

2024

# IGNITING THE SPARK FOR MENTORSHIP

COMMUNITY ANIMATOR REPORT

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Leading Inspired  
Learning

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## COLLABORATORS

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### **DR. DIANE KASHIN, Ed. D., RECE**

We were so fortunate to have had the opportunity to connect with Diane on multiple occasions throughout this process. We spent much time in discussion about mentorship, current and past contexts of early years professionals, what technology has to offer our profession, opportunities that professional friendships can offer, and so much more.



We cherish the visit we had to her cottage in Grand Bend and the rich conversations we were lost in all day. In Diane's last blog post (Kashin, 2023b), she spoke to reflecting on the legacy she would leave. We are grateful to have Diane as an inspiration in our ongoing work, and for the confidence to utilize technology support (ChatGPT) in our work process. We will always remember her and the impact she has had on the early years profession. Thank you for being our (professional) friend, Diane.

### **DR. CÉLINE BOURBONNAIS-MACDONALD, Ed. D., OCT, AECEO**

We are thankful to Céline and her wonderful team for the significant work they have done, and continue to do, on the Early Years Policy Framework Prototype. Their rigorous research and efforts in identifying needs, pathways, and measurables for an Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) system sets the stage for action in our community in the coming years. It is our hope that this work is supportive to the collective workforce, and serves to bring the community together as we navigate the everchanging work we all do each day.



# INTRODUCTION

As part of the recent nationwide child care initiative, the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC), Ontario's Ministry of Education (MEDU) was allocated a one-time federal investment to support the early years workforce. The Early Childhood Workforce Agreement had four key objectives:

## 01. Sustain

the existing child care and early years workforce to ensure a more stable and high-quality early years and child care system.

## 02. Enhance

access to opportunities for the workforce that promote retention and recruitment, including professional development, training, and qualification upgrade programs.

## 03. Grow

the number of qualified staff in the early years and child care workforce to increase access to high-quality licensed child care for families.

## 04. Attract

and support the development of an increasingly diverse workforce to more effectively reflect the children and families accessing early years and child care programs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023).

As part of the Workforce Agreement, Consolidated Municipal Service Managers/District Social Services Administration Boards (CMSMs/DSSABs), First Nations, Francophone, and other child care and early years partners were tasked with implementing several initiatives to obtain these objectives, including an initiative to support early years professionals' access to mentorship opportunities. The City of London and City of St. Thomas, the designated CMSMs for the area, along with Strive decided to create the Community Animator (CA) London-Middlesex and Community Animator Elgin positions to lead the mentorship initiative. Their roles involved developing and advancing a visionary, multi-faceted, and sustainable approach to mentorship for London, Middlesex, and Elgin early years professionals in any role (e.g., student, educator working directly with children, leader, facilitator, etc.) and at all points in their career (e.g., new, emerging, established, seasoned).

The CAs' work began in March 2023 and is currently ongoing. This report highlights the key processes and findings from the Community Animators' work, including an environmental scan of mentorship approaches, the community engagement processes, what we heard from collaborators, and proposed pathways to support mentorship opportunities.

# ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

## Mentorship Models

### Local

The London, Middlesex, and Elgin regions have previously engaged in several mentorship opportunities to support early years professionals.

#### Mentoring Pairs for Child Care (MPCC)

In 2009, the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC) launched this provincially funded program, which matched more experienced child care supervisors with those who were less experienced or just beginning in their roles. MPCC was a year-long training and mentoring program, in which mentor pairs engaged in individual and group learning and reflection as part of a set curriculum. In total, approximately 400 supervisors across 28 Ontario communities participated in MPCC (Doherty, 2011).

#### Centres of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care

The Centres of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care were established in 2018 as part of the Canada-Ontario Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. Three Centres were established, including the Indigenous, Francophone, and Provincial Centres, to support professional learning networks across Ontario. Through these networks, early years professionals could grow their pedagogical practice and leadership capacity in programs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021).

#### Raising the Bar

Raising the Bar (RTB) was initially established in 2002 by Affiliated Services for Children and Youth (ASCY) to support continuous quality enhancement in early years programs, in alignment with *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* (HDLH?) (Halfon & Dixon, 2015). Communities across Ontario, including London, Middlesex, and Elgin, utilized this quality framework to support early years professionals' professional learning needs and goals.

### Other

Other regions across Ontario, Canada, and internationally have also explored opportunities to support mentorship for early years professionals in their respective regions. Below are some of the opportunities available to professionals:

- Coaching - centre/ site specific, individualized
- Local and regional Communities of Practice/networks of support
- Mentor pairing
- Mentor/coach training
- Mentoring of professionals (re)entering the field
- MPCC (relaunched)
- Modules - e.g., Stepping Side-by-Side

## Understandings of Mentorship

There are various understandings of what mentorship is and what it looks like within the early years field.

The International Mentoring Association (n.d.) looks at mentoring as three things at once:

- It is a series of tasks that effective mentors must do to promote the professional development of others;
- It is the intense, trusting, supportive, positive, confidential, low-risk relationship within which the partners can try new ways of working and relating, make mistakes, gain feedback, accept challenges, and learn in front of each other;
- It is the complex, developmental process that mentors use to support and guide their protégé through the necessary career transitions that are a part of learning how to be an effective, reflective professional, and a career-long learner (para. 1).

