



Yukon Child Care Board

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

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(Cover Photo Credit: J. Dyck)

May 13, 2021

The Honorable Tracy-Anne McPhee
Minister of Health and Social Service
Government of Yukon
P.O. Box 2703
Whitehorse, YT, Y1A 2C6

Dear Minister McPhee,

As per section 4(11) of the *Child Care Act*, the Yukon Child Care Board is pleased to present our annual report to you, so that you may lay it before the Legislative Assembly. Noting the amendments to the *Child Care Act* that will officially move responsibility for our board to the Department of Education have not yet been passed, we recognize that responsibility for tabling our annual report still falls under your mandate.

I want to take this opportunity to thank You, and Minister Frost before you, for the hard work and dedication that the staff from your department have shown over the years. As we move to the Department of Education with the valued experience and knowledge gained from working with your department, I am confident that the transition will be smooth.

The forward thinking and leadership shown in the production of Yukon's *Putting People First* will greatly benefit the field of ELCC, and for that our board is grateful. I want to extend my gratitude to you for the work you did to initiate the transition of ELCC to the department of Education and I wish you all the best in your new role as Minister of Health and Social Services.

Sincerely,



Amy Ryder
Chair, Yukon Child Care Board



Photo: A. Ryder

May 18, 2021

The Honorable Jeanie McLean
Minister of Education
Government of Yukon
P.O. Box 2703
Whitehorse, YT, Y1A 2C6

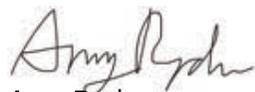
Dear Minister McLean,

I am honoured to be sharing our work with you for the first time under the Department of Education. Moving Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) to Education is a very positive move. With its focus on life long learning and the development of our youngest people, we will be positively influencing many generations to come.

I am so grateful and proud for what our team has been able to accomplish in the last year. I continue to be impressed by the knowledge and passion that our members have regarding ELCC. As well, your staff have shown incredible commitment to collaboration. Both Betty Burns, Director of the new Early Learning and Child Care Unit and Colin MacDonald, Strategic Project and Policy Advisor, have shown nothing short of true leadership in the development and transition to a Universal Child Care model. Our board has been honoured to work with both of them on this project.

Collaboration, sharing of knowledge, and building positive and productive relationships is something I believe will make ELCC in Yukon an example for other jurisdictions to look to. I look forward to continuing this work with you, your staff, and our fantastic team of Yukon Child Care Board members.

Sincerely,



Amy Ryder
Chair, Yukon Child Care Board





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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

With respect to Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC), the past year has been one of the most dynamic and inspiring I have ever seen. This past year marked a momentous shift in how ELCC is viewed and regarded in the minds of Yukoners. It is this shift that will greatly strengthen the industry and enrich the lives of our young people.

Beginning with COVID, the industry was quickly tagged as an essential service because it enabled critical service workers to continue their work during the pandemic. Although no one can dispute that ELCC is an essential service, many were quick to voice that the industry more importantly supported the learning and development of young children in their early years. This was the pivotal moment in the last year that set us on a better path.

Soon after and following the recommendations in “Putting People First”, it was announced that ELCC would be moving from the Department of Health and Social Services to the Department of Education and that a model for Universal Child Care would be developed. Staff at the Department of Education quickly laid the foundation for Universal Child Care under three pillars: Affordability, Accessibility, and Quality. Without the recognition that ELCC was significantly important for learning and development in young children, the focus on quality may not have been taken as seriously.

I am so proud of the thorough and thoughtful input that Yukon Child Care Board (YCCB) contributed to the initial development of a Universal Child Care model for Yukon. Issues we have been discussing and raising for years were now being considered holistically and sincerely. It was the greatest example of collaboration I have seen yet in this field and I am excited to continue on this journey.

