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Canada

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SPECIAL ISSUE ON INCLUSION

Providing an inclusive environment for children with disabilities requires a workforce with appropriate developmental training, understanding and support.

Growing awareness

Results from sector council projects—including surveys and focus groups with students, faculty and employers—show a growing awareness of inclusion as an important part of quality early learning and child care. For example, new occupational standards for child care administrators published by the sector council specify requirements for skills and knowledge in inclusive curriculum, programs and practices. And existing staff participating in career promotions focus groups cited supporting children with special needs and their families as one key area where they wanted more professional development opportunities.

There is also an acknowledgement that much remains to be done to make inclusion a reality. Our training strategy project found that:

- Sixty-six per cent of students about to graduate from early childhood education programs felt quite well or very well prepared to work with children with special needs. A much higher percentage (90%) felt quite well or very well prepared to work with typically developing children.
- Faculty rated students' preparation in these areas at 69% and 100%, respectively and said that the longer the program, the better prepared students were to work with children with special needs.

Increasingly, programs are making inclusion a priority because it is the right thing to do. Integrating children with special needs means ensuring a workforce that has appropriate developmental training, understanding and support.



Inclusion always a priority at Winnipeg centre

At the Discovery Children's Centre in Winnipeg, working with a child with special needs is not considered any different from working with typically developing children. This means that all staff at the centre work with all of the children.

This approach to inclusion benefits the children, staff and parents, says Donna Freeman, director of Discovery's children's program.

"The child with special needs bonds with more than one person and will be okay with all staff in the room," says Freeman. "Other children benefit too. If they see only one staff with one child in the room all the time, they will think that child is different."

It also means that staff don't get worn out. "If we had a child with a physical disability who needed to be lifted and positioned throughout the day, every day, it would be exhausting for one person," she says. "And for parents it's good because they don't have to rely on one particular person to be at work every day to care for their child."

The program is large: the centre employs 45 staff and is "like seven small day cares in one" says Freeman. The centre is located across the street from one of Winnipeg's "cluster schools", which means it has access to specialists in disabilities.

"Because of this, we have a lot of children with special needs," says Freeman. "In most cases, if a child starts

here at two, she or he will be here for the next 10 years."

Discovery is also home to a support group for parents and other relatives of children with special needs.

Recruiting for inclusion

Freeman always makes inclusion a big part of her interviews when recruiting new staff. She sits on the Community Living Manitoba Child Care Inclusion Committee, which is in the process of developing inclusive job descriptions and policies for early learning and child care programs.

In the rooms, staff work as a team "and all of the children participate in everything we do," says early childhood educator Joy Pollreis who works in the centre's Flex Room, which provides care for children whose parents work shifts and non-traditional hours.

Each room has a contact staff person who works with therapists and child development counselors, and reports back to staff on the needs of the children with disabilities in their care.

"We have a play tree posted in each area that includes the goals we are working on for each child and lists examples of what staff can do to help

facilitate that goal," says Pollreis. Centre and individual room staff meetings also help to ensure information and ideas are shared.

Workshops encouraged

Pollreis is one of two centre staff with an ECE degree with a specialty in special needs. All staff at the centre are required to take 24 hours each year of professional development, and those who have a child with special needs in their room are encouraged to take specialized workshops. The centre keeps a binder of all available workshops.

New staff are given a chance to get to know each of the children and observe how the other staff work with them. This is intended to help put to rest any fears new staff might have of working with children who have special needs, but this has not proved to be a concern for most, Pollreis says.

Discovery's children's program director Donna Freeman can't remember a time when inclusion was not a priority at the centre. "This goes back decades," Freeman says, adding that she's glad inclusion is now a growing priority for other child care programs.

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It's everyone's responsibility to make sure every child belongs

When Mary-Anne Bedard was a director in a child care centre, she saw first-hand what happens when programs are unable to meet the needs of children with special needs. "There were children we really struggled to serve and who we didn't serve as well as we wanted to. And we didn't know who to call."