Ontario's College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) views mentorship as a way for Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) to engage in their continuous professional learning (CPL) process. The CECE has developed resources related to mentorship and have included mentorship within their Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2017). The College of Early Childhood Educators (2018) defines mentorship for RECEs in Ontario as such:

*A reciprocal, relationship-based and process-oriented professional learning experience between two individuals (a mentor and a mentee) in the early learning and care sector. The purpose of the relationship is to learn and improve professional practice through reflective practice, self-directed learning and collaboration. (p. 2)*

Additionally, the College (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2018) provides the following definitions for mentors and mentees:

**Mentor:** "An individual who shares and uses their knowledge, skills and experiences to support and guide a mentee to improve their practice and acquire new skills" (p. 2).

**Mentee:** "An individual who is supported and guided by a mentor in order to learn, improve their professional practice or acquire new skills" (p. 2).

Dr. Diane Kashin discussed mentorship within the context of professional friendships. In traditional understandings of mentorship, there exists a power imbalance between the mentor and mentee, with the mentor typically holding more power through their experience, knowledge, and likely their position or role. Dr. Kashin (2023b) instead encourages professional friendships in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings, where professionals enter relationships assuming various roles including mentor, mentee, friend, and coach (para. 3). Professional friends go beyond just a person who you share a common professional context with, and act as someone who can "champion and challenge thinking, being, and practice within layers of love and kindness" (Kashin, 2023a, p. 2).



# ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

At the onset of the Community Animators’ work, it was prioritized by both Strive and the CMSMs that the mentorship opportunities that would be developed and implemented be both for and by early years professionals. Early years professionals’ perspectives aimed to be captured in several ways to understand the nuances, trends, and complexities present in relation to mentorship. In this section an overview of each engagement process and data analysis strategies are presented.

## Engagement Approaches

The following chart captures the various approaches in which early years and community professionals were engaged and contributed to the work.

Engagement Approach	Description/ Key Points
Local Child Care and Early Years Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 81 community engagement meetings were held with leaders, professionals, and students from various child care and early years organizations, agencies, and institutions across the 3 regions</li> <li>• Collaborators were asked to speak to mentorship successes, existing practices, challenges, wants, and needs</li> </ul>
Early Years Professionals Survey on Mentorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open to all early years professionals, including students, educators working directly with children, leaders, operators, facilitators, etc. in London, Middlesex, Elgin, and surrounding regions</li> <li>• Questions related to participants’ understanding of mentorship, mentorship in current practice, and mentoring needs, supports, and resources</li> </ul>
Strive Strategic Planning Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open to both service users and non-users of Strive</li> <li>• A section of questions related to the importance of mentorship, benefits of mentoring, Strive’s role in mentoring, and format/resources for mentorship</li> </ul>

Engagement Approach	Description/ Key Points
Early Years Student Survey on Mentorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open to all students currently enrolled in an ECEC program at Fanshawe College</li> <li>• Questions related to participants’ understanding of mentorship, field placement experiences and expectations, and mentoring needs, supports, and resources</li> </ul>
Early Years Professionals Focus Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One 90-minute focus group open to all London-Middlesex early years professionals</li> <li>• CAs’ work context and data from Early Years Professionals Survey on Mentorship was shared. Participants were then asked to brainstorm potential mentorship opportunities and pathways forward</li> </ul>
Early Years Leadership Focus Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three 90-minute focus groups; two open to London-Middlesex and one open to Elgin early years leaders</li> <li>• CAs’ work context and data from Early Years Professionals Survey on Mentorship was shared. Participants were then asked to brainstorm potential mentorship opportunities and pathways forward</li> </ul>
Mentorship Community Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaged with the following professionals/organizations, some of which were engaged several times and/or continue to be engaged with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario (AECEO)</li> <li>◦ CECE</li> <li>◦ CMSMs/DSSABs</li> <li>◦ Dr. Céline Bourbonnais-MacDonald</li> <li>◦ Dr. Diane Kashin</li> <li>◦ Fanshawe College</li> <li>◦ Firefly</li> <li>◦ Local community partners (e.g., employment and development organizations, public health)</li> <li>◦ MEDU</li> <li>◦ Professionals tasked with supporting mentorship opportunities in their respective regions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



Engagement Approach	Description/ Key Points
Elgin Leadership Communities of Practice (CoP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CA Elgin attended 3 leadership and 2 senior leadership CoPs to gain a stronger understanding of the work context and environments that exist in Elgin, hear their needs, concerns, and successes, and to share information about CA work and findings</li> </ul>
Strive Committee Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAs provide monthly updates at Strive’s Professional Learning Committee, Elgin Professional Learning Committee, and Strive’s Advisory Committee meetings</li> <li>• Committee members engage in dialogue about the context of the work, providing feedback on data collected, brainstorming potential pathways, and ensuring mentorship remains a pathway for the community in 2024 and beyond</li> </ul>

## **Data Analysis Strategies**

General themes were identified by the Community Animators based on the frequency in which they were discussed throughout the various engagement approaches and based on the level of importance identified by collaborators. The CAs also utilized ChatGPT to thematically code the data collected through the Early Years Professionals Survey on Mentorship.

The data collected was also analyzed using the six pillars outlined in a local early years policy framework prototype (Bourbonnais-MacDonald, 2023). The pillars identified in the policy prototype align with Ontario’s Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework’s four pillars of access, affordability, quality, and responsiveness (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017). The local policy framework identifies two additional pillars: inclusivity and relationships. The policy framework prototype includes a vision for the London and Middlesex Early Learning and Child Care system:

*An Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) system that, at its foundation, is responsive to the needs of the children and their families through relationships that benefit the child, the parents, the family, and the community. This affordable, quality ELCC system provides access and inclusivity for all children through a caring, learning environment led by passionate Early Years professional educators. (Bourbonnais-MacDonald, 2023, p. 1)*

Additionally, the Community Animators have intentionally aligned the findings from the engagement approaches to the priority areas identified by Strive and the CMSMs within their upcoming Strategic and Service System plans, respectively, which also closely align with the pillars identified by the MEDU and the local policy framework prototype.



