

# **PROMOTING EQUITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: BUILDING ATLANTIC CONNECTIONS**

## **SUMMARY REPORT: MAY-OCTOBER 2023**

### **LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Mount Saint Vincent University is located in Kjiptuk (Halifax), part of Mi'kma'ki, the unceded ancestral territory which remains the homeland of the Mi'kmaq Nation. This territory is covered by the Covenant Chain of Treaties of Peace and Friendship signed between 1725 and 1779. These treaties are affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada and recognize Aboriginal Title (which is embedded in both the 1763 Royal Proclamation and in section 35(1) of the 1982 Constitution Act). The treaties are living agreements that establish the rules for an ongoing Treaty relationship between nations.

We pay respect to the knowledge embedded in the Mi'kmaw custodians of the lands and waters and to the Elders, past, present, and future.

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## About the Project

This project builds upon ongoing work led by Dr. Jessie-Lee McIsaac at the Early Childhood Collaborative Research Centre (ECCRC) with Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU). The ECCRC engages families, as well as policy and practice partners, in research to enhance early childhood well-being. Since the establishment of the ECCRC in 2018, several knowledge mobilization activities have taken place that have contributed to this work.

**2018:** An event between Nova Scotia researchers, policymakers, and practitioners with an emphasis on storytelling was held to promote collective learning, strengthen future research partnerships, and support programming and policy.

**2019:** An in-person seminar series for Nova Scotia early childhood educators focused on bridging the research-to-policy gap was held.

**2021:** Five virtual seminars to share current progress in early childhood data collection across Atlantic Canada was held, followed by a meeting with policymakers to identify the next steps.



The current (2023) project, “Building Atlantic Canadian Connections to Support High-Quality, Inclusive, and Culturally Responsive Early Childhood Environments” focused on building and sustaining connections that expand our network, clarify research focus, and ensure alignment with the goals of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care agreements. We aimed to:

1. **Mobilize Atlantic-wide research** on high-quality, inclusive, and culturally responsive early childhood programs;
2. **Co-design policy and community solutions** to enable high-quality, inclusive, and culturally responsive early childhood programs.

Through this project, we created opportunities for early childhood professionals across Atlantic Canada to collectively come together to learn and share their knowledge related to equity in early childhood, including:

- A three-part virtual storytelling series in May and June (2023). Each session within this series focused on a central theme related to equity. Storytellers with expertise in each of these areas, shared their knowledge and current work they are engaged in, to promote and sustain equity in early childhood.
- An in-person two day event in Halifax in October (2023) to provide further opportunities for early childhood professionals to connect, share, and learn with each other (local practice tours, fireside chat, planning workshop).





## About the Virtual Storytelling Series:

The Virtual Storytelling series was held online via Microsoft Teams throughout May and June, 2023. Storytellers from the Atlantic provinces were invited to share their stories based on their expertise and ongoing commitment to promoting and sustaining equity in early childhood. Each series centered on a specific theme related to equity. Present during each of the sessions was [Rachel Derrah](#), a graphic facilitator who captured key messages from each of the storytellers. Rachel Derrah also created a [listening lens](#) to support participants' engagements with the storytelling series. The recording of each of the storytelling series can be found on our YouTube page [here](#).

### Session 1: Stories centered on Culturally-Responsive Programming (May 10, 2023)



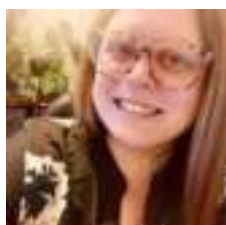
**Nicholas Phillips (NS):**  
*'Mi'kmaw ECE program in Mi'kma'ki'*



**Dr. Gabriela Arias de Sanchez & Emily Cook-McDonald (PEI):**  
*'Show me your ways, the entanglement of family literacy'*



**Debbie Ingram (NL):**  
*Embracing and celebrating diversity: implementing cultural programming into our everyday practices'*



**Kristin Dawson & Stacey Arbuckle (NB):**  
*'Honoring linguistic cultures of New Brunswick Children and Families'*

A total of 176 participants joined the live session.



## Session 2: Stories centered on Anti-Oppression (May 24, 2023)



**Moashella Shortte (NS)**

*'Making Room for all in the Circle of Change'*



**Adam Braye (NL/NS)**

*'Life outside the lines: Supporting gender diversity in the early years'*



**Pam Whitty (NB)**

*'Gender fluidity as equitable practice'*

A total of 108 participants joined the live session.