With respect to Universal Child Care, I think Yukon now has one of the best models for ELCC in the country. We are just beginning and there is more to do. With continued partnerships and dedication, ELCC in Yukon will continue to grow and thrive. We are in an enviable position.

A big thank you to our board members Clayton Keats (Vice-Chair), Cyndi Desharnais, Maggie Powter, Jessica Dyck, Myke McPhee, and Paige Galette, as well as our administrative support, Sophie Partridge—a really tremendous team that I am honoured every day to work alongside!

Amy Ryder, Chair, Yukon Child Care Board

ABOUT THE YUKON CHILD CARE BOARD

MANDATE

Under section 4 of the Yukon Child Care Act, the Yukon Child Care Board is established with the following functions:

- to encourage the development and support of child care services which meet the needs of parents and children in the Yukon;
- to make recommendations to the Minister on any matter pertaining to child care;
- to review any policies, programs, services or administrative procedures of government departments in matters pertaining to child care;
- to advise on the planning, development, standards, co-ordination and evaluation of child care services in Yukon; and
- to hear appeals under this Act.

VISION

Yukon Child Care Board proactively supports the management of child care issues and decisions thereby yielding strength, innovation, and resiliency for the child care industry, its workers and all families affected by childcare policies and decisions.

MISSION

Maintain our board at full capacity with trained and knowledgeable members that are able to fulfill the board's responsibilities under the Child Care Act and effectively serve our stakeholders.

PRIORITIES AND GOALS 2020-22

PRIORITY #1: KNOWLEDGE AND GOVERNANCE

We continue to prioritize good governance, professional development, and knowledge. focused on maintaining a full team of highly knowledgeable and effective members that are able to carry out its objectives under the Child Care Act with excellence. The YCCB will continue to improve clarity and reduce redundancy by reviewing and revising a number of outdated and overlapping board policies and procedures, as well as identifying issues and policy gaps that need attention.

- Continue to ensure board vacancies are filled in a timely manner.
- Ensure all board members receive annual training in administrative law and the appeal process in the form of one course per year.
- Training for the Board's Executive Secretary in administrative law and appeal processes.
- Complete the modernization of YCCB's terms of reference.
- Advise Government of Yukon regarding the modernization of the *Child Care Act*.
- Propose a new budget to the Department of Education.



PRIORITY # 2: UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE AND ISSUES RESEARCH

We will proactively support Government of Yukon in the implementation of the Universal Child Care model by providing knowledge and expertise on elements of the program as well as subsequent issues that arise. All recommendations to the Minister of Education will be based on the best available information.

- Continue to support the roll-out of the universal child care program and track concerns and successes.

- Continue to research issues, and provide recommendations on policies concerning the supported childcare worker program, support for appellants, recruitment and retention of qualified workers, access to child care spaces in Whitehorse and the communities, and professional development for early childhood educators.

PRIORITY # 3: COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

We will continue to focus on strengthening our ability to reach out to our stakeholders and communicate the role we provide under the Act.

- Develop and launch a bilingual YCCB website.
- Establish a network for information sharing.
- Continue to engage HSS regarding recommendations on policies and programs.
- Increase our presence and visibility at public events and spaces.



REPORTING ON PROGRESS

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Our Board has remained at full capacity with the same members as last year. Our board is strong and all members are interested in continuing on for another term. The *Child Care Act* specifies that our board should have a minimum of seven members. We would like to propose that two additional members be appointed to add First Nations and community representation.

Recommendation: That Government of Yukon re-appoint existing board members and appoint two new members to ensure First Nations and community representation.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to train our members or our administrative support person due to a lack of funding (the budget limitations will be discussed later in this report). Two of our members remain with out any training at all and five members have not recieved training in over two years. The purpose of a tribunal is to administer portions of the justice system that have been delegated to boards. In this situation, having a tribunal with members who are not current in their training is negligent and does not provide the best opportunity for fair administrative justice processes for Yukoners.

