



INSTITUTE
FOR
CHANGE
LEADERS



aeceo
Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario

EMPOWERING PRECARIOUS WORKERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

FINAL REPORT

AUGUST 2022

PREPARED BY: MELANIE MATTHEWS BSW, MSW, RSW

Executive Summary

AECEO, in partnership with ICL, developed the Empowering Precarious Workers in Early Childhood Education program to address the vulnerability of workers in early childhood education and raise the floor for workers in this sector. The project included an 8 week virtual training for ECEs, ongoing coaching, and child care centre visits. Deep canvassing and phone banking were later added as activities in response to the need for engaging more community members while conforming to public health and safety requirements.

Training participants learned leadership skills following the Five Leadership Practices: telling your story, building relationships, creating structure, strategizing, and taking action on social issues. These skills are essential for participants to engage in advocacy efforts to advance working conditions and other issues in the child care sector in their geographic locations through Ontario.

Overall, the project was successful in achieving its stated outcomes. Training participants reported increasing their skills in all areas of the Five Leadership Practices. The majority of participants who received ongoing coaching reported using their new knowledge to advocate for ECEs and/or engage with people in their network on issues related to child care. Participants from the child care centre visits also reported feeling more prepared and more likely to engage in advocacy efforts.

Despite the overall success of the project, there is still work to be done to achieve better working conditions and fair pay for ECEs. Participants will use their new skills and abilities to engage a wider audience within their communities. ICL, AECEO, and the project participants will continue advocacy efforts. Future projects will be implemented to advance the skills of project participants and train additional participants to join advocacy efforts.

"This has been such a great training and has really encouraged me to find my voice. Its great to have been a part of such a motivating group who share the same values and goals."
-ECE Participant

INSTITUTE FOR CHANGE LEADERS

Founded in 2016 by Olivia Chow, the Institute for Change Leaders (ICL) teaches the skills that organizers and activists need in order to win social change.

Our mission at ICL is to ensure organizers and community organizations are continually developing the skills they need to transform the resources they have into the change they want. Our approach to leadership is about accepting responsibility for enabling others to achieve shared purpose under conditions of uncertainty.

We believe students learn best when they practice what they learn. We work with organizations such as non-profits, community and neighbourhood organizations and social service agencies to deliver tailored training.

The Institute for Change Leaders has trained over 10,000 future leaders, organizers and change-makers from progressive non-profits, labour unions, and social movements. Each person whom we work with leaves our training with a more profound understanding of their own personal story, a deeper sense of their own power, and the skills to put that power into action.

ASSOCIATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS ONTARIO

The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) is the professional association for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and advocating for respect, recognition and appropriate wages and working conditions for all ECEs is an important part of its work.

Since 2015, the AECEO has been leading the Professional Pay and Decent Work Campaign (henceforth Decent Work Campaign) in partnership with the Institute for Change Leaders (ICL), Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development. Through the Decent Work Campaign, AECEO and ICL have provided training and leadership skill building to ECEs and early years staff in Toronto and Ontario as part of our long-term strategy to organize the early childhood (EC) workforce (a term which is inclusive of ECEs, ECAs, non-program staff, home child care providers, etc).

PROGRAM NEED

There is an urgent need for high quality and affordable early childhood education. There is also an urgent need for greater recognition, and improved compensation and working conditions for those employed in the sector, namely, ECEs.

There are only enough high quality and regulated early childhood educational services for 29 % of children aged 0 – 5 years old. In Toronto, 42% of children have access to a child care space, with some areas (Scarborough, York, North York) falling below 40%. Decades of research demonstrate the children who receive quality and nurturing early childcare are healthier, learn better and stay in school longer, and have higher earnings as adults. This is an issue because many children, and disproportionately children from low-income, racialized, and marginalized families, do not have access to the benefits of high quality early education.

In addition, without affordable child care and early years programs, women will continue to be displaced and excluded from decent work positions in the formal labour market, care of young children will continue to be devalued, un- and under-paid, and both mothers and the early childhood workforce will continue to experience economic injustice. As well, there is an over-representation of women, in particular BIPOC women, in precarious jobs and primarily responsible for unpaid care labour. Child care and early years programs are not only critical for the well-being of children, but also for supporting a just recovery that centres women and decent work. It doesn't have to be like this – policy decisions can improve access to the workforce for women in Toronto and Ontario.

Despite the clear and obvious importance of having qualified staff in readily available child care centres, ECEs continue to be undervalued, underpaid, and often employed precariously. This needs to change.