### Session 3: Stories centered on Accessibility and Inclusion (June 7, 2023)



**Jennifer Nangreaves & Megan McPhee (PEI)**

*'The tools we need'*



**Jill Shaw (NB)**

*'Loved, Heard & Respected'*



**Dr. Shanon Phelan & Colleen Diggins (NS)**

*Pursuing Inclusion in Early Learning & Childcare: Stories from Mothers of Children Experiencing Disability*



**Megan Griffith (NB)**

*'Human Rights and Accommodation in Early Learning'*



**Rhea Dale (NL)**

*'Inclusion not guaranteed: The battles of a mom and child care advocate'*

A total of 108 participants joined the live session.



## Participant Feedback on Virtual Storytelling Series

Across the three sessions, participants noted various reasons for their interest in attending. In the words of one participant, *“I was interested because it’s always great and beneficial to hear from people who work in the field, and all of the topics being discussed were extremely important, and the stories told were very meaningful.”*

The majority of participants in each of the storytelling series agreed that by attending the session they: made new connections, increased their understanding of how to promote equity in their own workplaces, and build their knowledge of resources and information related to equity in early childhood.

In each survey, participants were asked to describe the respective session in one word. The word cloud above is a reflection of words used across the three virtual storytelling series.



## IN-PERSON FALL EVENTS

Following the virtual storytelling series, the planning for our in-person events began. These events were an opportunity to bring early childhood professionals from Atlantic Canada together in Kijipuktuk (Halifax), Nova Scotia. The in-person events included the opportunity to tour three child care centres (morning/afternoon of October 3, 2023), a public Fireside Chat (evening of October 3, 2023), and a Full-day Workshop for invited guests (October 4, 2023). Over 60 guests joined over the course of the two days.

There was such a wonderful balance over the two day period. I thoroughly enjoyed having lots of time to network with other [role] in addition to have the opportunity to visit other Centres and connect with management and their team at each location. I honestly can't think of any recommendations for future events as I felt the event was planned out so well and everything was thought of. It was a wonderful experience and opportunity and I'm so grateful to have been part of such positive conversations.

-Participant



## About the Local Practice Tours:

Three child care centres in Nova Scotia opened their doors to welcome guests from the 'Promoting Equity in Early Childhood' event. These child cares were identified based on the high priority they give to fostering early learning environments that are diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible. The three child care centres were: MSVU Child Study Centre, YWCA Early Learning Centre, and East Preston Daycare Centre and Family Resource Centre.

**MSVU Child Study Centre:** The Mount Saint Vincent University Child Study Centre (CSC) was founded in 1976 and is a licensed, not-for-profit child care centre. The centre is committed to providing high-quality, inclusive, accessible, and culturally responsive child care for young children aged 18 months to 5 years.

**YWCA Halifax Early Learning Centre:** YWCA Halifax has a long history of providing quality inclusive early learning and childcare programs. YWCA Halifax operates all their early learning and child care programs from principles of equity, diversity and inclusion and family-centred care. YWCA Early Learning and Child Care programs take pride in their commitment to Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and their diverse educators that reflect the children in their programs - this is intentional.

**East Preston Day Care Centre and Family Resource Centre:** Established in 1974, the East Preston Day Care Centre uses an emergent curriculum, they have diverse programming that caters to each child's individual needs and interests. The East Preston Day Care Centre is open to any family in HRM, and prides itself on their feeling of community, shared experiences, and love. The East Preston Day Care Centre also has a Family Resource Centre which began their journey in 1993 by offering parenting and information classes in the community.



A group at the Child Study Centre with the director leading the tour and sharing about the centre's philosophy



A group at the YWCA Early Learning Centre with educators who came dressed in traditional cultural dresses and shared their own customs and traditions.



A group at the East Preston Daycare Centre ready to head in and learn about the history of the child care centre and the positive impact it has on the community.



## About the Fireside Chat:

To continue with the powerful theme of storytelling, a Fireside Chat was held at Mount Saint Vincent University on October 3rd, 2023.

The Fireside Chat continued with the theme of storytelling. Four storytellers shared their work related to equity in early childhood, the successes and challenges that they have experienced, along with their perspectives on how to move the work forward. Our storytellers were: Danielle Larry (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, NB), Debbie Ingram, a previous storyteller, (First Light, NL), Tayitu Sebsibie (Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia, NS), and Nathalie Nadeau (CHANCES, PEI).

