

For immediate release
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Hundreds more early childhood educators to receive peer mentoring support

Early Childhood Educators of BC and Thompson Rivers University are thrilled to announce additional funding for the *Peer Mentoring Program* for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) in B.C. The Canada-British Columbia Early Learning and Child Care Agreement has allocated \$500,000 over the next three years to expand the program from 17 to 35 community of practice groups across B.C. and support up to 500 ECEs.

This program has shown to be vital in B.C.'s recruitment and retention plan for the early years sector. Child care spaces in the province are in huge demand and waiting lists in many communities are long.

"We are pleased to see recognition of the need for supports for early childhood educators, especially finding a way where they can help each other to build their resiliency and retain them in the profession," said Emily Gawlick, Executive Director of Early Childhood Educators of B.C.

Since 2019, this program has paired up beginning and experienced ECEs so they can share their experiences, learn from each other, become part of a respected collective voice and build an effective network of support.

"There is no child care system without an early learning and child care workforce," said Karina Gould, federal Minister of Families, Children and Social Development. "Early childhood educators do incredible work in supporting families and children, and we are investing in them to ensure they have the tools, resources and training they need to succeed."

"When we invest in the people who deliver child care, we are investing in children, families and communities," said Katrina Chen, B.C.'s Minister of State for Child Care. "The expansion of the peer mentoring program will help educators support each other and continuously grow and learn from each other. We need more ECEs and this program is one of several ways we are working through ChildCareBC to retain and recruit more ECEs throughout B.C., which also includes bursaries, professional development opportunities and wage enhancements."

Led by Dr. Laura Doan, associate professor at Thompson Rivers University, this program supports the ongoing professional development needs of beginning and experienced ECEs. It aims to slow the number of ECEs who leave the field by expanding the current infrastructure of support for ECEs, building their capacity, supporting their ongoing professional identity development needs, increasing their levels of teacher-efficacy and boosting confidence in their abilities as educators.

“With this funding, we aim to firmly embed peer mentoring within the early childhood education culture in B.C., as well as within the professional association representing the Early Childhood Educators of B.C.,” said Doan.

Doan began the peer mentorship program as a pilot project in Kamloops based on what ECEs said they needed. Before it ended in 2020, that pilot grew to involve 17 peer-mentoring community-of-practice groups throughout B.C. Each group had six pairings of one experienced and one beginning ECE, plus one or two facilitators. This funding is a continuation of that program and will apply knowledge gained through the pilot.

This announcement is made possible by a one-time \$49.2 million investment by the Government of Canada through the 2021-2022 to 2024-2025 Canada-British Columbia Early Learning and Child Care Agreement to better support workforce development in the child care sector. This funding will reduce barriers and increase access to post-secondary ECE programs and professional learning opportunities – including in underserved communities – and will support ECE graduates to transition to the workforce. Federal investments provided to the province through early childhood workforce funding complement and support the Canada-wide early learning and child care vision.

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