This project addressed the need for ECEs to both learn skills for leadership and organizing, as well as come together to take concrete action to address systemic issues within the profession. All aspects of the project were specifically tailored to address the specific needs of individual ECEs as well as the profession overall. By creating change, ECEs will achieve equity in employment and more quality early education will be available for the families who need it the most.

HOW WE BUILD LEADERS

Organizing to make change is based on the mastery of five key leadership practices: telling stories, building relationships, structuring teams, strategizing, and acting.

The Five Leadership Practices

1. How to articulate a **story** of why we are called to lead, a story of the community we hope to mobilize, and a story of why we must act now.
2. How to build intentional **relationships** as the foundation of purposeful collective actions.
3. How to create **structure** that distributes power and responsibility and prioritizes leadership development.
4. How to **strategize** turning your resources into the power to achieve clear goals.
5. How to translate strategy into measurable, motivational, and effective **action**.



The Institute offers an innovative curriculum on how to organize to achieve change. The program is an intensive, hands-on learning process. It is led by a team of trained facilitators from all backgrounds and neighbourhoods, including labour activists, newcomers, Indigenous people, and people with lived experience of poverty and marginalization.



The Institute offers the first accredited course in Canada based on the curriculum of Marshall Ganz, a Harvard Kennedy School professor, veteran of the labour and civil rights movements, and key organizing strategist behind the 2008 Obama campaign.

Our training ensures optimal engagement through interactive group work that puts the teachings into practice.

"The AECEO-ICL training session was a meaningful learning experience for me. As each week progressed I felt (a growing sense of belonging) that I was part of a community and felt empowered to take action to achieve change."

-ECE Participant

EMPOWERING PRECARIOUS WORKERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

AECEO, in partnership with ICL, developed the Empowering Precarious Workers in Early Childhood Education program to address the vulnerability of workers in early childhood education and raise the floor for workers in this sector.

PROGRAM DETAILS

Key Activities:

Training

ECEs from across sectors participated in 8 training sessions with ICL teachers and facilitators. Participants learned essential skills for advocacy and organizing for change within the ECE profession. A special emphasis was placed on deep canvassing to develop and execute a deep canvassing strategy prior to the 2022 Provincial Election. 88 participants registered and 23 qualified for a certificate of completion.

Coaching

With the support of an ICL coach, interested CoP members received one-on-one coaching on their personal narratives. This helped the CoP members to build their confidence in using their story to recruit and share with parents/families, their colleagues, and in centre-visits and canvassing. This also supported CoP members in connecting to their advocacy community and other CoP members. 19 participants were engaged.

Child Care Centre Visits

CoP members visited Child Care Centres to share the work of the CoP, talk about the power of personal narratives, and recruit new ECEs and child care workers into the CoP. This helped build our base for the 2022 Provincial Election and ensured we reached ECEs, child care workers, and families in key ridings. Unfortunately, COVID-19 restrictions prevented this aspect of the project from being completed before the time of this report. Centre visits are continuing as public health and safety requirements allow. To ensure that a wide audience was reached, 2 deep canvassing sessions and 1 phone banking session was added to the awareness and recruitment activities.

EMPOWERING PRECARIOUS WORKERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

This training addressed the strategic goal of improving job quality for low-wage workers and creating access to decent work for low-income workers and job seekers in the ECE sector by empowering precarious workers in this sector with the advocacy, leadership, and organizing skills they need to work with the AECEO to win better working conditions and pay. Completing all sessions qualifies the participant to receive a certificate.

The training took place over 8 sessions and included the following topics:

Session 1: Leadership and Organizing

Setting clear goals

Developing an organizing statement

Session 2: Story of Self

Stories are at the Heart of Organizing for Social Change

Public Narratives' Lecture and Video

Demonstrate the Power of Stories and Coaching

Breakout Group: Sharing Our Stories

Session 3: Strategies

Organizing Statement: who are we organizing, what is our goal, how are we doing it and by when?

Difference between strategies and tactics

Locating power and the 6 Big Questions

Theory of Change

Session 4: Tactics

Who are our allies and our oppositions?

Mapping power through the spectrum of allies.

Tactics; nested goals and identifying smart tactics

Breakout Group: Organizing Statement, Tactics, Timeline, forming teams

Session 5: Public Narratives Part 2: Self, Us, Now

How do we use our stories to organize for change?

