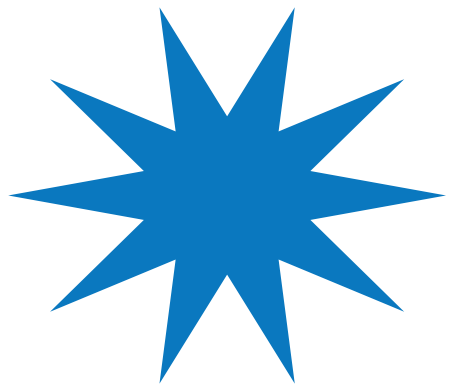
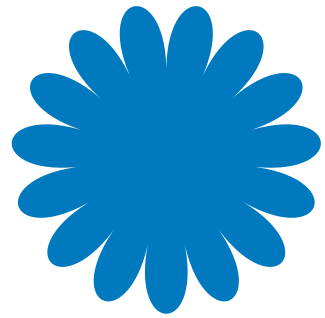
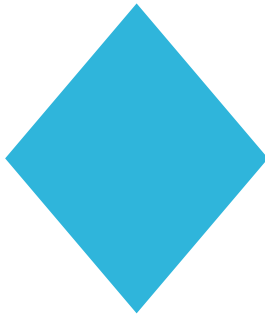
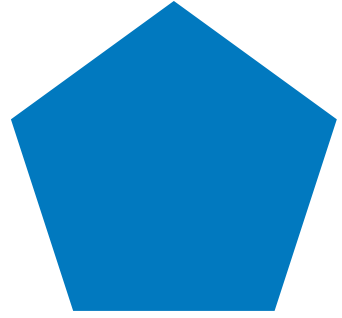
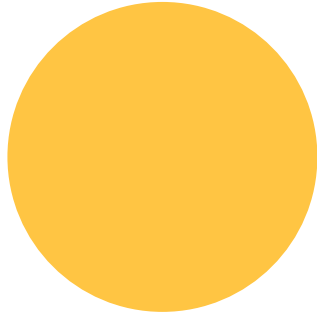
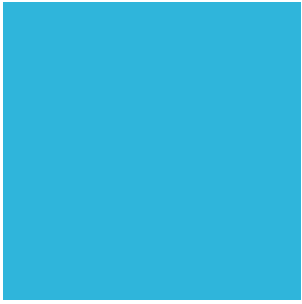
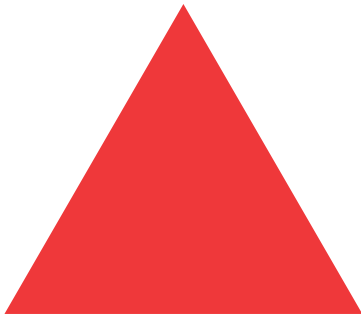
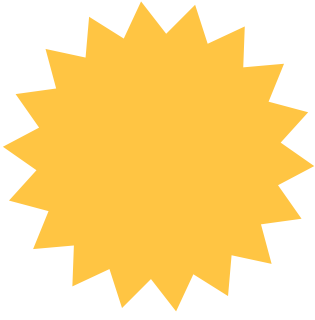




THE CHILD CARE CRISIS

IS A WORKFORCE CRISIS

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR
SURVEY REPORT



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INTRODUCTION

In 2021, the federal government announced a long-overdue plan to provide affordable childcare to children across Canada. The plan was based on established evidence: affordable, high-quality childcare is good for children, their families, and the economy. By January 2023, fees for regulated childcare were down to \$10 per day.

Still, in Newfoundland and Labrador, families cannot access a childcare spot for love nor money. Expecting parents are advised to put their children-to-be on as many childcare waitlists as possible. In many cases, parents will wait over two years for an available spot. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) validates the experience of these parents. In 2021, CCPA reported that 79% percent of young children in NL live in a childcare desert, the second-highest percentage in the country.¹

What's holding NL back from delivering affordable, accessible childcare spots to parents who need them? It turns out that our childcare system is missing a key ingredient: workers. Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) have post-secondary training that equips them to deliver age-appropriate, high quality educational programs for young children. Without ECEs, there are no programs – and news reports tell us that childcare centres are operating below capacity and dismissing students with exceptionalities because they do not have the staff to meet demand.²

If we are to meet the provincial government's targets, NL will need at least 1000 new ECEs by 2026. We'll also need to keep the ones we have. The provincial government has taken modest steps to support ECEs in the workforce and to recruit new ones, including a wage grid, training bursaries, and a one-time recognition bonus.³ They have also spent undisclosed sums to recruit ECEs internationally.⁴ But all this begs the question – why are our ECEs leaving as fast as they enter the workforce?