Over the years, YCCB's training has primarily focused on a basic overview of the principles of administrative justice and running an appeal in the context of our Child Care Act. There is so much more that members of any tribunal should know. After members receive training in the basics, they should be able to access more specific training in decision making, decision writing, questioning, evidence, interpreting legislation, and holding effective hearings. Government of Yukon has an opportunity to support the learning of people who volunteer for these important positions. It is an investment that will build capacity and proficiency across Yukon and ensure that Yukoners have access to high quality administrative justice.

Recommendation: That Government of Yukon commit to providing funding for training up to a maximum of one course per year per board member and secretary.

CHILD CARE ACT AMENDMENTS

It has long been known that the *Child Care Act* is in need of modernizing. YCCB is keenly aware of improvements that can be made to bring the legislation inline with current best knowledge and practices, as well as the recent move to a universal child care model.

In the spring sitting of the 35th Legislative Assembly, the *Act* is being tabled to formally move ELCC from the Department of Health and Social Services to the Department of Education. We see this as a necessary first step, but a further tabling of more detailed and thorough amendments will need to happen in the near future. Specifically, the *Act* will need to reflect a culture shift to focusing on the child's development and learning in the early years. More clarity will need to be built into a modernized act regarding appeals. Level designation and certification, supported child care, age definitions from infant to school age, and professional development are examples of items that will need serious consideration and analysis.

Recommendation: That Government expeditiously modernize the Child Care Act and Regulations within two years so as to support the smooth transition to Universal Child Care and its foundational pillars: Affordability, Accessibility, and Quality.

Recommendation: That Government collaborate with the YCCB during all stages of modernizing the Child Care Act and Regulations.

SUPPORTED CHILD CARE

We continue to prioritize the issue of the broken supported child care program. We first raised this issue in our 2016-18 annual report. The current program makes it difficult for operators to include children with diverse needs in their programming for a variety of reasons. The following excerpt describing the problem is taken from our 2016-2018 report, and we present it again because the issue deserves continued attention:

"A. Recruitment and Retention

The Supported Child Care Worker (SCCW) must work within an unstable contract which lasts just six months with no assurance of renewal, the SCCW does not get paid if the child is sick for more than three days in a month, the SCCW does not get paid if the child takes time off for

travel or vacation and the SCCW is expected to plan his/her own unpaid vacation time around the child's vacation time. These are a few of the barriers to reliable employment that are outlined in the SCCW contract. Without reliable employment opportunities within this program, we have noticed that very few highly trained or qualified people are interested. In its current state, the SCCW position tends to attract more transient people who lack experience/training or stability themselves. Those seeking more stable employment tend to move on to more permanent positions within the field.

B. Training Issues

In contradiction to the goals of the program as outlined in the CCSU policies and procedures, access to training for SCCWs is extremely limited. Because of the nature of the contract, it is difficult to hire staff that are trained and qualified to work with children with special needs. To work effectively with children with special needs, SCCWs must have knowledge of the characteristics of the needs and understand particularly the cognitive and social abilities of the child, in order to design appropriate learning experiences for the child. Not only does the SCCW need the skills and knowledge to work with the child, but also to write weekly progress notes and meet regularly with the families and relevant agencies. The expectations of the SCCW are high but the resources provided to them are limited.

C. Financial Burden to Child Care Centres

The SCC Program, in its current state, creates a financial burden to childcare programs, thereby reducing the number of childcare programs that are willing or able to participate in the program. As a result, either children's needs are not being met appropriately or they are being asked to leave the childcare program and find care elsewhere. It often becomes the responsibility of the childcare program to cover SCCW wages due to a child's absence, wages for staff/family meetings, or SCCW training expenses. The policies in place for wages regarding unexpected child absences can be highly financially burdensome for program operators. If the centre chooses not to cover these lost wages, they are even less likely to be able to retain an employee who is willing to accept a job that has no responsibility to pay them. If the centre chooses not to provide the SCCW with training opportunities, they are faced with a staff member that is poorly prepared for their position.