Lecture on Public Narratives (Self/Us/Now)

Demonstrate + Debrief

Break out rooms with a chance to practice

Share Stories

EMPOWERING PRECARIOUS WORKERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Session 6: Mobilizing Relationships

Holding a campaign together
Importance of building relationships
Gaining commitment
Roleplay activity

Session 7: Lobbying MPPs and Other Candidates

Knowing your MPP and other local representatives
How to lobby MPP
Roleplay activity
Group activity
Meeting your MPP

Session 8: Celebration & Tying it all Together

Recap: What We Learned
Personal commitment - leadership statements
Breakout Groups - formalize group commitment and collective action plans
Celebrate!



EVALUATION

The evaluation of this project utilized a mixed methods design to collect both qualitative and quantitative data to assess to what extent the project achieved its stated outcomes. Specifically, the evaluation looked at changes in skill level and actual participation in advocacy efforts. Demographics were also collected to determine what vulnerable populations were being reached through this project.

The evaluation was designed and implemented with an anti-oppressive lens to ensure that the evaluation caused no harm to the vulnerable participants who were involved in the project. Explicit consent was obtained for the collection and use of evaluation data.

Evaluation tools were designed specifically to collect information on the stated outcomes and metrics in this application. These tools included:

- mixed methods surveys that collected qualitative and quantitative data on the CoP immediately after participation in the structured training, as a later follow up for participants who stayed engaged in advocacy, and for participants in the child care centre visits to provide feedback;
- individual interviews with interested participants and;
- collection of anecdotes and stories from participants willing to share.

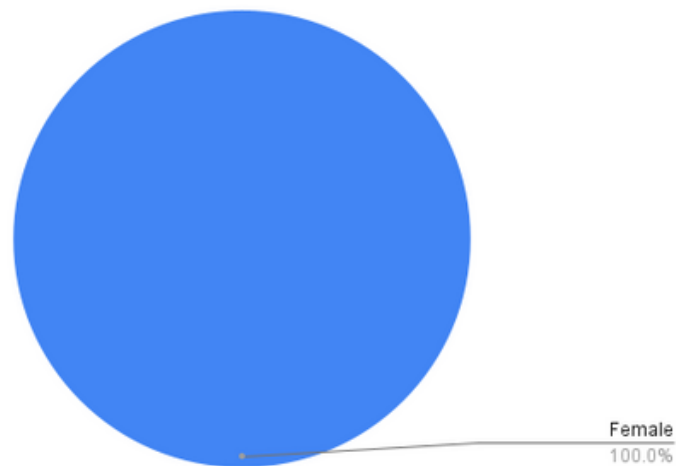
The results were collected, analyzed, compiled into this report for dissemination in the community. ICL and AECEO value the free sharing of information in an accessible and understandable manner. So, social media posts regarding the results of the program will also be shared over time. This information will advance advocacy efforts and support not just our direct participants, but also the wider community through the creation and sharing of an evidence base for leadership and advocacy programs.

DEMOGRAPHICS

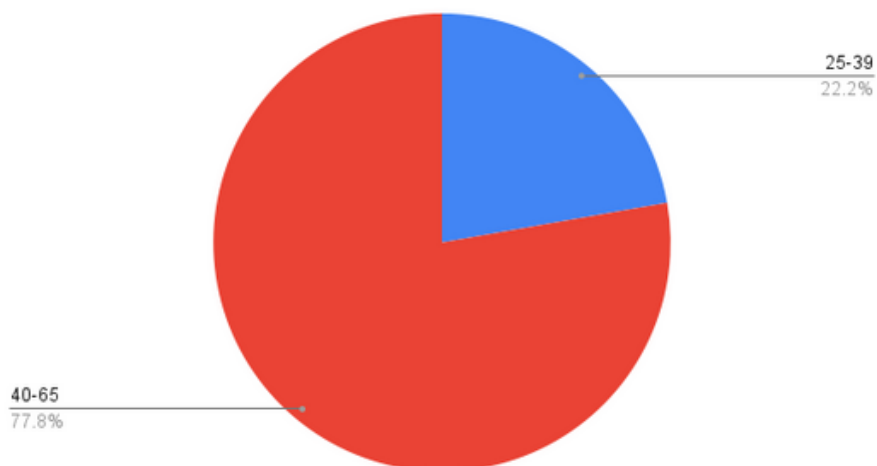
Participants were given the opportunity to provide some demographic information to help better describe the people who took part in the project.

Participants from a variety of geographic locations in Ontario. Locations included: Ajax, Markham - Stouffville,, Scarborough, Mississauga, Toronto, and Etobicoke.