The Fireside chat was moderated by Moashella Shortte, a former storyteller and Faculty for the Africentric Learning Option (ACLO) of the Adult Learning Program (NSCC, NS).

The recording of the Fireside Chat can be viewed [here](#).



*From left to right: Dr. Jessie-Lee McIsaac, Danielle Larry, Debbie Ingram, Tayitu Sebsibie, Moashella Shortte, and Dr. Elizabeth Jean Larson.*



*The ECCRC Connections Team*

*From left to right: Janice Osei-Essah Dr. Jessie-Lee McIsaac, Dr. Elizabeth Jean Larson, Nahal Fakhari, Milena Pimentel*



*Rachel Derrah, graphic facilitator, listening to the stories and capturing them visually.*



*Storytellers sharing their stories and engaging in conversation with the audience. (From left to right: Danielle Larry, Debbie Ingram, Tayitu Sebsibie, Nathalie Nadeau and Moashella Shortte)*

## About the Planning Workshop:

The full day workshop was planned to intentionally continue the conversation and ongoing efforts in promoting equity in early childhood. This workshop was comprised of: academics in the area of early learning and child care, early childhood education practitioners, policy makers, and organizations focused on early childhood such as early intervention and family resource centres. This allowed for rich conversations on ways to effectively promote equity in early childhood and build meaningful connections across Atlantic Canada.

The purpose of this workshop was to continue thinking about the future of our work, in terms of how we can continue our shared learning, collaboration, and best practices to promote and sustain equity in early childhood. These ideas helped shaped our current Partnership Development Grant proposal.

The workshop was held at the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre and had representation from all across the four provinces of Atlantic Canada. We were also joined by participants from Ontario and Alberta.

With the support of a planning committee and Rach Derrah, we had three activities to guide the conversation throughout the day. These included:

- Checking in through Storytelling
- Shared Purpose
- Shared Work



Elder Debbie graciously grounded the group with an opening prayer and blessing. The group was also invited to participate in and witness a haircutting ceremony to bring awareness to 'National Day of Action for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2 Spirit and Gender-Diverse People'.

Please see the link below for more information: [Haircutting Ceremony](#)

For additional resources please see:

- [MMIG2SPlus National Action Plan](#)
- [National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#)
- [Native Hope](#)



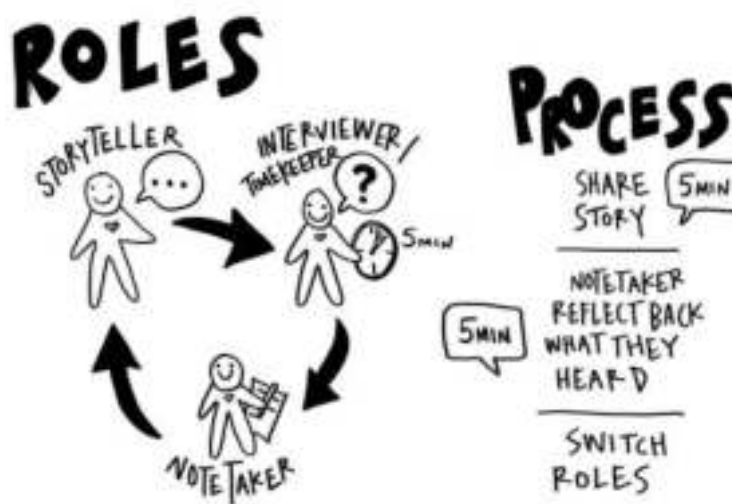
# ACTIVITY 1: CHECKING IN THROUGH STORYTELLING

This activity offered participants the chance to share their own stories based on the prompt, “*Tell a story of a time when you’ve experienced hope for positive change related to equity in early childhood.*” The storytelling lens was employed to continue the building of connections among workshop participants.

In groups of 3-4 each participant had the chance to be in one of the three roles: Storyteller, Interviewer/Timekeeper, and Notetaker.

Workshop participants were prompted to listen to each other’s stories with intention and find the similarities and connections across each story. They were then asked to highlight what stood out to them and explore linkages to their own work and experiences.

**Tell a story of a time  
when you’ve  
experienced hope for  
positive change related  
to equity in early  
childhood...**



# ACTIVITY 2: SHARED WORK: PROMOTING EQUITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD HUB

Activities 2 and 3 were centred on and informed by the 'Shared Work Framework'. This framework, originally developed by [Tuesday Ryan-Hart](#), is a powerful approach to centering on a particular shared idea, as a collective, so that a concrete and meaningful difference can be made.