Now, as program manager for the City of Toronto's Children's Services, Bedard is part of the municipality's efforts to make inclusion real. Every Child Belongs is the city's vision and program to bring down the barriers to inclusion in child care by supporting the development of inclusive practice in the sector. The goal is to ensure all children aged 0-12 who need extra support have access to a child care centre in their community.

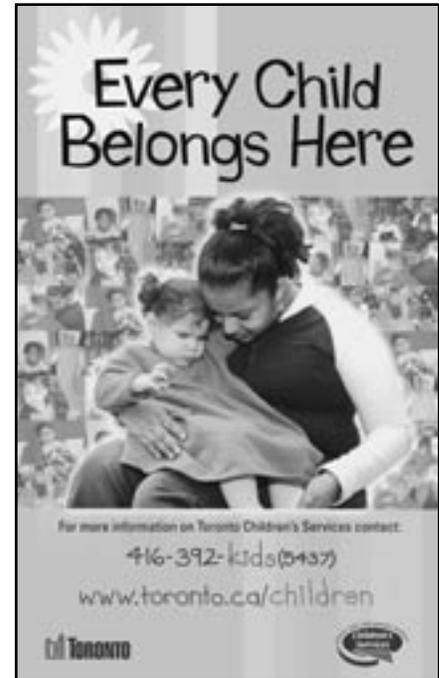
Every licensed child care program in the city has an assigned special needs resource person who regularly visits and provides supports that include:

- early identification and intervention
- individual and program consultation

- providing or finding appropriate staff training
- enhanced staffing and intensive resource support when needed
- program adaptations and environmental assessments
- service coordination and referral

There are about 120 special needs resource people for 950 child care programs.

Before this new approach, says Bedard, support for children with special needs consisted mainly of on-site resources in a few child care programs. "The city found that those programs were really oversubscribed by families with children with special needs. So these were not typical child care cen-



tres and couldn't really be called integrated."

Removing barriers

Bedard said that having assigned special needs resource people on-site often became a barrier to inclusion. "In a lot of cases when there was someone on site, that person was who the child with special needs 'belonged to' and other staff didn't see it as their responsibility. Now it's everybody's responsibility."

The new approach focused on having assigned special needs resource people who aren't on site. While staff initially had some fears about the new approach, they now "feel really confident. They feel more empowered."

Bedard said that the sector as a whole is trying to find ways to resolve the training "gap" when it comes to preparing new and existing early childhood educators to work with children with special needs.

"What we say is that every single child at some point needs additional support. Making programs more inclusive is the right thing to do. We need to figure out the best way to train people."

A provincial inclusion strategy

Newfoundland and Labrador has launched a strategy for supporting inclusion of children with special needs in child care settings. Central to the strategy are provincial and regional consultants who will work directly with child care settings to help them address barriers to participation for children with special needs.

A key goal is to provide the support and resources to ensure that early childhood educators are appropriately trained to work with children with special needs. The province is also making grants available for specialized equipment and additional child care staffing supports.

In another program, the province is offering on-site consultations to measure and improve the quality and inclusive practices of child care environments. Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia have similar programs that tie inclusion to quality enhancement.

Workforce barriers bigger for people with disabilities

For the approximately 10% of working-age Canadians who have a disability, getting into the workforce is no mean feat. Almost 59% of working-age adults with disabilities do not have a job.

“People with disabilities are one of the groups most excluded from the workforce,” says Penni Richmond, national director of the Canadian Labour Congress women’s and human rights department.

Richmond says the barriers to employment for people with disabilities are many and complex, and can’t be looked at in isolation.

“We have to look at the entire lived

experience of people with disabilities: the social climate, systemic discrimination in our institutions, workplace accommodations, access to good health care, education and training, services, and social and income supports.”

People with disabilities need more time to find work than those without disabilities and have longer spells of unemployment. People with disabilities who have young children have an even harder time finding paid work because of their child care responsibilities. The need for transportation—common to most workers—is magnified for people with physical disabilities.

