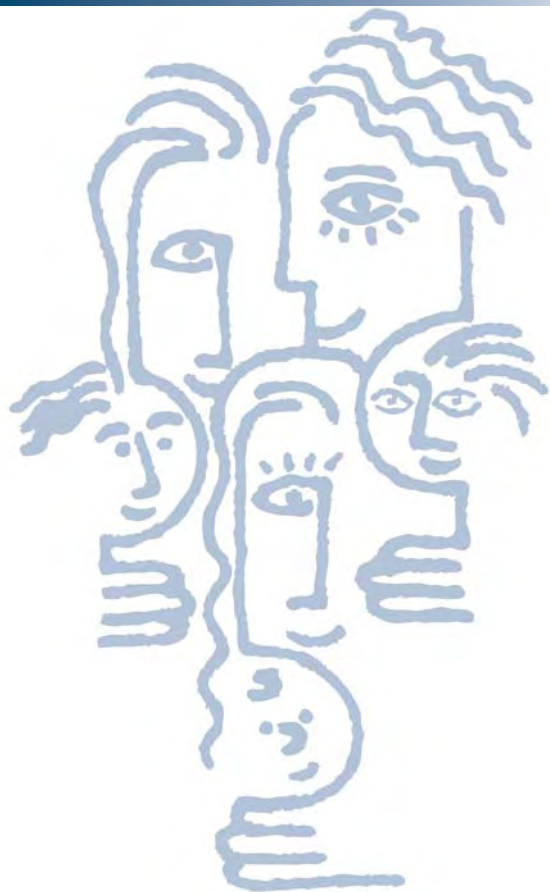


EMPLOYER MODELS IN CANADA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC) SECTOR

Supporting Employers in Canada's ECEC Sector



**Child Care
Human Resources
Sector Council**

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Introduction

This document was produced as part of the **Supporting Employers in Early Childhood Education and Care Project**. Developed by the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC) and implemented between June 2007 and December 2008, the Supporting Employers project focused on:

- Defining the range and type of employer governance models in Canada's early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector;
- Identifying the human resource needs of employers in different regulated settings and contexts; and
- Identifying and prioritizing solutions that could help employers address human resource issues.

Project research included an in-depth literature review, a survey of close to 1,000 ECEC employers, and focus groups with more than 200 employers and other sector stakeholders. These research activities generated significant data on ECEC employers and the contexts in which they work. Comprehensive project findings will be released in January 2009 in the **Final Supporting Employers in ECEC Report**.

Employer Models in Canada's ECEC Sector was developed to complement the overall project research findings and bring different governance models to life in a series of descriptive articles. Directors, executive directors, and owner-operators from across the country contributed their knowledge and experience by participating in extensive interviews throughout spring and summer 2008. The result is a series of 14 articles that explore a variety of different programs and models, while sharing innovative practices and key challenges from the employer perspective. The environment in which ECEC employers work varies widely across the country. As a result, these articles reflect just some of the many diverse setting and contexts in which ECEC employers work.

The CCHRSC would like to extend deepest thanks to those who contributed their time by participating in interviews and to the author, Bozica Costigliola, for making this initiative possible.

To order additional copies of this document or to request the Final Report e-mail: info@ccsc-cssge.ca with your name, contact information, and the number of copies requested.

A Note on Employment Settings and Governance Models

It is important to note that one goal of the research was to determine the distribution of various governance models by province/territory. Using previous definitions of ECEC governance models, information from the key informant interviews and focus groups, and by examining responses to the survey, a total of seven **governance model groups** were identified. These groups provide the foundation for analyzing the overall project research findings.

Employers who completed the survey were asked to identify whether they were a for-profit or non-profit organization. Employers who were non-profit could choose from multiple categories to best describe their governance model. As a result, governance model groups 2 to 7 in Table 1 all fall under a larger heading of non-profit. This is because when multiple groups were selected, the most exclusive category was chosen as the primary governance model. For example, community organizations, religious institutions, and First Nations Band/Tribal Councils, who all indicated they were **non-profit**, often indicated they had parent

board members. Rather than group all of these organizations under a **non-profit board member operated** label, the more exclusive category (e.g. community organization) was chosen.

Table 1

Governance Model Group	Types of Governance Models Included in Group
1. Commercial/Private organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sole proprietor • Corporation • Partnership • Franchise • Co-op (for-profit)
2. Non-Profit Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent board member operated • Community board member operated • Co-op (non-profit)
3. Aboriginal organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Nations Band/Tribal Council operated • Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement (AHRDA)
4. Community organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community organization (e.g. YMCA/YWCA, etc.) • Religious institution
5. Worksite/private company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worksite/private company operated
6. Educational Institution/Hospital organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University or college • School board • Hospital
7. Government organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal/local government • Provincial/territorial government

Organization: Come and Learn

Model: Aboriginal (Off-reserve)

Setting: Aboriginal Family Service building

Location: Regina, Saskatchewan

The Come and Learn Aboriginal Head Start¹ (AHS) program in North Central Regina “was designed by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people,” says Delora Parisian, executive director of the Aboriginal Family Service Centre, which oversees Come and Learn. “The AHS program empowers our people, our parents and our children.”

Come and Learn has been operating since 1997 and provides the AHS program to 105 children aged three to five. The four- and five-year-olds come for 2 1/2 hours a day, from Monday to Thursday in the afternoons, while three-year-olds attend from Tuesday to Thursday for 2 1/2 hours a day in the mornings. Children receive breakfast or a hot lunch, and transportation is provided, if needed. There is no fee for the program.

Instilling cultural pride is one of the main reasons some parents place their children in the AHS program. First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures are incorporated into activities such as stories and singing. Children are taught to speak Cree. Pow wow dancers come every second week to teach the children, who have since performed the dances they've learned at several school openings.

Being an urban AHS centre makes a difference, says Parisian. “People are moving away from their communities into an urban setting where, more than likely, they don't have sense of belonging, and poverty and housing are even more of an issue. They also may be isolated even though they are in the city, and may not have the same access to cultural activities such as elders or teachings that they might have received on the reserve school. And then there is the racial discrimination that parents may face and that our children face too.”

As in other AHS programs, parents at Come and Learn are seen as a child's most influential teacher and are encouraged to volunteer at least once a month, either in the classroom, the kitchen or at a special event.

“It is so important because it does matter to the children to have their parents in the program,” says Karen Bird, one of two program team leaders and a family support worker. Some of the parents who volunteer at Come and Learn connect so well that they end up being recruited as staff. “They like the program and the teamwork,” she says. The program now has a volunteer-turned-bus driver who has been on staff for five years, and once had a cook and a teacher who both started as parent volunteers.

Governance

The Aboriginal Family Service Centre administers six programs that serve children and their families, including Come and Learn. The non-profit centre, which is governed by a board of directors, employs all staff of the AHS program, sets the policies, oversees the budget and develops the parent handbook.

¹ AHS programs operate in urban and northern communities, on- and off-reserve. They are parent- and community-led and designed. In addition to encouraging parental involvement, the programs provide preschool programming in education and school readiness, health promotion, nutrition, and social and cultural support.

Karen Bird works with co-team leader Alicia Bird to manage the Come and Learn Program on a day-to-day basis. Together they are accountable to executive director Parisian and submit a monthly report on the program's activities.

"We have a strong team approach," says Parisian. "The three of us [at Come and Learn] work together." The program itself has a five-member parent board that meets monthly with at least one of the team leaders. The board is responsible for planning fundraising and other special events, as well as providing suggestions for programming.

Because the program is funded by Health Canada, Parisian must file quarterly financial and activity reports with the department. She also meets with a Health Canada program consultant between two to four times a year. "We've always enjoyed a fairly healthy working relationship with our consultants. We sometimes meet about funding issues, and they advise us on different things based on their experience dealing with all 15 AHS sites [in Saskatchewan]."

Staff

In addition to team leaders Karen and Alicia, Come and Learn has a staff of 15: four lead teachers, four teacher associates (who help in the classroom reading stories and guiding the children through activities), two cooks, four bus drivers (who also work in the classrooms as associates) and one family support counsellor. All program staff either have an ECE diploma or are working towards it.

Six staff members—a lead teacher, a teacher associate and the four bus drivers—are male. "Having positive male role models is important because some of our children don't have that," says Karen. "We are all First Nations and Métis staff, and that also makes a difference to the children because they know the culture and background of the people they are with—they know where they're coming from."

"The AHS program empowers our people, our parents, and our children."

Delora Parisian

Delora Parisian has worked in Aboriginal community development for 30 years. "I come from a family of 11 and we were raised in a strong Métis environment. Mum and Dad were always teaching us about our people and culture and struggles."

Parisian originally studied business, receiving a college diploma in business management. She subsequently took training and courses in adult education, life skills and other social service-related areas.

"I always had a heart to help my people and my community from a community-based angle," she says."

Parisian is the Saskatchewan AHS program representative on the National Aboriginal Head Start Council, and is also the council's vice-chair.

Organization: Hilda Young Child Care Centre

Model: Aboriginal – First Nations Band/Tribal Council Operated (On-reserve)

Setting: Opaskwayak Cree Nation building

Location: The Pas, Manitoba

At the Hilda Young Child Care Centre in the Opaskwayak Cree Nation (OCN), the start of each of the four seasons is celebrated with a feast. Parents and staff work the night before to prepare food donated by the community. The next day's celebration is shared with the children, community members and elders.

For Dina Meade, executive director of the centre, celebratory events such as those that welcome the seasons affirm the importance of family, community, culture and pride in oneself and one's heritage.

The Hilda Young Child Care Centre is located on-reserve and has three programs—a child care program for children from birth to age five, a nursery school program for four-year-olds (both programs began when the centre opened in 1993), and an Aboriginal Head Start Program (AHS)² for children from birth to age six, introduced in 1999.