Participant Gender

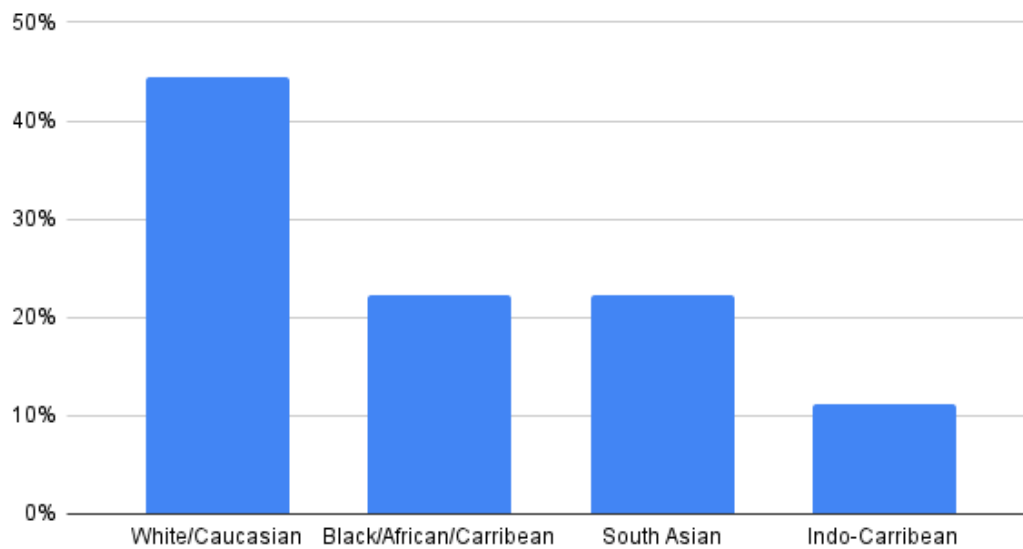


Participant Age

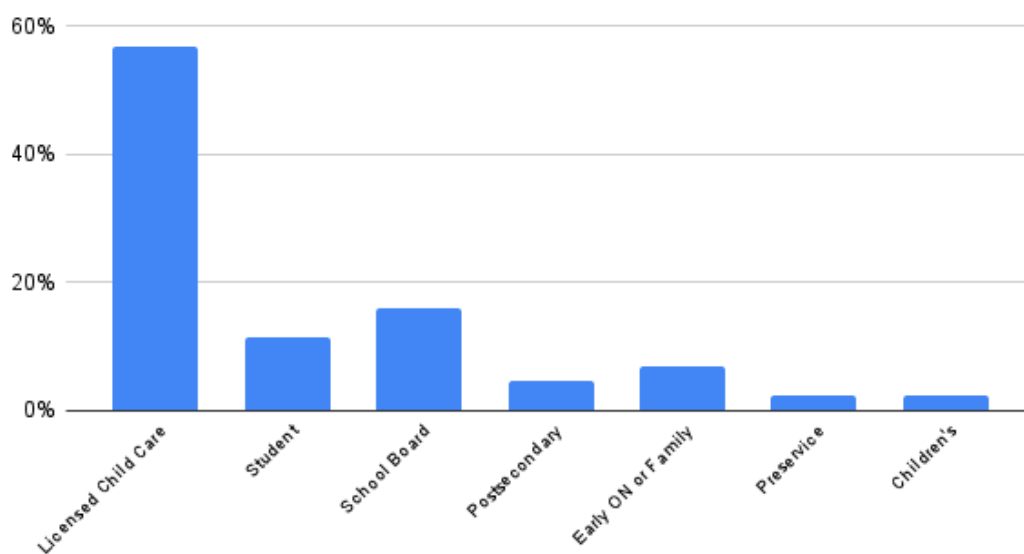


DEMOGRAPHICS

Participant Racial Identity

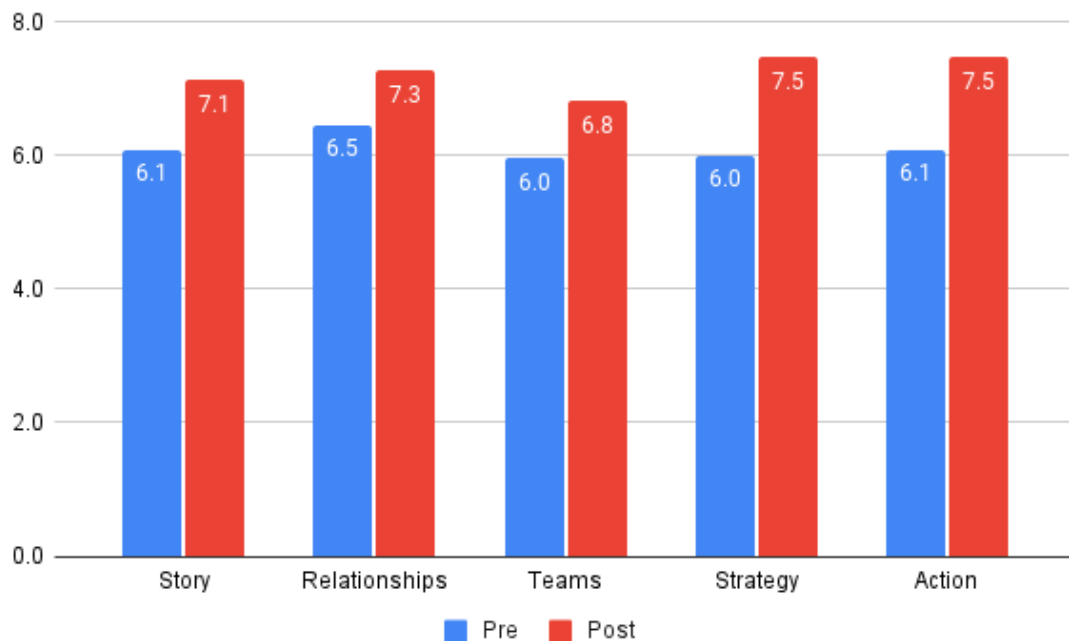


Participant Sector of Employment



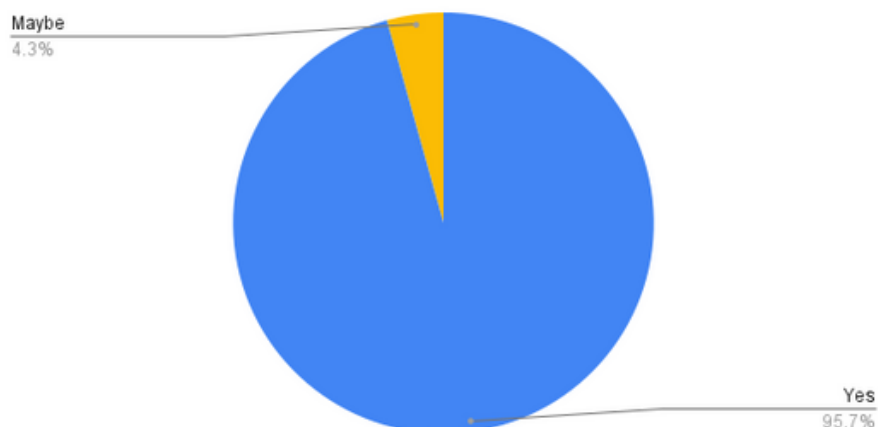
RESULTS - COP SURVEY

All participants in the CoP were invited to participate in a pre-post survey. Participants were asked to rate their skill level in the 5 core leadership practices centred in the training on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being inexperienced and 10 being very experienced. Overall, participants improved their skill level in all areas after finishing the training.