Workplace supports such as modified or reduced hours, physical changes to the workplace, or job redesign can go a long way to making employment of people with disabilities successful. About 80% of job-related accommodations cost less than \$500.

Despite the obstacles, says Richmond, “questions around the political will to put in place good public policy backed by resources, supports, coordination and accommodation are not very complicated. There is no reason that the employment statistics shouldn’t shoot up if society takes these variables seriously.”

“Children need to see people who are different.”

Deirdre Munroe knows of no other person like her working in the child care sector. A supervisor at Central Eglinton Children’s Centre in Toronto, she has been in a wheelchair since 1990, when she was a passenger in a car that was hit by a drunk driver.

At the time, Munroe’s centre was in an old school that was completely inaccessible. She credits the centre’s parents for making it possible for her to return to the job she loves. They raised \$38,000 to have a ramp built and the bathroom retrofitted. The school was later demolished and rebuilt, and is now barrier-free.

Munroe feels governments and training institutions need to be proactive and take steps to make the child care workforce more inclusive of people with disabilities. An inclusive workforce is both about equity in employment, and about enhancing the quality of child care programs, she says.

“Every single day I’m asked by children three or four times, ‘Why are you in a wheelchair? How do you drive? Can you stand up?’ It’s important because the children get real life lessons. Children need to see people who are different. That’s how society is, after all.”

Union programs support families of children with special needs

Two unique programs sponsored by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers/Union of Postal and Communications Employees provide members whose children have disabilities with support that really makes a difference.

The Special Needs (for children 0-18) and Moving On projects (for adult sons and daughters) have earned the praise of parents, the disability community, researchers and the child care sector for their innovative approach to helping ease parents’ financial, emotional and physical stresses. The projects help defray expenses directly related to a child’s special needs, and provide resources such as a newsletter, and personal support through regular contact with advisors.

Many parents have used the project to help build the skills of child care providers to meet their children’s specific needs, says Jamie Kass, CUPW Child Care Coordinator and sector council executive committee member. Examples include training teaching assistants or special needs assistants on ways to include individual children in programs more effectively, and early childhood educators in sign language or medical procedures.

For more information visit, www.cupw-sttp.org.

Family child care

Inclusion helps overcome fears

The biggest hurdles to inclusion for family child care providers are fear, and lack of training and supports, says Marcia MacKenzie, Services Team Leader at the West Coast Child Care Resource Centre in Vancouver.

MacKenzie was in family child care for 27 years. She now trains providers as part of her job and includes a component on children with special needs.

“When I was in family child care, a new child with special needs would come to me every couple of years,” she says. “At first I was fearful of doing something wrong, but you have to learn your limitations and not let fear get in the way. You also have to take advantage of whatever tools are available.”

The BC Centre for Ability and therapists helped her learn more about the children’s specific disabilities and develop activity matrixes that meant “everybody could do things together.”

MacKenzie says specialized support is difficult to find today. As well, providers don’t have access to capital grants to make the needed changes to their homes to accommodate a child who, for example, is in a wheelchair.

Nonetheless, she is a strong proponent of inclusion in family child care, saying it was a “huge blessing” that helped her, the children in her care and their parents to overcome biases.



Where to get inclusion training

SpeciaLink, the national centre for child care inclusion, provides personalized responses to specific questions, referrals to other organizations, and sources of help, information, and technical assistance. Visit the Inclusion Assistance section of the organization’s web site to access links to post-secondary institutions offering inclusion training at: www.specialinkcanada.org/assistance

Now available

What Factors Influence Wages and Benefits in the Early Learning and Child Care Sector?

No single factor can explain the low compensation levels in the sector. Instead, the reasons stem from a complex relationship between four variables: revenue, employment and labour issues, system design and public policy. This new paper examines these variables and their impact on the compensation of early childhood educators and assistants. Download your free copy at: www.ccscc-cssge.ca.

Forum moves ECE training issues forward

Are early childhood education programs adequately preparing students to work in a sector that expects more from practitioners than ever? This was one of the critical issues in ECE training considered by participants of the first gathering of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges Early Childhood Education Affinity Group.