“We share children within each of the three programs,” says Meade, “but there are some who are only in Head Start or only in nursery school, so those children are in the programs for 2.5 hours a day, while children in day care are there for the full day.”

The waiting list for the programs is long. “Our population on reserve in 2006 was 456 children aged newborn to six years, with 131 attending one of our three programs. Our nursery school program has gone from 40 to 60 children within the past two years. Our total population is increasing every year, but our floor space is not, and neither is the funding.”

Forty children and their parents are in the AHS program. “We have 100 percent parental involvement,” says Meade. “The parents come with the children every day. There are daily activities for the parents geared toward positive parenting skills in traditional culture, and we have workshops on such things as first aid, CPR and food handling.”

The centre is governed by the Opaskwayak Cree Nation and is not provincially licensed, “but we do follow all the best practices of licensing standards provincially,”³ says Meade. (Manitoba does not require on-reserve programs to be licensed nor are the programs federally licensed. Licensing standards and regulations are the responsibility of Manitoba's First Nations, who are in the process of developing their licensing standards and regulations, says Meade.)

The programs are funded through three different agreements. Manitoba Keewatinook Ininew Okimowin

² AHS programs are community- and parent-led and designed. They provide cultural support, preschool programming in education and school readiness, health promotion, nutrition, and social support.

³ The regulatory regime for on-reserve Aboriginal child care varies. *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2006* notes: “Although governments in some provinces regulate on-reserve Aboriginal child care, others do not. In some provinces, First Nations communities do not recognize provincial jurisdiction on reserves. First Nations and Inuit governments and organizations ordinarily have responsibility for administration of funds and developing programs.”

(MKO, the northern Manitoba First Nation's Government) funds up to 90 percent of the infant/toddler program, with parent fees covering supplies and the costs of special events. The OCN band's Opaskwayak Education Authority funds the nursery school program, while the Public Health Agency of Canada funds the Aboriginal Head Start Program. Both the nursery school program and the AHS program are free for participating parents. These different streams are typical for early childhood programs on First Nations reserves. All three are funded with federal monies.

Reporting is time-consuming and complicated, says Meade. She sits on the regional committee of First Nations and Inuit Health, which meets quarterly regarding the AHS programs, and she files quarterly annual narrative and financial reports.⁴ She also sits on a sub-committee of child care directors within MKO who meet and file reports quarterly. Meade files quarterly reports at the OCN for the nursery school program as well.

Governance

Like other First Nations band councils, the OCN's is responsible for overseeing community and social services such as child care, health, education, water, sewer and fire services, roads, by-laws, and community buildings. The OCN band council consists of a chief and 12 councillors who are elected by band members every two years. There is also a council of six elders who are appointed by the band council and act as spiritual guides, community role models, and a link between the past and present.

Meade's immediate supervisor is the community services manager of the band council. The community services manager reports to the community services committee (three council portfolio holders, five community members and one elder) and to a general manager who oversees the operations of the band. In turn, the general manager is accountable to the chief and band council. Human resource issues such as recruiting and hiring are mainly handled by Meade and the band's personnel administrator. The administrator also takes care of staff benefits and payroll.

Meade also works with a parent advisory committee made up of two parent representatives from each program, one community member, one elder and one band council member. The advisory committee meets monthly to discuss program updates and ideas, as well as fundraising.

"Every year we do a work plan for each program and review it with the parent advisory committee, and the supervisor in each program," says Meade. Once approved by her managers and the community services committee, the plans are submitted to their respective funders. "We start working on the process in January and it has to be completed and finalized by the end of March."

Staff

All staff are employed by the OCN. The child care and nursery school programs are staffed by three early childhood educators (including Meade), two child care assistants and a cook. The AHS program is staffed by two ECEs—one who works directly with the children, and one who works with the parents—plus a child care assistant in training.

Staff take 40 hours a year of ECE training through the University College of the North to "keep current". Staff

⁴ Meade says future reporting will be on an annual basis.

often take other professional development courses and workshops as well, ranging from mandatory occupational health and safety training to early childhood development training with an Aboriginal focus.

Not surprisingly, culture is a large component of the programs, finding concrete expression in activities such as the smudging⁵ ceremony that takes place each day, and the monthly lunch to which elders are invited to “share culture and ages” with the children.

“We go with the children’s needs and look at the whole child in all areas of development—spiritual, cultural, physical, social and cognitive—and we work directly with parents, having that partnership,” says Meade. “We also use our first language within the programming to ease the transition into the school system where they have Cree Immersion. I think Canada is a very culturally diverse country and when we work with our children, we really have to focus on culture and background.”

Meade is very proud of what the programs contribute to the lives of OCN children, their parents and the community.

“Every year we have a graduation,” says Meade. “It is another celebration of recognition for our children.”

This year (2008) will be a double celebration: it is the year that a group of children who were the first to attend Hilda Young Child Care Centre will be graduating from Grade 12. “They are coming back and walking down the aisle during the ceremony with our children [who are graduating from nursery school]. It will be wonderful.”

“I think Canada is a very culturally diverse country and when we work with our children, we really have to focus on culture and background.”

Dina Meade

Dina Meade worked in home-based child care before studying early childhood education at Keewatin Community College.



“When I achieved my ECE III⁶ in 2004 I told myself, ‘I’m going home and I’m going to work with our people,’” she says. “Our children are such an asset, and it’s not only the centre that works with the children—we have our elders involved in their development and we have the parents. It’s a family, it’s everyone coming together.”

She first worked as the child care director at the Brandon Friendship Centre, and came to the Hilda Young Child Care Centre in 2005.

⁵ Smudging is a ritual cleansing and purification by smoke, through the burning of herbs or incense.

⁶ Manitoba has three qualification levels: ECE III, II, and Child Care Assistant (CCA). ECE III requires completion of an approved degree program from a recognized university or an approved ECE II program plus a recognized certificate program. Child care directors in a full-time preschool centre must be classified as an ECE III and have one year of experience in child care or in a related field. Manitoba post-secondary institutions often offer diploma programs in ECE customized to meet the needs of First Nations communities.

Meade puts in 12-hour days, which include doing program rounds, meeting with parents, staff, supervisors, committees or council, ordering supplies, collecting parent fees and ensuring administrative and financial information and paperwork are kept up to date.

“I love the children. They make it worth coming into work every day. The staff and community are very supportive and everyone knows how important the centre is and they see the benefits that our children are receiving.”

Organization: Stepping Stones Child Care Services

Model: Commercial/Private: Sole Proprietor

Setting: Two stand-alone child care centres

Location: Miramichi, New Brunswick

The owner-operator of a child care centre is typically the one responsible for everything in the program. “But if you have a good team and involve them all, it’s easier,” says Beth McCormack, owner-operator of Stepping Stones Child Care Services.

McCormack opened Stepping Stones in March 2002, after she bought the business at the suggestion of her former college roommate and longtime friend Tammy McTavish, the centre’s director. The two women work closely together and consult each other on many aspects of the program—McTavish’s well-organized style complements McCormack’s hands-on approach.

The centre has two buildings: the original one that was purpose-built in 1999, and another that previously housed law offices and is now home to the centre’s after-school program. With 78 spaces serving children from birth to 12 years of age, Stepping Stones is one of the largest child care centres in the area. The majority of its revenue comes from parent fees, and the government provides a quality improvement grant for training, equipment, material and wage enhancement.

The owner-operated model also has the advantage of streamlining decision-making, McCormack says. “I like that we can make decisions at our team meetings, ask for staff input, and handle any concerns that arise immediately.”

Governance

As the owner, McCormack is responsible for developing policies and procedures, setting budgets and managing the centre’s accounting and payroll, as well as ensuring that provincial regulations are followed and that the environment is healthy and safe for the children. Her day includes morning rounds of the programs before getting down to her administrative work; she can also be found doing the cooking and answering the phones when the centre is short-staffed.

The centre’s director, McTavish, “oversees the day-to-day operations—the scheduling, staffing issues,” says McCormack. She collects the fees, administers the billing, and looks after the integrated day care programs (for children with special needs).

Staff

Stepping Stones employs 11 front-line program staff and one cook. McCormack and McTavish hire and conduct staff evaluations together. Current staff have different degrees of Early Childhood Education training, ranging from those with no formal training to those with an ECE diploma. McCormack has made it mandatory for staff to have earned an ECE certificate within the next three years.

“In New Brunswick formal education is going to be more and more a requirement and it helps to make staff more accountable,” she says. “If staff are willing to put the time and money into training, this will be a career for them and it creates security for everyone.”

Ongoing staff training is a high priority, and McCormack's responsibilities include organizing professional development workshops. "If we see a workshop coming up, we determine which staff should attend, and we look at the cost and whether we have the funds and the relief staff. I also make sure all staff are members of Early Childhood Care and Education New Brunswick (ECCENB) and are aware of any training [offered] through the association."

Staff retention has been a challenge in the past, but now "we have a really good team." Fostering a collaborative approach is important because "people support what they can create. When staff feel more ownership of their job, they feel like they not only work for Stepping Stones but are also an important part of the decision making process. Decisions that ultimately affect them directly."

McCormack says it's also important for directors to work together. "It's good to use other directors as a sounding board because we all work under the same guidelines and principles and follow the same standards." She is a strong supporter of the mentoring approach, and is involved in a province-wide project called Director to Director—or D2D—which pairs directors and facilitates meetings and retreats, providing opportunities to acquire leadership skills, network and share experiences. The project is sponsored by the New Brunswick Association for Community Living.



"It's good to use other directors as a sounding board because we all work under the same guidelines and principles and follow the same standards."

Beth McCormack

Beth McCormack was a learning associate in New Brunswick's public school system before she decided to open Stepping Stones Child Care Services in 2002. After becoming a mother in 1991, McCormack stayed at home, working for her husband doing bookkeeping and payroll. She also was a home child care provider.

As an owner-operator who likes to be closely involved in the programs, time management is a challenge. "The most difficult aspect is finding the time to get everything done, but it's worth it." McCormack says the best part of being in child care is "working with all the families and knowing their needs. And each child brings something different to the centre and that keeps it exciting."

In addition to centre duties, McCormack is part of an informal directors' group, and is vice-president of ECCENB. "This commitment takes a lot of time, but it is a huge benefit for the centre because I know what's going on and what's coming. There is so much happening right now—the [provincial] pay equity initiative for child care staff, and the talk about a staff certification requirement."

Organization: Montessori Children's Centre

Model: Commercial/Private: Sole Proprietor

Setting: Single-site centre

Location: Montague, Prince Edward Island

The Montessori Children's Centre was designed and built by its owner, Rheo Rochon. In operation since 1976, it has a capacity of 50 spaces, serving a large, mainly rural area of 15,000 residents in and around Montague. The program serves children aged 22 months to eight years. Like most child care centres in the province, it offers a kindergarten program.

The centre's design is open-concept. "There's lots of light and visual connection with the outside... lots of windows," says Rochon. There is a toddler room and kindergarten room that are used by these groups for part of the day, but overall "the children are almost never separated," says Rochon. "We mix and move groups around."

Governance

The centre is an incorporated company, owned and operated by Rochon. There is no board of directors. He says the structure works well for him: he sets the policies, recruits and hires staff, collects parent fees, and pays the bills. He is solely responsible for making the major decisions, keeping the centre financially viable and performing all administrative duties. "The buck stops here," he says. "A majority of child care programs in PEI are owned and operated by one person."

Being an owner-operator means that Rochon is also involved hands-on in the program. He greets parents every morning and leads the music program for half an hour just before lunch. "Then I'm off to get groceries or supplies and I'm usually back on the floor at 4:30 to have contact with the parents as they start arriving." The paperwork is usually done on weekends.

While Rochon does not have a formal parent advisory group, "we make a point of speaking to each parent every single day. Being in a rural area, you know everybody."

The centre's staff recently unionized, making Montessori Children's Centre the third-only unionized child care centre in the province. Negotiations for its first collective agreement took about a year and the contract began in March 2008. The Early Learning Operators of PEI (ELOPEI)—an employer group of not-for-profit and owner-operated centres of which Rochon is a founding member—hired a human resources firm to do the bargaining.

"There are benefits to unionization in that the working conditions, benefits and wages are spelled out very clearly and this avoids confusion," says Rochon. "The biggest challenge is to try to find the money [for wages and working conditions] and still break even."

Parent fees account for 80 percent of the expenses for staff and operating. "This is high," says Rochon, pointing out a centre's need to cover most operating costs through parent fees can make child care a financial challenge for many families.

The centre also receives a maintenance grant from the province, half of which must be allocated to equipment and administration and the other half to enhance wages, "but that only works out to 50 or 75 cents an hour." There is also a special needs program that provides funding to hire additional staff to reduce overall ratios. All

staff, says Rochon, are trained in issues concerning children with disabilities and are aware of any special-needs goals of the children.

Staff

The centre has seven full-time early childhood educators (ECEs), two part-time ECEs, and one full-time employee who cooks and cleans. A bookkeeper and a student who helps with cleaning work a couple of hours each week are also part of the staff.

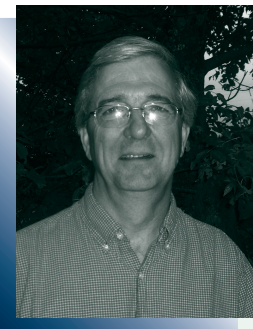
After a probationary period, newly hired ECEs are required to enroll in a six-month correspondence course for Montessori teachers. Staff receive a wage increase once they complete the course. Rochon covers the \$2,000 course fee up-front and deducts it from the individual's wages in the amount of the wage increase until it is paid off (the wage increase remains afterwards).

Rochon believes that quality staff “really make your program; you want to keep them, and you should treat your staff like gold. If you have a quality program, the children are happy—and if the children are happy, then everybody's happy.”

Rochon is quick to point out that “staff retention is a huge problem [in PEI] and wages are a big part of it.”

The wages at the Montessori Children's Centre are among the highest in the province, and Rochon has been fortunate in being able to recruit good staff. Staff get two days a year of professional development provided by the centre, and Rochon hopes he will be able to increase it to three. “We close our centre and offer professional development right on site.”

“We have a great team and a team approach,” he says. “In some centres staff hardly see each other but here, because of the open concept, most staff interact all day long and pull and push to get everything done. It is a very organic flow.”



“You should treat your staff like gold. If you have a quality program, the children are happy—and if the children are happy, then everybody's happy.”

Rheo Rochon

The Montessori Children's Centre was originally owned by Rheo Rochon's wife. He built the centre and helped out after it opened. “I fell in love with the program,” he says. “It restored my faith in education.”

When his wife left the centre to work for the provincial government, he took over ownership. He has an ECE certificate and has taken university courses related to child development.

Rochon is the PEI representative on the Canadian Child Care Federation's national member council and a founding member of the Early Learning Operators of PEI (ELOPEI). He is also involved in the Early Childhood Development Association.

Organization: Vancouver Society of Children's Centres (VSOCC)

Model: Community Organization

Setting: Seven child care sites (six child care centres and one school)

Location: Vancouver, British Columbia

With five new child care centres under construction in the downtown core, Vancouver Society of Children's Centres' (VSOCC) Executive Director, Sandra Menzer often finds herself starting her workday at a site meeting with developers and architects.

Menzer says that the urban boom in the city's downtown has led to a strong need for more services for children and families—services the society is uniquely positioned to help provide.

VSOCC was originally founded to deliver child care in city-owned spaces.⁷ When Menzer became the executive director in 1998 the organization had two child care programs and a \$250,000 budget. Since then, the society has partnered with school and other agencies to deliver a range of services for families and children. Today, Menzer oversees a \$6-million budget, 20 child care programs and a range of family support programs.

“We have been able to play leadership role in planning [for services]. Working with other organizations, we have come up with a collective vision that is phenomenal,” Menzer says about current plans to try to meet some of the increased service needs caused by the population growth. “We are working with agencies to create neighbourhood hubs where families can access a continuum of services.”

VSOCC's seven child care centres serve a socially, ethnically and economically diverse population of children aged three months to 12 years. The society has 350 licensed child care spaces and will add about 225 new spots over the next three years. It also runs a variety of family support programs in 10 locations. “We deliver 40 to 50 parenting workshops and collectively serve about 5,000 families a year,” says Menzer.

Governance

VSOCC is governed by a volunteer board of directors made up of the Society's members, clients and community members. “Our board is responsible for strategic planning, setting direction, establishing policies and doing related work,” says Menzer.

Menzer reports to the board and oversees a management team comprised of three directors: operations, quality and administration. They work with two child care managers, a manager of family programs, an office manager, an accountant, and supervisors directly responsible for the child care and family programs and staff.

“There is no human resources department at VSOCC—the management team performs all human-resource-related tasks—but this could change in the next couple of years,” Menzer says, “because of the size and complexity of the operation.”

⁷ In exchange for permits to build more condominiums and high-rises, the City of Vancouver requires developers to build child care spaces.

The workload at VSOCC is substantial. “It was only last year that we were able to build up our infrastructure at the senior level of the organization. Before that all our time was focused on direct service delivery.”

Menzer’s workday can include planning meetings for the joint downtown service hub venture; meeting with the society’s management team to address issues such as the staff training program; ensuring compliance with recently approved provincial regulations; applying for grants; and working on policies and procedures at the operational level.

Part of her job involves sitting on the society’s labour-management committee (employees are unionized) and serving as the employer negotiator⁸ during collective agreement negotiations. She also handles meetings with parents whose children are on the society’s waiting list (currently at 2,200).

Parent fees account for the majority (67 percent) of VSOCC’s revenues. The provincial government provides another 20 percent and grants from the City of Vancouver makes up another 7 percent. The society fundraises to meet any shortfalls—in 2007/2008, for example, the infant/toddlers program had a \$430,000 deficit. Without core funding, Menzer says, financial sustainability is always a challenge.

“We have been offering parenting workshops for employees of corporations, child-minding services for corporate events and a few other things that help us generate revenue to offset some of our costs,” says Menzer. “It’s exciting to create a social enterprise that generates new revenues, but I wish we didn’t have to.”

Staff

The society employs 108 staff. Child care staff have at minimum either a basic Early Childhood Education certificate, Infant/Toddler certificate or Special Needs certificate. Those who work in the family resource programs that deliver services such as drop-in’s and parenting workshops have a variety of training backgrounds—from ECE certificates to university degrees in social work.

Menzer says it is increasingly challenging to find qualified staff, even though VSOCC provides relatively good salaries and benefits for the sector, internal job opportunities, training, and paid time for program planning and committee work.

“We have colleges delivering fewer ECE programs and many experienced people go to work in the school-board system where wages and benefits are better,” she says. “We’ve lost a number of excellent staff in the last little while and that could continue to grow.”

Menzer makes it a priority to involve staff in decision-making. Employees work in program and age-specific teams on an ongoing basis, and “we have made a commitment that if we are going to make any significant changes like program standards, all the staff will be involved in one way or another.”

⁸ As employer negotiator, Menzer has a mandate to negotiate a tentative agreement, which then has to be ratified by both parties.

“We have been able to play leadership role in planning [for services]. Working with other organizations, we have come up with a collective vision that is phenomenal..”

Sandra Menzer

Sandra Menzer’s background is in social work, and after graduating from university she worked in youth programs and in a residential group home for children and youth.

Before coming to VSOCC she was the co-executive director of one of Vancouver’s neighbourhood houses, working a range of community programs, including child care programs. When a developer came into the area and was required by the city to build child care spaces in order to proceed with building, the neighbourhood house became the operator of the programs.

“I had to learn everything you needed to know about child care,” says Menzer. “I learned about design, setting up the program and hiring staff.”

Menzer says that the most gratifying part of her job is seeing the impact that both a good child care program and a continuum of services can have on children and families. “It’s also great to be able to give staff opportunities [such as in the programs that will open in the new centres] and to see them take these opportunities.”

Organization: WoodGreen Community Services – Child Care Services Unit

Model: Community Organization

Setting: Bruce Public School – Bruce/WoodGreen Early Learning Centre

Location: Toronto, Ontario

Context: The focus of this profile is the integrated child care, kindergarten, and family support program at Bruce/WoodGreen Early Learning Centre. The centre's child care program is operated by WoodGreen Child Care Services, which falls under the umbrella of WoodGreen Community Services, a non-profit organization that provides a range of programs and services to the east-Toronto community. Both WoodGreen Child Care Services and WoodGreen Community Services are referenced in this profile to clearly explain the operations and governance structure of the centre.

WoodGreen Child Care Services provides early learning and child care programs in eight centres to an economically and ethnically diverse population in Toronto. “It’s a challenge to have multiple sites and programs,” says the unit’s director, Elaine Levy. “There’s always so much going on.”

There are 535 child care spaces in WoodGreen’s centres. Across the inventory of programs, the centres serve children from birth to age 12. Levy has overall responsibility for all eight sites. She recruits the manager for each site, who in turn recruits the front-line staff, all of whom are employees of WoodGreen Community Services. The City of Toronto provides the majority of program funding through subsidies and grants, while parent fees make up about 38 percent of revenues.

Bruce/WoodGreen Early Learning Centre

Located in Bruce Public School, the Bruce/WoodGreen Early Learning Centre is unique among the eight sites that WoodGreen Child Care Services operates. A Toronto First Duty⁹ site, the centre is an innovative model of several partners working together to integrate kindergarten, child care and family support programs.¹⁰ The centre has 102 spaces¹¹ and offers programs for prenatal up to age 12.

“We consider our program to be an integrated seamless day, so the children in the 3.8- to 5-year-old group are more or less in the same environment all day,” Levy says. This means that, unlike the children in Grade 1 and higher, they do not move from a child care room to the classroom and back again. The program combines kindergarten curriculum with the child development approach of child care and uses the support of the Parenting and Family Literacy Centre. Early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, teaching assistants and a parenting worker work together to deliver the integrated program using a common approach.

⁹ Toronto First Duty began as a three-year pilot project (2002-2005) in five Toronto neighbourhoods to provide integrated child care, kindergarten and family services, and encourage increased parental participation in their children’s early development. After the pilot project ended, funding continued to be provided for Bruce/WoodGreen Early Learning Centre (BWELC) by the City of Toronto and the Atkinson Charitable Foundation. The Toronto District School Board funds the half-day program for children 3.8 to 6 years of age. Bruce/WoodGreen Child Care Services provides services at BWELC for children and families from 2.5 to 12 years of age.

¹⁰ See Governance section for a list of partners.

¹¹ WoodGreen Child Care Services holds the licenses for the preschool, kindergarten and school-age programs.

Bruce/WoodGreen also encourages parental participation in children's early development. Parents are welcome at any time, are provided with parenting resources, and sit on the program's management committee.

Governance

The overall decision-making body at WoodGreen Community Services is the volunteer board, which approves a global budget and policies for the organization. Within this framework, Levy, as the Child Care Service Unit Director, prepares individual budgets for all child care sites, including Bruce/WoodGreen, and all policies relating to their operations. She submits them for sign-off to WoodGreen's president to whom she reports directly.

Unlike other WoodGreen child care sites, Bruce/WoodGreen also has a management committee that includes representatives from its main partners: the City of Toronto, the Toronto District School Board, the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, WoodGreen Community Services, the Child Development Institute, Toronto Public Health, and parents. This committee determines the allocation of resources, service planning and monitoring, and program policies.

The central administration provided by WoodGreen Child Care Services also provides many benefits for Bruce/WoodGreen, including access to a special needs resource person who works with all of the centres, and the creation of economies of scale that reduce the purchasing costs of program resources and supplies. But the biggest benefit, both for the Bruce/WoodGreen centre and the seven other programs, is that site managers have more time to focus on the programs. "It's not that they don't have any administrative duties," says Levy. "They have to track attendance and they still have a lot of non-program related things they have to do. But there are huge chunks, such as reconciling monthly payments, that are done centrally and free up the managers' time to devote to the children, families and programs."

Challenges of program integration

The widely respected program has "all the challenges you would expect" of a multi-stakeholder model, says Levy. "We've had to work out how to support each other to meet the program's objectives. The principal still has to run his school and I still have to run my unit. We've looked at how to use the resources to create an integrated program and change the way things work."

On the ground, the site manager and principal work closely together. "If an issue is identified, then the principal and manager problem-solve along with the staff."

A key challenge has been dealing with the different work cultures that teachers and ECEs have. For example, says Levy, TDSB¹² teachers have much more time built into their schedules to prepare than ECEs do. "It's about finding the time for [ECE] staff to be away from the program and children to do the planning, reflection, and sharing that they need to do."

It has also been important to develop consistent approaches to curriculum delivery and behaviour management, which usually involves finding the middle ground.

¹² Toronto District School Board.

Staff

The Bruce/WoodGreen centre includes a complement of 7.5 full-time staff employed by WoodGreen Community Services, including the site manager. They work with two TDSB teachers, two TDSB teaching assistants and one parenting worker. Recruiting staff who believe in the model is critical, Levy says. Staff hiring for both kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators is typically done by the program manager and school principal working together, while ensuring that the hiring practices comply with the requirements of the collective agreement applicable to the position. When there was a change in principals, the school board superintendent focused on finding a replacement who would embrace the Bruce/WoodGreen model.

Levy is proud of the results: “If you walked into the Bruce/WoodGreen site today and went into the room for four- and five- year-olds, you would see an active group of kids and some adults. You would not know who was technically the TDSB teacher and who was the ECE or the teaching assistant or parent, because everyone plays an integral role in delivering the program.”



“It’s about finding the time for [ECE] staff to be away from the program and children to do the planning, reflection, and sharing that they need to do.”

Elaine Levy

Elaine Levy has been Director of WoodGreen’s Child Care Services Unit since 1982. A former kindergarten teacher, she holds a Masters of Education from McGill University. She has served as voluntary chair of the Toronto Coalition for Better Child Care and the City of Toronto’s child care advisory group. She is currently involved with Every Child Belongs, the city’s program to support child care practices for including children with special needs. She is also a member of other child care related networks, including a multi-site operators group working on the mutual challenges they face as employers.

Levy says she works with a great group of staff, and loves the variety in her job and the opportunities for innovation: “I like not knowing what’s going to happen when I walk in the door in the morning, and the ability to go with what needs to happen, and that we’ve been able to be on the cutting edge.”

Organization: The Early Childhood Learning Centre

Model: Educational Institution

Setting: Community college campus

Location: Springhill, Nova Scotia

The Early Childhood Learning Centre on the campus of the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) is the only licensed child care centre in Springhill. It is also the only one of NSCC's 13 child care centres where the staff is directly employed by the college¹³.

“Originally when it opened 21 years ago, it was a pilot project,” says centre director Jennifer Elliott. “The centre was not open to the community but was just for students and for use as a lab school¹⁴”

The Springhill centre now offers two programs to student parents, college faculty, and area residents: one for children aged 18 months to three years and one for those aged three to five. The centre is licensed for 49 spaces, “but we run at about 28 for best practices reasons,” says Elliott.

The centre is located on the lower level of the NSCC campus building in Springhill, just down the hall from the ECE program. Because the program serves as a learning centre for ECE students, there are two-way mirrors in the children's classrooms that can be used for observation by the ECE students. All of the classrooms and Elliott's office are connected by large windows so that people can see from room to room. The two-way mirrors also allow parents to observe the program their child is in, a benefit that many appreciate, including those who leaving their children in care for the first time.

Students have regular lab time in the centre. Time is allotted in two-hour blocks, allowing students to conduct activities for their course work—for example, on creativity or preschool methods—and participate in the program as teachers. “We usually have two [students] at a time along with two regular teachers. As a result, there are at least four adults and the children get lots of one-on-one time.”

The centre is subsidized by the college through free rent and services such as cleaning, laundry, telephone and other utilities. “We are responsible to pay for staff salaries, supplies and equipment,” says Elliott. Parent fees make up 69 percent of the centre's revenues, government grants account for 20 percent, and 11 percent comes from the college.

Governance

Elliott is responsible for the overall management of the centre's staff and the program. She reports directly to the head of the Health and Human Services Department, who she meets with at least once a month to discuss budgets, student accounts and human resource issues.

¹³ The other centres are contracted out to independent organizations who deliver child care services.

¹⁴ Lab schools are child care centres that allow Early Childhood Education students to gain real-life experience through observation and hands-on practice in an early childhood setting. They also provide students, parents and faculty with quality child care on-campus and can be used as a resource for students in other education, health, social or psychology-related faculties. NSCC has two other lab schools that also offer its ECE program: in Kentville and Yarmouth.

An advisory board comprised of the department head, two ECE faculty members, two parents and one student meets four times a year to discuss issues related to the program.

Elliott meets with the human resources and finance staff person every two weeks to post billings to student parent accounts, submit time sheets for payroll, and discuss any issues around payroll, vacation or benefits. Along with the Health and Human Services department head, they draw up the centre's annual budget, which must be approved by the college's principal and then its board of governors.

Elliott also meets regularly with the assistant to the ECE department to stay up-to-date on the ECE program at the college and the lab school program, which is based on emergent curriculum.¹⁵

"We know what they're teaching in the ECE program and follow what they teach," she says. "As small campus of 200 students we are really hands-on. We currently have 21 ECE students in their first and second years and are here mentoring, watching, and assisting them."

Staff

The centre has five ECE staff, including Elliott. All are unionized and in the same bargaining unit as the other support staff in the college.

All staff at the centre have an ECE diploma. Staff retention is high—wages and benefits are good relative to others in the sector, and the program puts a high priority on quality, both because of the children and because it wants to demonstrate to students what a model child care centre looks like. Staff view their mentoring and assisting role with students as "second nature. We're so used to it we don't even think about it."

The centre emphasizes ongoing professional development for staff. "Each year we go over their performance review and each staff member makes an individual plan regarding what they would like to achieve and what they want their learning to look like," says Elliott.

There is good access to professional development. The centre often asks ECE faculty to teach a workshop, and the on-site NSCC Cumberland Early Childhood Development Support Centre offers professional development for the ECE community. Centre staff will sometimes share knowledge they have learned at workshops or courses they've attended. Staff can also take a college course in any discipline for free.

Elliott is proud of the work that the centre does. "We work as a team with faculty members, and the ECE and Health and Human Services students. We strive to be the best. We are not just helping children learn, but helping our ECE students learn as well and supporting student parents while they study."

¹⁵ *Emergent curriculum* means that the programming is driven by the children's interests rather than teacher-driven by early childhood educators. ECEs respond to children's interests by planning activities and providing materials that support the theme preferences expressed by the children.

“We work as team with faculty members, and the ECE and Health and Human Services students.”

Jennifer Elliott

Jennifer Elliott knew from an early age that she wanted to work with young children. She received her ECE diploma from the Institute of Human Services in Truro in 1992, and received a diploma in special education in 1993. She has also studied management development for women, with an ECE component.

As director of the Early Childhood Learning Centre, Elliott spends part of each day working on the floor and the rest doing administrative work such as ordering supplies, billing, filling out grant applications, and attending meetings with students, parents, staff or faculty.

“I love the fact that we get to mentor ECE students and the other students that come. We see growth all around—with the children, the students and the parents, many of whom are just getting back on their feet and starting their education. It is really rewarding to see them come back to school and fulfill their dreams.”

Elliott sits on a number of college committees and boards: the Critical Incidence Response Team (CIRT), the Occupational Health and Safety Committee, the Learning Council (managers and supervisors on campus) and the NSCC Cumberland Early Childhood Development Support Centre.



Organization: UBC Child Care Services

Model: Educational Institution

Setting: University campus

Location: Vancouver, British Columbia

The buildings on Acadia Road that house the University of British Columbia's (UBC) child care programs are "lined up along the street like tiny houses, with the play yards all in the back. It's like a little village," says Darcelle Cottons, director of UBC's Child Care Services unit.

The "village", which currently houses 17 programs, is growing. Five new child care centres are being built; four of them will house a new mixed-age program model that will group 24 children aged 15 months to five years in a "very large space", allowing them to work on activities according to skills and interest rather than age.¹⁶

UBC Child Care Services is currently licensed for 332 spaces ranging from infant to school age. The number will grow to 460 when the new programs are in place, partially easing the huge demand for services (the average wait for a space is 2.5 years). The programs now serve more than 400 UBC families—students, staff and faculty. Children can be enrolled full- or part-time.

When Cottons came to UBC in 1991, its child care programs were in transition—the university was just taking over their management. The programs had previously been run by parent cooperatives and then as a non-profit society. To come under the control and employ of a public institution was an unusual arrangement for a university child care centre, since such centres are generally operated by non-profit boards. "I liked the challenge," Cottons says, adding that it was a big job to manage the changeover, build a system and integrate the various programs under one umbrella. "But it's been wonderful and it's everyone working together that got us where we are."

Governance

The child care unit falls under the department of UBC Housing and Conferences. Cottons reports to the Director of the department and consults with the Day Care Council, an advisory group of parents. In addition to directing existing programs, Cottons is responsible for overall development of new programs and integrating them into the unit. An assistant director reports to Cottons and is responsible for financial management of the programs and the waiting list. "The waiting list management is complex," says Cottons. "It's important to have one point of contact and it builds relationships with the parents."

The university subsidizes the child care programs through the Housing and Conferences Department at about \$1,800 per space annually. The department covers the cost of rent, utilities, major repairs, and cleaning. Parent fees pay for the major expenses—staff salaries and benefits, as well as toys and equipment. There is also some funding from government. Time sheets are done by senior staff and approved by Cottons before going to Housing and Conferences, which also looks after payroll and benefits.

¹⁶ This model is designed to allow children, staff and families to build long-term relationships with each other, and it provides opportunities for children to work in break-out groups according to their skills and interests rather than their age. It will require a variance from provincial regulations, which stipulate a maximum of eight children in a mixed-age program. The mixed-age model at UBC will also have a research component—one employee is planning to base her doctorate on it.

Staff

The programs have a total of 70 full-time staff (an additional 26 will be required for the new programs), and the unit maintains a list of 50-60 'casuals'. Cottons and the senior staff in each program do the hiring of front-line staff, all of whom are UBC employees.

Each of the centres has a head teacher who works on the floor alongside other staff, but "it is a flat organization and the people who work together evaluate each other." Staff are divided into teams and each team decides its program's philosophy and logistics. "There is no prescription. The team negotiates this as a group."

The unit's policies are developed collectively, but "we don't have lots of rigid policies because that takes away initiative and responsibility from staff," says Cottons.

The centres each control their own mini-budget for toys and equipment and are managed differently by the staff teams. "When I take tours of students through the buildings (three of the buildings are identical duplexes), people can see how different they are in exactly the same physical space. Each team has decided within a quality child care standard how it will implement its programs."

Evaluations are ongoing, and five of the senior staff act as mentors to the other teams, observing programs and meeting with the teams every month to debrief on how each team's goals are being met.

Professional development is a priority. Workshops often occur on-site after regular working hours, and staff are paid. The current focus is on communication, conflict resolution, co-creation¹⁷, and sharing knowledge. "Staff can walk up and down to visit the other child care centres, but they need more formal opportunities to share their knowledge with each other," says Cottons.

A number of workshops have been held for senior staff on interpersonal relationships, "challenging each other to explore values as caregivers and people, and how they can work with their co-workers and the organization."

Cottons feels it will be very important to ensure staff share their knowledge and experience around the mixed-age model of the new programs. Combining age groups to reduce transitions and promote long-term relationships should create conditions for children to learn from in-depth interactions with each other and staff. "It will require staff skills that are well developed and self-reflective," she says. "And it will require a lot more staff meeting time outside of child care hours to explore and examine issues as they arise to ensure the best care possible and resolve any safety and programming needs."

¹⁷ *Co-creation* describes a way of working "within a learning community" where caring guides all action and interaction. Working together with this approach at the core helps create the best possible outcomes for children.



“It is a flat organization and the people who work together evaluate each other.”

Darcelle Cottons

It was a longstanding love of children and the example her mother set as a kindergarten teacher that inspired Darcelle Cottons to go into early childhood education and care. She is a certified Early Childhood Educator/Infant Toddler Educator and holds a valid BC License. She was a front-line ECE in several child care centres and a director in a North Vancouver centre before coming to UBC Child Care Services in 1991.

Cottons says her colleagues are the best thing about her job. “It’s the people I work with and the commitment, the dedication and the soul they bring to their work. It reflects in the care they give to the children.”

Cottons is on the board of the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council. She is co-chair of the BC Association of Child Care Employers and represents the association on the Child Care Advocacy Forum. She also sits on the provincial Child Care Council, which reports to the Minister of State for Child Care in BC.

Organization: Primary Day Care Centre

Model: Government – Municipal/Local

Setting: Community building

Location: Vibank, Saskatchewan

With a population of 370, Vibank, Saskatchewan may seem small, but the Primary Day Care Centre is “bursting at the seams,” says its director Michelle Ecarnot. “We are a natural feed into Regina [Vibank is 48 kilometres southeast of the city], so we have families from several communities around us who use our centre.”

Primary Day Care Centre is located in a former convent that was built in 1923 and is owned by the Village of Vibank.¹⁸ The village also holds the license for the centre, an unusual arrangement and the only one of its kind in Saskatchewan until 2007. The centre has 49 spaces and serves more than 69 children aged six weeks to 12 years.

Ecarnot and her sister originally wanted to open a private child care program, but the Department of Social Services would not license a private centre. When Ecarnot, a former village administrator, discovered that provincial regulations allow municipalities to hold a child care license, she approached the village with the idea and council agreed to it.

“The first auditors had said, ‘Why would the village want to do this? Think of the liabilities,’” says Ecarnot. The village is ultimately responsible for any debt the centre incurs “and they are aware of this.” However, at the time there was no licensed child care in Vibank and council thought having one would benefit the community.

“That was their greatest motivator, and it has proven to be correct because one of the first questions people ask when they think of moving here is ‘What is there for child care?’,” says Ecarnot.

The centre pays \$500 a month in rent to the village for 3000 square feet located in the lower level of the building. The village also covers the costs of hydro, water, and any physical repairs. “This allows us to keep our fees low and offer more to parents,” says Ecarnot.

The centre’s revenues cover staff wages and other expenses. It receives 46.5 percent of its revenues from parent fees and another 40 percent from government grants.¹⁹ Fundraising makes up the rest.

Governance

While she is directly accountable to the village council of five elected members, Ecarnot works most closely with the village administrator. Together they form “the operating management team”.

“Officially we meet monthly, but we are really in constant communication,” says Ecarnot. At the monthly meetings, they discuss issues as such compensation, the status of the waiting list, building maintenance (for example, plumbing or heating problems), and any ongoing renovation projects.

¹⁸ The convent houses a mix of public organizations and private businesses: the Village of Vibank offices, the library, post office, a restaurant, an esthetics and tanning salon, a hair salon and judo and dance clubs.

¹⁹ This includes wage and operating grants, as well as enhanced staffing grants provided for children with special needs.

“After our meeting I complete a written report along with a financial statement, which the administrator provides to council,” says Ecarnot. “Council members always have the complete financial picture and they also want to be aware of anything regarding the physical environment.”

Ecarnot meets with council on an as-needed basis (perhaps three times a year) to discuss any significant projects, such as the current expansion of outdoor space for the children. Overall, she says, council gives her a lot of leeway in day-to-day decisions and in developing and implementing policies. For example, she can recommend whether and how much to raise staff wages.

Ecarnot says that the three-year term of council members provides the centre with a certain amount of security. “I bring the consistency and can plan from year to year. Traditional boards will often change every year or two.” The centre also has a parents’ advisory committee that meets every two months to discuss curriculum and fundraising, which is a major part of their responsibility. Ecarnot incorporates the advisory group’s ideas into her reports to council.

Staff

Primary Day Care Centre has 10 early learning staff. Eight have ECE diplomas, certificates or university degrees, although not always related to education. Two are high-school students who work less than 65 hours a month (accompanied by another staff member). The centre also has a cook and a custodian.

“I have a very hands-on approach with staff,” she says. “I have conversations with each staff person every day and we have a monthly supper meeting. We are like a big family.”

Ecarnot staffs at low ratios so that employees are able to have a half-hour paid break each day, as well as a half-hour for programming. The centre also has a policy that requires staff to attend at least two professional development events each year, which are paid. “Good staff is the key to a quality program,” says Ecarnot. “If your staff is happy, then generally the children will be happy.”

As director of the centre, Ecarnot’s job includes recruiting, hiring, administering the payroll, conducting annual staff evaluations, supervising staff, managing the waiting list, enrolling children, billing, and collecting parent fees. She typically works 12- to 13-hour days, coming in to open the centre at 5:45 a.m. and leaving when the centre closes at 6:15 p.m.

In addition to its former status as the sole municipal centre in Saskatchewan as well as its low staff turnover rate, Primary Day Care Centre has also made a name for itself because of its physical environment, says Ecarnot.

“All kinds of people come for tours,” she says. “It’s a large space with a lot of light. We have a lot of art and there are all kinds of natural things in our centre, like driftwood and rocks—it’s all about nature, beauty and comfort.”

“I have conversations with each staff person every day and we have a monthly supper meeting. We are like a big family.”

Michelle Ecarnot

Michelle Ecarnot was an Art History major in university, and worked as the village administrator and postmaster in Vibank before becoming director of Primary Day Care Centre 15 years ago. She applied for and received her ECE2 in 1999, several years after taking all the required classes. When the centre first opened, neither she nor the staff had formal ECE training. “I felt it was important to have a grounding in ECE to operate a centre,” says Ecarnot. “At the time, we were all in the same position and we all worked during the day and took ECE classes in the evening.”

Ecarnot also chairs the regional Southeast Child Care Directors’ Association, a group of 12 to 15 rural centres. “We talk about the challenges of finding trained staff, and it’s also hard to find substitutes to come in. Sometimes we share staff if we have part-timers.”

“This is what I love, and I really care about children,” she says. “I absolutely believe in what I’m doing and the need to provide quality child care in Saskatchewan.”



Organization: Day Nursery Centre

Model: Non-profit: Community & Parent Board Operated

Setting: Three sites in Winnipeg's inner-city

Location: Winnipeg, Manitoba

Day Nursery Centre is the oldest child care centre in Western Canada. Opened in 1909, Day Nursery now has three sites in Winnipeg's inner-city, each purpose-built for the child care program. One is in a family housing complex, another in a multiplex community building, and the third in a stand-alone centre. Executive Director Fernanda Hodgson divides her time between the three sites and makes it a priority to be in touch with the centre's directors and administrative staff on a regular basis.

With 128 spaces, Day Nursery Centre serves children from birth to age six, with some provision for school-age care. The centre receives its main funding through operating grants from the Manitoba Child Care Program and parent fees (almost all parents are subsidized).

Most of the children are First Nations or Métis and a few are Inuit. Others may come from immigrant or low-income families. There are also a number of children with special needs. The centre is committed to celebrating and embracing diversity in all its forms.

Staff take a holistic approach, looking at the needs of individual children and their families. "We try to take cultures into account when we plan programming, and buy toys and furniture," Hodgson says. "Staff have to program for all children, including those who speak different languages or have different backgrounds."

Governance

The centre is a non-profit, charitable organization governed by a volunteer board of directors consisting of parents and community representatives—for example, early childhood education instructors, special needs workers, and staff from schools and family agencies—as well as a member with a financial background.

The board sets the centre's vision, philosophy and mission, approves policies and budgets, and is responsible for strategic planning. Hodgson, a financial manager, and directors from the three sites form the management team responsible for day-to-day decisions.

The main benefit—and challenge—of a volunteer parent/community board is the different perspectives and opinions members bring to the table. "Together our board members see more possibilities," says Hodgson. "There are lots of opinions, but everyone has the common goal of providing quality child care for the children."

As a result, Hodgson says collaboration is critical to the working environment at Day Nursery Centre. An example of this approach in action is the centre's strategic planning sessions, which bring together parents, board members and staff.

"You get people involved and get them to work together and that's how you move the organization to move forward," she says. "People get excited, and they feel they are part of the decision-making process and have a vested interest."

Staff

In addition to the four-person management team, there are 32 other staff—19 early childhood educators and 13 child care assistants. Hodgson recruits and hires staff in consultation with the three centre directors.

The management style is collaborative and team-based. The centre conducts annual employee surveys and staff evaluations, holds regular topic-based meetings with staff, consults with staff on programming and other issues, and has a workplace health and safety committee.

Staff are required to take ongoing training—a minimum of 24 hours annually. (Part-time employees and those on leave are pro-rated.) The centre defrays some of the cost, and provides some optional in-house training. “In our experience, staff truly appreciate and believe that professional development is important,” says Hodgson.

Recruiting staff in a time of workforce shortages is one of the challenges of Hodgson’s job, but retention is high, and she attributes this to the team approach, acknowledging the staff’s contribution and focusing on priority issues for employees.

Innovation

One example of responsiveness to employee concerns is the health, safety and wellness project developed in 2002. The project was funded by the Worker’s Compensation Board of Manitoba’s Community Initiatives and Research Program and focused on finding ways to promote health practices and prevent workplace injuries related to working with young children. The project provided training in proper ergonomic methods to perform daily tasks and in the use of equipment to reduce body strain while working in a child-sized environment, and presented information and support through workshops and newsletters. The project’s DVD, *A Guide to Workplace Health, Safety and Wellness*, is available to all child care centres through the Manitoba Child Care Program or by contacting Day Nursery (www.daynurserycentre.ca/wellness.html).

Day Nursery Centre also employed an innovative approach when it introduced the emergent curriculum model²⁰ in 2001. To ensure a smooth transition, the centre obtained funding to hire a coordinator who worked with staff to introduce the new curriculum over a four-year term. “She had time to be in each centre each day to observe and talk with staff, and provide one-on-one mentoring,” says Hodgson. “The position was so successful that the centre would put it in place again if funding allowed.”

²⁰ *Emergent curriculum* means that the programming is driven by the children’s interests rather than teacher-driven by early childhood educators. ECEs respond to children’s interests by planning activities and providing materials that support the theme preferences expressed by the children.



“Together our board members see more possibilities. There are lots of opinions, but everyone has the common goal of providing quality care for the children.”

Fernanda Hodgson

Fernanda Hodgson took Early Childhood Education at Red River College and obtained a management certificate from the University of Manitoba. She began working in child care in 1979, and has been executive director of the Day Nursery Centre since 2001.

At Day Nursery Centre, Hodgson’s workday can include writing reports, attending team meetings, reviewing board documents, talking with parents and government bureaucrats, and organizing professional development. She also actively fundraises for the centre from community businesses and foundations. It’s a big job, “but I’m really happy and feel I’m making a difference in families’ lives,” she says. “Coming to work is something I really look forward to.”

Hodgson sits on Community Living Manitoba’s Child Care Inclusion Committee and the Manitoba Child Care Association’s Public Policy and Professionalism Committee. She also meets regularly with other area child care directors.

Organization: St. Mary's Child Care Centre

Model: Non-Profit: Parent Board Operated

Setting: Hospital

Location: Montreal, Quebec

When Quebec introduced its new family policy in 1997, St. Mary's Child Care Centre and others that were subsequently transformed into Centres de la petite enfance (CPE) feared that they would lose their homey touch, says executive director Gina Gasparrini. The government program rapidly expanded the number of spaces to create a system of accessible child care services for families with young children.

"We all panicked at first...but our experience has shown that being bigger has allowed us to improve, because we now have an administrative team with specific areas of expertise—you don't have to be a jack-of-all-trades. Financially it's better because you can save on some things when you're bigger. And there is more financial stability."

Government financing accounts for 86 percent of the centre's revenues, Gasparrini says. Parent fees, which are \$7 a day, account for 13 percent, and the remaining 1 percent comes from other sources.

The centre, which is housed in two locations at St. Mary's Hospital Centre in Montreal's Côte des Neiges neighbourhood, has 119 spaces—more than double what it had in 1997—serving children from six months to five years of age. It is a workplace child care centre that gives priority to children of hospital employees—a "great recruiting tool for the hospital, especially since there is such a shortage of staff in health care," says Gasparrini.

While affiliated with the hospital, the centre is an independent, non-profit organization. It rents space in two buildings owned by the hospital that were renovated to accommodate the child care program and has been approved to open a third center for 60 children by Fall 2010.

Governance

Out of nine board members at St. Mary's Child Care Centre, seven are parents—regulations require that two-thirds of a board be parents—one is staff and one is a hospital liaison (currently a human resources lawyer on staff at the hospital).

"The board is responsible for the strategic management of the centre, and it approves all policies and procedures—the manuals, handbooks, bylaws—and the financials such as the annual budget," says Gasparrini. She is directly accountable to the board and has responsibility for the recruitment and hiring of staff, the quality of the program, implementation of policy, management of the centre's financial resources and materials, and representation of the centre in the community.

While having a parent board can make the job more complex and time-consuming, "the results are so much better," says Gasparrini, indicating that parent involvement raises the quality of the programs.

The board receives ongoing support from two organizations—l'Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance (AQCPÉ), and a regional network of CPEs (RCPEIM). Each year, Gasparrini brings in someone from

RCPEIM to train the board on roles and responsibilities. AQCPE also publishes a guide for boards on salary scales and working conditions for directors of centres, and how to evaluate them. A regional network supports the boards through consultations and meetings, and has an on-demand service to advise board members on ways to deal with specific issues in their centres.

Centralization

Gasparrini points to a number of benefits and economies of scale that come with a systemic approach to early childhood education. “In Quebec, we (employers) are a network and we have accomplished so much by working together,” she says. Pay equity, a province-wide pension plan, and the group insurance plan were negotiated between government, AQCPE and unions.

As well, St. Mary’s belongs to two CPE co-ops: one is part of AQCPE and negotiates discounts with suppliers; the other is regional and maintains a centralized waiting list.²¹

While the “red tape” of working within a system can be frustrating, “we manage a lot of public money so it is normal to have to be accountable. It takes time and energy because everything is regulated, but the results are better.”

Staff

The centre has 30 staff. This includes Gasparrini and an assistant director, who work together to supervise staff, register children, and conduct parent orientations. Twenty-one educators and five support staff work directly with the children. All educators have either a college diploma in Early Childhood Education or a bachelor’s degree in Child Studies or Education. A pedagogical advisor acts as a resource for educators, and a part-time bookkeeper provides financial support.

Every year the staff go on a retreat for a weekend. “I bring in a speaker for a workshop, and the rest of the time is spent team-building and bonding.” Staff are also able to attend one RCPEIM workshop per year, with all costs are covered by the centre.

With the rapid expansion of child care services in Quebec, it has become a challenge to find qualified staff. “It takes persistence—you just have to keep looking,” says Gasparrini. “We are fortunate that it is not as big an issue in our centre.”

Gasparrini says it’s a priority to have a cohesive and strong team. “We are here for the children and families, and the staff are the front line. If I take care of the staff, I know they will take care of the children.”

²¹ The Quebec government has said that it wants all regions to have centralized waiting lists by September 2008 so that parents have only one call to make to find a space, and to eliminate duplication and ensure a more accurate statistical snapshot of supply and demand.

“In Quebec, we (employers) are a network and we have accomplished so much by working together.”

Gina Gasparrini

Gina Gasparrini has worked in early childhood education and care since 1986. She is a graduate of the three-year ECE program at Vanier College and has two certificates in management. She became the Executive Director of St. Mary's Child Care Centre in 1998.



Gasparrini is president of a regional network of CPEs, Le Regroupement des Centres de la Petite Enfance de L'Île de Montreal. She is also president of Co-op William (the AQCPE co-op that negotiates discounts with suppliers), and a former president of the board and member council of the Canadian Child Care Federation.

“I like the diversity of the work because my responsibilities are so varied, and knowing that I'm making a difference in the lives of young children and families is a key thing. My work for the network [of CPEs] is very motivating and stimulating because it has an impact beyond the children in my centre.”

Organization: Campus Childcare Incorporated

Model: Non-Profit: Community Board Operated²²

Setting: University campus

Location: Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland

“One of the best things about operating a child care centre on Memorial University’s campus is having access to services and expertise,” says Tracy Rose, executive director of Campus Childcare Incorporated. While the centre has its own board of directors and operates at arm’s length from the university, “we still fall under the university’s umbrella,” she says.

This means the centre has access to the university’s services, including its finance and human resources departments, psychologists and social workers, faculty of education, volunteer bureau, and more. These departments provide support on a wide range of issues, from producing financial statements to providing advice on community resources for families.

Once run by the students’ union, the centre was incorporated as a separate entity in 2006. “We still receive assistance from the students’ union and from the university,” says Rose, “but we are responsible for a break-even budget, our own financial management and administration.”

The students’ union provides the centre with an operating grant of \$20,000 a year, as well as grants to student parents to help them defray the costs of child care. The university provides maintenance and cleaning services in kind. Parent fees account for the majority of the centre’s revenues (about 85 to 90 percent), and the provincial government provides some grants to assist with the inclusion of all children and the purchase of equipment and supplies.

Campus Childcare is licensed for 164 spaces and operates in a building that houses four individual centres: one toddler centre, two preschools, and a kindergarten after-school centre for 5- to 12-year-olds. First priority for spaces goes to full-time Memorial University students, and then to university employees and families. Any remaining spaces—usually only a few—are made available to the general public. The centre offers both full- and part-time enrollment.

The centre is used as a “lab”²³, where students who are training to become ECEs at local colleges complete hands-on practicums. The centre is also used for research and observation by students from several of the university’s faculties, including social work, education, psychology, and nursing. The centre follows an emergent curriculum²⁴ and is inclusive of children with special needs.

²² In this case ‘community’ refers to members of the Memorial University community.

²³ Child care centres that are used as labs allow Early Childhood Education students to gain real-life experience through observation and hands-on practice in an early childhood setting. They also provide students, parents and faculty with quality child care on-campus and can be used as a resource for students in other related faculties.

²⁴ Emergent curriculum means that the program is driven by the children’s interests rather than by early childhood educators. ECEs respond to children’s interests by planning activities and providing materials that support the theme preferences expressed by the children.

It's a high priority for Rose to be hands-on and keep in touch with the programs. She makes sure to do a centre walk-through every day to check in. "And if there is any down time during the day, I'm usually on the floor with the children and engaging with them and staff throughout the building. I think it is key that they see that I am there and available." She also works on the floor if a staff member is absent.

When in her office, she maintains an open door policy for staff and parents. "People are coming and going all the time," she says. "Sometimes it becomes rather busy but I want people to know that I am approachable and available."

Her duties include meeting with staff, parents, and government and university officials, managing the centre's waiting list, working on the budget, enrolling children, preparing invoices for child care fees, and fielding calls about programs and placements. Once a week, she meets with the program directors who run the four centres.

Governance

Rose reports to the centre's board of directors, which consists of representatives from the university's human resources, finance and legal departments, two parent representatives, two student representatives, a professional representative from the Faculty of Education, and a child psychologist.

"The board oversees managing policies and procedures, setting fee schedules, and approving changes to programs," says Rose. "They also approve the budgets."

While Memorial University's human resources department acts as the centre's pay roll agent and looks after staff benefits, "anything outside of that in HR happens in-house," says Rose. "The hiring is done through a hiring committee, which consists of a representative from the Board, me and the relevant program director."

Rose is also involved in negotiating with the staff union. She sits on the employer's negotiating committee, along with two board members and a representative from the university's human resources department. Rose is also a member of the labour-management committee.

Staff

Campus Childcare has 29 full-time staff: there are 22 early childhood educators, four program directors, one cook, an administrative assistant, and Rose. There is also one part-time cook.

The centre strives to create good working conditions, including flexible hours of work and planning time as well as a "wonderful medical, dental, and pension plan". Staff pay into the university's larger-scale employee benefits plan, which makes the contributions more affordable. The centre also offers incentives such as education credit courses at the university.

Staff can also receive pay or take time in lieu of pay for up to 21 hours for professional development sessions taken during off-hours. Rose organizes the on-site professional development (which is paid), polling staff once a semester on issues that interest them.

She and the four program directors have also developed an internal handbook for staff outlining everything that relates to the centre's procedures—"who you call if you're sick, how to deal with different situations that may arise with families."

Rose feels that child care employers should place a priority on staff to build a good program. “You can’t have a quality program without quality staff, and you can’t keep quality staff unless you treat them well. It’s important for employers to work closely with all of their employees.”

“And if there is any down time during the day, I’m usually on the floor with the children and engaging with them and staff throughout the building. I think it is key that they see that I am there and available.”

Tracy Rose

“I always wanted to work with children,” says Tracy Rose, adding that she was not sure that she would always remain in early childhood education. “I thought that going into the [ECE] program would guide me and I would do other things. I’ve done a lot of other education and training since then, but it’s 17 years later and I’m still here.”

Rose’s first job as an ECE was in the lab school of the College of the North Atlantic. She started work at Campus Child Care as a front-line ECE when the building first opened in 1992. She then went on to become a program director, and has been executive director since 1999.

Rose says she likes the opportunity that the job gives her to help others—staff, children, families and students who work or train at the centre. She considers herself a strong promoter of quality child care. “I enjoy making sure we have good programs and showing people what it means to have a quality child care program.”

Organization: Pump-kin Patch Day Care Centre

**Model: Partnership between a Non-profit: Community Board Operated and Work Site/
Private Company**

Setting: Office tower

Location: Calgary, Alberta

Pump-kin Patch Day Care Centre sits on the third floor of one of Petro-Canada's two gleaming office towers in downtown Calgary.

Petro-Canada opened the centre in 1987 to help employees returning to work from maternity leaves and to assist other parents who were having difficulty finding quality child care. The centre has 80 spaces and provides care to children from birth to six years of age. First priority for spaces goes to Petro-Canada employees, then to employees of other companies in the tower, and then to members of the community.

Providing worksite child care benefits the corporation because the employees have peace of mind and are "more productive and focused," says Garth Lockwood, the corporation's manager of employee benefits.

Petro-Canada holds the license²⁵ for the centre, but day-to-day operations are handled by Churchill Park Family Care Society, a non-profit charitable agency that operates centre-based family child care and school-age programs.

"While [being the license holder] meant taking on an additional level of responsibility, it also gave us more control over the operation of centre and a way to ensure that the standard was appropriate," says Lockwood.

Churchill Park, which became Pump-kin Patch's provider in 1998, is "very easy to work with," he says. "The organization is known in the community. They have access to very good quality staff and their turnover rates are low. As a result, it makes the operation of the centre that much easier for us."

Petro-Canada provides the space for the child care centre, and all of the equipment, toys and furniture. "Churchill Park delivers the program," says Noreen Murphy, Executive Director of Churchill Park. "We collect the parent fees, provide staff and staff training and provide supplies such as paper and glue."

Most of the parents who use the program are dual-income professionals in demanding jobs. Pump-kin Patch actively welcomes their participation. The centre recently formed a parent committee to "brainstorm ideas of how parents and others can become more involved, such as through show-and-tells of their work or hobbies," says Pump-kin Patch's program manager Lori Godin²⁶.

Godin says the benefit of having a child care centre right in the workplace instead of off-site is that it allows working parents to "come to the day care to be with their children at any time—even if it's just joining their child for lunch or a snack every day."

²⁵ A license is required to operate a child care centre. The license holder is legally responsible for ensuring that all provincial child care regulations are adhered to, including requirements for program content, staffing, physical setting, safety, equipment, and administrative requirements such as records and posted information.

²⁶ Since this profile was written, Godin has left Pump-kin Patch and moved to New Brunswick.

Governance

Pump-kin Patch Child Care Centre is the sole workplace child care arrangement that Churchill Park Family Care Society has, and the only program for which it does not hold a program license. Churchill Park works closely with Petro-Canada to deliver the program.

Churchill Park is run by a community volunteer board of directors—to which Murphy is accountable—and is the employer for the staff in all of the child care programs. An executive team consisting of the director, a program director and a director of administration provides leadership and policy direction. Most day-to-day or operational decisions are made by program and administration managers who work at almost every site.

Parent fees account for most of the revenue for the society's programs, including the Pump-kin Patch. Program staff also receive staff support funding that is tied to program accreditation²⁷.

Murphy says that because Petro-Canada holds the license, the company has a better understanding of the value of child care and how it works. It also means Petro-Canada always knows what's going on at the centre. "[Garth Lockwood] gets copies of everything, and has to sign off on everything—annual licensing, accreditation applications, all the paperwork normally signed off by a license holder."

Murphy deals directly with Lockwood on any license- or regulation-related issues at Pump-kin Patch. The centre's two program and administration managers work with his assistant and Petro-Canada's facility manager on day-to-day issues, such as needed repairs, enrollment statistics, and any important issues related to the centre's families.

Staff

There are 22 employees at Pump-kin Patch, including two managers, a cook, and six support staff (to cover breaks, absent employees, and to enhance ratios for children with special needs). The remaining staff are early childhood educators.

Program manager Godin supervises the staff and the program—including program planning and goal-setting—and deals directly with the parents. The administrative manager is responsible for billings and payments, organizing the waiting list, ordering supplies, supervising the cook and preparing the payroll. The program manager, the administrative manager and the society's director of programming hire the staff for the centre.

Having two managers on-site means that "people use their strengths and work together closely," says Murphy. "We have collective decision-making in the management team and that style of cooperation rolls out to the staff and becomes part of the culture."

At Pump-kin Patch, the two managers work together "constantly," says Godin. "We are just a foot away from each other."

²⁷ Accreditation is a voluntary process where child care centres and family child care agencies can show that they exceed the regulatory requirements of licensing. Accredited child care services are entitled to a number of government grants, including staff support funding.

All of the Churchill Park's managers meet monthly with the executive team to provide updates on the sites, staffing issues, partnerships, professional development²⁸ and new initiatives, and to consider any requests for assistance from staff or parents from the Friends of Churchill Park Fund.²⁹ Monthly meetings also include acknowledging the overall accomplishments of the programs.

"This is most important for all of us," says Murphy. "Each manager at the society is not only responsible for his or her own site, but also for the success of all the sites."

This includes Pump-kin Patch, a site that Murphy views as a successful model of workplace child care because of the society's policies and standards, and the corporation's oversight role. "Petro-Canada has all the information at their fingertips," she says, and this provides continuity should the corporation ever need to change providers, and helps ensure accountability and program quality.

"We have collective decision-making in the management team and that style of cooperation rolls out to the staff and becomes part of the culture."

Noreen Murphy

Noreen Murphy trained as a teacher in Ontario. She moved to Alberta and in 1980 started a non-profit family child care service in the bedroom community of Airdrie. She has been working for Churchill Park Family Care Society as its director since 1987.

"My job is to make sure that everyone in the organization has what they need to do their job—that they are working in an environment that values, acknowledges and supports them, that the society is stable financially and that the policies and organizational structures are in place for them to be able to do their work."

Murphy is a member of the governing council of the Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services, and is chair of the Child Care Task Force for Public Interest Alberta. She also co-founded Churchill Park's Family Resource Facilitation Project, which provides a support network for children, families and child care centre staff across the Calgary region.



²⁸ Churchill Park shuts down all of its centres two days each year for paid professional development. Staff also receive some funding for professional development through accreditation (the amount varies according to each staff's certification level).

²⁹ This is a general fund consisting of donations. It is used to assist staff and parents in emergencies, either through a loan or a gift.

Organization: The Copper House

Model: Worksite/Private Company (subsidized by the corporation below)

Setting: On-site at Husky Injection Molding Systems Ltd.

Location: Bolton, Ontario

The Copper House is one of the few workplace child care centres of its kind in North America. While most others contract out the operation of their child care programs, the Copper House is owned and operated by Husky Injection Molding Systems Ltd³⁰.

The centre was the brainchild of Husky's founder, Robert Schad, who believes that investing in employees pays off in productivity and quality.

"Robert walked the talk," says Valerie Nease, director of The Copper House, adding that initially his vision was not easy for some in the company to understand. "They were saying, 'We're into plastics, not kids.'"

But after more than a decade serving Husky families, The Copper House is now viewed as an "incredible" recruitment and retention tool for the company. The centre has helped to make Husky an employer of choice that supports balancing personal commitments with career development. Outside of Husky, it is widely recognized as a model workplace child care program.

The centre is located on the Husky "campus" in Bolton, Ontario, and was designed to be as residential and family-friendly as possible. For example, the centre has a homestyle kitchen and areas that look like family rooms. The layout of the centre promotes the easy flow of activities and interactions between the programs. The building is nestled among trees and greenery, and has an outdoor garden where the children grow vegetables.

Licensed for 98 spaces, the centre provides flexible services for 150 children from toddler to school age.³¹ Children can be enrolled full- or part-time. Parents can also use the centre on a drop-in or emergency basis. Care is available day or early evening whenever parents need it for job-related reasons such as working late, traveling, or during emergencies, including school closures due to snowstorms.

Providing child care at a moment's notice can be challenging, says Nease, but the centre is always able to accommodate the children. "We never know how many we're going to have, but the parents know they can just show up with their children and we'll take care of them."

The centre seeks to provide as much support to parents as possible so that they can spend more time with their families and at the same time feel free to focus on their work responsibilities. The program exceeds the minimum standards in the *Ontario Day Nurseries Act* and offers a high-quality program and the fullest flexibility possible. For example, the centre's ratio of staff to children is greater than that stipulated by provincial regula-

³⁰ The company supplies injection molding systems to the plastics industry around the world.

³¹ It is common for a space to be shared by children who are enrolled part-time. This is why the number of spaces at Copper House is less than the number of children served.

tions. The Copper House also provides other services—at a cost to the parents who use them—such as arranging to have a hairdresser come in and cut the children’s hair, and offering a “date” night so parents can have an evening to themselves. The centre is funded by parent fees deducted through payroll, and a subsidy from Husky.

Governance

Financial and policy decisions are made by Husky’s Board. Operational decisions are made by Nease, who is accountable to Husky’s senior executive team—the president and vice-president of the company. Nease also works with them to manage the waiting list (the company has 1,500 employees and there is high demand for the centre’s services). While the Copper House is viewed as a business tool and as such a business decision can inform who gets a space, “Employees at all levels are important and eligible for a space for their child,” Nease says.

Staff

The Copper House’s 16 staff³² are employees of Husky. They receive the same benefits and vacation time as other Husky employees, take part in the company’s profit-sharing, and are invited to all employee gatherings and business updates.

Nease developed the staff job descriptions and established staff positions in the salary grid with assistance from the company’s human resources department. “We have an HR department that helps guide us in the HR world,” she says. Nease also recruits new staff, with support from the HR department regarding any legal issues. The department takes care of payroll and staff benefits.

When recruiting, Nease is careful to select people who understand they are there to provide not only an enriching learning environment but also a service to children and families. They must be prepared to work late when required. “I’m clear in the interviewing process that you have to feel comfortable that you might be here until 7 p.m. if someone needs to keep working on machinery that has broken down, and that you need to view it as, ‘How do I support the family?’”

Her approach to working with staff is team-based. She delegates the day-to-day management of the centre to various team members. Senior staff mentor other staff. The programs are self-evaluated using an environment assessment tool, and the team offers input and suggestions to the evaluations. It is a collaborative approach among all individuals and programs within the setting. As a result, the team is responsible and accountable to one other as professionals.

The benefits of the team approach, says Nease, are high-quality staff and strong employee retention and motivation. This is in part because staff support each other, take ownership of the centre’s outcomes, and challenge themselves to strive for excellence.

³² 13 are program staff and three are administrative and kitchen staff.



“People are allowing me to share in the life of their children, and staff are allowing me to share in their lives and contributions.”

Valerie Nease

Valerie Nease taught Early Childhood Education at Humber College for 17 years before becoming a consultant in 1994. Nease was one of two consultants originally hired to help design and plan the centre. Once it was complete, she was asked to stay on to develop the philosophy, implement the program, hire the staff, and integrate the service into the business. She subsequently became the centre's first and only director to date.

The job is a source of great satisfaction for her. The value of making a solid contribution to early learning, young children and families is incredible. And no two days are the same. Nease appreciates the fact that “people are allowing me to share in the life of their children, and staff are allowing me to share in their lives and contributions. What a gift.”

Outside of the centre, Nease is involved with Work-Life Harmony, a work and family research and consulting organization. She is also in demand as a speaker at forums and conferences related to child care or work and family balance issues.

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