



Minimizing the Gap in Indigenous Early Years Education

North Shore Micmac District Council
Final Report

March 31, 2022

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FSC is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada

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A Note from Helen:

I would like to begin by thanking everyone who took the time to support the *Minimizing the Gap in Indigenous Early Years Education* project. It was not only a journey into understanding why we have such a high turnover in staff; it was also an opportunity to learn more about the love and commitment that our Early Childcare Educators (ECE) have for their role in our communities and with our children and families.

We initiated this project over a year ago to identify the issues or reasons as to why people leave the Early Education Years field in our communities with the intention of generating innovative solutions to address this problem.

The journey began by initiating exit surveys with former Early Childcare Educators who had left the industry. We also launched sharing circles for former Early Childcare Educators, current ECE staff, Directors, and community Elders who have been or are currently active in the field.

The sharing circles offered a way of collecting stories and information about their experiences and reflections on challenges and strengths in the field of Early Learning

Education. The information that resulted from this project will help strengthen the need to support the Early Years program and the components that make it successful. What we have learned is shared in this report.

Helen Bernard-Ward

Helen Bernard-Ward,
Early Learning Childcare Coordinator, NSMDC



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Section 1: Project Context.



PROJECT CONTEXT

Indigenous communities were stable and successful civilizations for thousands of years. Many now are rebuilding and reestablishing their traditions and their culture after the impacts of colonization and residential schools. For many Indigenous communities, the impact of COVID-19 was a stark reminder of the importance of community resiliency and sustainability. Community resiliency for our participating communities of North Shore means ensuring that our teachers and knowledge holders are trained and ready to deliver culturally appropriate programming to children. Children hold a sacred place in our culture. With that comes a sacred responsibility to care for them. High-quality, culturally-specific and well-supported Indigenous Early Learning Childhood Education (IELCE) programs, services, and supports that are specifically designed for and with Indigenous families and communities will make a genuine difference in the early experiences of children. This, in turn, will support children's long-term development and life outcomes. IELCE holistically supports parents and families to participate in their cultures and languages. Programs provide access to information and resources, connections to community, alignment to unique health, education and social needs, and childcare for children.

NSMDC proposed to Future Skills Centre's Shock-Proofing the Future of Work: Skills Innovation Challenge funding opportunity that as the economy was rebuilding and new ways forward being developed, the current system of Indigenous Early Learning Education for Educators in communities be reengineered to a system that has fewer barriers to entry, is more inclusive and equitable, and allows Indigenous Peoples the right to determine and develop strategies for exercising their right to development (Article 23, United Nations). When the proposal was approved and launched in March 2021, NSMDC believed and continues to believe that this funding and initiative will give communities the opportunity to create their own solutions and will result in a plan moving forward that will allow our communities to be more resilient and less dependent on outside systems.

The purpose / goal of this project was to find creative and innovative solutions to addressing the shortage of trained IELCE for Micmac communities of Northern New Brunswick.

The impact of this project will guide the future work of NSMDC in IELCE for the foreseeable future. NSMDC will be able to use evidence and data gained through this project as the foundation for their strategic plan. Furthermore, knowledge gained will be used to advocate for better and more equitable services and programming. This project proved that a community-led problem-solving process does result in innovative solutions as documented in this final report.



Section 2: Project Approach

PROJECT APPROACH

The North Shore Micmac District Council's (NSMDC) mission is to provide service delivery, technical support, and capacity building in water and waste management, housing and infrastructure, post secondary education, training and employment, community development, financial and technical services, and child and family services. NSMDC primarily serves its seven member nations.

NSMDC proposed an early seed innovation project to Future Skills Canada's Shock-proofing the Future of Work in order to explore and generate innovative approaches/solutions to build capacity (upskills and/or certify) Indigenous Early Learning Childhood Educators (IELCE) in participating Micmac communities of New Brunswick. Through a series of sharing circles, individual interviews, community consultations, and questionnaires, solutions to address the shortage of IELCE in communities, barriers to entry, high staff turnover rates, and lack of funding for professional development were tracked.

This initiative will result in solutions needed to reengineer the existing processes at NSMDC in early learning and to create a plan that addresses gaps and challenges. The key result of this project will be a culturally appropriate Indigenous early learning education plan that will address skill shortages and gaps in programming and services.

As illustrated below, the project approach was divided into three phases of development: Phase 1: Problem Identification, Phase 2: Concept Generation, and Phase 3: Validating and Reporting.



Phase 1:
Problem Identification
(including survey launch)



Phase 2:
Concept Generation
(sharing circles and critical conversations)



Phase 3:
Validating and
Reporting

PROJECT APPROACH

Phase 1: Problem Identification

In order to properly generate innovative solutions to building capacity in Indigenous Early Childhood Education, NSMDC proposed to first gain a better understanding of staff turnover rates in IELCE by conducting individual interviews (exit interviews) from a sample of 15 ELCEs who exited the industry within the last seven years (survey results).

NSMDC then proposed to engage community employment officers from each of the seven participating Micmac communities to help facilitate community consultation sessions to discuss perceived and/or real barriers to entry in the Indigenous Early Learning Childhood Education sector.

NSMDC then proposed to develop and launch questionnaires to current IELCEs to better gauge level of engagement and opportunities (training) and challenges associated with their positions.

Phase 2: Concept Generation

Once the results of Phase 1 were compiled, NSMDC proposed to host a series of five (5) focus groups to explore innovative approaches and solutions to building capacity in IELCE. Solutions and approaches were documented and compiled and will be presented to communities in a final symposium at the end of this project.

Phase 3: Validating and Reporting

NSMDC proposed that the final phase of this project will involve bringing participants from Phase 1 and 2 together for a final symposium to review and validate findings of the final report. The final deliverable of this project will include a final report documenting all findings and recommendations.

The success of this project depends on understanding the participants, the key challenges they encounter, their learning environment, the culture they live and work in, and the supports that can be recommended to ensure that NSMDC is able to meet their vision of a future state for IELCE in communities where educators are trained and have the capacity to better support Indigenous educational programming. This, in turn, will support children's long-term development and life outcomes. IELCEs holistically support parents and families to participate in their culture and their language.



Section 3: Project Learning
Survey Learnings and Key Findings

PROJECT LEARNING

Survey Learnings and Key Findings

Phase 1: Problem Identification

In order to properly generate innovative solutions to building capacity in Indigenous Early Learning Childhood Education (IELCE), Phase 1 of the project involved proposing to first gain a better understanding of staff turnover rates in ELCE by conducting exit interviews from a small sample of 15 ELCEs who had exited the industry in the last seven years.

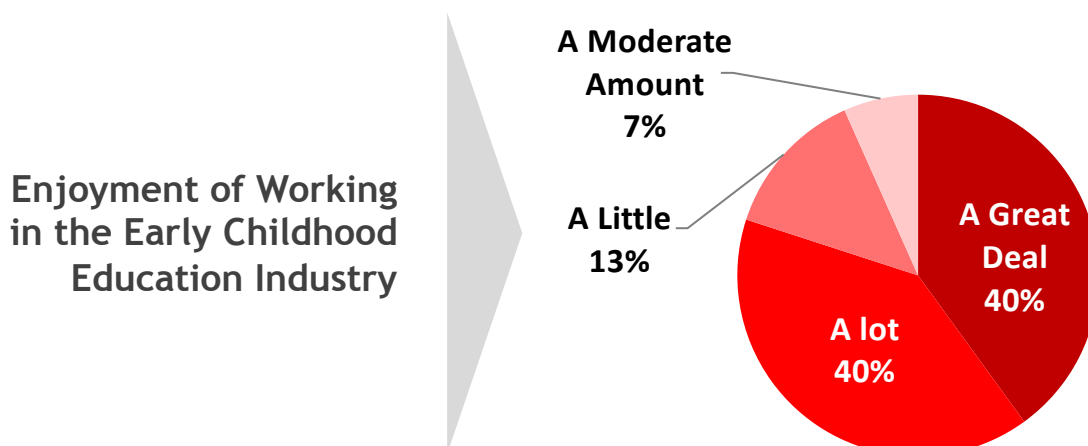
Participants were selected based on a high level of knowledge in Indigenous Early Learning Education. The exit interview survey is included in Appendix A of this final report. The following pages report on information generated by this initial survey. For ease of analysis, the information is represented below in bullet and/or graphic format that concludes with a summary of findings.

