

CCHRSC's Work Enhanced by East Coast Involvement

By Ashley Stewart

Working in partnership with Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) stakeholders across Canada is an important part of the work of the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC). On Child Care Connection Nova Scotia's (CCCNS) 20th anniversary the CCHRSC welcomed the opportunity to reflect on CCCNS, while sharing our current and future work. The opportunities to collaborate through project work have provided several occasions for CCHRSC staff and board members to experience the warmth of East Coast hospitality first-hand.

On a chilly day in February 2003, only a few months after the CCHRSC incorporated, the first task of CCHRSC's new Executive Director was to attend a meeting for the *Attracting and Retaining Qualified Staff in Child Care* project, led by Child Care Connections Nova Scotia. "In contrast to the bitter wind from the harbour, the warm welcome from a range of early childhood experts from across Canada and in particular those from Nova Scotia, was a wonderful introduction to the early childhood education and care sector" says Diana Carter, CCHRSC's Executive Director.

Since then, the work of CCHRSC has benefited greatly from the knowledge and wisdom from the many ECEC leaders from the Maritimes and from support of CCCNS. CCHRSC currently has two projects nearing completion – *Supporting Employers and Workforce Shortages* - both of which have had strong support from

our colleagues and stakeholders in Nova Scotia.

We welcome this opportunity to extend best wishes to our colleagues at CCCNS, for 20 years of dedicated work that has played a role in building capacity in the ECEC sector. We thank you for your continued support and contribution to our project work, and look forward to future initiatives.

Innovation and infrastructure needed to support employers

To meet the human resources challenges in early childhood education and care (ECEC), employers must work collectively and share innovative strategies that have been successfully used by others, says a new report released by the CCHRSC.

Supporting Employers in ECEC: Main Report says that the sector must continue to expand its ability for creative problem-solving as it grapples to find ways to strengthen administrative and leadership practices and human resource capacity. The study also underlines the importance of developing and resourcing a sustainable infrastructure for the sector to help employers address factors outside of their control, such as the impact of inflation on wages.

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“As an employer, the project’s findings confirm that we are facing common challenges” says Shane Richard, Co-Owner/Operator of Little Wonders Child Care in Truro, NS, and project steering committee member. “It is encouraging knowing that there are collaborative solutions available, for addressing human resource issues that we as employers all face at one time or another.”

Two sets of focus groups have been conducted for the project. The first was comprised of representatives from child care organizations, labour organizations, government agencies and training institutions and the sessions were held in Halifax, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. The second set involved child care employers who were directors or owner operators from a variety of governance models. Sessions were held in each province and territory.

The focus groups emphasized finding ways to provide ongoing staff training since employers sometimes have little choice but to hire people whose experience and training are not at the desired level. Creating a supportive and collegial working environment for frontline staff was also a priority since salaries in the sector tend to be low.

A cross-Canada survey of 1,000 employers is also part of the project and will provide a profile of the different types of employers in the sector as well as statistical data on the issues and key areas of interest in terms of resource and tool development. In addition, a series of profiles of various employers are being developed to explore different governance models and document

common issues and innovative Human Resource practices.

The main report includes recommendations in areas where employers can have an impact, including improving human resources and leadership capacity; promoting exemplary practices and the value of the profession both inside and outside the sector; training and professional development for employers; and the monetary and non-monetary ways of recruiting and retaining staff.

The full *Supporting Employers in ECEC* study, including the Main Report, is available at www.ccsc-cssge.ca.

Workforce Shortages Project an eye-opener for the sector

A groundbreaking CCHRSC project that looks at child care supply and demand will provide information to help stakeholders plan ways to deal with current and future workforce shortages.

The *Workforce Shortages Project* is collecting national, provincial and territorial data to comprehensively estimate workforce shortages in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector and study the feasibility of developing tools to predict future workforce needs in 13 provinces and territories. The project is also studying the socio-economic impact of the shortages, as well as current innovative practices around recruitment and retention.

The project looks at workforce shortages, and at the relationship between quality care and labour force participation. "Not only will the project utilize the application and interpretation of data analysis to enable the development of workforce strategy measures, but it will further identify the importance, the interrelationships and the cost benefits between a skilled and competent early childhood workforce; families' access to quality early learning environments; and life long healthy development" says Virginia O'Connell, Director of Early Childhood Development Services in Nova Scotia's Department of Community Services; and a project Steering Committee member.

The preliminary findings are already producing some "eye-popping" results, says economist and project researcher Robert Fairholm.

The most striking is the magnitude of the benefits of child care to the economy. Aside from the positive impact on parental workforce participation, the long-term benefits of improved educational outcomes for children "are huge," said Fairholm. "The long-term benefits vastly outweigh the costs."

Not enough people

The sector is already facing acute workforce shortages. According to the 2006 Census, about 36% of those with ECE qualifications are working in the sector. But even if all of those who are currently unemployed instantly found a job, "there still wouldn't be enough people to satisfy the demand," said Fairholm. "To satisfy current needs you need to

look for people with ECE who are working in other sectors or who are not currently in the paid workforce."

CCHRSC hopes the project's findings will help the provinces and territories plan for adequate numbers of staff as they develop child care spaces. Training institutions will be able to use the information to determine the potential demand for ECE programs, while the findings will help policy makers put in place initiatives to help recruit people into the field. The figures will show what the shortages will be and what will happen if child care spaces don't increase over time," said Christine McLean, project co-chair. "Even without adding any more spaces, we already know we need more people. But when you see the enormity of the problem, and start to do the math, that is the eye-opener, and front and centre is the urgent need to build the workforce."

The final results of the project will be available in June 2009 at www.ccsc-cssqe.ca.

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