify their programs to meet First Nations training needs? A case can be made for continuing to encourage and support community members to access the approved programs, either on-campus or off-campus. For example:

- The programs, despite their imperfections, provide students with useful knowledge and skills.
- They offer the route to a BC license to practice as an Early Childhood Educator or as an ECE Assistant.

- These qualifications enable individuals to work in child care facilities licensed by the province under the *Community Care and Assisted Living Act*. While on-reserve child care programs have the option of not being licensed, there are some financial benefits associated with obtaining a license. Eligible parents using licensed centres can apply for the child care subsidy and licensed centres can apply for operating funds and capital funds when they are available.
- Diplomas and certificates from the approved institutions are recognized qualifications that enable graduates to pursue employment opportunities wherever they wish to work.

Perhaps it is worth considering whether it would be preferable to initiate a different strategy rather than continuing to advocate easier access and stronger support systems or modifications to existing programs. A new approach would need to take into account the low number of First Nations administrators and faculty who could be advocates and champions for meaningful change.

In an effort to understand the current situation, the research component of this project will attempt to find answers to the following questions:

- Does the content of approved ECE training programs fit with the needs, priorities, and vision of quality of First Nations? If not, how might training institutions better prepare students for the work they will do?
- Do the admission requirements of approved ECE training programs present unnecessary barriers to First Nations students?

- Existing training is expensive but the quality of the products being purchased is uncertain. Should there be a mechanism in place to independently assess the available programs and report on their quality?
- How can delivery models of approved ECE training programs be improved to better meet the needs of First Nations students? What supports would enable students to be successful?
- Does the training of ECD personnel reflect First Nations world views effectively? If not, what changes are needed to incorporate First Nations world views?
- Is the provincial *Child Care Licensing Regulation* regime, involving licensing officers inspecting on-reserve facilities, consistent with the constitutional rights of First Nations?
- At this time, is it realistic to plan to transition away from the provincial systems for training and registering ECEs and licensing facilities and begin the process of establishing First Nations control?
- Should a First Nations organization develop a course entitled “Introduction to First Nations ECD” and make it available for delivery by provincially “approved” training institutions?

Canada-wide ECD Recruitment Issues

The CCHRSC’s project *Supporting Employers in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)*¹¹ conducted research that focused on documenting human resources needs of employers, including administrators, executive directors, managers, supervisors, and boards of directors of child care programs. This 2009 report provides an overview of recruitment challenges across Canada. At that time, 28.4% of respondents indicated

¹¹ The executive summary is available at <http://www.ccsc-cssge.ca/uploads/SE%20EXECUTIVE%20SUMMARY%20ENGLISH%20FINAL.pdf>.

that recruitment of qualified staff was the greatest human resource challenge they faced as employers. The most common reason for recruiting challenges was low wages, cited by 47.6% of the respondents. Lack of qualified staff was cited by 34.6% of the respondents. It is noteworthy that 76.8% of the respondents stated that they or their management teams would benefit from or needed training or professional development related to human resources management. When asked what types of HR management would be of most benefit they indicated the following would be of most interest:

- Training in conflict management (79%)
- Leadership, mentoring, or coaching (76.3%)
- Team building (74.7%)
- Reviewing staff performance (74.2%)

The need for human resources expertise, knowledge, and capacity is a characteristic of Canadian ECD programs. Individuals are commonly promoted to managerial positions because of their skills as ECEs. Lacking access to professional development or formal training in human resources management, they learn on the job or through trial and error. The employers in the ECD sector are most often small organizations with volunteer boards of directors and the board members also lack HR training and skills, so they are unable to support the program managers.

The *Supporting Employers in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)* research found employers were concerned about the skills of ECE graduates. The respondents noted that close to 40% of job applicants lacked the essential skills to do the day-to-day work expected of ECEs. This is an indication that the existing pre-service programs are not a good fit with the needs of the sector.

The *Supporting Employers in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)* authors identified nine human resources areas that pose challenges for Canada's ECEC sector:

- Need for sustainable infrastructure
- Internal human resource capacity
- Human resource leadership
- Respect for the ECE profession
- Recruitment of qualified staff
- Retention of qualified staff
- Training
- Professional development
- Compensation

The authors recognized that the sector's human resources challenges are interrelated and complex and require multiple stakeholder groups to work together on solutions. The report includes recommendations to address each of the nine challenges.