For activity 2, the team put forth the idea for a potential hub for early childhood professionals centered on promoting equity in early childhood.

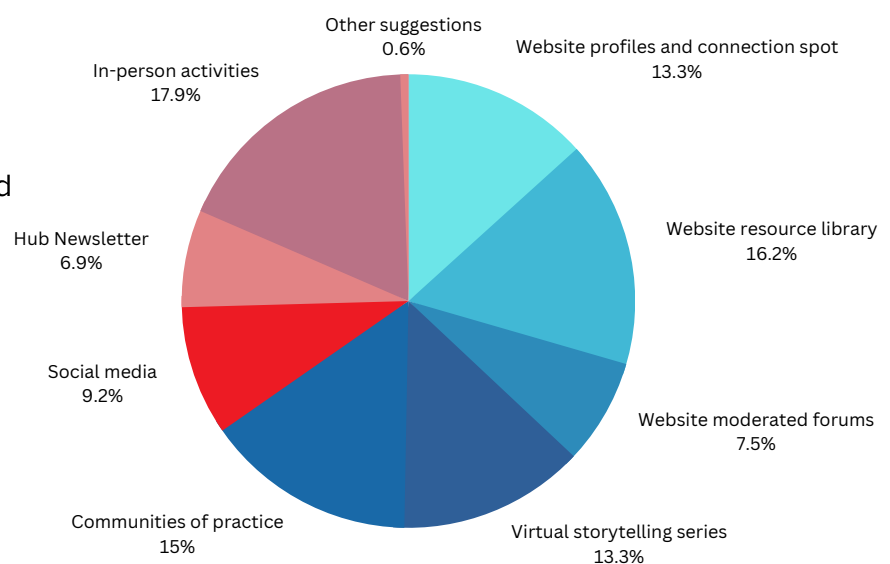


The vision of the hub is to provide a safe and accessible space for professionals working with young children and families with the tools and resources to deepen their knowledge and understanding of equity in early childhood. This will, in turn, empower professionals and support their commitment to promoting and sustaining equitable early childhood environments for all families with young children.

**Part 1:** First, participants had the opportunity to participate in a gallery walk with the descriptions of the initial brainstormed ideas that were spread around the room. Alongside each description was a graphic drawing that participants were encouraged to contribute their thoughts on what could make it beneficial, who it would benefit, and a space to ask questions and/or provide suggestions.

**Part 2:** Secondly, participants were encouraged to break out into a group that was focusing on a conversation on one component of the hub. These conversations were facilitated by ECCRC team members and allowed for participants to collectively have a conversation about each hub component; what would make it beneficial, who it would benefit, and to provide any suggestions. There were three rounds of these break out conversations.