Participants were also asked if they were more likely to take action after having completed the training. Overall, the participants all agreed that they would be more likely to take action (95.7%) or might be more likely to take action (4.3%).

After this training, are you more likely to take action to achieve change?



RESULTS - COP FOLLOW UP SURVEY

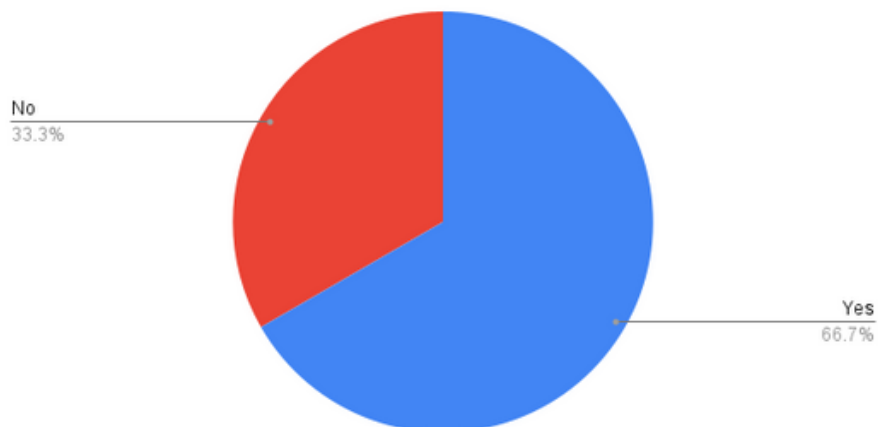
Participants from the CoP who stayed engaged in leadership roles and advocacy efforts after completing the training were invited to complete a survey regarding the progress they have made. Participants were asked if they had used their new skills to advocate for changes in ECE workplace conditions.