# COLLABORATORS

The term 'collaborators' here refers to early years professionals who have contributed to this work. By having a diversity of collaborators, a range of perspectives and experiences can be shared to inform future mentorship opportunities for professionals. Therefore, the Community Animators aimed to engage professionals in numerous roles, from different organizations, and with varying years of experience.

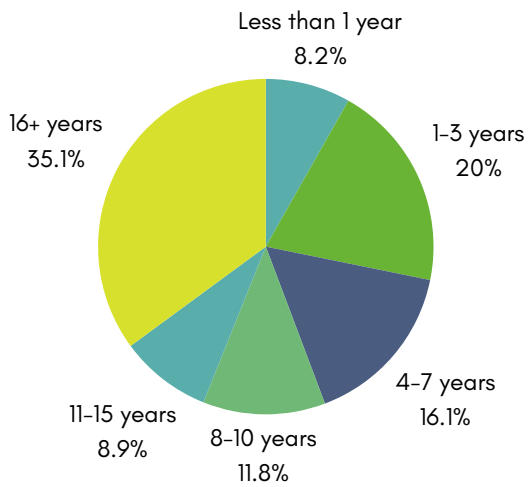
## **Collaborators had numerous roles including, but not limited to:**

- Educator working directly with children (e.g., RECE, educational assistant, school-age educator, etc.)
- Leader (e.g., executive director, regional manager, centre director, program/project manager, program coordinator, pedagogical leader, site supervisor, lead educator, assistant director, etc.)
- Operator
- Faculty
- Student
- Facilitator
- Community Connector
- Resource consultant / consultant
- Funder/ CMSM
- Early years advisor
- Mentorship advisor

## **Collaborators held positions at different organizations including, but not limited to:**

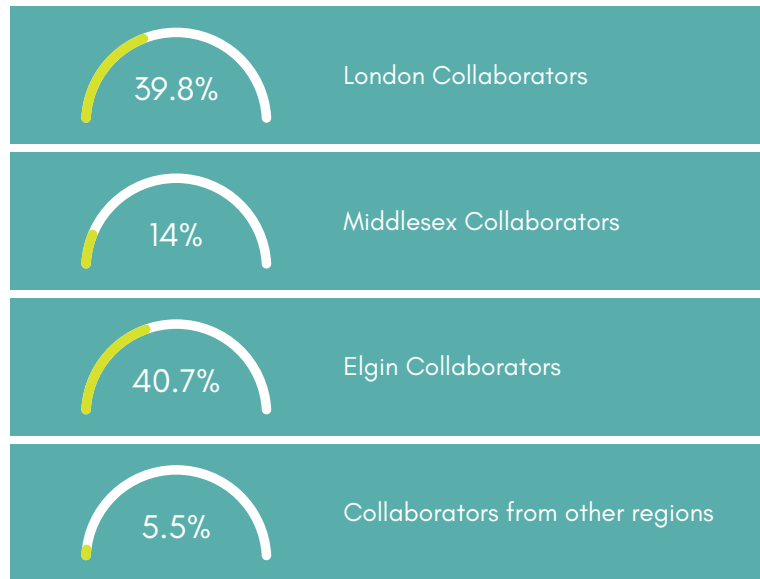
- Licensed, centre-based child care, including not-for-profit, for-profit, multi-site, single-site/stand alone, nursery/preschool, Francophone, First Nation/on-reserve
- Licensed, home-based child care
- Licensed, school-age child care
- Unlicensed child care (e.g., home care, nanny, care for newcomer children)
- Children's services (e.g., special needs resourcing, developmental services, children's mental health, children's treatment centre, child welfare)
- Child and family programs (e.g., Family Centre/EarlyON, outreach classes or groups)
- School board (e.g., administration, full-day kindergarten, educational assistant)
- Government (e.g., First Nations, federal, provincial, municipal, policy, licensing, administration)
- Pre-service or in-service (e.g., professional resource centre, secondary or post-secondary institution, professional training/learning, consultant)
- Advocacy (e.g., professional association, union, network)

## Collaborators' Years of Experience in ECEC\*



\*obtained from the Early Years Professionals Survey on Mentorship and Early Years Professionals and Leadership Focus Groups.

## Geographical Distribution of Collaborators



Collaborator Engagement Method	Total Number of Collaborators
Local Child Care and Early Years Community Meetings	260 collaborators 52 organizations 81 meetings
Early Years Professionals Survey on Mentorship	274 (265 English; 9 French)
Strive Strategic Planning Survey	63
Early Years Student Survey on Mentorship	45
Early Years Professionals Focus Group	10
Early Years Leadership Focus Group	33
Mentorship Community Meetings	33
Elgin Leadership CoPs	15
Strive Committee Meetings	55
<b>Total Sum of Collaborators</b>	<b>788</b>



# RESULTS

In this section, the findings from the various engagement processes are summarized and presented. First, general themes and findings in relation to mentorship are summarized. Next, findings are situated within each of the six pillars, as outlined in the local early years policy framework prototype (Bourbonnais-MacDonald, 2023).