The forum took place at Red River College in Winnipeg in November 2006 and featured sessions on:

- hot topics in training across the regions;
- issues around heightened expectations;
- new ECE training initiatives and projects;
- the sharing of ideas, activities, strategies and tips; and
- the sector council's training strategy project.

"Faculty appreciate and need the opportunity to get together with other professional colleagues to talk about issues," said Joan Kunderman, chair of the Community Services Department at the college and one of the forum's organizers.

"The entire forum was really important. It was great to have a record of successful tips, the opportunity to hear about different learning models and to get together with other professional colleagues to talk about issues. Faculty thought it was wonderful."

Kunderman said that her faculty

has continued to stay in touch with faculty at other colleges—"a very positive outcome" in a field where isolation is common.

She said that many of the issues people brought forward were consistent across the country "with a taste of regionalization". These included entrance requirements, unique delivery models, dissemination of the lat-

Kunderman said that a pan-Canadian organizing committee worked for a year to put the forum together. "A lot of cooperation went into making this happen so it shows that we are united in our goal of the betterment of education."

Another forum is planned for Fall 2007. The ACCC/ECE Affinity group is a pan-Canadian network

"I was surprised at how many great ideas I came away with - concrete ideas for teaching and new insights about our common challenges in early childhood training and education across the country."

— Jane Hewes, Chair of Early Childhood Development, Grant MacEwan College, Edmonton

est research, and issues regarding the professional suitability of students.

"None of these can be resolved in a day and a half of meetings. But it allows us to start the discussion and move things forward."

for early childhood faculty and staff, lab school practitioners and administrators from public post-secondary institutions to advance and advocate for excellence in early childhood education and training.

Currently underway...

Research for the Training Strategy project continues. This spring more than 30 focus groups were conducted to gather feedback from employers, post-secondary trainers, government officials, new graduates, and other stakeholders across the country. Building on the 2006 analysis of training approaches by province/territory, the groups were an opportunity to further explore issues including:

- gaps between curriculum and the day-to-day demands of the field;
- barriers to training (including geographic barriers faced by rural Canadians); and

- the need for on-going professional development and education.

Along with upcoming discussion groups and key informant interviews, the focus groups are a key element in the project's research and consultation process. Each activity will help ensure that the final Training Options Paper responds to the sector's training needs. The paper will recommend ways to improve the quality and consistency of training in Canada's early learning and child care sector and is expected to be complete by Fall 2007.

Recently completed...

The CCHRSC's Career Promotions and Recruitment Strategy project is now complete. The project focused on identifying ways to attract more people to careers in early childhood education and encourage skills development in the sector. An executive summary is set for release in May and will include key project findings such as:

- how careers in early childhood education are perceived;
- factors that influence people's decisions to enter the sector;
- what motivates people to remain in the sector despite low wages;
- key issues to consider when developing recruitment and career promotion initiatives; and
- potential target audiences for recruitment and career promotion initiatives.

»» Download the executive summary at: www.ccsc-cssge.ca.

Beginning in 2007...

Supporting Employers in the Early Learning and Child Care Sector

Employers in the child care sector play a key role in shaping the human resources approach and often directly affect recruitment, retention, and training. This project focuses on defining employer needs by setting and identifying specific tools to meet those needs and support the growth of a skilled workforce.

Pathways to ECE Credentialing in the Early Learning and Child Care Sector

Currently many provinces or territories have different certification/registration practices for early childhood educators, while others have no formal system or process in place. Often a credential achieved in one province is not recognized in another, creating a barrier to entry. This project focuses

on conducting an in-depth analysis of certification/registration processes across the country and creating tools that would allow credentials achieved in one province/territory to be understood and recognized in another.

Understanding and Addressing the Workforce Shortages

An accurate understanding of the workforce shortages facing the sector is critical in order to address recruitment and retention issues. By examining factors such as the creation of new child care spaces, projected birthrates, and parental employment patterns, this project will determine the current and projected shortages facing the sector. The information can then be used to identify innovative approaches to address those shortages.

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