Survey Respondents

- The survey had a total of 15 respondents
- 13/15 of respondents have noted their experience in educator roles within the early childhood education industry
- Other roles of respondents include support workers, cooks, and directors
- The combined experience of all survey respondents equates to 207 years of working in the Early Childhood Education Industry
- The range of experience from each respondent ranged from 2 - 25 years with approximately 47% of respondents having 20+ years of experience

Working in the Early Childhood Education Industry

- When asked about their enjoyment of working in the Childhood Education industry, 80% of respondents reported a “*great deal*” or “*a lot*” of enjoyment

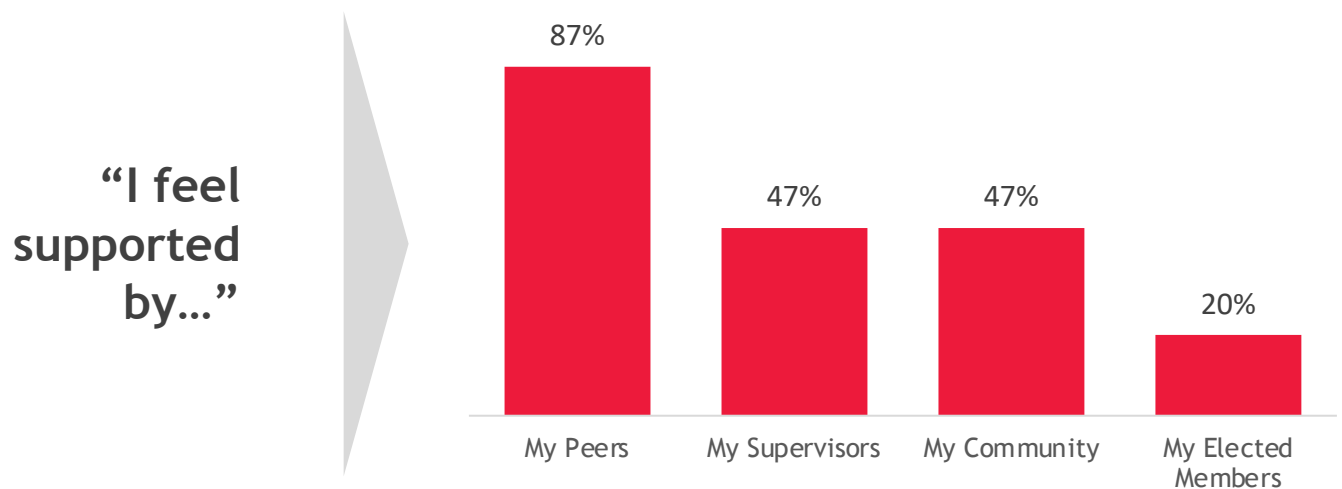


PROJECT LEARNING

Survey Learnings and Key Findings

Role Support

- 86% of respondents reported feeling supported by their peers whereas only about 47% of respondents reported feeling supported by their supervisors
- 47% of respondents also reported feeling supported by their community
- Only 20% of respondents felt supported by their elected members



Skills, Knowledge and Curriculum

- 7/15 respondents felt their skills and knowledge were valued either “a lot” or a “great deal”
- 8/15 respondents felt their skills and knowledge were valued either “not at all,” “a little,” or “a moderate amount”
- 6/15 of respondents felt the learning curriculum reflected their Indigenous way of knowing and learning “a lot” or a “great deal”
- 5/15 of respondents felt the learning curriculum reflected their Indigenous ways of knowing and learning “a moderate amount”
- 5/15 of respondents felt the learning curriculum reflected their Indigenous ways of knowing and learning “a little” or “not at all”

Challenges Associated with Working in Early Childhood Education

Respondents reported some difficulties and challenges associated with working in Early Childhood Education that included:

- Lack of parent and community support
- Lack of cultural knowledge amongst workers and supervisors

PROJECT LEARNING

Survey Learnings and Key Findings

- Lack of qualified staffing and proper training
- Budget constraints

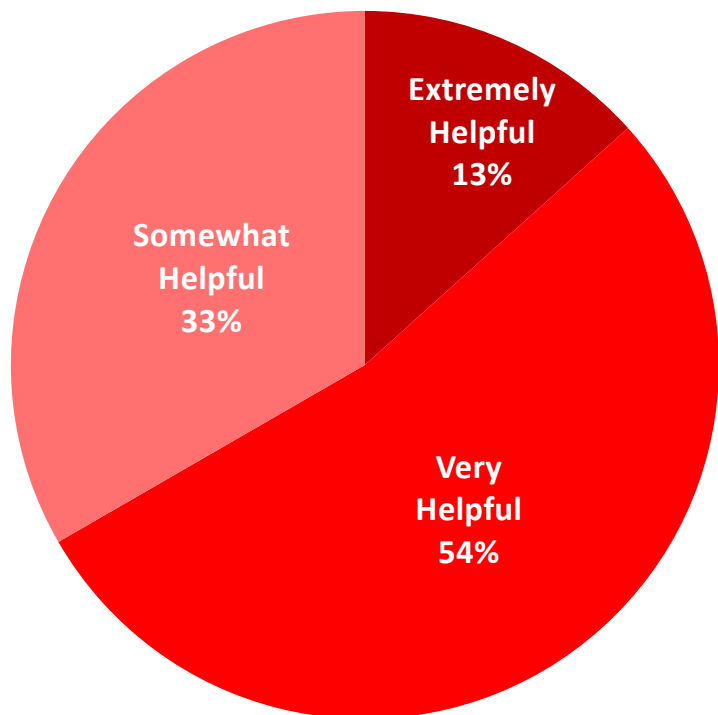
When asked why the respondents have left the industry, some common themes amongst the responses include:

- Low compensation
- Lack of leadership
- Lack of professional development opportunities
- Lack of future opportunities

Helpfulness of Professional Development Opportunities

- All 15 respondents noted that professional development opportunities were at least somewhat helpful for their careers
- 10/15 respondents noted that professional development opportunities were either “*very*” or “*extremely helpful*”

Helpfulness of
Professional
Development
Opportunities



PROJECT LEARNING

Survey Learnings and Key Findings

Changes Needed to Retain Educators

When asked what changes would need to be made to recruit and retain quality educators, the following themes were highlighted by the respondents:

- Improved pay scale
- Support from internal and external stakeholders
- Additional training and professional development opportunities
- Focus on recruiting the right people with the proper training and experience for the positions

When asked how a more supportive work environment could be created, the respondents suggested some of the following action items:

- Increase training offered
- Ensure there are enough resources
- Increase support from supervisors
- Additional mental health supports
- Allow the educators to make more decisions regarding their teaching and classroom style
- More frequent communication
- More time to complete administrative tasks



PROJECT LEARNING

Survey Summary and Analysis

Summary of Findings

The survey responses proved critical to the project's methodology in order to move this initiative to the concept generation phase and to design sharing circles (focus groups) guides. For the purpose of a clear final analysis and with the intention of meeting the project's goal of finding creative solutions to addressing the shortages of trained IELCE for communities, key highlights have been grouped into the following themes: strengths, weaknesses, potential solutions to better retain educators, and potential solutions to create a more supportive work environment for ELCEs.