BC ECD Recruitment Issues

The Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC), the professional association of British Columbia ECEs, is campaigning for a wage increase to \$20 per hour for entry level early childhood educators. The ECEBC campaign explains the need for better wages this way:

The Early Childhood field is in crisis in BC – many Early Childhood Educators are leaving the field and it is difficult to recruit new people. Research shows and your voices tell us that this is occurring because of wages/benefits that are too low to make a living wage. The Early Childhood Educators of BC believes that the

benchmark of \$20 an hour is a realistic entry level wage for early childhood educators.¹²

In 2008, ECEBC surveyed ECEs throughout the province.¹³ Over 88% of the 827 respondents held licenses to practice in British Columbia. Over 74% of the respondents had been working in the field for longer than 6 years. In spite of their qualifications and experience, over 77% were earning less than \$19 an hour, with the largest group, over 35% of respondents, earning between \$13 and \$15 an hour. The survey also found that over 54% of the respondents receive no group benefits. Only one third receive Medical Services Plan coverage and fewer than half have the option of receiving extended health or dental benefits. Uncompetitive wages and lack of benefits make recruitment of personnel difficult in a province with a high cost of living.

Recruitment is a challenge for both employers and training programs. Employers of ECEs report their difficulties attracting personnel to available jobs. The training institutions are also thought to be having difficulty attracting students to their programs. This trend is undocumented, but anecdotal reports suggest that the future of some existing programs is uncertain. Students are becoming reluctant to invest the time and money required to earn qualifications that provide entry into careers where wages and morale are low and working conditions are difficult. Graduates who take out student loans to finance their ECE training have problems surviving on their earnings while repaying their loans. While many post-secondary credentials lead to higher-income careers, in the case of ECE, this is not so. Many jobs that require less formal education pay more and provide better benefits and working conditions.

¹² See <http://www.ecebc.ca/fairwage/index.html>

¹³ See http://www.ecebc.ca/resources/pdf/ecebc_survey_mar09.pdf.

The 2009 CCHRSC study *Recruitment and Retention Challenges and Strategies Understanding and Addressing Workforce Shortages in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Project*¹⁴ reported “The ECEC sector is remarkably good at recruiting people” and “...the net inflows into the sector are well above the average for all occupations (p. 36).” The present project will investigate whether those observations are true for British Columbia First Nations programs in 2012.

First Nations ECD Recruitment Issues

The document “Initial Response to Ministry of Education Early Learning Framework,” prepared by BCACCS in 2007, stated “All communities are experiencing difficulties in recruitment and retention of high quality personnel because the sector simply is not highly valued – as evidenced by the compensation levels.” There are anecdotal reports that recruitment remains difficult, but no firm data has been collected on a province-wide basis. Through an on-line survey and key informant interviews, this project will identify some of the recruitment difficulties in First Nations ECD programs.

Canada-wide ECD Retention Issues

Accessing the training required by the ECD workforce is only one of the essential pieces of a strong foundation for service delivery. On its own, a trained ECD workforce is not sufficient to establish and maintain services for children and their families. Nationally, there is a problem retaining people in the sector. In 2006, over 40% of the people with ECE qualifications were employed elsewhere.¹⁵ The top three reasons for leaving the sector are:

- Lack of pay and promotion opportunities

¹⁴ See <http://www.ccscc-cssge.ca/uploads/WFS%20Recruitment-%20FINAL.pdf>.

¹⁵ “Trained ECE shortage in Canada worsening, study says” *Child Care Human Resources Sector Council Bulletin* (Spring, 2009)

- Lack of respect for ECE and child care
- Poor working conditions

The 2009 CCHRSC publication *Recruitment and Retention Challenges and Strategies: Understanding and Addressing Workforce Shortages in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Project* cited above reported a shortage of trained ECEs throughout Canada. The researchers concluded that the shortages are primarily due to the sector's problems retaining trained ECE workers. They recommended that "the primary focus should be on stemming the outflow of employees, particularly trained employees (p.36)." The report discusses factors that affect employee quit rates: financial benefits and non-financial benefits such as improved job satisfaction.

To improve job satisfaction, the CCHRSC report suggests employers address retention difficulties by addressing issues that cause reduced job satisfaction such as:

- Lack of collegiality among co-workers
- Insufficient supervisor support
- Unfair decision-making structures
- Lack of professional growth opportunities
- Lack of goal consensus
- Poor internal communication practices
- Poor working conditions
- Poor human resource management practices

The many factors that make retention difficult for ECD programs are compounded by the practice of licensing officials granting educational exemptions. The hiring of untrained personnel harms the quality of services, which negatively impacts the working

conditions of their co-workers, thereby increasing retention problems among trained staff. The report recommends that policy-makers limit exemptions because they have the effect of making workforce shortages among trained ECEs worse. In British Columbia, the term “variance” is used to describe exemptions from provincial licensing requirements. This project will obtain some information on the extent to which First Nations ECD programs are operating with variances.

BC ECD Retention Issues

The First Call survey¹⁶ confirmed that staff retention is a serious problem in British Columbia. Low wages and difficult working conditions combine to discourage trained ECEs from staying in the sector. Many qualified people, whose first choice is to work with young children, leave to work in other jobs simply because they cannot earn a living wage in the careers for which they trained. This unfortunate situation is the result of poor public policies.