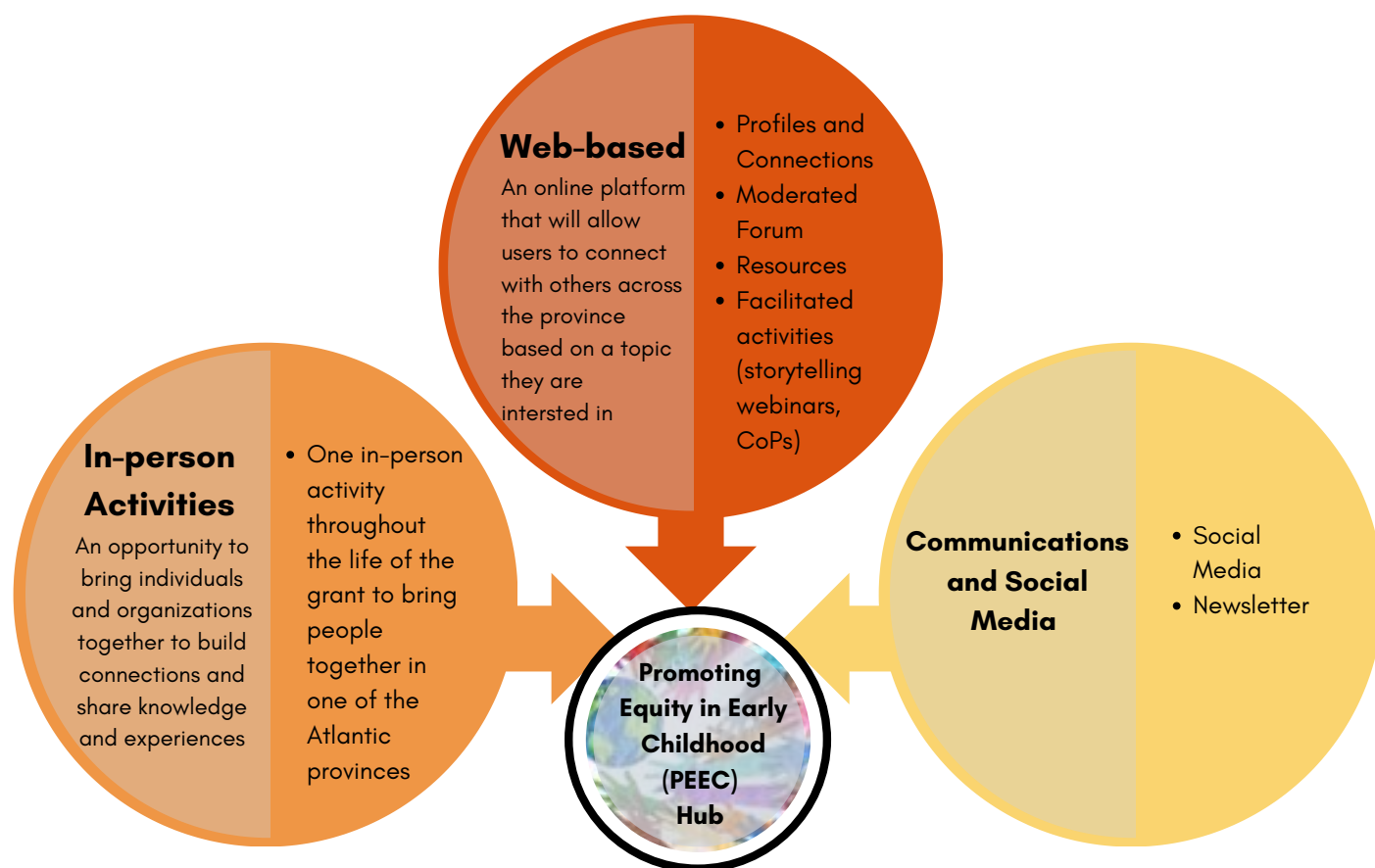
**Part 3:** Lastly, participants were given dot stickers to participate in a 'Dotmocracy' and asked to put them on their top three hub activities.





# ACTIVITY 2: SHARED WORK CONT'D

*\*This draft visual demonstrates each of the hub descriptors that informed activity 2.*



Display of the hub activities to gather participant input



Participants reading the proposed hub activities description



A workshop participant adding a suggestion onto one of the proposed hub activities

# ACTIVITY 3: SHARED PURPOSE: PROMOTING EQUITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD HUB

In this session, we had a table discussion where participants were grouped by the similar interests i.e. organizations like researchers (comprising of universities and colleges), associations, early learning and childcare centres, governments, foundations etc.

The purpose of this grouping was for participants to discuss how their organizations can contribute to the hub and how individuals and organizations can benefit from it.



**Universities and Colleges**



**Associations**



**Government**



**Child Care Centres**



## FINAL GRAPHIC FROM IN-PERSON EVENTS



*This graphic, by Rachel Derrah, illustrates a summary of the conversations had over the two days of the in-person events.*

## GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF PARTNERS AND PARTICIPANTS



## Participant Feedback:

Following the in-person series of events, participants were encouraged to complete a survey to help inform future events. There was a 50% response rate (n=36). Participants were satisfied with all of the components of the events (i.e., local practice tours, Fireside Chat, full-day planning workshop). Overall, participants agreed or strongly agreed that the events were informative and beneficial to spark participants thinking in promoting equity in early childhood. Additionally, participants strongly felt that the events allowed them to connect with new people.

“There are so many diverse perspectives and skill sets from a broad range of people/roles in our region. I am grateful to have the chance to engage/continue to find ways to collaborate to promote equity in the future.”

“Together we become stronger and more efficient/effective in the work that is accomplished as we move forward. The sharing of lessons learned provides invaluable information.”

## Next Steps:

The team is currently working on a proposal for a SSHRC Partnership Development Grant to build on this current project. The grant results will be released in the spring of 2024, stay tuned for updates!

## THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS, PARTNERS AND ALL THOSE WHO JOINED US!

This work has been made possible through ongoing collaboration with a number of partners from across Atlantic Canada and beyond. We thank each and everyone of you who are committed to this work and supported the various aspects of this project.



## Questions? Contact us at:

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