Strengths

- When asked about their enjoyment of working in the Childhood Education industry, **80%** of respondents reported a “*great deal*” or “*a lot*” of enjoyment
- **86%** of respondents reported feeling supported by their peers
- All 15 respondents noted that professional development opportunities were helpful to their careers

Weaknesses

- only about **47%** of respondents reported feeling supported by their supervisors
- Only **20%** of respondents felt supported by their elected members
- 8/15 respondents felt their skills and knowledge were valued either “*not at all*”, “*a little*,” or “*a moderate amount*”
- 5/15 of respondents felt the learning curriculum reflected their Indigenous ways of knowing and learning “*a little*” or “*not at all*”
- When asked to list challenges associated with working in ELCE, respondents responded with the below list:
 - Lack of parent and community support
 - Lack of cultural knowledge amongst workers
 - Lack of qualified staffing and proper training
 - Budget constraints

PROJECT LEARNING

Survey Summary and Analysis

Weaknesses Continued

- When asked why respondents left the industry, common themes included:
 - Low compensation
 - Lack of leadership
 - Lack of professional development opportunities
 - Lack of future opportunities

Potential Solutions

The below table highlights potential solutions identified by survey respondents to improve ability to recruit and retain quality educators and potential solutions to create a more supportive environment for ELCEs.

Retention Solutions	Supportive Work Environment
• Improved pay scale	• Increase training opportunities offered
• Support from internal and external stakeholders	• Ensure there are enough resources
• Additional training and professional development opportunities	• Increase support for supervisors
• Focus on recruiting the right people with the proper training and experience for the positions	• Offer additional mental health supports
	• Empower educators to make more decisions regarding their teaching and classroom style
	• Allow for more frequent communication between stakeholders and peers
	• Allow for more time to complete administrative tasks

PROJECT LEARNING

Survey Summary and Analysis

Next Steps

NSMDC asked 15 respondents ten (10) critical questions relating to their past experiences as Early Learning Childhood Educators in the First Nation communities of North Shore in order to better understand the high turnover rates in ELCE. Some results, documented in the previous pages, were expected (Early Childhood Educators find their work meaningful and enjoyable) and some answers were suspected and confirmed (approximately half of the respondents felt their skills were not valued). Finally, respondents spoke their truth and offered key solutions to mitigate high turnover rates and to offer a more supportive working environment based on their lived experiences. The next step of this project was to design sharing circle guides and host sharing circles in order to continue building on the information and data generated in Phase 1 of this project.





Section 3: Project Learning *Sharing Circles*

PROJECT LEARNING

Sharing Circles Learnings

Introduction

A total of seven stakeholder engagement sessions (sharing circles and critical conversations) were conducted from October 15, 2021 to March 11, 2022 as part of the “Minimizing the Gap in Indigenous Early Years Education” project that explored Indigenous Early Learning Educators’ experiences in the First Nations communities of North Shore.

Sharing circles and/or critical conversations were conducted with participants that included current community Early Learning Educators, Directors of Indigenous Early Learning Education Centres, and Community Elders. The table below highlights the participant segment (who), the date of event (when), the number of participants, and the stakeholder engagement type.

Target Segment:	Date:	Participation Number:	Stakeholder Engagement Type:
Staff	October 15, 2021	6	Sharing Circle
Staff	November 5, 2021	6	Sharing Circle
Staff	November 12, 2021	3	Sharing Circle
Elders	February 14, 2022	3	Sharing Circle
Elder	March 1, 2022	1	Critical Conversation
Directors	March 3, 2022	2	Sharing Circle
Elder	March 11, 2022	1	Critical Conversation

Participants were selected based upon having a high level of involvement in some aspect of Indigenous Early Learning Education. Discussion guides for each focus group are included in Appendix B and Appendix C. The following pages report on each sharing circle by participant sector, the methodology employed, and the key findings. The sharing circles and critical conversations were used to continue building on Phase 1 of this initiative and are subsequently grouped into the following themes for analysis purposes: strengths, weaknesses, and potential solutions to better retain educators to create a more supportive work environment.

Stakeholder engagements proved to be an invaluable mechanism for documenting multiple points of view and perspectives from participants. The results of the sharing circles and critical conversations documented in the following pages provide a great deal of rich insight into the relevant issues and proposed community-led solutions.

PROJECT LEARNING

Sharing Circles Learning

Methodology

All sharing circles (focus groups) were conducted virtually using Zoom platforms, with some participants joining as a group following COVID-related health protocols. Sharing circles were audio and video taped and later transcribed and the transcripts used in the data analysis. Sharing circles that were staff-focused lasted between 187 minutes to 202 minutes. The sharing circle that was director focused was approximately 33 minutes while the Elders sharing circles and or critical conversation lasted between 86 minutes and 203 minutes. Each participant received a gift certificate as compensation for their time. A discussion guide was created for both the Educators and Directors and for community Elders (see appendices). Participants of sharing circles that were staff- or director-focused were introduced to the context of the project and confidentiality guidelines. Once consent was given, participants then proceeded to be guided through four thematic sections of questions including: project overview, feature questions, change questions, and future questions. The community Elders who participated in sharing circles and or critical conversations were guided through three thematic sections that focused on points in time: the past, the present, and the future. The discussion guides served as the blueprint for the sharing circles sessions and critical conversations, although at times, the NSMDC team strayed from the guide when interesting discussions emerged that led to meaningful insights.



PROJECT LEARNING

Staff-Focused Sharing Circles Learnings and Key Findings

Staff

This section of the report presents findings from the sharing circles (staff-focused) in the form of a summary of what respondents said in response to specific sections and questions of the discussion guide. The information in this section represents the researchers' interpretation based upon: (1) notes made during the sharing circle sessions, (2) a review of the audio and video recordings, and (3) a content analysis of the typed transcripts from the three (3) staff focused sharing circles.

Question 1:

The first thematic section, setting the context, project overview, began with soliciting participants' feelings about being an Early Learning Educator. Staff-focused sharing circle participants identified some of the following general feelings about their work: passion, dedicated, love, meaningful work, motivated, stress, pride, commitment, fun, focused, and inspirational.

Illustrative quotations for Question 1 from staff-focused sharing circles are included below:

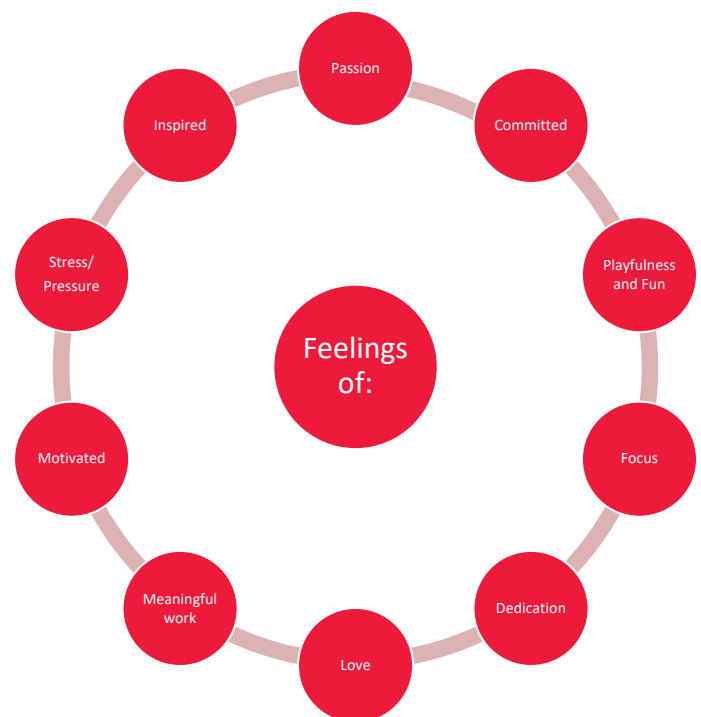
"I absolutely love being an early learning educator, I love guiding the children to be lifelong learners and help shape them into the people and learners they will become."

"For me when I have a bad day or a bad morning, I come to work and it's a lot better when you see the kids because that's our future and that's who we're here for."

"I just like to watch them develop and learn and grow. It's just like, wow, I did that."

"Kids are my passion!"

"Because if you love what you do, you want to do it well, and that's the struggle for everyone in education in finding the balance between loving your job and having a full life outside of the workplace."



