

## Ontario campaign that helped boost child-care worker wages wins \$50,000 prize

Atkinson Foundation's Good Fight prize goes to province-wide campaign that helped lift wages for thousands of child-care workers.

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Upon winning the Good Fight prize Wednesday, members of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario and CUPE Ontario unfurl a rainbow parachute that has become a symbol of Worth More!, their united campaign.

A province-wide campaign that galvanized thousands of child-care workers and helped to lift base wages by nearly \$5 an hour has earned the Atkinson Foundation's \$50,000 Good Fight prize.

The Worth More! Campaign for Child Care Workers was honoured Wednesday by the Atkinson Foundation, which noted that the group's efforts "not only improved pay for tens of thousands of educators, but also strengthened the community-union alliance driving Ontario toward a future where early learning professionals are truly valued – and paid – what they are worth."

Accepting the award, Carolyn Ferns opened her remarks by thanking the charitable foundation, the jury and the other shortlisted finalists. "Ontario is better, our world is better because of the change you are making every day," she said.

Ferns, public policy co-ordinator with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, was joined onstage by representatives from the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario and CUPE Ontario, who unfurled a rainbow parachute that has become a symbol of their united campaign.

The three organizations banded together to launch Worth More! in 2022 in the wake of the federal government's commitment to \$10-a-day child care – an agreement that did not address sector wages or benefits in the province. The coalition's advocacy has since helped to raise the wage floor for child-care workers to \$23.86, up from \$18.

“We made a choice to build a campaign that treated early childhood educators' talents that are often overlooked and undervalued – care, connection, play and parachute games, silliness and storytime – as important skills in political advocacy,” said Ferns.

Colette Murphy, CEO of the Atkinson Foundation, told the Star that Worth More! stood out for its “perseverance, creativity and breadth of organizing.”

“It's the latest in a generational struggle for decent work, dating back to 1950 when our grandmothers were fighting for the very first government regulations and formal training programs for day nursery staff,” she added.

Two other finalists – the Investors for a Fair Economy Campaign and the Youth Climate Corps Campaign – were awarded \$15,000 each on Wednesday.

Ferns said the \$50,000 prize will go straight into launching a new campaign to fight for a wage grid, benefits and pensions. “We still have a long road to reach decent work and pay for all early childhood educators and child-care workers,” Ferns told the Star, “but this gives us hope that we are headed in the right direction.”

The Good Fight prize was launched in 2017 to mark the Atkinson Foundation's 75th anniversary and was to be awarded every five years. The Fight for \$15 and Fairness Campaign was the inaugural winner, followed in 2022 by the Toronto Community Benefits Network.

The foundation, which was established in 1942 by Toronto Star owner and publisher Joseph E. Atkinson, has switched to handing out the prize annually.

“This fight doesn't take a day off, never mind a year,” said Murphy.