## General Themes and Findings

### Understandings of Mentorship

- Professionals define and understand mentorship in varying ways, including a process of guidance and support, sharing of knowledge, reciprocal, a way to support professional growth, and role modelling
- Most professionals recognized mentorship as important to both them and the early years field, especially in relation to workforce retention and recruitment, community collaboration and relationship-building, well-being, professional growth, and leadership
- Professionals see Strive’s role in supporting mentorship opportunities as offering training/professional learning on mentorship, providing opportunities for connection, planning and organizing opportunities, creating and sharing resources, and advocating and promoting the importance of mentorship

“  
*Mentorship is creating a welcoming and engaging environment in which you can teach and expand the learning of an upcoming Early years professional*  
 (Early years professional working directly with children, Middlesex)

*Mentorship is a deeply pedagogical process in which we grow ourselves, other, and the field of Early Years Education. Mentorship is like waves, where we grow together, our strength and knowledge compounding into something stronger*  
 (Leader, London)

*...Mentorship is the key in connecting staff intentionally to the team, the organization, program statements, goals, and learning opportunities. Mentorship cultivates belonging. Helps people reach their goals.*  
 (Operator, Elgin)

”

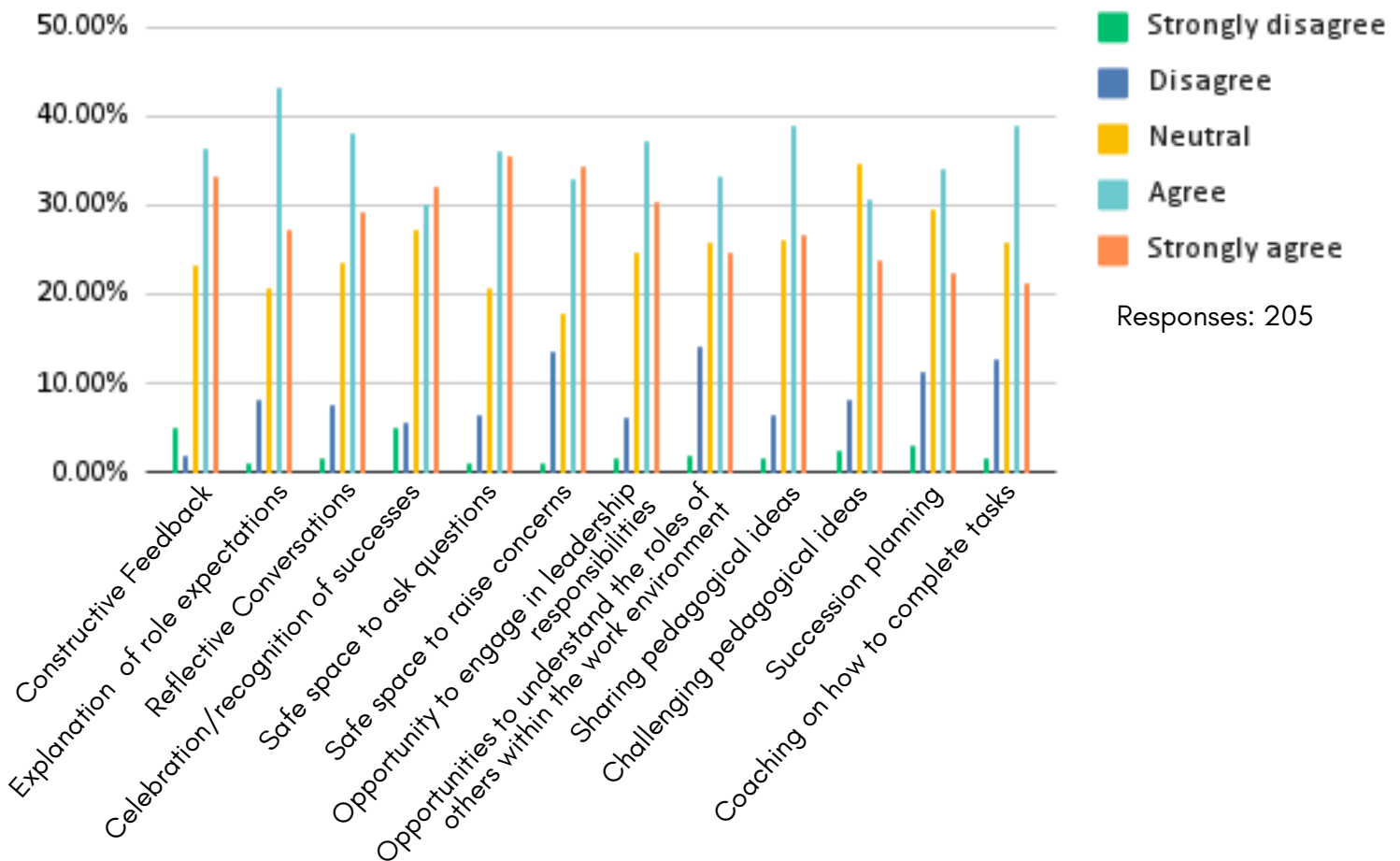
**The following terms were used by professionals when asked what they consider to be a ‘good’ mentor:**



## Mentorship in Current Practice

- Many professionals are already engaging in informal mentorship opportunities. Formal opportunities exist; however, collaborators mainly identified their mentorship as informal
- The most common mentoring practices, procedures, and policies currently in use are:
  - Student mentorship; including secondary, post-secondary, apprentices, and interns
  - Onboarding/hiring/orientation/training; including pairing new staff with experienced staff, either formally or informally
  - Designated mentor position/support role (e.g., assistant director, lead educator, program supervisor)
  - Team meetings/team collaboration
  - Professional learning opportunities
  - Individual support/check-ins/performance reviews
- Leaders indicated that they felt connected to peers in the community, either through being a part of a multi-site organization, being connected to another centre/leader through the MEDU, or by networking within the community. However, leaders from standalone organizations felt less connected