Have you used your participation in the CoP to advocate to change ECE workplace conditions?



Participants were asked if they had used their learning from the training to engage with a coworker, family member, friend, neighbour, or parent.

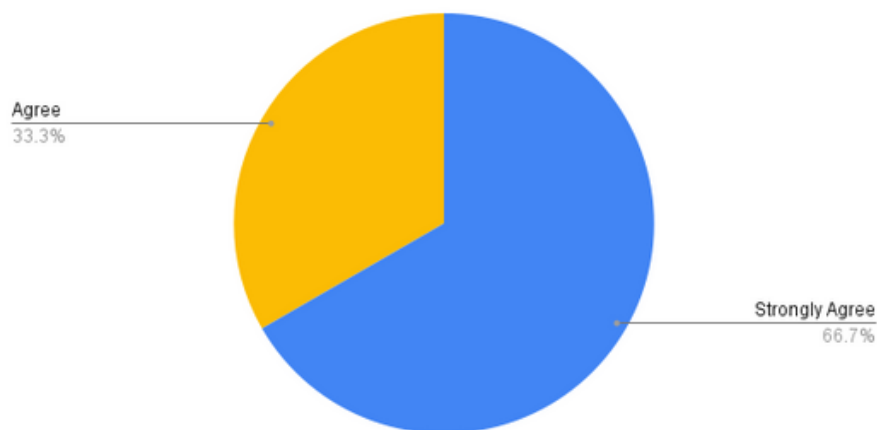
Have you used this training to engage with a coworker, family member, friend, neighbour, or parent?



RESULTS - CHILD CARE CENTRE VISITS

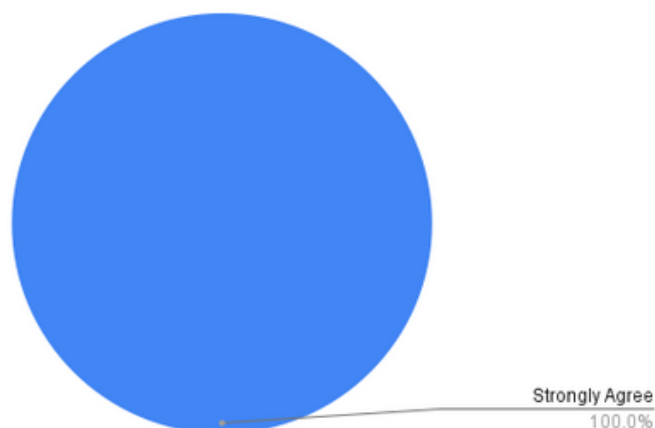
Participants from the Child Care Centre visits were invited to provide feedback in a survey after the visit. Participants were asked if they felt more prepared to engage in advocacy after the centre visit.

Since participating, I feel more prepared to engage in advocacy for ECEs.



Participants were asked if they were more likely to engage in advocacy after the centre visit.

Since participating, I am more likely to engage in advocacy for ECEs.



Participants who said that they were more likely to engage in advocacy said that they planned to share information and have conversations with colleagues, families, and friends; attend meetings, and vote.

RESULTS - PARTICIPANT SATISFACTION

All participants who responded said that the program met or exceeded their expectations. All participants who responded also said that they would recommend the program to a friend with or without reservations.

Most Effective Aspects of the Program

A common theme across all aspects of the project was that participants enjoyed group discussions.

"Being in a small group and having personal, one-on-one conversations. This helped us to build a bond and connection to the educators."

Participants across all aspects of the project also stated that an important and effective aspect of the program was the ability to connect with others. They stated that the facilitators were able to create a comfortable environment for participants to speak, feel heard, and connect.

Areas for Improvement/Expansion

Very little critical feedback was provided. Two participants stated that they would have liked more and consistent in person programming. One participant said that they would have liked to attend more child care centre visits. One participant said that there were too many facilitators.

Additional Feedback

There was no additional critical feedback given in open ended qualitative questions. Some participants chose to leave a short message.

"ICL experience is something I have never been apart of before. The lead educators where very knowledgeable and supported all our questions during the weeks we meet. The positive supportive atmosphere had me looking forward to each week night we meet."