PROJECT LEARNING

Staff-Focused Sharing Circles Learnings and Key Findings

Question 2:

The first thematic section, setting the context, project overview, Question 2 asked educators: what is something you would like to learn more about as it relates to being an educator? Staff-focused sharing circle participants identified the below list as professional development and/or training opportunities relevant and important to the work they do:

- Specialized training for trauma in young children
- Trauma-informed education
- Self care for workers
- Basic speech pathology for educators
- Art therapy
- Behavioural training (autism training)
- Classroom management
- Mental health first aid
- Developmental trauma, the impact of adverse childhood experiences and how we can help
- Outdoor practitioner /Outdoor classroom training
- Land based / cultural training



Question 3:

The first thematic section, setting the context, project overview, Question 3 asked educators: how do you feel about the role of early learning centres in the development of a child? Staff focused sharing circle participants shared their thoughts that are captured below in bullet form:

- The earlier the intervention the better for the development of the child
- We offer a positive place for children to come to and to grow
- Learning centres have a lot more support and services than we did in the past
- Learning centres offer safe spaces for childhood development

PROJECT LEARNING

Staff-Focused Sharing Circles Learnings and Key Findings

An illustrative quotations for Question 3 from the staff-focused sharing circles are included below:

“So the way they [children] interact with the Early Learning Centre is probably going to dictate a little bit of how they start to explore the rest of the world. If we make this a ridiculously wonderful wonderland, then they’re going to want to go out in the rest of the world and know they can do so safely and with assurance.”

Question 4:

The second thematic section, feature questions, Question 4, asked educators: as an Indigenous person, what would motivate you to work in Early Learning Education? Staff focused sharing circle participants shared their thoughts that are captured below in bullet form:

- Language training
- Freedom to continue to explore culture and identity
- Instructor flexibility
- Working with your strengths
- Community support
- Partnering with the cultural coordinator
- Watching children learn and excel in all of their factors
- Safe space to come to
- Introducing young people to culture (language and drumming)

Illustrative quotations for Question 4 from the staff-focused sharing circles are included below:

“Because when we are together as Indigenous people, we feel different than when we are in a different setting, you know that isn’t Indigenous, so that’s why I always thought it was important for us to have Indigenous people in these kind of roles. Because our kids need to see that.”

“As an Indigenous educator, my motivation is to watch and observe Indigenous children gain important learning about their culture and be proud of who we are as a community and as a person.”

“When we can be comfortable with who we are, this is why our children feel safe.”

PROJECT LEARNING

Staff-Focused Sharing Circles Learnings and Key Findings

Question 5:

The second thematic section, feature questions, Question 5 asked educators: what would make Early Learning Education a career you would be interested in? Staff-focused sharing circle participants shared their thoughts that are captured below in bullet form:

- Co op experiences and the opportunity to be in the classroom
- Inviting people into the classroom to see what we do
- Showcasing a career and not “*just a job*”
- Focusing on the lasting impact you make on lives
- A sense of belonging at work and working with friends



An illustrative quotation for Question 5 from the staff-focused sharing circles is included below:

“It’s really getting people into the building so we can show them what contributions they can make and again, how they can use different talents.”

PROJECT LEARNING

Staff-Focused Sharing Circles Learnings and Key Findings

Question 6:

The second thematic section, feature questions, Question 6 asked educators: what is something that concerns you about entering the field of Early Learning Education? Staff-focused sharing circle participants shared their thoughts that are captured below in bullet form:

- Not getting the proper support and training
- The liability and responsibility (building safety)
- Parents' unrealistic expectations
- Managing paperwork
- Managing and de-escalating conflict
- Compensation and fair wages
- The perception of babysitting (professionalizing the industry)
- COVID-19 impacts from the pandemic
- Getting people activated in roles for the right reasons (example: not just saying we need workers so hiring anyone)
- Hiring people who do not have the required training
- Undervaluing the profession
- Lack of parent involvement

Question 7:

The second thematic section, feature questions, Question 7 asked educators a two part question: Why do you think parents choose to send their children to the community learning centre and why do you think they choose to send their children elsewhere? Staff-focused sharing circle participants shared their thoughts that are captured below in bullet form, Part A and Part B:

A) Parents choose to send their children:

- It is free service
- Geographically convenience
- Health and safety (safe spaces)
- Language
- Culture based program
- Accessibility of support services
- The perception of daycare
- They are with family and friends



PROJECT LEARNING

Staff-Focused Sharing Circles Learnings and Key Findings

B) Parents choose not to send their children:

- Our hours and scheduling conflicts
- Competition with French Daycare
- Age appropriate socialization opportunity (age groupings)

Question 8:

The third thematic section, change questions, Question 8 asked educators: Have your thoughts of Early Learning Education changed over the last few years? Staff-focused sharing circle participants confirmed that their thoughts have changed in the last few years. Their points to support that response are captured below in bullet form:

- Focus on child-directed learning
- Focus on cultural awareness
- More holistic learning approaches
- Focus on good nutrition and good overall health
- Complex needs: speech pathology, behavioural challenges and special needs children
- The need for advocacy work in community and externally to better support programs and services

Illustrative quotations for Question 8 from the staff-focused sharing circles are included below:

“There’s been lots of changes in the profession. When I first started, there was no curriculum.”

“When I started, ...a lot of things was like, ‘well the province says this, so we have to do this’ and ‘the province says this so we have to go by the province rules’. Now, we are finally getting to be able to incorporate more culture, incorporate the language, and base everything in it so there’s the pride and the support of who you are.”

“So I’m just hoping at some point, maybe, we’ll get that raise and we’ll be up there with them.”

PROJECT LEARNING

Staff-Focused Sharing Circles Learnings and Key Findings

Question 9:

The third thematic section, change questions, Question 9 asked educators: how could we recruit more people to Early Learning Education? Staff-focused sharing circle participants shared their thoughts and they are captured below in bullet form:

- Better align with community and leadership; make our presence known
- Focus on development and advancement
- Levelled certifications (pay scale adjustments)
- School placements and partnerships
- Partnering with post secondary education

Question 10:

The third thematic section, change questions, Question 10 asked educators: how could we keep more people in Early Learning Education? Staff-focused sharing circle participants shared their thoughts and they are captured below in bullet form:

- Offer part time work
- Offer job sharing opportunities
- Advancement opportunities
- Health benefits
- Time and opportunity to focus on professional development
- Better compensation package that includes a pension plan and health benefits
- Fantastic supervisors with the skills to motivate people
- Increase personal day allocations and vacation time

An illustrative quotation for Question 10 from the staff-focused sharing circles is included below:

“This profession is requiring more and more of us and it’s not going away. No, and it’s not paying more....There has to be a shift in that, because we’re gonna lose some good people if we don’t start understanding that there is a lot of work.”

PROJECT LEARNING

Staff-Focused Sharing Circles Learnings and Key Findings

Question 11:

The third and final thematic section, change question, Question 11 asked educators to imagine Indigenous Early Learning Education in five years... what does it look like? Staff-focused sharing circle participants shared their thoughts and they are captured below in bullet form:

- Programs and learning made by us for us - tailored to be culturally appropriate
- Completely bilingual
- More land-based training
- A professional and recognized industry
- Indigenous run and Indigenous staffed
- True collaboration and a network of support
- Support of leadership (policies that do not get changed)
- Being able to get training when you need it
- Compensated fairly

Illustrative quotations for Question 11 from the staff-focused sharing circles are included below:

- *“That’s how it gets started right? It gets started with just a couple people that have a passion to make changes, little changes and those little changes are just with your own little bubble... but eventually something bigger can happen.”*
- *“My mother’s been fighting to keep the language alive for well, she’s 60 some year old now, so that’s really important, obviously the language and the culture.”*
- *“It would be really nice to see this entire building...be fully staffed by Indigenous community members.”*
- *“I think the dream thing would be.. no matter what the issue you could come up with, whether it be policies, whether it be a service needed for a child, or whether it be funding for a certain program you wanted to do, it would be nice to finally have a network where you could say ‘OK, I am going to pick up the phone and call this person’ or ‘I am going to pick up the phone and call this person’, because the support is there, and it’s known, and it is needed, and you know they’re there to support you.”*

PROJECT LEARNING

Staff-Focused Sharing Circles Learnings and Key Findings

At the end of each sharing circle session, participants were asked if there was anything else they would like to add to the sharing circle. In most cases, there was not; however, it should be noted that three themes emerged during the sharing circles that are not adequately captured above. These are:

- The need to focus on male recruitment in IELCE
- That reviewing the current process of criminal record checks could lower barriers to entry for new recruits to work in IELCE (for example, someone who had a very minor offense not associated with safety could still be eligible to work in the field)
- The importance of leadership support (Chief and Council).