**Professionals also indicated the following aspects of mentorship being present at their place of employment or at their field placement sites:**



## Successes

- There were various mentorship successes identified by professionals. Some of these successes included:
  - Formal and informal mentorship processes (e.g., mentoring portfolios through Storypark, pairing of professionals/organizations, bi-annual mentoring review, pen pal system between two organizations, online groups, mentoring policies)
  - Professionals acting in a mentor role to teams and/or students (e.g., centre director/assistant director, lead educator, resource consultant, faculty advisor)
  - Strong relationships with and between:
    - Colleagues/ peers
    - Leadership team
    - Students
    - Funder/CMSM (e.g., City of London, County of Middlesex, City of St. Thomas)
    - Other organizations/ agencies (e.g., All Kids Belong, Ministry of Education, other early years organizations)
    - Families; especially in Middlesex
    - Children
  - Celebration/recognition of professionals (e.g., 'brag board', 5-minute shout-out)
  - Retention of staff; especially in licensed, home child care agencies
  - Successful student placement experiences, leading to the hiring of students after or during their field placement
  - Dedicated, paid planning time as part of workday, utilized to collaborate with colleagues, engage in reflective practice, support students on placement
  - Organizational professional learning opportunities to grow skills and practice
  - Participation in existing CoPs (e.g., Elgin leadership CoP)
  - The use and effectiveness of healthchat.ca for Community Connectors apart of the Family-Centred Service System
  - Students building positive relationships with colleagues/mentors, children, and families, increasing their confidence and knowledge, and applying their knowledge to practice

*I have had such amazing mentors throughout my career and the reason why I have lasted 15+ years in this field (Facilitator, Elgin)*

*I have been mentored through a reconstruction as I transitioned into a leadership role, this guidance was vital in my development as a professional and helped my understanding of the work we do, and all the moving pieces necessary for quality care. (Leader, London)*

**76%**

of collaborators see themselves as mentors

**74%**

of students indicated that their field placement experience(s) encouraged them to stay in the field

*...Since the time, I came to Canada as an international student, I am really not comfortable talking to people or doing anything but that place, my field placement, and the people there, although I was nervous before going there but now I am really very comfortable going there and talking to anyone about anything. They never make me feel judged. They are really really nice. Whatever I write, it's still not enough for their love and kindness towards me. (Level 2 ECE Student, London)*

## Challenges/Barriers

Several themes emerged when professionals shared about challenges and barriers affecting their capacity to engage in mentorship. Some of the prominent challenges were:

### Staffing

- Retention issues, such as:
  - high turnover
  - immigration challenges leading to professionals moving out of province
  - seasoned professionals burnt-out, and leaving for leadership opportunities
- Recruitment issues, such as:
  - lack of time for onboarding, orientation, succession planning
  - difficulty hiring qualified professionals, especially in counties, Francophone, and non-regular hours programs

### Foundational Knowledge

- Gaps in understanding around certain topics and policies (e.g., HDLH?, CCEYA, licensing manual, reflective practice)
- Underutilization/ skills-gap in hands-on, practical skills (e.g., singing songs, reading books, play provocations/ invitations)
- Leaders' skills-gap specific to their role (e.g., HR, administration, team building, onboarding)
- Professionals do not understand the "why" to their practice, programming, and policies

### Resources/ Time

- Limited (paid) time to engage in intentional mentoring with peers, leaders, and students
- Varying expectations or lack in understanding of expectations within mentoring relationships
- Want and need for further learning on how to be a mentor
- Competing responsibilities (e.g., course work, additional jobs) make it difficult for professionals to engage in mentorship

### Communication

- Gaps in understanding and confidence in how to speak with colleagues, students, families, and children
- Generational differences in communication and expectations
- Gaps in intercultural competency and language barriers hinder effective communication

### Student Mentorship

- Limited opportunities to mentor students in areas which lack public transit (e.g., counties/rural areas) and with non-regular hours (e.g., school-age care, nursery programs)
- Challenge finding suitable mentors for students (e.g., RECE, experienced)
- Students' poor field placement experiences have discouraged them from working within certain programs or within the field all together



## Needs

- Professionals want access to various pathways/ modes to access mentorship opportunities; both formal and informal
- Professionals indicated that they would like resources on how to effectively mentor and how to understand and engage in mentoring relationships

### Top 5 mentoring resources/formats that would be most beneficial (257 responses)



- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 01. Communities of Practice (in-person & virtual) (57%)  | 02. Professional learning opportunities related to mentorship (38%) |
| 03. Having a mentor outside of one's place of work (37%) | 04. Being a mentor at one's place of work (32%)                     |
| 05. Mentor/mentee pairing (29%)                          |   |

### Top 6 mentoring resources/formats that would be most beneficial to students on field placement (43 responses):



- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 01. Choosing field placement site (67%)  | 02. Having a peer mentor within program (49%)                       |
| 03. Visiting field placement site ahead of time (42%)                          | 04. Professional learning opportunities related to mentorship (40%) |
| 05. Mentoring on leadership responsibilities (37%)                             |   |
| 06. Online forum for current and/or former students to share experiences (37%) |   |

### What professionals need to support their participation in mentorship:

- Financial support/ compensation/recognition
- Technology/internet access
- Conditions to effectively participate (e.g., time, staffing, safe space, awareness of and access to opportunities)

“Time is a factor. It is tricky to find the time to sit and chat or go off "duty" to mentor in a quiet place. A place to sit and just be for a few moments on a regular basis.  
(Early years professional working directly with children, London)

### What students wish they had to better prepare themselves before or during field placement:

- Supportive and experienced professionals, including assigned mentor and faculty advisor
- Learning resources/ programming supports
- Communication skill building
- Understanding of expectations

“I wish I had an experienced mentor, my mentor and all the educators in the room were very new to the field and didn't have a lot of knowledge to share.  
(Level 2 ECE student, London)





# PILLARS

Findings from engagement processes were also situated within the six pillars, as identified in a local early years policy framework prototype (Bourbonnais-MacDonald, 2023). The guiding principles shared here are directly copied from the local policy framework prototype.