RESULTS - INTERVIEWS

Three individual interviews were conducted with participants. The interviews facilitated an opportunity for participants to expand fully on their experience with the project in a supportive environment. The interviews were conducted by an evaluation consultant from the childcare sector. The researcher used an interview style in line with participatory action research methods where the interviewer and participants work together to understand an issue that impacts them. Compassion and collaboration were central parts of the interviews and the interviewer ensured that she was affirming and validating of the participants' experiences.

Interview participants were from different sectors and had different employment statuses but were all involved in the child care sector in some capacity. Hearing from participants from different sectors ensured that we were able to gain diverse understandings of issues within the childcare sector.

Participants were asked the following questions and were encouraged to expand on their experience using open-ended questioning beyond the limits of the predetermined interview questions:

1. What made you decide to take part in the program?
2. What advocacy activities have you engaged in since participating in the program?
3. What was your favorite part of the program?
4. What could be added next time to make the program even better?
5. How will you use the things you learned in the program?

Analysis was completed to understand themes and collect anecdotes from interview participants.

"This training was amazing! I feel so motivated, so empowered, and so ready to build relationships and create change!"

-ECE Participant

RESULTS - INTERVIEWS

Themes

While all participants came from various different areas of the childcare sector, all were Early Childhood Educators.

Participants had similar reasons for deciding to take part in the project. All stated that their motivation was some combination of desire to upgrade advocacy skills, connect with others, and advance working conditions in the child care sector. One participant noted that continual professional development is a condition for being a Registered Early Childhood Educator.

Participants all agreed that advocacy is important within the child care sector. Participants discussed high level systemic needs for advocacy including human rights issues. One participant noted that they had personal experience with difficulty accessing daycare for their child in the past which helped them understand systemic issues that require advocacy.

"Advocacy is important at all levels, starting from the family. It is important to be in touch with the needs of family members, particularly children, to ensure they are in better positioned. Without advocacy, there cannot be meaningful change in life."

Participants said that they have engaged in advocacy by speaking to people in their networks, sharing information, and encouraging participation by others. Participants noted that they had some challenges in advocacy. One stated that it's difficult to engage with others as there is a sense of hopelessness. One participant said that they were limited in what they could do with their status as a temporary resident in Canada. One participant also discussed how advocacy takes a great deal of time.

"And one of the things that I have, if I've learned anything, just in terms of advocacy and and sort of keeping in the fight you have to sort of take things one step at a time. Can't like if you burn yourself out you're not doing anyone any service."

RESULTS - INTERVIEWS

Two participants noted that their favourite aspect of the program was learning to tell their story as a way to advocate for change.

"What was also very, very meaningful to me was the understanding of the concept of the heartbeat of advocacy – using stories (from the head) to move the heart, and then the hand. This means, we can get people to do what is needed if we use stories not only to stimulate the mind, but move the heart and ultimately, the hand."

One participant also stated that cold calling their local political representative was very meaningful to them.

"I had a really good opportunity to work with my MPP Chris Glover, who not only responded to the phone call, but was open to a meeting, and then took the petition that the AECEO and OCBCC had drafted and brought it to the legislature."

Participants had some suggestions for improvement for the program. One participant noted that they believe the program could have been very different if it had been run in person. They acknowledged that virtual programs are more accessible but also limit opportunities for interaction with other participants. One participant said that they needed more time to digest information and reflect. One participant said that they would like to hear more diverse voices of newcomers in the child care sector.

Participants all shared plans to continue advocacy through continued training, engaging with other professionals, and encouraging participation in advocacy.

"What is very meaningful to me is the need to motivate the professionals in the industry to support the advocacy work of the AECEO and other entities like the OCBCC."

"...staying connected to the network in the community means participating in meetings and means doing things like what I'm doing with you right now, participating even if it's just like every once in a while in events that take place, just staying connected with the information that's getting shared and sent out and and using it myself so passing it on, and sharing it with my colleagues and friends and family."

SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

ICL and AECEO both have engaged social media followings where each organization posts regularly to inform their audience as well as provide a platform for discussion. This free, accessible platform is essential for widespread knowledge dissemination and increased community engagement in issues that directly impact vulnerable communities.

ICL posted on Instagram about the new childcare deal. This new deal is an important advancement in making childcare accessible to all. However, the deal is imperfect at addressing other issues in the sector and so more community discussion as well as critiques are needed.