1 David Macdonald and Martha Friendly, "Not Done Yet: \$10-a-Day Child Care Requires Addressing Canada's Child Care Deserts" (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, May 2023).

2 Heather Gillis, "Dozens of Children with Autism Being Dismissed from N.L. Daycares Due to Staff Shortages, Advocates Say," CBC, April 18, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/children-with-autism-exceptionalities-dismissed-from-some-daycares-1.6808114>; CBC News, "Facing Staff Shortages, Labrador Daycares Forced to Limit Spaces despite High Demand," CBC, October 23, 2020,

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/labrador-daycare-staffing-shortages-1.5770649>.

3 Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Provincial Government Updates Progress on Early Learning and Child Care Initiatives - News Releases," November 30, 2023, <https://www.gov.nl.ca/releases/2023/education/1130n03/>.

4 Juanita Mercer, "N.L. Government Recruiting Early Childhood Educators in Seoul, South Korea," Saltwire, accessed February 6, 2024, <https://www.saltwire.com/atlantic-canada/news/nl-government-recruiting-early-childhood-educators-in-seoul-south-korea-100900239/>.

The Jimmy Pratt Foundation, the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour and the Workers' Action Network of NL teamed up to commission a survey of over 500 ECEs across the province. The results of the survey paint a concerning picture of working conditions for ECEs and what needs to change in the system to improve the lives of workers and the educational outcomes for children.

Through the survey, ECEs shared their thoughts on what needs to change in the sector. We learned that ECEs work under impossible conditions – most work year-round with young children without a full complement of benefits, retirement plans, paid vacations and sick days. 54% of respondents told us that if they could take stress leave due to their working conditions, they would.

While the challenges experienced by the ECE workforce are significant, what is also clear in the survey results is that ECEs are passionate about their work and committed to delivering the best quality childcare and early learning for children in Newfoundland and Labrador.

How can the sector move forward and address the issues outlined by ECEs? How can Newfoundland and Labrador retain and recruit ECEs? The solutions are clear: our province must provide ECEs with appropriate compensation and dignified working conditions. The province must step up and fund the cost of health and dental benefits, pensions, paid sick days, and paid vacations. ECEs play a critical role in our public education system and deserve to be compensated fairly and have access to benefits that allow them to live and retire with dignity. As long as these key issues remain unaddressed by the provincial government, our childcare crisis isn't going anywhere.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

This study was commissioned to explore four main questions:

- 1. Do ECEs feel appropriately compensated for their work?**
- 2. Is the absence of a benefits package a deterrent to working in this career?**
- 3. Are the working conditions conducive to employees staying in this career?**
- 4. Do ECEs feel that they receive the professional recognition they deserve for the work that they do?**

The survey was open for 20 days in November 2023. Completion was voluntary and anonymous, with participants having the opportunity to enter their name for a randomized draw for five \$100 gift cards (names were compiled separately from data and winners were drawn anonymously). The online platform Survey Monkey was used to administer the survey and it was distributed to ECEs through email and social media. While this ensured the widest reach possible, it does prevent a definitive identification of the number of people the survey actually reached.

According to a government news release (August 2023), “[t]here are approximately 1200 early childhood educators working in Newfoundland and Labrador.” However, other reports such as the NL labour market information (as per the 2021 Census) stated that “there were approximately 1,800 people working in this occupation in Newfoundland and Labrador.” In total, 520 ECEs completed the survey, allowing a response rate that ranges from 43.3% to 28.9% of working ECEs. This gives a confidence interval of 95%, meaning that if every ECE in the province completed it the same answers would be obtained 95% of the time.

The survey was designed by Dr. David Philpott, a retired university professor and researcher, with input from the three sponsoring agencies. A private, independent contractor with a graduate degree in Applied Social Psychology and a high degree of experience in program evaluation, performance measurement and research was hired to assist in the delivery of the survey and with analysis, allowing a greater degree of objectivity and non-bias.

WHAT WE HEARD: WAGES

The provincial government implemented a wage grid in April 2023. This wage grid defines a minimum hourly wage for ECEs according to their training and years of service. There is additional compensation for center administrators, francophone ECEs, and ECEs working in Labrador.