Pillar	Guiding Principle	What We Heard in Relation to Mentorship
<p><b>Access</b></p>	<p>We believe child care services need to be reliable and accessible to all. Access should be fair and equitable for children, families, educators and community members (Bourbonnais-MacDonald, 2023, p.1).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentorship can support recruitment and retention of early years professionals</li> <li>• Professionals can mentor families in understanding the ECEC system and provide resources to support the whole family</li> <li>• Mentorship opportunities can build the capacity of professionals to support the diversity of families and children</li> <li>• Professionals need access to program planning time to think with colleagues and mentor one another</li> </ul>
<p><b>Affordability</b></p>	<p>We believe in order to prioritise the needs of children and families, child care services should be available to all who wish to access the ELCC system. Therefore, the system must be supported with appropriate funding towards operational costs, funding for a wage grid for educators, professional recognition and pathways within the sector, as well as childcare fees that are manageable for all families (Bourbonnais-MacDonald, 2023, p.1).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for financial support, including funding for time out of program and monetary compensation/ recognition for those in mentoring roles (e.g., student mentors)</li> <li>• Continued funding is needed for support positions that can offer mentorship, including special needs resourcing (e.g., All Kids Belong), lead educators, supervisors, etc.</li> <li>• Focusing on supporting retention through mentorship as a solution to current challenges being faced at a centre and organizational level</li> <li>• Effective mentorship during onboarding/hiring process can support recruitment</li> </ul>

Pillar	Guiding Principle	What We Heard in Relation to Mentorship
<p><b>Inclusivity</b></p>	<p>We believe that every child and educator regardless of culture, ability or differences has the right to be included in high quality child care. Therefore, we will continue to maintain inclusivity as a separate pillar until such time it can be embedded and evident in each of the pillars (Bourbonnais-MacDonald, 2023, p.1).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionals want to learn more about inclusive practices through mentorship opportunities, and identified this as a top area in which they want to be mentored</li> <li>• Professionals are seeing an increasing number of children requiring additional supports, and want to grow their skills and capacity in supporting children to allow for higher quality programming and for more time to engage in mentorship with team</li> <li>• Students are concerned about the culture/climate of the field, and want to feel included in their field placement environments</li> <li>• Existing bias and misconceptions around expectations for students, new, and non-RECE professionals in the workforce create difficulties in establishing mentorship</li> </ul>
<p><b>Quality</b></p>	<p>We believe that children and families have the right to access a quality ELCC system that can demonstrate its approach to quality of practice and leadership through the intersections of inclusivity, affordability, access, responsiveness and relationships. This will result in a caring, learning environment where all children will feel supported and able to flourish (Bourbonnais-MacDonald, 2023, p.2).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity for mentorship, reflection, relationship nurturance, etc., lowered in face of mounting workloads and stress</li> <li>• A need for revisiting and re-defining mentorship to highlight the existing relationships and leadership present in all professionals</li> <li>• Professionals are willing, passionate, and ready to engage in mentorship but are communicating support needs to engage meaningfully</li> <li>• Operators and leaders are looking for mentorship and guidance in steps to take/ best practices in workplace implementation of strategies</li> </ul>

Pillar	Guiding Principle	What We Heard in Relation to Mentorship
<p><b>Relationships</b></p>	<p>We believe that trusting and caring relationships are needed to support an accessible, quality ELCC system for all children and families. Adaptive practice and leadership, built on diverse personal and professional interpersonal connections, will nurture a caring and learning environment (Bourbonnais-MacDonald, 2023, p.1).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communities of Practice and networks of support have been identified as a key need to support mentorship and relationship building</li> <li>• High turnover of professionals has resulted in decreased relationship building, mentoring, and sense of belonging amongst professionals, families, and children. Professionals identify mentorship as a way to support recruitment and retention</li> <li>• Trust is low since pandemic and professionals are struggling to connect and support each other in their day-to-day work</li> <li>• Leadership teams are struggling to prioritize mentorship and professional growth amongst teams, due to the high level of administrative tasks, turnover, and the demands of their programs</li> </ul>
<p><b>Responsiveness</b></p>	<p>We believe that a high level of cohesiveness is necessary to cultivate and maintain the connections necessary for a strong community. Therefore, we are highlighting the need for the responsibility of all members of society in supporting quality child care services through responsiveness that considers the needs of children and their families (Bourbonnais-MacDonald, 2023, p.1).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionals want autonomy and multiple pathways to engage in mentorship opportunities, that are responsive to their needs and roles and that can evolve and sustain overtime</li> <li>• Professionals are looking for opportunities to connect across organizations to see how other professionals are responding to community needs</li> <li>• Professionals and Community Connectors within Family Centres and EarlyON programs serve as a hub for information, and can act as mentors to peers and colleagues</li> <li>• Knowledge gaps around the early years' systems exist within all levels of the profession, and professionals want to address these gaps to be more responsive to their teams, families, and children</li> </ul>



# FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Community engagement performed through this work demonstrated that while there is a strong hope, desire, and willingness for mentorship, capacity to engage meaningfully in mentorship is missing. In this section, three proposed pathways to support engagement in mentorship are presented.