An illustrative quotation to support the above theme from the staff-focused sharing circle is included below:

“The question I think we need to think about is, ‘how do we get our leaders involved, so that they understand the type of work we do with these kids?’”

The staff-focused summary and analysis is documented on the next pages to conclude this section.



PROJECT LEARNING

Staff-Focused Sharing Circles Summary and Analysis

Summary of Findings

The stories and experiences shared by ELCEs were critical in order to further develop this initiative. For the purpose of a clear final analysis and with the intention of meeting the project's goal of finding creative solutions to addressing the shortages of trained ELCEs for communities, key highlights have been grouped into the following themes: strengths, weaknesses, potential solutions to better retain educators, potential solutions for recruiting Indigenous Early Years Educators, and potential solutions to improve retention in Early Years Education. Finally, based on the summary analysis from Phase 1 and the importance of professional development and/or training opportunities, participants were asked to develop a list of relevant and meaningful professional development and/or training opportunities relevant to the work they do.

Strengths

- Early Learning Educators who participated in sharing circles are passionate, committed and find their work meaningful and impactful
- Learning centres offer safe spaces for childhood development
- Learning centres offer a lot more support and services than in the past
- Learning centres are cost efficient for parents and provide a variety of support services
- Strengths identified by sharing circle participants in current programming include focus on child directed learning, cultural awareness, holistic learning approaches, and a focus on good nutrition and overall good health

Weaknesses

- ELCEs not getting the proper support and training
- The liability and responsibility (building safety) can be overwhelming for ELCEs
- Parents' unrealistic expectations can be difficult to manage
- Managing paperwork and administrative functions on top of day-to-day centre operations creates a large workload for ELCEs
- Managing and de-escalating conflict can be stress for ELCEs
- Compensation inequities (fair wages) was highlighted several times as a barrier to entry into the industry and as a barrier to retention
- The perception of babysitting and lack of professionalism is a weakness

PROJECT LEARNING

Staff-Focused Sharing Circles Summary and Analysis

Summary of Findings

Weaknesses Continued

- COVID-19 impacts from the pandemic continue to create uncertainty and change
- At times, people are hired who do not have the required training
- The lack of parent and community involvement in Early Learning Education centres
- Hours of operation are not always stable due to resources and the pandemic

Professional Development and/or Training Solutions

The list generated below by participants of the staff-focused sharing circle offers actionable professional development and/or training opportunities as a possible solution to increase staff satisfaction and to create a more supportive work environment:

- Specialized training for trauma in young children
- Trauma informed education
- Self care for workers
- Basic speech pathology for educators
- Art therapy
- Behavioural training (autism training)
- Classroom management
- Mental health first aid
- Developmental trauma, the impact of adverse childhood experiences and how we can help
- Outdoor practitioner /Outdoor classroom training
- Land based / cultural training

PROJECT LEARNING

Staff-Focused Sharing Circles Summary and Analysis

Potential Recruitment Solutions (Indigenous specific and new educators specific)

The below table highlights potential solutions identified by staff focused sharing circle participants to improve ability to recruit Indigenous educators and potential solutions to attract new educators to the field of Early Learning Education.

Recruitment Solutions for Indigenous Educators	Recruitment Solutions for New Educators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer language training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer Co-op experiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer freedom to continue to explore culture and identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer opportunities for potential entrants to the field to be in the classroom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer instructor flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite people into the classroom (open houses)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with individual strengths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showcase a career and not ‘just a job’
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer more community support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the lasting impact educators make on lives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with the cultural coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showcase a sense of belongingness at work with family and friends
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on safe spaces for all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better align with community and leadership priorities - make our presence know
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the opportunity to introduce young people to culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on development and advancement

Potential Retention Solutions

The list below highlights potential solutions identified by sharing circle respondents to improve ability to retain ECEs.

- Offer part time work
- Offer job sharing opportunities
- Offer advancement opportunities
- Offer time and opportunity to focus on professional development
- Offer a better compensation package that includes a pension plan and health benefits
- Position fantastic supervisors with the skills to motivate people in community learning centres
- Increase personal day allocations and vacation time

PROJECT LEARNING

Staff-Focused Sharing Circles Summary and Analysis

Next Steps

NSMDC hosted three (3) sharing circles with 15 Early Learning Childhood Educators to ask a series of 12 critical questions relating to their stories and experiences in Early Learning Education in the First Nation communities of North Shore in order to better understand the high turnover rates in IELCE.

Participants offered insights and assisted to generate actionable lists pertaining to relevant professional development and/or training opportunities and targeted recruitment for both Indigenous educators and new educators to the field of Early Years Learning. Finally, participants shared their hopes for what Indigenous Early Learning Education could look like in five years time.

Their vision shared included characteristics such as an Indigenous run and Indigenous staffed learning centres, true collaboration and a network of support for children, and the support of leadership. The next step of this project is to add the Directors sharing circle summary and analysis to the body of data collected to date.



Section 3: Project Learning
Director-Focused Sharing Circle

PROJECT LEARNING

Director-Focused Sharing Circle Learnings and Key Findings

Directors

This section of the report presents findings from the director-focused sharing circle in the form of a summary of responses to specific questions. The information in this section represents the researchers' interpretation based upon: (1) notes made during the sharing circle sessions, (2) a review of the audio and video recordings, and (3) a content analysis of the typed transcripts from the three director-focused sharing circles. For ease of analysis and to differentiate between the staff-focused sharing circles, information is captured below in four groupings inclusive of motivation, industry challenges, compensation reviews, and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Motivation

Director-focused sharing circle participants identified some of the following general motivations in response to what keeps them in the field of Indigenous Early Learning Education:

- Seeing children succeed
- Sense of accomplishment
- Love of children
- Seeing the development of each child
- Personal development and growth

Illustrative quotations from the director-focused sharing circle are included below:

“It’s an awesome accomplishment when programming comes together, and kids are getting services and thriving.”

“The main reason...is seeing them [children] thrive and seeing them succeed, and ...doing things they never thought they could do themselves.”

“I find that I’ve developed in in my own training and my own development, personally. So, working in the field has helped me that way.”

PROJECT LEARNING

Director-Focused Sharing Circle Learnings and Key Findings

Challenges

Director-focused sharing circle participants identified some of the following general challenges in response to what distracts them or would pull them away from the field of Early Years Education:

- Lack of levelled pay scale
- Political interference
- Lack of protection (for example, participants highlighted the need for governance systems that cannot be influenced during leadership changes and policies and procedures that are upheld and consistent)
- Salary and compensation packages

Illustrative quotations from the director-focused sharing circle are included below:

“One of the big things that would pull me personally away from the field would be politics getting involved.”

“We are fortunate to be paid a little bit more than what we were being paid, but still provincially again, even when I interview for ELCEs..., a lot of them straight out say..., ‘well, I can make more money in town’..., and you know what, that makes a lot of people walk out the door or not even put their name in for an interview, because they know that they won’t be able to make it, like won’t be able to survive on that salary, and that’s unfortunate.”

Compensation

Director-focused sharing circle participants shared some of the below responses to how well compensated are you for the work you do?

“I personally do not feel like I’m compensated at all for the work I do...I feel like I am at the bottom of the pay scale.”

“So for the compensation, it comes with a lot of responsibility.”