AECEO released a report titled "Forgotten on the Frontline" that discusses the painful issues in the childcare sector and particularly issues as a result of/exacerbated by COVID-19. By advertising the report on social media, AECEO ensures that the community receives the benefit of this new knowledge, not just academics. AECEO also created info sheets and hosted a webinar to inform ECEs and child care centres on the new child care deal as well as answer questions.

Both ICL and AECEO both post regularly regarding how to get involved, connect with others, and engage in continued learning. Both organizations also provided information and encouraged their audiences to vote in the June 2022 provincial election.



CONCLUSION

Overall, the project was successful in achieving its stated outcomes. The evaluation of this project demonstrates that the combination of training, mentorship, and targeted outreach are effective in equipping ECEs with the skills and resources they need to advocate for change in the child care sector.

Despite the overall success of the project, there is still work to be done to achieve better working conditions and fair pay for ECEs. Participants will use their new skills and abilities to engage a wider audience within their communities. ICL, AECEO, and the project participants will continue advocacy efforts. Future projects will be implemented to advance the skills of project participants and train additional participants to join advocacy efforts.

This training provided an opportunity to identify how my own values connect to other ECEs advocates. It felt powerful to connect to ECEs beyond my workplace. It was valuable to learn how to be as intentional with advocacy as we are with our interactions with children.

-ECE Participant

OUR TEAM



Olivia Chow - ICL Founder and Academic Lead

For 30 years, Olivia Chow has been an effective and well-known public figure, serving in Toronto's municipal politics and on the national stage as a Canadian Member of Parliament. As a founder of the Institute for Change Leaders, Olivia and her team of 30+ trainers have taught community and political organizing to over 7,000 of organizers since March of 2015. She leads curriculum development for programs.



Rachel Vickerson - AECEO Interim Executive Director

Rachel engages in strategic planning and policy work, oversees overall operation of the AECEO, and leads the Decent Work Project. She holds a Masters degree in Public Policy from the University of Toronto and has previously worked in child care policy research at the Childcare Resource and Research Unit and as a project officer with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.



Alana Powell - AECEO Executive Director

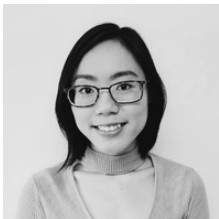
Alana engages in strategic planning and policy work, oversees overall operation of the organization, and leads the Decent Work Project. After working in a community-based child care centre in Toronto, Alana completed her Masters of Arts in Early Childhood Studies at Ryerson University where her research focused on reasserting care as central to practice, policy, and advocacy. Alana is a proud ECE, who has been active in the child care advocacy movement for nearly a decade.

OUR TEAM



Erin Filby - Community Organizer

Erin is a proud Early Childhood Educator (ECE), and a Community Organizer who has worked with the AECEO for more than 3 years. Erin is tasked with supporting ECEs to build local advocacy communities that offer a sense of belonging, agency, and hope to members. Erin believes that Educators possess the skills and strengths needed to co-create communities that centre radical care, and that supportive relationships are the best foundations for advocacy and action. Erin has been involved in advocacy and activism for various causes for 15 years, and is proud to share her knowledge about the tools and values of participatory democracy with others.



Ngoc Tho (Tegan) Nguyen - Research Consultant

Tegan (she/they) plans and conducts evaluation interviews. Tegan holds an Honour Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Leadership and works on child care policy research at the Childcare Resource and Research Unit. Tegan is a proud ECE and an active member of the child care advocacy movement. Tegan strongly believes in using personal narratives to initiate change.



Amrit Parhar - Training Manager

Amrit is responsible for the day-to-day management of educational training and the operation of ICL. Amrit believes that through collective action we can make social change and build stronger communities, especially through the power of storytelling. Amrit holds a Bachelor's degree in Criminology and a Master's degree in Immigration and Settlement Studies at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University). She got involved with the ICL as a placement student and completed her Masters while working at ICL, working on issues relating to the refugee and immigration system, early childhood education, anti-racism, gender-based violence and more. She is also a facilitator with ICL and has completed a certification for the Train the Trainer program through the Leading Change Network.

OUR TEAM



Melanie Matthews - Evaluation Consultant

Melanie is a registered social worker with Bachelor and Master's of Social Worker degrees. She specializes in anti-oppressive and anti-racist research and evaluation. Before beginning her work as a consultant, Melanie spent 6 years working in day cares and school age programs.

The hard work and dedication of all the training facilitators and mentors is also acknowledged. Without their combined experience as well as their hard work and dedication, this project would not have been possible.



This project was supported financially by Metcalf Foundation.