## Proposed Pathways:

1. New and Emerging Professionals
2. Established Professionals
3. Current and Emerging Leaders

Though these pathways may be intended to support professionals and leaders at different points in their careers, most opportunities within each pathway are open to all professionals and leaders to offer them autonomy in how they want to grow their mentorship capacity.

Additionally, the proposed actions shared in this section are not an exhaustive or definitive list of opportunities that will be available to professionals. Opportunities will evolve over time, as professionals' needs in each of the regions also change and evolve.



# PROPOSED PATHWAYS

## 1. New & Emerging Professionals

### Intended Professionals (Who?)

- New to the early years profession
- New to the London-Middlesex early years community
- New to an organization
- Students and interns
- Those interested in developing their skills/knowledge

### Associated Challenges & Barriers (Why?)

#### Staffing

- Students and professionals leaving field due to poor experiences
- High turnover, especially of new professionals
- New professionals and students do not feel sense of belonging within organizations/ teams

#### Student Mentorship

- Lack of suitable and/or experienced mentors and accessible field placement agencies
- Lack of time to support students on field placement
- Limited understanding of expectations of students, mentors, and field placement agencies

#### Foundational Knowledge

- Knowledge and skills-gap related to CCEYA/licensing manual and hands-on skills (e.g., singing songs, reading books with children, care routines)

#### Resources/Time

- Lack of time to support onboarding/hiring
- Lack of time to support team building/new hire integration

### Recommended Actions (What?)

- Develop and curate resources and opportunities for new professionals and students regarding:
  - Onboarding/ training for new professionals
  - Student mentorship
  - Foundational knowledge building (e.g., hands-on skills)
- Create new and build upon existing networks of support for new professionals and students
- Create opportunities for students and new professionals to engage in career planning and goal setting
- Establish a resource hub with curated supports for new professionals and students
- Launch an online forum for new professionals and students to engage in mentorship
- Increase mentorship opportunities available to new professionals and students
- Increase participation in mentorship opportunities among new professionals and students

### Proposed Action Steps (How?)

1. Determine information and streamline content for mentorship resources and opportunities
2. Assess existing mentorship supports and resources
3. Develop and curate mentorship resources and opportunities to share through Strive and local ECEC platform(s)
  - a. Onboarding (e.g., local ECEC community guide, DEI modules)
  - b. Student mentorship (e.g., field placement expectations guide)
  - c. CCEYA/ licensing manual infographic
  - d. Online forum (e.g., Facebook group)
  - e. Resource hub (e.g., professional resource webpage)
4. Promote cross-collaboration between Strive and local ECEC partners (e.g., licensed child care, Family Centres/EarlyON, Fanshawe College)
5. Integrate mentoring and mentoring concepts within professional learning (e.g., workshops, CoPs, podcasts, blogs, etc.)
  - a. Offer professional learning specific to mentoring topics (e.g., developing an individual mentoring action plan, defining mentorship, supportive practices for mentorship)
  - b. Offer opportunities for networking to build mentoring relationships (e.g., student CoP, age-group specific CoPs)
  - c. Offer opportunities to foster foundational knowledge and skills to build mentorship capacity (e.g., PL on singing songs, HDLH? PL)
6. Market mentorship resources and opportunities
7. Develop and formalize an evaluation system to monitor sustainability and efficacy of mentorship opportunities and resources



# PROPOSED PATHWAYS

## 2. Established Professionals

### Intended Professionals (Who?)

- Those with experience in the profession
- Those interested in becoming mentors/ mentees
- Emerging leaders
- Professionals interested in developing their skills/knowledge

### Recommended Actions (What?)

- Develop and curate resources and opportunities for established professionals:
  - Effective mentorship guiding document
  - Mentoring students and colleagues
  - Foundational knowledge building (e.g., CCEYA/ licensing manual, ECEC systems, reflective practice, bridging theory and practice)
- Create new and build upon existing networks of support for established professionals
- Create opportunities for professionals to develop leadership skills and engage in career planning and goal setting
- Establish a resource hub with curated supports for established professionals
- Launch an online forum for established professionals to engage in mentorship
- Increase mentorship opportunities available to established professionals
- Increase participation in mentorship opportunities among established professionals

### Associated Challenges & Barriers (Why?)

#### Staffing

- Difficulty recruiting and retaining RECEs, placing further demands on established professionals
- Lack of leadership opportunities available within agencies, leading to professionals leaving for other agencies

#### Foundational Knowledge

- Knowledge gaps related to organizational policies and legislation (e.g., CCEYA, licensing manual), ECEC systems, and reflective practice
- Professionals not knowing the “why” behind their practices and policies

#### Student Mentorship

- Lack of time to support students
- Professionals/agencies unwilling or unable to mentor students due to geographic location (e.g., County sites) and/or past poor experiences
- Limited understanding of expectations of students, mentors, and field placement agencies

#### Resources/Time

- Lack of dedicated and/or paid time to collaborate with colleagues, leaders, etc.
- Need for resources on how to be a mentor/ engage in mentoring relationships

