

PROFESSIONAL PAY AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL

Mobilizing the early childhood workforce in the movement for decent work

This year the AECEO's Professional Pay for Professional Work campaign is ramping up to the next level.

With support from the Atkinson Foundation's Decent Work Fund, and the assistance of our partners, the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, we have embarked on a new project that will accelerate the campaign and amplify the voices and participation of early childhood educators and allies in the movement for professional pay and decent work.

As the decent work movement gains momentum in Ontario and around the world, it is important that Ontario's early childhood workforce (EC workforce) becomes part of this broader movement for social and economic justice, fair work and compensation. There are over 50,000 ECEs registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators and that number is growing. Registered ECEs also work with thousands of other staff and professionals that make up the broader EC workforce. We are a vibrant, diverse and resilient group of dedicated professionals working in numerous programs that support and sustain families and communities. There is strength in the breadth and variety of the EC workforce's roles and work settings and our project aims to develop a shared understanding of decent work and to unite and empower our collective voices to call for change.

Decent work for the EC workforce is a long overdue goal. As an almost entirely female workforce performing a critical social service by educating and caring for young children and supporting families, decent work for early childhood educators means a better society for us all. The work being done in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and family resource programs (FRP) has the potential to fundamentally benefit our society by promoting the healthy development of children and their families. But this is only possible if we have a healthy and supported workforce to implement the high quality programs and services that Ontario's families need.

Although there has been increasing acknowledgement and expectations of the EC workforce's specialized skills and knowledge; wages and working conditions continue to be highly problematic. Our research shows that wages in the regulated child care sector have actually dropped and there was little to no improvement in other crucial elements of decent work such as access to sick leave and pensions. Anecdotally, we also know that precarious work arrangements in the ECEC/FRP sector are having a negative effect on the workforce with the increase of part-time work and split-shifts. The recent wage grant initiative by the Ministry of Education to address wages for some members of the EC workforce has not addressed the

systemic issues impacting wages in the sector and has increased some of the inequities within the workforce by excluding early childhood educators who work outside of licenced child care programs.

The current situation is not sustainable. Systemic low compensation results in a large proportion of the EC workforce experiencing their own poverty, exacerbated by workplace stressors, which can limit their

ability to support the children and families that they care for. This reality also contributes to high turnover in ECEC/FRP services, which impedes quality and hinders the benefits of these programs for everyone.

Despite these ongoing challenges there are a number of reasons why this is an opportune time for the EC workforce to come together and push for systemic solutions and policies to address decent work.

First, we have started to gain momentum through the Professional Pay for Professional Work campaign; we've received tremendous encouragement from our members and the broader early childhood community.

Our vision of decent work includes: decent wages; full-time, stable jobs; health benefits and pension coverage no matter where you work in the sector; increased access to collective bargaining and union membership; and working conditions that allow staff to provide high quality programs, including safe and healthy facilities, paid preparation time, lunch breaks and access to on-going training and professional learning opportunities.

The second reason this is the right time for this effort is that there are a number of opportunities on the horizon in which the EC workforce can push for government action on decent work. Talks about a national child care strategy between the provinces and the federal government are expected to start this year. The EC workforce is key to making that program a reality and we need to be ready to identify decent work and professional pay as a non-negotiable consideration in the coming provincial and national conversations. Also, Ontario is working to develop a strategy to close the gender wage gap. As a female dominated workforce with a long history of pay inequity, it is essential that the EC workforce participates in this initiative to leverage the power of pay equity legislation to access compensation that reflects the value of their training, skills and work.

Decent work for all Registered ECEs and the broader EC workforce must include fair compensation, supportive work environments, a strong professional community, public recognition, and appropriate representation and power in the process of change in the sector. Our vision of decent work includes: decent wages; full-time, stable jobs; health benefits and pension coverage no matter where you work in the sector; increased access to collective bargaining and union membership; and working conditions that allow staff to provide high quality programs, including safe and healthy facilities, paid preparation time, lunch breaks and access to on-going training and professional learning opportunities.

Through a series of mobilization forums and other initiatives across the province, we will inspire the EC workforce to come together, deepen their connections and articulate their needs and understanding of decent work. These forums will build on the momentum of the Professional Pay for Professional Work campaign to integrate a broader understanding of decent work and the decent work movement, increase dialogue and engagement, identify and nurture leaders within the workforce, and document a collective vision and strategy for decent work for all.

We expect that this project will strengthen the collective voice of the EC workforce and mobilize leaders in the call for decent work. The EC workforce will learn about the decent work movement and the benefits of participating in it for themselves and their communities. This engagement will build our networks and alliances for future collaboration and advocacy work. We also hope to learn as much as possible about decent work from the unique perspective of the EC workforce and what is needed to bring its members together on an ongoing basis.

This is a valuable opportunity for ECEs to have a visible presence in the movement for decent work and our intention is to translate that leadership into the development of a comprehensive workforce strategy and implementing real policy change at the provincial and federal level.

What will the project look like?

Eight community mobilization forums will take place across Ontario that will bring ECEs and allies together to share knowledge and contribute toward shaping policy recommendations and a comprehensive workforce strategy that will achieve professional pay for professional work. The forums will be free to attend and will provide resources and professional learning that will assist participants to take on leadership roles within the movement for decent work and professional pay. A planning session where participants and facilitators work together and strategize to outline our next steps will be included.