When asked for their thoughts on the wage grid, ECEs were clear: the wage grid doesn't cut it.

- **42% of survey respondents told us they were planning to leave the field because of low wages.**
- **57% reported that their salaries increased with the wage grid**
- **31% reported that the wage grid did not raise their salary**
- **38% reported that the wage grid path of wage progression will not benefit them**
- **56% were disappointed with the wage grid**

While there is some increase of wages for ECEs who upgrade their training, our survey responses call into question whether it is worth it:

- **40% feel that the wage grid motivates them to raise their training**
- **66% report that government bursaries are required for them to pursue additional training**

“I AM A LEVEL 2 WITH 19 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE, AND I AM VERY DISAPPOINTED WITH THE WAGE GRID. ... THE PAY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 19 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AND 0 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IS \$1.56 FOR LEVEL 2; THAT IS PATHETIC.”

42%

**PLAN TO LEAVE THE FIELD
BECAUSE OF LOW WAGES**

WHAT WE HEARD: BENEFITS AND PENSIONS

The provincial government's focus on wages has perhaps been at the expense of other aspects of ECE compensation, including benefits, pensions, vacation and sick days.

In 2019, a survey of ECEs, former ECEs and licensees in our province reported that benefits are nearly as important as wages to recruitment and retention; a report in 2007 found the same conclusion.⁵ This feedback is not surprising given that ECEs work daily with children and have little to no access to paid sick days.

While Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have taken steps to provide benefits and pensions to ECEs, it is curious that our provincial government does not seem to have considered doing the same. Indeed, 90% of our respondents reported being disappointed that the wage grid did not include a benefits package.

Most of our survey respondents did not have a pension, or health and dental insurance.

- **83% do not have a pension**
- **57% do not have health and dental insurance**

ECEs are not guaranteed paid sick days or paid vacation. ECEs working for for-profit centers, on average, had fewer paid sick days than their peers working in not-for-profit or public settings. As of 2020, 70% of spaces in the province were delivered by for-profit operators.⁶

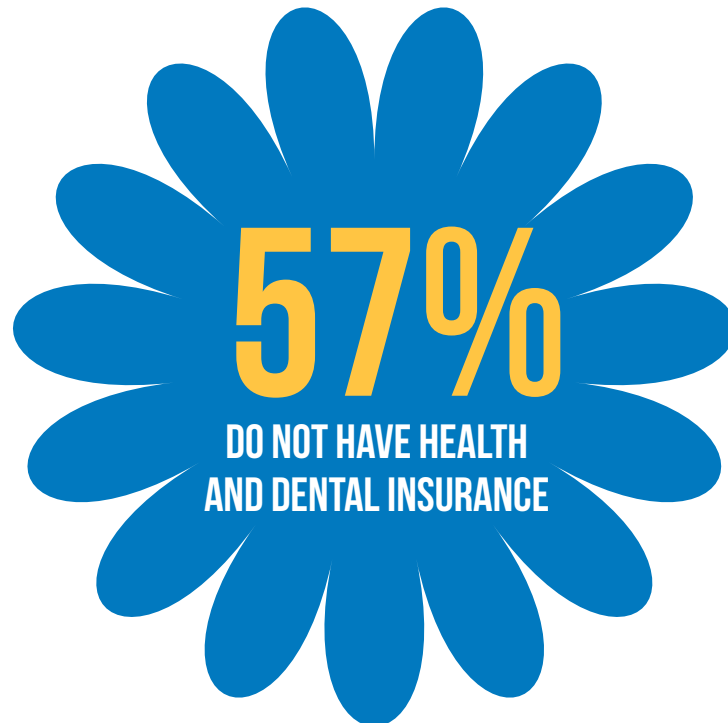
- **Average paid vacation was 13 days (9 days in for-profit centers)**
- **Average unpaid vacation was 7.2 days (2.6 in for-profit centers)**
- **Average paid sick leave was 8 days (2.2 days in for-profit centers)**

⁵ Don Gallant and Associates, "Examination of Recruitment and Retention within the Regulated Early Learning and Child Care Workforce in Newfoundland and Labrador" (Early Childhood Educators Human Resource Council, March 2019).

⁶ Emis Akbari, Kerry McCuaig, and Daniel Foster, "Early Childhood Education Report 2020" (Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 2020).

