

ECE Professional Development Bursary Fund: Supporting ECEs in Their Pursuit of Learning

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On September 18, 2019, the ECE Professional Development Bursary Fund at ecebursary.org was launched to financially support early childhood educators and other child care providers to participate in ongoing professional development throughout BC. This initiative is a partnership with the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the Government of Canada, and Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre, the agency responsible for administering the funds. The three objectives of this bursary fund are to:

- Build capacity in the field by reducing the financial barriers for early childhood educators and child care providers in accessing high-quality training opportunities.
- Improve access to training for Indigenous peoples.
- Improve access to training for early childhood educators and child care providers living in rural and remote communities.

Historically, there has not been a province-wide system to financially support early childhood educators in their continued pursuit of professional learning. They have personally paid for workshops or conferences and in some circumstances also forfeited their day's salary to continue their professional learning. The ECE Professional Development Bursary Fund has provided financial assistance to over 1,500 early childhood educa-

tors and child care providers in British Columbia. Bursary recipients have expressed appreciation for this financial support and its positive influence on their professional efficacy and growth:

"In my 25 years of experience, I have never felt more supported and encouraged to develop my profession in a meaningful way. I cannot express my gratitude enough for these funding opportunities and to those who are administering it. This is where change happens and it is amazing!"

"I live in a remote area far north of BC, where access to conferences and workshops are very far and very costly. After the conference, my life as an early childhood educator and childcare provider was never the same."

The bursary funds are administered and distributed in three ways. First, individuals caring for and educating young children may apply for funds. Second, child care resource and referral centres (CCRRs) may seek funding to provide a learning experience not typically offered to their communities. Third, early years leaders seeking to establish communities of practice can apply for funding. Those looking for financial support fill in an online application at eceprodbursary.org detailing their intended learning experience that they would like to participate in or lead.

Despite the availability of bursary funds, some individuals still expe-

rience significant stress by paying for the cost of a workshop or conference and then waiting for reimbursement, particularly if travel expenses are incurred. In response to this potential barrier, the ECE Professional Development Bursary Fund has subsidized registration and accommodation fees for several major conferences to reduce the expenses that participants have to pay up front. Registration prices for conferences such as The Children Heart of The Matter, The UBC Early Learning Conference, and Frog Hollow's, Hundred Ways of Ways of Thinking have been reduced by 50% or more of the original price. The effect of this financial support is revealed in the feedback offered by the recipients of this funding:

"Although, I had to lose a days wages, I am grateful for the opportunity to attend the conference. I am just managing to make ends meet ... I have operated a family licensed daycare for 10 years. I have only attended one other conference, 10 years ago."

Others expressed how this financial support minimized their overall stress and helped them engage more deeply with the professional content and peer interactions:

"It took all the stress out of the experience. Rather than worrying about paying for a sub, transportation, accommodation, food and the cost of the event I was able to emerge stress free into the learning experience."

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“The bursary helped me to feel less stressed financially which ultimately helped me to get more out of the day and the learning.”

These comments show that financial support may help to build professional capacity by simply reducing the financial stress for early childhood educators so that they may focus on learning instead of the costs associated with the experience.

The ECE Professional Development Bursary Fund has enabled groups of colleagues to attend a conference or workshop. This has provided opportunities for these peers to share and co-create plans that are unique to their specific work environment.

“The bursary fund allowed for me to experience a learning institute with the other colleagues who work with me at our center. This is valuable as we could walk away with a cohesive learning plan and formulate goals for ourselves and our program as a team.”

Funding has also been available for those who sought to organize a community of practice. Several communities of practice have been organized throughout British Columbia in order to explore the ideas and questions found in the new Early Learning Framework. Some child care resource and referral centres have also used bursary funds to organize and implement training to learn about professional self-care, strategies to cope with burn-out, and emerging concepts and practices of child development.

The ECE Professional Development Bursary Fund has been made possible by the BC Government's Early Care and Learning Recruitment and Retention Strategy and the Early Learning and Child Care Agreement with the Government of Canada. The final report for this project is scheduled for release in June 2020.

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For more information visit ecebursary.org.

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frame early childhood education practices as a way for change-making. The language is bold and unapologetic for asking what educators must consider of learning and practice: pedagogy of listening, critical reflection, collaborative dialogue, and pedagogical narration. The work is difficult; there is no easy way or shortcut.

Moss (2014) writes:

What matters ... is the longing and the capacity to think differently, to listen to and work with different stories; and the passion, commitment, collaboration and sheer hard work of individuals and groups of individuals who want to tell a different story and who desire to gain and maintain movement to achieve transformative change (p. 169)

These ways of learning and practice are not anything new. We have been working with these ideas for a long time. The new Early Learning Framework articulates these concepts and demands that we as early childhood educators continue to make visible our efforts to create change that matters in our professional lives and the lives of children and their families.

In my first column as chair (in the fall 2019 issue), I wrote about liminality, the tipping point. Imagine if, this time tomorrow, early childhood educators, students, and administrators each took just one action to make a difference in how they work with children, with families, with community, and with government. We move into this liminal space, this state of potentialities, and together we construct a new early childhood education narrative. Be brave, be bold—make that first step a new year's resolution.

References

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