D. Barriers to Accessing the Program for Rural Communities

The instability of the SCCW contract, issues with training, and the financial burden placed on centres, already contribute to a strained system to operate within, creating barriers to access. This is further complicated in rural Yukon because of physical distance from both Child Care Services Unit and the Child Development Centre. While much can be accomplished over the phone, screenings and assessments cannot. This negatively impacts families, children and child care centre staff, and does not support positive program outcomes. The principal purpose of the program is to provide additional support for those that need it, and these barriers inhibit access to the children and families that need it in a timely manner."

Shortly after our 2016-18 report came out, officials at the Department of Health and Social Services conducted a review of the program upon our recommendation. To date we have not seen a copy of the results of the review. We find this concerning because some children are being left behind and we are no further ahead than we were in 2018.

It's easy to think of accessibility in the context of affordability or even in the supply of child care spaces, but accessibility is more than that. Social accessibility is about inclusion. There is still more to do to ensure the needs of all children are being met, especially now as we transition to Universal Child Care. To do this, we must take a serious look at supported child care.



Staff at the Department of Education have been receptive to our concerns on this issue, and we are beginning to see some positive action.

Recommendation: That Government of Yukon either share the results of the supported child care program review or have staff at the Department of Education conduct a new review before the end of this fiscal year.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Issue

The current process and funding structure for ELCC training and certification does not support the efficient recruitment and retention of qualified level 3 educators and creates hardships for students.

Background

The ELCC program at Yukon University is structured with many classes at night, allowing people to work during the day. Many are working full-time jobs. As a result, students often are taking many years to get their diploma and level 3 certification. It also leaves the field with a workforce that is in training on an on-going basis. We are seeing increased burnout and turnover in the field and managers that are providing ongoing training for staff who are not fully qualified, especially when courses are required under an exemption (allowed under the Act for centers who do not meet the minimum requirements for staff training).

Recent changes to the expectations for ELCC students in the Yukon University program now require them to leave their place of work to complete field placements in a broad range of settings to better support a rich learning experience. This means that there are six-week periods where students are not being paid by their place of work and where centers are without a staff member. This poses new and unique financial challenges for students, as well as staffing and financial challenges for centers.

There has long been a need to increase capacity within the child care field in Yukon, and with the new Universal Child Care program recently introduced, we can expect an even greater need to increase capacity. The ability to recruit trained staff has been an issue for years, so the demand for successful students coming out of the Yukon's Early Learning and Child Care training program is immediate. Sending more fully trained ELCC practitioners into the workforce in a quicker amount of time will create a stronger, more resilient field and increase quality outcomes.

We want to see programs and staff be able to shift their focus from required training to more diverse and targeted professional development opportunities. Building on the foundations that students have already acquired through their diplomas and certificates will create a strong workforce that is able to meet the highest standards of quality of care. This will have positive effects on the economy, Yukon, and outcomes for Yukon's children.

Recommendation: That Government of Yukon, in consultation with Yukon University's Early Learning and Child Care Program, students, and Yukon ELCC licensed programs develop and implement an ELCC Certification, Recruitment and Retention Strategy within two years that will:

- ***market ELCC as an attractive career;***
- ***attract new students to Yukon University's ELCC program on a more full-time basis;***
- ***incentivize existing students to finish their diploma quicker;***
- ***support operators that welcome field placement students into their programs; and***
- ***increase resiliency for operators and programs through retention of qualified staff.***

UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE

The roll out of Universal Child Care in Yukon has been an impressive demonstration of commitment to positive change, holistic thinking, active listening, and endurance. As of April 1, 2021 the new model was launched. The model focuses on funding licensed child care spaces and funding operational costs.