A lack of benefits and pensions has concrete effects on ECE wellbeing and ability to stay in the sector:

- **90% have no idea how they will ever be able to retire**
- **12% work a second job to secure benefits**
- **62% feel that they will have to leave the profession to secure benefits**



“I HAVE WORKED 25 YEARS AS AN ECE, AT LEAST 20 YEARS OF THOSE WERE LIVING CHEQUE TO CHEQUE. THERE WAS NEVER ANY MONEY TO SAVE FOR RETIREMENT.”

WHAT WE HEARD: WORKING CONDITIONS

An ECE's working conditions are our children's learning conditions. The survey respondents indicated that they were suffering from burnout due to their working conditions, which chipped away slowly at their dignity and wellbeing.

According to survey respondents, a workday includes duties in addition to their work with children and even unpaid work:

- **35% report not getting reimbursed for material that they have to buy for their work with the children**
- **28% report that they have to attend unpaid staff meetings**
- **66% are expected to clean washrooms**

Throughout the workday, ECEs can rarely take a break. When they need a day off due to sickness, they often cannot take it:

- **82% do not have a paid lunch break**
- **45% reported not getting a break in shifts of 5 hours or more**
- **28% said that they get a break in shifts of 5 hours or more but that it is less than an hour**
- **65% report that when they take a sick day there isn't a substitute for them**
- **28% reported not feeling emotionally safe at work**

These experiences add up to burnout, and many ECEs decide to look elsewhere for work:

- 33% reported having to take sick leave due to workplace stress
- 54% said that if they could take sick leave for workplace stress they would
- 25% are considering leaving the profession due to working conditions



“WE ARE SEVERELY UNDERSTAFFED. WE DO NOT GET EVEN A 15-MINUTE BREAK. WE WORK 9.5-HOUR DAYS AND WE ARE NOT EVEN PAID THE OVERTIME WE ARE ENTITLED TO. THE VACATION TIME WE ARE “ALLOWED” TO TAKE IS ONLY DURING JULY AND AUGUST... WE ARE UNABLE TO TAKE TIME OFF ANY OTHER TIME DURING THE YEAR.”

WHAT WE HEARD: RECOGNITION

Childcare is foundational to our society, but we can't seem to put our money where our mouth is when it comes to compensating the people who care for and educate our children.

94% of survey respondents identified their love of working with children as their reason for entering the profession. Government recruitment materials portray early childhood education as a career that “loves you back.”

According to our survey respondents, this is not the reality of their job. While parents and other ECEs respect their work, ECEs feel underappreciated by the government, and within the broader education system:

- **73% feel respected and appreciated by their peers**
- **81% feel respected and appreciated by parents**
- **47% report that their supervisor seldom validates their work (57% in for profit centers)**
- **69% feel appreciated by their supervisors (56% in for-profit centers)**
- **63% feel government does not view them as educators (76% in for-profit centers)**
- **63% feel that primary school teachers do not view them as educators**

This lack of recognition discourages ECEs and is a significant factor in decisions to stay in the field or leave:

- **52% would discourage people from entering the profession (65% in for-profit centers)**
- **45% are considering leaving the field due to a lack of professional recognition**

81%

**FEEL RESPECTED & APPRECIATED
BY PARENTS**

52%

**WOULD DISCOURAGE PEOPLE
FROM ENTERING
THE PROFESSION**

“THE GENERAL PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENT HAVE VERY LITTLE AWARENESS OF WHAT AN ECE DOES AND AS A RESULT THERE’S VERY LITTLE RESPECT FOR THEIR WORK. RACIST AND SEXIST SYSTEMS CONTINUALLY DEVALUE THE WORK OF ECES.”

WHAT WE HEARD: THE UNION ADVANTAGE

Unlike teachers, ECEs do not have a common employer (like a school board) and are not usually members of a union. Compensation and working conditions vary depending on where educators work. The median wage for ECEs in Canada is \$20 per hour. Often, they do not have paid holidays or sick days. It's rare that they have health or dental benefits, or any kind of retirement plan. Meanwhile, they spend their career caring for and educating young children – which is difficult, skilled and important work.