A workshop at the [13th Annual Summer Institute on Early Childhood Development](#) on June 3 in Toronto will also be offered and a culminating event at our provincial conference Sept 16/17 in Ottawa will provide an opportunity to present on the knowledge and information gained through the mobilization forums, make further connections, continue the conversation with conference participants, and invite members of the EC workforce to lead discussions on how to strategically use the connections and information we have gathered to advocate for decent work for the EC workforce and beyond.

The insights and knowledge gained through this project will be used to create a culminating document, *Decent work from the perspective of the early childhood workforce*, and a comprehensive workforce strategy that can be used as a public education and advocacy resource to continue to advocate for decent work for everyone involved in educating and caring for young children. We expect that these will be important tools in the coming years to inform both provincial and national policy and program planning for the ECEC sector.

Who are our partners?

The Atkinson Decent Work Fund is a grants program that takes aim at growing income and wealth inequality in Ontario. It's an investment in changing this reality. It's also a sign of confidence in the people who are demonstrating that a just society and inclusive economy are possible.

The OCBC is Ontario's central advocacy group for a universal, affordable, high quality, public and non-profit system of early childhood education and care. The OCBC is a member organization comprised of child care centres, national and provincial groups and individuals from all across Ontario.

The Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development is a research centre that promotes research on child development, and the development of early learning policy and practice that serve young children and their families. It is committed to using the best available evidence to inform public discourse, public policy and the professional learning of those who work with young children.

PROFESSIONAL PAY for PROFESSIONAL WORK

Continuing the Movement for the ECE Workforce - professional pay event

AECEO members, partners and community stakeholders gathered for the Professional Pay for Professional Work event, *Continuing the Movement for the ECE workforce*, at Conestoga College on November 28, 2015. This event was a follow up to a previous panel, Professional pay for ECEs: How do we get there?, that took place at Conestoga in March 2015. The event was organized in partnership with AECEO members from Waterloo/Kitchener and Guelph/Wellington and the Early Childhood Professional Resource Centre at Conestoga College.

Panel presentations explored professional pay for professional work from a number of perspectives. Panelists included researchers, advocates, practitioners and regional children's services government staff. The panel was moderated by Goranka Vukelich, Chair of Community Services at Conestoga College and long time AECEO board member.

Panelists Martha Friendly and Shellie Bird shared high level analysis about the systemic elements that influence the experiences of the child care workforce. Martha identified some of the key policy questions that need to be considered for the workforce, including the provision of child care services through a market and the impact of being a female dominated workforce.

Shellie spoke about three interconnected elements that have been identified as essential for supporting the child care workforce – advocacy, professionalization and unionization. Challenges and opportunities within and across the three items were explored by Shellie.

Nancy Dickieson and Laura Coulman presented data on wages in the licensed childcare sector. Nancy Dickieson presented annual data collect by the Region of Waterloo. Her presentation

highlighted the important information obtained through local level data to inform policy and advocacy in support of the child care workforce.

Laura shared data from the 2013 *You bet we still care!* national survey, with an analysis of data from Ontario and the Guelph/Wellington area in particular. Laura's analysis challenged the group to think about the true cost of high quality child care when the child care workforce is paid professional wages.

Lorna Reid brought a variety of perspectives from her career and her many positions in the licensed child care sector. From her current position as Director of the lab school at University of Guelph Child Care and Learning Centre, Lorna highlighted the role and challenges for supervisors and directors in achieving professional pay and working conditions for child care staff.

Lastly, Shani Halfon closed the panel with a summary of the AECEO's profession pay campaign and an overview of the discussion paper on regional wage scales for the regulated child care sector. Shani highlighted the feedback that the AECEO has heard and next steps for the discussion and the broader campaign.

The panel presentation was video recorded and the AECEO has developed a discussion guide to accompany videos. Both items will be available to members on the AECEO website and members are encouraged to use these resources for their own self-directed learning individually or with a group of colleagues. The discussion and questions that followed the presentations were not recorded but ideas and themes from the conversation were integrated into the discussion guide.

A REMEMBRANCE OF DONNIE IRENE PETSCHÉ 1938 - 2016



Dedicated AECEO member, Donnie Irene Petsche passed away on Tuesday, January 19, 2016 with her family by her side.

Donnie was the beloved wife and best friend of Robert Petsche for 58 years. Loving mother to Keith (Gloria), Gerard, Mary-Jo Mustoe (Karl) and Jody Tucker (Bill). Proud Nana of Ryan, Alyson & Noah Petsche, Aidan, Alaric & Aries Mustoe & Great-Nana to baby Talon.

Donnie worked tirelessly as the owner/operator of the Kinder Haus Daycare in Beamsville for the past 48 years. Educating and caring for children was her passion and Donnie was currently pursuing her Bachelor of Early Childhood Education at Brock University. Donnie was an avid quilter and her beautiful creations will be a lasting reminder of her amazing talent to create from the heart. Donnie always gave from the heart and asked nothing in return.

The AECEO sends condolences to Donnie's husband, children and grand and great-grand children.