



COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

Committee Report

To: Chair and Members of the Social Services Committee **CEYD-23-09**
From: Mandy Koroniak, Director of the Children's Early Years Division
Date: Wednesday, November 08, 2023
Subject: **State of the Wellington Child Care System and Workforce 2023**

Background:

In recent years, the child care and early years system has experienced significant changes that continue to impact its workforce. During the COVID-19 pandemic, beginning in March 2020, many centres temporarily closed while some licensed child care programmes supported front-line workers by offering emergency child care. Throughout the pandemic, operators undertook a range of important increased health measures to support safety in child care that altered the day-to-day duties of educators and interactions between educators and children. Many Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) and other child care staff left the sector during this time, and licensed child care programmes frequently experienced challenges in operating at their full licensed capacity as a result.

The Province of Ontario then entered into the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) Agreement with the Government of Canada in March 2022. The CWELCC System is transforming access to affordable licensed child care in Ontario. Families with children up to age 6 in a CWELCC-enrolled licensed child care programme have now seen a fee reduction of 50%, relative to 2020 fees. To increase access to affordable licensed child care spaces, Ontario is additionally supporting the creation of approximately 86,000 new licensed child care spaces across the province (relative to 2019) by December 2026. To achieve this goal, a sufficient high quality, qualified workforce of RECEs is needed, at a time when many programmes continue to experience difficulty staffing the spaces that they currently operate.

Update:

To better understand the impacts of staffing challenges locally, the Children's Early Years division conducted the 2023 Centre-Based Staffing Survey. This survey was distributed to all 89 licensed centre-based child care programmes within the County of Wellington and City of Guelph, with a response rate of 65% (58 programmes responding).

The survey results showed that a clear majority of programmes have implemented changes to their operations related to staffing challenges, which are described in the key findings below.

Key Survey Findings:

- Many programmes reported that due to staffing shortages, they have operated at a reduced capacity, meaning that they were not able to provide care for the maximum number of children that the programme can support, according to their licence from the Ministry of Education.
- 32% are relying more on non-registered programme staff than on RECEs to staff their centre.
- 20% programmes have Director approvals from the Ministry of Education for supervisor positions to be filled by staff that do not meet qualifications as per legislative requirements.
- 25% reported relying on a supervisor to cover staff absences unexpectedly to meet ratio requirements 4-6 times per month.
- 57% made at least one operational change to their programme in the last 12 months, including:
 - 36% pausing the enrolment of children.
 - 9% closing a programme room in the centre resulting in decreased service levels.
 - 4% shortening their hours of operation.

These operational changes negatively affect the quality and stability of child care programmes, as well as access to licensed child care by families, leading to broader impacts on overall workforce participation. Not surprisingly, many survey respondents called for improved recruitment and retention strategies, including competitive wages and benefits.

Sufficient compensation is broadly identified as a challenge to recruitment and retention across the sector. The CWELCC System is supporting the compensation for RECEs who are low wage earners, and has set a wage floor of \$19/hour in 2023. It is also providing a wage increase of \$1/hour annually up to a wage cap of \$25/hr. Meanwhile, the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario and the advocacy group Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care have recently called for a publicly funded salary scale of \$30-\$40/hour for RECEs and at least \$25/hour for non-RECEs. They report that in 2022, only 22% of RECEs and 9% of non-RECEs were compensated at this level.

To support growth of a qualified child care and early years workforce, and make child care expansion goals a reality, many more RECEs will need to be trained across the province, and locally. The Ministry of Education estimates that an additional 8,500 RECEs are required in Ontario to meet the goals for space creation under the CWELCC System.

Apprenticeship allows individuals to continue to work while attaining the requirements to become registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators. Through funding received under the Canada-Ontario Early Childhood Workforce Agreement in 2022-2023, the Children's Early Years division was able to support a bursary for ECE apprenticeship students with a permanent address in the County of Wellington or City of Guelph and there are currently 26 ECE apprenticeship students at the Guelph Conestoga College campus. While this local strategy will promote an increase of RECEs in our service delivery area, it will not fully address recruitment and retention challenges across the system.

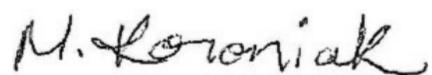
In conclusion, increased access to affordable licensed child care under the CWELCC System is an exceptional and positive system transformation, however substantial growth of a qualified workforce is needed. This can be supported through recruitment and retention efforts that include improved compensation, benefits, and overall working conditions, the capacity to train more individuals qualified educators, and broad recognition of RECEs as valued professionals. These, and other workforce supports, are required in order to meet many of the goals of the CWELCC System, including improving access equity by achieving a provincial target of 37% of children from birth to age 5 having access to an

affordable licensed child care space, and to alleviate the workforce challenges that continue to place pressure on current licensed child operations across the sector.

Recommendation:

That the report State of the Wellington Child Care System and Workforce 2023 be received for information.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Koroniak". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mandy Koroniak
Director of Children's Early Years