The ECEs surveyed felt strongly that union representation would be critical to securing better working conditions and benefits:

- **66% feel that a union is the only way to ensure fair pay**
- **59% report that unionization will motivate them to stay in the field.**
- **66% feel that unionization is the only way to ensure fair compensation**
- **77% feel that a union would help professionalize the sector**
- **75% feel that the subsidy should entitle them to the public services benefit package available for all other government employees**



77%

**FEEL THAT A UNION WOULD
HELP PROFESSIONALIZE
THE SECTOR**

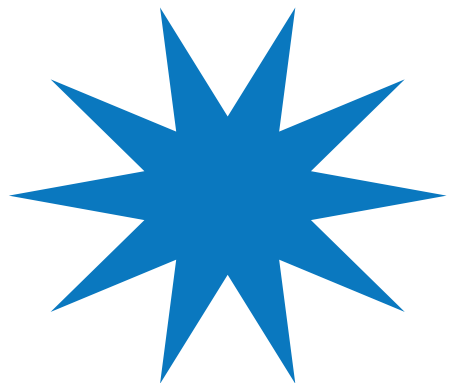
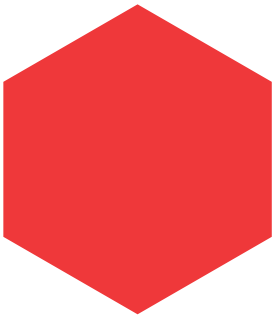
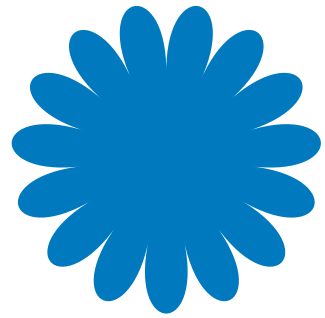
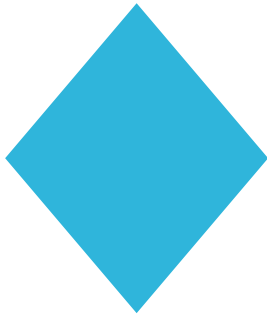
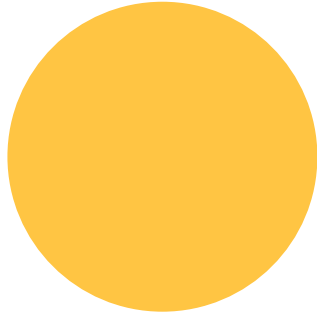
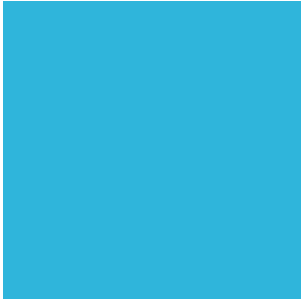
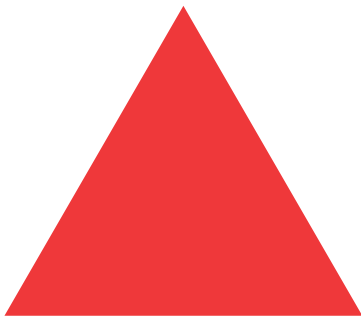
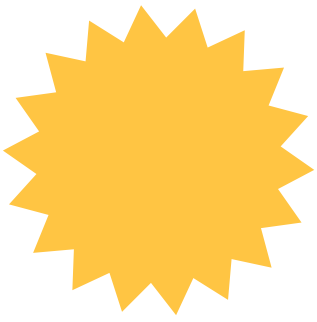
UNLIKE TEACHERS, ECES DO NOT HAVE A COMMON EMPLOYER (LIKE A SCHOOL BOARD) AND THE MAJORITY OF ECES IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR ARE NOT UNIONIZED. THE ECES SURVEYED FELT STRONGLY THAT UNION REPRESENTATION WOULD BE CRITICAL TO SECURING BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS AND BENEFITS.

SOLUTIONS

Until we solve the workforce crisis in Early Childhood Education, we won't come close to the goal of providing childcare to every family and Early Childhood Education to every child. By investing in ECEs, we can create good, well-paying, professional jobs in every community in the province.

The solutions to the challenges facing the sector can be found in the responses to this survey from ECEs themselves. ECEs, parents, and childcare advocates recommend the following solutions:

- 1. Introduce and fund benefits under the Operating Grant Program**
- 2. Introduce and fund pensions under the Operating Grant Program**
- 3. Require and fund 10 paid sick days, daily lunch breaks, and daily break under the Operating Grant Program**
- 4. Require and fund annual paid vacation**
- 5. All childcare expansion must be funded and delivered through public and not-for-profit providers.**





JIMMY PRATT
FOUNDATION



**WORKERS'
ACTION
NETWORK**
OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR