

# Walking Together in Reconciliation

Since 2016, the AECEO Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation has been engaging in important discussions about early childhood education and reconciliation. While we consider the question “**what can leaders and educators in the ECE sector do to respond to the TRC Calls to Action?**” We want to remind you that reconciliation is the responsibility of *all Canadians*. We must walk together in response to the TRC Calls for Action.

All educators and systems serving Indigenous children have been called on to ethically, critically, and thoughtfully engage with reconciliation practices as defined by Indigenous communities. Finding and joining collaboration is a crucial first step but creating space for Indigenous leadership and self-determination in the early childhood sector is the key to walking together in reconciliation.

The AECEO Guiding Committee hopes to publish content in every issue of the eceLINK publication. For this issue, we pose a series of questions and our hope is that all AECEO members and readers of the eceLINK will reflect on these questions individually and together with children, families and colleagues. Members of the Guiding Committee have contributed their own reflections.

**What can leaders and educators in the ECE sector do to respond to the TRC Calls to Action?** Where are the opportunities to share knowledge and learn? Where are the opportunities to engage in dialogue with Indigenous Peoples? Where can we learn about Indigenous protocols? How do we create culturally safe spaces and develop cultural competence? How do we make space for Indigenous leadership in our organization and in the sector?

## **AECEO Truth and Reconciliation Guiding Committee responses:**

Our Elders tell us our children are our future.

Long ago, a young person heard me say that. She stated it scared her because the adults are not showing us the ‘way’. It took me a while to get what she meant.

My Anishinabe name is Imprint Hanging Standing Women, my doodem is Red Sucker, Oji/Cree woman and I was raised in Sandy Lake, ON. I am a mother and a grandmother. Today, I know who I am.

For 11 years, I’ve been blessed to facilitate youth healing circles. I share my lived experiences, identity and my healing stories with the youth (11 to 20 years ages)

I have been on my healing journey for a long time, living my life today, getting to know who (Brenda) Imprint Hanging Standing woman is and my purpose on earth. You see, I share this with the youth and adults—my life story—hurtful past experiences and the healing journey experiences. Utilizing the Medicine Wheel teachings aided me to reconnect to my identity and our knowledge. We as adults need to continue to heal from the past—in all areas of our life—everything that we got separated from, we took the beliefs, values and practices that are not of our own. Today, we have our Indigenous knowledge, values, beliefs, practices, teachings, medicines, and our way of life. We did not lose them (never have) for they are very much alive within our hearts and in the hearts of our Elders and babies. Through our healing, we are finding our voices, reconnecting with the earth-land, returning to our heart and re-remembering who we are and where we came from, we have our tradi-

tional knowledge and our way of life to teach our children and to do so in a safe place. To pass on and share our stories of the past, our healing journey utilizing the guidance that was left behind by our ancestors and our Elders.

We need Indigenous instructors to share and teach our traditional knowledge, traditions, values, customs, practices, identity, culture, our way of life, teachings, science, math, language, and everything that is in the education system but teaching it all from our way of understanding, our way of seeing the world, our knowledge about the land, spirituality and stories. We need the grandparents to be part of educating our children from the start to completion. We as Indigenous people are responsible to respond to the TRC calls to action but invite non-Indigenous people to 'the part of the 'work'. We are on the healing journey, yes, but we need the other races to join us in healing so we can leave a path of respect, love, wisdom, bravery, honesty, humility and the truth for ALL CHILDREN. Mee-gwetch. To All My Relations.

*~Elder Brenda Mason, Thunder Bay*

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I think responsibility for early childhood education in Canada is to create spaces where truths can be shared. It is so important that we are building relationships and ally ships that will inform and guide our actions. We must create opportunities and space for truths to be told and for non-Indigenous ECEs and childcare workers to think with, and respond to, these truths. It will take time, and thought, and action – but most importantly, I think, our openness and collaboration as we build the relationships that will sustain our work and commitment to truth and reconciliation.

*~Alana Powell, Ottawa*

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I wouldn't call it 'new responsibilities'. ECE's, educators and anyone who works with children have the responsibility to bring out the gifts ALL children have. Making sure all children's voices are being heard. Be that person. If every educator was 'that person'; close your eyes and imagine those children as adults...proud of their gifts....their gifts shining...Adults LISTENING, Adults COOPERATING, Adults COLLABORATING!!! ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES!!! Be that person...Miigwech.

*~Michelle Taylor-Leonhardi, Curve Lake First Nation*

Early Childhood Education in Canada must be informed on the long-term effects of intergenerational and historical trauma. Indigenous families with young children are living these experiences today and require professionals in the field to understand the long-term practice and impact of genocidal policy on Indigenous families. As an Indigenous Registered Early Childhood Educator, I firmly believe, Indigenous ways of knowing is the pathway for healing. Indigenous peoples, in remembering our ways of knowing and being "ceremony" will lead us in pathways of restoring our hope in holistic learning. We must engage with Earth Mother and all she has to naturally offer our children and families. Moreover, the early childhood community must be brave enough to create the space to have Indigenous leaders share their knowledge and inform the learning community on Indigenous ways of being in our everyday practice. A:ho! Oda Nagabadish.

*~Faith Hale*

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Early Childhood Education in Canada must provide every Indigenous community with equitable funding for programs and services across Canada by allocating funds based on the true and full cost of delivery (e.g., provide funding for a program and the infrastructure needed to support it). Early Childhood Educators and child care workers must practice good allyship by disrupting oppressive spaces through education, relationship building and dialogue (Deer, et al., 2019). ECEs can engage children, families and colleagues in actions and projects that support national and local Indigenous campaigns for justice (Deer, et al., 2019). Every ECE must recognize that "not having Indigenous children/families in your program" does not absolve an individual of the responsibility to learn about the history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and to share this learning within the children, families and colleagues/staff involved in the program.

*~Lyndsay Macdonald, Toronto*

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Non-Indigenous early childhood educators have a responsibility to listen with great care to the truths about the past for Indigenous peoples. They must question what these truths mean for the 'truths' of non-Indigenous people. They need to

listen respectfully to what Indigenous peoples want for their future. Non-Indigenous early childhood educators must-see and honour the strengths, knowledges and resiliency of Indigenous peoples. They must act in ways that reflect a genuine commitment to collaboration and reconciliation.

~Rachel Langford, Toronto

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A safe place for connections and the ability to open up and feeling no judgement. Value language through land-based and through play activities. Honouring the child's self-identity as a way to express themselves.

~Michaela Bottle, Mishkeegogamang, First Nation

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To find a sense of belonging.

~Jennifer Meekis, Sandy Lake First Nation

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Showing gratitude and coming together recognizing a different kind of structure, not different kinds of people.

~Chanelle Skunk, Mishkeegogamang, First Nation

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Recognition of who they really are and their homelands.

~Pauline Nothing, Bearskin Lake, First Nation

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To have more educators who are culturally sensitive and have some understanding of the Indigenous history, In Ontario, we have teachers that come teach in our community and are unaware of our history.

~Priscilla King, Kingfisher Lake, First Nation

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For every child to learn about the Indigenous culture and have resources available for all teachers and students.

~ Tracy Dore, Ginoogaming, First Nation

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To support truth and reconciliation in the early years I believe we need to look at the interconnected relationships of our ex-

periences and perspectives as the teachings to build relationships with ourselves and others. As the individual observes and reflects on the beauty of relationships and interconnections with all living beings, one can conclude with our own inner thoughts to expand and deepen all relationships that support and uplift Indigenous children.

~Lori Huston, Thunder Bay

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Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities cannot begin without first reconciling with the land. Regardless of where our early childhood environments are situated, they exist in relation to land and land knowledge. Often, these relations are strained or disregarded as being meaningful in our reconciliation processes. For leaders and educators in the ECE sector, we can work together to bring about new relations to land in which we seek to uncover the Indigenous presences, and center those knowledges in our education systems. Not only does this bring about dialogue with Indigenous peoples who hold the knowledge of a place, but it also offers new conceptions of what it means to reside on Indigenous territory. Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike have much to learn from land that can hold us to a new standard of ethical responsibility to one another, our communities, and our planet. Using land-based knowledge and memory to inform our practice is a way we can move forward in walking a better path towards collaborative and generative futures.

~Nicole Ineese-Nash, a member of Constance Lake First Nation residing in Toronto

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#### Reference:

Deer, Boldo, Fast, Sioui, Richardson, Raye, Puskas, Clark, Laine & Reid, (2019). *Indigenous Ally Toolkit*. Montreal Indigenous Community Network.