“...there has to be some changes made to keep our staff because we have very good staff in our centres, and we want to be able to keep them and we don’t want them going.”

PROJECT LEARNING

Director-Focused Sharing Circle Learnings and Key Findings

Recruitment and Retention

Director-focused sharing circle participants shared some of the below responses to what changes need to happen to recruit and retain staff:

- Salary
- Bringing students into the centre to showcase what we do (13 - 16 year olds)
- Create partnership with community colleges to recruit new graduates

Impact of the pandemic

Director-focused sharing circle participants shared some of the below responses to what impacts has COVID-19 had to the work you do as an educator?



“I think we have only been here nine weeks in total since September, it impacts our work, because we are trying to get kids ready for Kindergarten, we’re trying to get out special needs students to meet milestones....we are trying to get stuff in place, but it’s hard.”

“Our operations shut down.”

“Like all of us are on survival mode...even the relationships are not the same or not as close as they should be.”

“We stayed open most of the time, we were only closed for two week the whole time, and I found that it was really hard on staff who were scared of COVID..., and it was a very stressful time for staff...,and it wasn’t the same across the band, and it was different for every centre.”

At the end of this sharing circle session, participants were asked if there was anything else they would like to add to the sharing circle and there was not. However, it should be noted that all the directors clearly advocated for their staff and recognized the excellent work that their teams do.

The director focused summary and analysis is documented on the next pages to conclude this section.

PROJECT LEARNING

Director-Focused Sharing Circle Summary and Analysis

Summary of Findings

The stories and experiences shared by the director-focused sharing circles assisted to support previously collected data from Phase 1 and Phase 2. For the purpose of a clear final analysis and with the intention of meeting the project's goal of finding creative solutions to addressing the shortages of trained IELCE for communities, key highlights have been grouped into the following themes: strengths, weaknesses, and potential solutions to better retain educators to create a more supportive work environment.

Strengths

- Early Learning Childhood director sharing circle participants enjoy seeing children succeed and find their work meaningful and impactful
- Early Learning Childhood director sharing circle participants stay in the field for the love of children and for personal development

Weaknesses

- Lack of levelled pay scale
- Political interference
- Lack of protection (for example governance systems that provide job security during leadership changes)
- Salary and compensation packages

Recruitments Solutions

- Improve compensation package
- Bring students into the centre to showcase what we do
- Create a partnership with community colleges to better recruit new staff

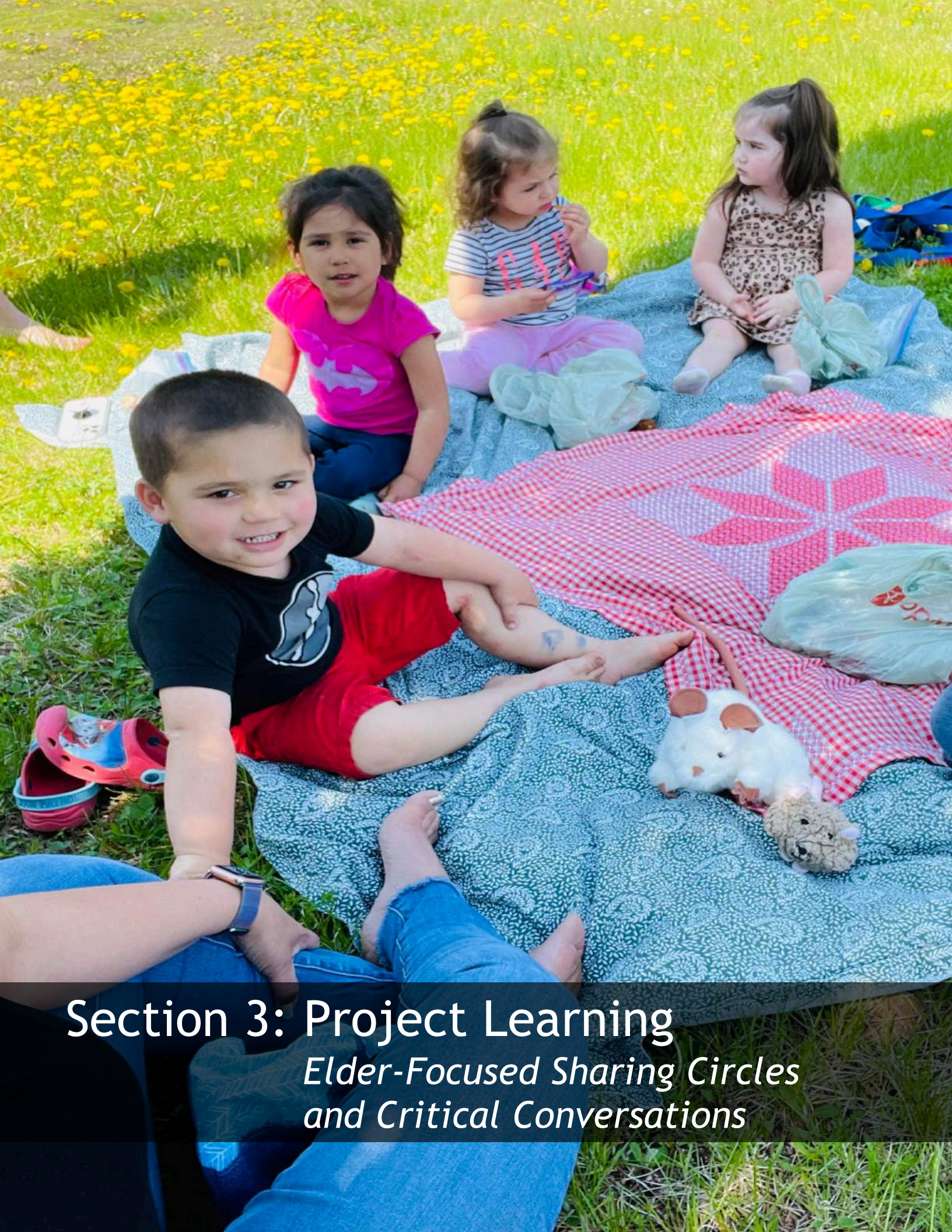
PROJECT LEARNING

Director-Focused Sharing Circle Summary and Analysis

Next Steps

NSMDC hosted one (1) sharing circles with two (2) Early Learning Childhood directors to ask a series of critical questions relating to their stories and experiences in Early Learning Education in the First Nation communities of North Shore in order to better understand the high turnover rates in IELCE and to generate key solutions to mitigate high turnover rates. Participants offered insight into a very specific question around compensation and salary scales.

The next step of this project is to add the community Elders sharing circle and critical conversations summary and analysis to the body of data collected to date.



Section 3: Project Learning
*Elder-Focused Sharing Circles
and Critical Conversations*

PROJECT LEARNING

Elder-Focused Sharing Circle and Critical Conversations Learnings and Key Findings

Community Elders

This section of the report presents findings from the Elder-focused sharing circle and the two critical conversations in the form of a summary of what respondents said in response to specific sections and questions of the discussion guide(s). The information in this section represents the researchers' interpretation based upon: (1) notes made during the sharing circle sessions, (2) a review of the audio and video recordings, and (3) a content analysis of the typed transcripts from the three engagements with community Elders.

Section 1:

The first thematic section, the past, began with asking community Elders: what comes to mind when you think about the past and how young children's learning was supported in their communities and the roles of Elders? The Elder-focused sharing circle and critical conversation participants identified some of the following thoughts about the past:

"I think I like how things are going right now, obviously, but I would love to see something ...that's informal, where children just come to hang out where there's no title or expectation."

"The online training that our Early Educators are getting, it's not quality training. They're just getting the training to get their Early Education so that we can say that we have one in our program."

The other thing is, when Early Educators go back to their centre, they're new and fresh and they don't have the experience or anybody to mentor them because old gals like us have moved out of those programs and the people behind us are taking over, but they're not getting the same type of training that we got, 'hands on training'...and cultural training that is appropriate."