Licensed child care spaces are being subsidized \$700 for all full-time spaces for infants to kindergarten. Additionally, \$350 for part time kindergarten spaces, \$300 for school-aged kids in school, and \$500 for school-aged kids during the summer. Part time spaces are being subsidized at a prorated amount. An additional 10% of the subsidized funding for child care spaces is provided to the operator to use at their discretion for operational needs.

In addition to the funding to reduce costs of childcare to parents/caregivers, the new funding agreement has also increased wage supplements for Early Childhood Educators. The supplements are based on certification level and incentivize educators to achieve higher levels of education. Operators who sign on to the new funding agreement agree to

pay minimum wage, according to the Employment Standards Act, in addition to the wage supplement offered by Government of Yukon. The supplements for levels 1, 1a, 2, 2a and level 3 equivalent each increased from the previous funding agreement by \$2/hour, and level 3 has increased by \$5/hour.

The Child Care Enrolment Unit Funding has changed and is now called the Quality Program Enhancement Funding. The funding is based on the number of children enrolled rather than on “units” or groups of children. This funding is provided to operators to enhance the quality of their programs based on the number of children in attendance.

Finally, the new funding agreement provides some additional funding for programs to include children with special needs in their programs.

So how does this all meet the objectives for a system based on affordability, accessibility, and quality? In our opinion, Government of Yukon has done an excellent job coming up with a model that begins to address the three pillars. So far it is clear that a holistic view of ELCC as it concerns programs, families and educators has been taken. A total of 67 out of 69 licensed programs signed up for the new funding arrangement in about one month.

This certainly indicated that people feel heard and that they see the benefit of proceeding in this direction. We have some initial comments and observations related to the three pillars and will present them now.

Affordability:

There is so much benefit to how the new funding structure has been developed. Saving \$700 a month per child for full time spaces is nothing but significant. We are hearing relief and gratitude across the board from parents with children enrolled in licensed programs or from those that could not afford child care before. There are many benefits of subsidizing licensed spaces including:

- Providing parents with more options;
- Providing options for people living in domestically abusive situations;
- Enabling more people, especially women to enter the workforce;
- Providing macro-economic effects including a net benefit to GDP, especially with more women pursuing careers; and
- Reducing Yukon's overall cost of living for families, thereby attracting more professionals to move and work here.

There are still further areas to explore such as parents who prefer not to enrol their children in licensed programs. In some countries for example, funding may be provided to families who hire nannies, as long as they meet minimum requirements.

Accessibility:

Accessibility, in many ways, is connected to affordability. More parents can now choose to enrol their children in ELCC programs because there is a new ability to pay for it. Regardless of the financial contribution, accessibility is a much larger and more complicated issue when you look past the funding. Much that is mentioned here as been touched on in other areas of this report, but we give a brief overview nevertheless.

Spaces cannot be accessed if there are no educators to care for the children. Our board has been discussing the issue of recruitment and retention for many years. Yukon has taken some great first steps to deal with recruitment and retention of qualified educators. Specifically, the wage enhancement funding begins to acknowledge the value educators add to the development of our children. We believe this could help attract people to the field, incentivize educators to further their education and provide more stability for staff and operators. With an expected increase in demand for spaces, addressing the issue of recruitment and retention is even a greater of a priority. Essentially, a strategy is needed that will help ensure more people are attracted to the field and obtain their certification efficiently and expeditiously. We encourage Government of Yukon to consider our recommendation described earlier in the report.

Accessibility is also about inclusion. There is a need to ensure that ALL children are able to access spaces, including those with diverse or special needs. We have discussed the supported child care program many times over the years and we feel this is an immediate issue that should be addressed in the short term. Please refer to our earlier recommendation in the section regarding supported child care.

Some options for accessibility in communities have begun to be developed including options for pre-Kindergarten in the schools. Supporting the communities by really getting to know their specific needs and resources is another important task that we have to address in the short term.