The difficulties associated with retaining personnel stem from the underfunding of ECD. While federal and provincial governments do support ECD in a variety of ways, that support is far less than what is required to make high quality, professionally staffed, professionally administered, affordable programs available to all children. For decades, advocates have been calling for fundamental changes. For most of that time, their efforts have been ineffective. There have been brief periods when changes seemed to be imminent, but policy-makers changed and optimism quickly faded.

¹⁶ See <http://www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/EarlyChildhood/1-staffing%20survey.pdf>.

There are a few high-income neighbourhoods in British Columbia in which high quality child care services can operate successfully using the present user-pay model.

However, for the vast majority, services that rely on parent fees are struggling to stay afloat and do so by paying staff poorly and by devoting a great deal of time and energy to fund-raising.

The delivery of ECE, stressed at the best of times, has been further destabilized as an unintended consequence of the Ministry of Education's introduction of StrongStart. StrongStart programs have been beneficial for the families able to use them, but they have recruited early childhood educators away from lower paying, less well resourced programs, creating staffing challenges for those facilities. The move to full-school-day kindergarten within the school system has impacted the bottom-line of centres and family child care providers who were accustomed to caring for five-year-olds for longer periods of time each day. The availability of these employment opportunities is good for the early childhood educators who get these better-paying jobs, but these policy changes have made staff retention even more difficult for other components of the ECD sector.

In 2011, the Early Childhood Educators of BC and the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC jointly published a second edition of the *Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning*.¹⁷ The *Community Plan* describes child care services in British Columbia as having “high levels of operational fragility (p. 9).” Acknowledging that many qualified ECEs no longer work in the field, the *Community Plan* advocates a provincial strategy for “welcoming ECEs who have left the field back into the new system (p. 19).”

¹⁷ See http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/plan/Community_Plan_ECL.pdf.

First Nations ECD Retention Issues

Anecdotal reports and informal observations of high turnover rates among ECEs working in BC Aboriginal settings led BCACCS to conduct an exploratory survey in 2008. The survey findings are summarized in an unpublished report.¹⁸ A total of 101 ECEs from throughout the province completed the survey. Fewer than half thought they would still be at the same job in 5 years. Of the 80 respondents who stated their ages, only 6 were 55 or older, so the 52% who expected they would not be in the same jobs were not just mature workers looking forward to retirement.

The survey findings explain why retention is such a serious problem:

- Only 41% of respondents thought their wages were fair.
- 43% reported feeling stressed either frequently or all the time at work.
- 50% thought their communities valued them highly or very highly.
- 36% wanted more professional development.

The comments of the respondents are revealing as well. They identified workplace issues such as:

- Being overworked and having insufficient breaks
- Challenges associated with caring for children with special needs
- Difficulty finding substitutes
- Understaffing
- Stresses associated with turnover, recruitment, and orientation of new staff
- Challenges associated with working with high risk families

¹⁸ *Ensuring Quality Child Care: A Background Paper for a Strategy to Develop and Sustain the Aboriginal Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce in BC*, June 2009 DRAFT

- Colleagues who are not ECE trained

Addressing First Nations ECD Retention Issues

Nationally, the high rates of turnover in the sector of ECD are explained by the low wages and poor working conditions, poor employee benefits, burnout and stress, and a number of other factors. These factors, along with others, explain retention issues in BC First Nations programs. While many people simply leave, it is probable that some remain in their jobs because they see no better alternatives. Dissatisfied personnel who have lost their enthusiasm for their jobs and no longer enjoy their work are unlikely to be effective in occupations that require so much energy and giving of oneself. These are jobs in which it is impossible to coast or just go through the motions and still deliver quality services to children and their families.

The *Session Notes*¹⁹ recorded at the 2004 strategic planning session include suggestions from the delegates that, if implemented, could address morale and retention problems. The recommendations include:

- Address self-health and wellness for ECD personnel.
- Create opportunities for networking with other ECD personnel through regular meetings, workshops, and professional development sessions.
- Let ECD personnel know they are valued and respected.
- Raise wages and improve benefits.
- Provide personnel with pre-service and in-service training that prepares them adequately for the demands of their jobs.

This project will seek to determine what type of retention strategies are being implemented by First Nations.

¹⁹ See http://www.acc-society.bc.ca/files_new/documents/ManyVoicesCommonCausell.pdf.

Next Steps

This project will utilize an on-line survey, interviews with key informants and focus group discussions elicit opinions and suggestions related to the recruitment, training, and retention of the First Nations ECD workforce. It will use the data gathered to propose strategies and recommend policy changes to support the goal of developing the human resources needed to provide all BC First Nations children and families with high-quality ECD services.