"I think our programs back 20 years ago, were better...I don't want to be mean, but I think they were. It was more quality program than what we have now....it was informal, and I just find we've got so carried away with curriculums. Curriculums are great, I'm not saying that but let these kids be kids while they have the opportunity because once they hit five years old, they're institutionalized for the rest of their life."

PROJECT LEARNING

Elder-Focused Sharing Circle and Critical Conversations Learnings and Key Findings

“I think now that back then we were more casual, and I think since we’ve kind of tried to follow the provincial guidelines, a lot of people are nervous that we can’t bring people in like we used to be able to...it was more of a family development centre...,whether it be a grandmother or our Chief that used to come in and read stories once a week.”

“I know how important Elders are in our communities...because every child sees an Elder as their granny or nanny, you know, and it’s just getting there cuddling with them and just sitting on their lap and wanting to be close to them.”

“Our Elders are our first teachers; they have the ability to teach the children at a young age with their wisdom and knowledge to be patient and learn by mistake. I’ve learned many useful things as an adult today that my Elders showed me when I was a youth.”

Section 2:

The second thematic section, the present, continued by asking community Elders: what roles do Elders have in Early Learning now and what are some of the key challenges around how people think about early learning programs in community? The Elder-focused sharing circle and critical conversation participants identified some of the following thoughts about the present:

“They [Elders] have the teachings of respect, knowledge, and patience to pass on to the youth with unconditional love on both sides. Sharing in personal experiences as a youth allows the youth to explore and expand those thoughts that are just building knowledge.”

“The challenges we face today with early learning programs in the community ...include children should be able to just play, have fun and the ability to say and we can do this or that today instead of being forced to sit in a classroom setting for 20-30 minutes. Finding other ways to incorporate learning in a fun way, especially with different diagnoses and triggers that incur in a daily basis.”

PROJECT LEARNING

Elder-Focused Sharing Circle and Critical Conversations Learnings and Key Findings

“I have a grandson that’s going to town daycare, because there’s nothing that can accommodate them here at the daycare, and he’ll grow. So here we are pulling our kids away from our community, from their language, from their culture and their traditions and they are being placed in white schools again. You know, I personally have concerns about that.”

“We have our centres and people call them babysitting services. It’s like, man, if you only knew all the stuff that actually happens in there.”

“I think they need to have a supply teacher on call, like ...regular school, if a Grade One teacher is sick and can’t come in, they don’t say, oh, all kids [have] to stay home.”

Section 3:

The third thematic section, the future, continued by asking community Elders: what are your dreams for supporting the early learning of children, how can we support the leaders and educators working with young children in our learning centres, and what roles can Elders have in Early Learning in the future? The Elder-focused sharing circle and critical conversation participants identified some of the following thoughts about dreams for the future:

“The fact that we can even sit here and say we have Elders that come in our centres now and we have a community cultural coordinator who’s teaching dance which was outlawed and is teaching regalia making to children, they make these things that we’re actually able to finally do. And it says [to the children] ‘yeah, you can do that’.”

“Our Elders are the key to the past, present, the future for the next seven generations.”

“The dream is to be able to have children and to bring them up with our way of life in the language. The acknowledgement of mother earth, the creation stories, the traditions, the beliefs and the customs of the four seasons.”

“So it’s important for our children to see all these things around them to learn to grow, because they need to feel connected to their community, and the way that they feel connected to a community is by being integrated into that community.”

“Open the exact same day, time, every day, same days, full day, all week, someone there. So parents feel comfortable and they can get their children in that routine. Yes, a child needs that routine. They need to know that five days a week, I’m at school, not ‘Oh, it’s closed’.”

PROJECT LEARNING

Elder-Focused Sharing Circle and Critical Conversations Learnings and Key Findings

“My mother always said ‘children’s minds are like sponges and they soak everything up and retain easier than other people.’”

“I see in that my dream would be is to have a training program that’s developed specifically for [our] communities and have it taught in our communities...”

“Honestly, my dream, I would love to have a long house, a home, a true style longhouse, Montessori style, but inside, everything is all wood. The kids come in, and they’re in charge of it...the kids make the fires with us. Yeah, that’s my passion.”

“Decode, decode, decolonize, decolonize, our education approach for little early years.”



PROJECT LEARNING

Elder-Focused Sharing Circle and Critical Conversation Summary and Analysis

Summary of Findings

The Elders' knowledge and stories shared were critical in order to support previously collected data as well as assisting in the development of the 'vision state' for Indigenous Early Years Education in North Shore Micmac communities. For the purpose of a clear final analysis and with the intention of meeting the project's goal of finding creative solutions to addressing the shortages of trained IELCE for communities, key highlights have been extracted from the Elders' stories to formulate the 'vision state' of Indigenous Early Learning Education for our communities in the future. The knowledge shared from community Elders, in addition to the data previously collected from Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this project, will create the vision of what we aim to accomplish in Early Years Education for the communities North Shore.

The next step of this project is to bring all the information and data collected to date into a summary conclusion that meets the goal of this project, which was to find creative and innovative solutions to addressing the shortage of trained IELCE for Micmac communities of Northern New Brunswick.



Section 4: Conclusions

PROJECT CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Findings

The purpose of the project, “Minimizing the Gap in Indigenous Early Years Education,” was to find creative and innovative solutions to addressing the shortage of trained IELCE for the Micmac communities of Northern New Brunswick. Many insights were gained from the stakeholder engagement sessions. As is NSMDC tradition, our conclusion begins by highlighting the knowledge shared by our community Elders, specifically as it relates to the future state of Indigenous Early Learning Education in our communities. This information will be critical to developing a culturally appropriate Indigenous Early Learning Education plan that will guide NSMDC for the foreseeable future.

Indigenous Early Learning Education, Vision Statements:

The vision statements listed below were generated from the analysis of the Elders sharing circle and critical conversations, validated during the March 31, 2022 symposium. Their knowledge capturing an understanding of the past, present, and future of Indigenous Early Learning Education for our communities will be used to develop an Early Years Learning plan to guide NSMDC in the work we do.

- Our educational programming for Early Years Education will be decoded and decolonized, it will reflect a balance of formal and informal learning approaches that is culturally appropriate and designed by us for our communities.
- IELCEs and ELCEs working in our communities will have quality and hands-on training that includes mentorship for new educators.
- Our communities and our Early Learning Centres will be more inclusive of children with special needs.
- The field of Early Learning Education will be professionalized and governed with a governance system that is resilient to change.
- Elders will be involved in Early Years Education and recognized as the key to seven generations, past, present, and future.
- Early Learning Education will be connected to and integrated with community.
- Early Learning Centres will have the resources needed to offer consistent and dependable programming.
- Educators will be offered a training program developed specifically for our communities and taught in our communities.
- Our leadership teams will understand and support the work that IELCEs and ELCEs do to support the development of our communities' children.

PROJECT CONCLUSIONS

In addition to the vision statements listed on the previous page, the staff-focused sharing circle participants imagined a future state that also included the below vision statements:

- An Indigenous run and Indigenous staffed Early Learning Centre inclusive of culture and language training.
- A recognized field with IELCEs who are compensated and rewarded fairly for their work and have the opportunity to pursue professional development in their careers.

Aligned to the vision statements above and to the goal of this project, the below information highlights creative and innovative solutions to address the shortage of trained IELCEs for Micmac communities of Northern New Brunswick. Solutions generated to fill this current gap include both potential retention solutions and potential recruitment solutions. Finally, ELCEs also identified potential training and professional development opportunities that were relevant to the work they do and that could assist with retention rates of educators.

Potential Retention Solutions

The table below highlights potential solutions identified by participants of this initiative to improve retention of quality early learning educators. The list below is inclusive of adapting the work environment to offer more support to ELCEs.