Quality:

Quality programming has been shown to improve the outcomes for children over the course of their lives. This is a large and complex topic to address, but work has already begun that will set Yukon above many other models in Canada and around the world. Quality program funding, educator wage enhancements as well as some initial funding to support inclusion, are all positive first steps

Another excellent step is the creation of three new positions in the ELCC unit under the Department of Education. Previously, Government of Yukon focused on inspections and enforcement of the *Child Care Act and regulations*. Support and coaching for programs was missing. These new positions will go a long way in effecting collaborative and supportive change. The positions, combined with the implementation of a curriculum framework that can be used by programs, will gently guide the field in the same direction at a pace that is reflective of each program's own unique situation. It is our hope, and the hope of many others that we have heard from, that a made-for-Yukon framework be completed in the near future.

In a short time, Yukon has risen as a leader in Canada's system of universal childcare. We have little doubt that other provinces and territories will look to us to learn about the implementation of their own universal systems. There are many more details to figure out but the first steps have been taken in a very positive direction towards high quality, universal early learning and child care.

Recommendation: That Government of Yukon continue to support programs as they transition to Universal Child Care and implement the recommendations presented in this report as they relate to Universal Child Care.

COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

The Yukon Child Care Board has been limited in its ability to reach out to programs, families, and other stakeholders in the ELCC field. Part of our mandate under our legislation is to support the field by providing policy advice to the Minister. Our board is very concerned that we are not reaching everyone. The diagram on the next page shows the incredible network of stakeholders that we could be working with better. Our main limitation is funding.

Early Childhood Educators YT

Works to professionalize the ELCC sector through mentorship, professional development and education. They also organize events for the Community of Practice.

Non-profit dedicated to supporting the development of children from birth to kindergarten.

Child Development Centre

ECEs who gather or talk regularly to engage in professional development, network, and shared discussion on topics relevant to the ELCC sector.

Early Childhood Educators Community of Practice

Supported Child Care Workers

Essential to the development of children with diverse needs and to enable programs to be more inclusive.

The primary advocate for the health and development of their children.

Parents and Guardians

Schools

Early learning continues into the early primary years at school. How do we best ensure a seamless transition to school?

Responsible for the delivery of ELCC that supports the development of our youngest people.

Licensed Centres and Family Day Homes

Advocates on issues affecting its membership of child care operators. Hosts an annual training conference and works to improve ELCC.

Yukon Child Care Association

Network for Healthy Early Human Development

A hub for ELCC individuals and organizations to support each other. Advocates for change through evidence based decision making.

Department of Education

Administers the Child Care Act, provides funding to programs, conducts inspections, and supports program development.

Offers courses and a Diploma program in Early Learning and Child Care.

Yukon University

First Nations

Opportunities for reconciliation through collaboration and the inclusion of indigenous ways of knowing into programming.

Works to improve the health and development of our youngest children through supportive programming offered to parents, professionals and the public.

Partners for Children

We are looking for the ability to connect with our stakeholders more wholly through in-person (when possible) and virtual town halls, surveys, meetings, and a website.

As a first priority, we would like to launch a website this year that would help us connect more effectively with our large network of stakeholders, allow anyone to reach out to us, and serve as an information source for parents, programs, organizations, educators, Government of Yukon and our own board members.

Recommendation: That Government of Yukon support the development of an independent website for the Yukon Child Care Board.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

We have been unsuccessful to date in our ability to address our dwindling budget. Although we are proud of what we have been able to accomplish, we are limited in our ability to more fully meet our legally mandated objectives.

In the last five years we have seen existing items from our budget be eliminated (travel for community representatives and administrative funds for our mailbox and printing costs) or reduced (legal fees, secretarial services). It is imperative that these be restored and increased to meet the work objectives we need to accomplish. In addition, there are items that we feel to be added to our budget in the immediate term including training, communication and outreach, and research.

Recommendation: That Government of Yukon meet with the Yukon Child Care Board to discuss a revised and proposed budget.