Retention Solutions
• Offer a better compensation package (equitable wage) that includes a pension plan and health benefits
• Offer leveled pay options
• Offer support from internal and external stakeholders
• Offer the time required and funding required to participate in training and professional development opportunities
• Focus on recruiting the right people with the proper training and experience for the positions
• Offer part time work
• Ensure there are enough resources (physical space and human resources)
• Increase support for supervisors
• Offer additional mental health supports
• Empower educators to make more decisions regarding their teaching and classroom style
• Allow for more frequent communication between stakeholders and peers
• Allow for more time to complete administrative tasks

PROJECT CONCLUSIONS

Retention Solutions (continued)

- Offer job sharing opportunities
- Offer advancement opportunities
- Position fantastic supervisors with the skills to motivate people in community learning centres
- Increase personal day allocations and vacation time

Potential Recruitment Solutions for Indigenous Educators and New Educators

The below table highlights potential solutions identified by participants involved in this initiative in order to improve recruitment rates of Indigenous educators and potential solutions to attract new educators to the field of Early Learning Education.

Recruitment Solutions for Indigenous Educators	Recruitment Solutions for New Educators
• Offer language training	• Offer co-op experiences
• Offer freedom to continue to explore culture and identity	• Offer opportunities for potential entrants to the field to be in the classroom
• Offer instructor flexibility	• Invite people into the classroom (open houses)
• Work with individual strengths	• Showcase a career and not ‘just a job’
• Offer more community support	• Focus on the lasting impact educators make on lives
• Partner with the cultural coordinator	• Showcase a sense of belonging at work with family and friends
• Focus on safe spaces for all	• Better align with community and leadership priorities - make our presence know
• Focus on the opportunity to introduce young people to culture	• Focus on development and advancement
• Re-visit criminal record procedure (minor offense)	• Create a partnership with community colleges to better recruit new staff
	• Re-visit criminal record procedure (minor offense)

PROJECT CONCLUSIONS

Professional Development and/or Training Solutions Identified to Improve Retention

The list generated below by participants of this initiative offers actionable professional development and/or training opportunities as a possible solution to increase staff satisfaction, to create a more supportive work environment, and to better retain educators:

- Specialized training for trauma in young children
- Trauma informed education
- Self care for workers
- Basic speech pathology for educators
- Art therapy
- Behavioural training (autism training)
- Classroom management
- Mental health first aid
- Developmental trauma, the impact of adverse childhood experiences and how we can help
- Outdoor practitioner /Outdoor classroom training
- Land based / cultural training

It should be also noted, that through this initiative, NSMDC was also able to document strengths and weaknesses of the current system in each summary analysis of this report. This documentation, in addition to the vision statements generated by community Elders will position NSMDC to complete an Early Learning Education Plan in the near future.

Final Symposium

Review and Validation

On March 31, 2022 a symposium and final review was organized with participating community members, Early Learning Educators and staff (past and present), and the project team. A copy of the final report was circulated to all participants of the project along with a solicitation for feedback on the final report and findings. The participation rate for the final symposium that was held on March 31, 2022 was 40 attendees. Each participant received a meal per diem and a gift certificate as compensation for their time. The agenda for the session included: an Elder blessing, a review of both the project context and approach, a review of learnings from survey respondents and sharing circle participants, a summary of project conclusions, an open circle for attendees to share their feedback and thoughts and concluded with a sincere thank you from the project team for the attendee's participation in this project. The feedback generated from the final symposium was very positive. Participants expressed their appreciation for the follow up and the care that was taken to ensure clear communication processes were followed. A few key items generated by attendees of the final symposium and divided into two sections inclusive of reinforcement and acknowledgement are captured below:

Reinforcement

- A reinforcement of the need for Indigenous Early Years Education (training specific programming for educators) be designed by Indigenous Early Years Educators for Indigenous Early Years Educators
- A reinforcement of the need to ensure that the proper supports (personnel) are in place for training to be supported in community centers
- A reinforcement of the importance of partnering with community and cultural support workers
- A reinforcement of how important language training was for children and educators in centers

Acknowledgement

Two new pieces of feedback that were generated during the final symposium included:

- the need to establish a professional Indigenous Early Years Education Association for communities, and
- that although there remains work to be done, changes made in the last few years towards better pay equity and health benefits for Early Learning Educators should be acknowledged.



Section 6: Appendices

Appendix A:

Exit Interview Survey

1. What role(s) did you have with Indigenous Early Childhood Education? (example: previous job or jobs held) (please check all that apply)
2. How many years have you worked in the Early Childhood Education industry?
3. When did you leave the Early Childhood Education industry? Overall, how much did you enjoy working in the Early Childhood Education industry?
4. Did you feel supported in your role? How valued were your skills and knowledge?
5. Did the learning curriculum reflect your Indigenous ways of knowing and learning?
6. What were the most difficult aspects of your job? Please explain. How helpful were professional development opportunities (skills development days, career planning, succession planning) for your career?
7. How well were you paid/compensated for the work you did?
8. Why did you leave the industry? (Please check all that apply)
9. What changes need to happen to recruit and retain quality ELC educators?
10. How could a more supportive working environment be created for current educators? Anything else you would like to share with us?

Thank you for providing your feedback.

Appendix B:

Sharing Circle Guide

Introduction:

We have invited you here today to hear your ideas and opinions on early childhood learning in NSMDC communities. NSMDC will use the compiled results in reporting to community members and external stakeholders about Indigenous early childhood learning and early childhood educator training.

This focus group will take approximately 90 minutes of your time and conversations will be confidential. Your names will not appear in any reporting. You decide what information you wish to share, so if there is a question you do not want to answer, you don't have to.

We are recording this session only so we can transcribe the conversations. Once the transcriptions are finished, the recordings will be deleted. Your names will not appear in the transcription, instead, you will be assigned a code number.

Are there any questions?

Setting the context: Project overview

1. What are your general feelings about Early Learning Education and being an Early Learning Educator?
2. What do you already know about being an Educator in Early Learning Education? What is something you would like to learn more about as it relates to ELE?
3. How do you feel about the role of early learning centres in the development of a child?

Feature Questions:

4. As an Indigenous person, what would motivate you to work in Early Learning Education?
5. What would make Early Learning Education a career you would be interested in?

Probe - job and career

6. What is something that concerns you about entering Early Learning Education?
7. Why do you think people leave the community Early Learning centres?
 - a. Why do you think parents choose to send their children to the community ELCs?
 - b. Why do you think they chose to send their children elsewhere?

Appendix B:

Sharing Circle Guide

Change Questions:

8. Have your thoughts about the role of Early Learning Educators changed over the last few years?
9. How could we recruit more people to Early Learning Education?
10. How could we keep more people in Early Learning Education?

Future Questions:

11. Imagine Indigenous Early Learning Education in five years... what does it look like?

Exit Questions

12. Is there anything else you would add to this conversation?

Appendix C:

Sharing Circle Guiding Questions: Elders

Introduction:

We have invited you here today to hear your ideas and opinions on early childhood learning in NSMDC communities. NSMDC will use the compiled results in reporting to community members and external stakeholders about Indigenous early childhood learning and early childhood educator training.

This focus group will take approximately 90 minutes of your time and conversations will be confidential. Your names will not appear in any reporting. You decide what information you wish to share, so if there is a question you do not want to answer, you don't have to.

We are recording this session only so we can transcribe the conversations. Once the transcriptions are finished, the recordings will be deleted. Your names will not appear in the transcription, instead, you will be assigned a code number.

Are there any questions?

Past

1. What comes to mind when you think about the past and how young children's learning was supported in their communities?
2. What roles did Elders have in early learning in the past?

Present

3. What roles do Elders have in early learning now?
4. What are the key challenges around how people think about early learning programs in the community?
(baby sitting; different diagnoses beyond Western medical definitions of Autism, etc., trained educators who stay in the role, etc.)

Appendix C:

Sharing Circle Guiding Questions: Elders

Future

5. What are your dreams for supporting the learning of young children (aged 0-5 years) in your community?
6. For the dreams you have for the children in our community, what would need to happen?
 - a. To programming (*land-based education, language, culture*)
 - b. To leadership?
7. How can we support the leaders and educators working with young children in our communities and in early learning centres?
8. What roles can Elders have in early learning in the future?
9. Anything else to add?