### Proposed Action Steps (How?)

1. Determine information and streamline content for mentorship resources and opportunities
2. Assess existing mentorship supports and resources
3. Develop and curate mentorship resources and opportunities to share through Strive and local ECEC platform(s)
  - a. Effective mentorship guiding document
  - b. Student mentorship (e.g., field placement expectations guide)
  - c. ECEC systems guide
  - d. CCEYA/ licensing manual infographic
  - e. Online forum (e.g., Facebook group)
  - f. Resource hub (e.g., professional resource webpage)
4. Promote cross-collaboration between Strive and local ECEC partners (e.g., licensed child care, Family Centres/EarlyON, Fanshawe College)
5. Integrate mentoring and mentoring concepts within professional learning (e.g., workshops, CoPs, podcasts, blogs, etc.)
  - a. Offer professional learning specific to mentoring topics (e.g., developing a mentor action plan, defining mentorship, supportive practices for mentorship)
  - b. Offer opportunities for networking to build mentoring relationships (e.g., student mentor CoP)
  - c. Offer opportunities to foster foundational knowledge and skills to build mentorship capacity (e.g., PL by MEDU, PL on HDLH?)
  - d. Offer opportunities to build leadership skills (e.g., leadership CoP, facilitating PL)
6. Market mentorship resources and opportunities
7. Develop and formalize an evaluation system to monitor sustainability and efficacy of mentorship opportunities and resources

# PROPOSED PATHWAYS

## 3. Current & Emerging Leaders

### Intended Professionals (Who?)

- Current leaders
- New leaders
- Emerging leaders
- Those interested in developing leadership skills
- Those interested in developing their skills/knowledge

### Recommended Actions (What?)

- Develop and curate resources and opportunities for current and emerging leaders:
  - Leadership development
  - Onboarding/hiring processes
  - Mentoring team(s)/ team building
  - Foundational knowledge building (e.g., CCEYA/ licensing manual, ECEC systems, HR, administration, reporting)
- Create new and build upon existing networks of support for leaders
- Create opportunities for leaders to develop leadership skills and engage in career planning and goal setting
- Establish a resource hub with curated supports for leaders
- Launch an online forum for current and emerging leaders to engage in mentorship
- Increase mentorship opportunities available to leaders
- Increase participation in mentorship opportunities among leaders

### Associated Challenges & Barriers (Why?)

#### Staffing

- Difficulty recruiting and retaining RECEs, placing pressures on leadership and programs
- Difficulty recruiting qualified leaders, leading to challenges with succession planning
- Lack of formal and informal leadership opportunities available to professionals
- Leaders struggling to support team building/ cohesion

#### Foundational Knowledge

- Knowledge gap around leadership responsibilities (e.g., reporting requirements, waitlist management, dealing with board of directors)
- Knowledge gap around leadership skills (e.g., digital/technology skills, HR, administration)
- Knowledge gap around policies and ECEC systems
- Limitations around DEI and inclusive practices with teams and in programming

#### Student Mentorship

- Difficulty for leaders to identify suitable mentors for students

#### Resources/Time

- Lack of time for succession planning
- Limited resources dedicated to leadership development

### Proposed Action Steps (How?)

1. Determine information and streamline content for mentorship resources and opportunities
2. Assess existing mentorship supports and resources
3. Develop and curate mentorship resources and opportunities to share through Strive and local ECEC platform(s)
  - a. Onboarding/ hiring processes modules
  - b. Effective mentorship guiding document
  - c. Policy and reporting templates
  - d. ECEC systems guide
  - e. CCEYA/ licensing manual infographic
  - f. Online forum (e.g., Facebook group)
  - g. Resource hub (e.g., professional resource webpage)
4. Promote cross-collaboration between Strive and local ECEC partners (e.g., licensed child care, Family Centres/EarlyON, Fanshawe College)
5. Integrate mentoring and mentoring concepts within professional learning (e.g., workshops, CoPs, podcasts, blogs, etc.)
  - a. Offer professional learning specific to mentoring topics (e.g., developing a mentor action plan, defining mentorship, supportive practices for mentorship)
  - b. Offer opportunities for networking to build mentoring relationships (e.g., leadership CoP)
  - c. Offer opportunities to foster foundational knowledge and skills to build mentorship capacity (e.g., PL on Excel/ software programs)
  - d. Offer opportunities to build leadership skills (e.g., facilitating PL)
6. Market mentorship resources and opportunities
7. Develop and formalize an evaluation system to monitor sustainability and efficacy of mentorship opportunities and resources

# CONCLUSION

Throughout the duration of this work, it has been clear that early years professionals working and studying in London, Middlesex, and Elgin regions are supportive of engaging in mentorship opportunities as a way to support themselves as professionals and the field of ECEC as a whole.

There are previous and existing mentorship opportunities that can be gleaned and learned from as we move forward in offering mentorship opportunities for our community. Various understandings of mentorship, within and external to our community, will help to guide our work.

Many professionals have contributed valuable insights and considerations to this process, and have engaged in this work in a multitude of ways. The goal of this work was and continues to be building a mentorship approach for and by early years professionals. The understandings of mentorship, current practices, successes, challenges/barriers, and needs shared by collaborators have informed this work every step of the way and will continue to do so to support an accessible, affordable, inclusive, quality, relationship-focused, responsive ECEC system.

Though we have provided recommended opportunities and actions for this work, we see this as a starting point. Professionals have identified that their capacity for mentorship is currently limited for a multitude of reasons, the workforce crisis being a significant one. Our hope is that through sustainable, multi-faceted mentorship opportunities, professionals in all roles and at all points of their careers will have the capacity to engage more deeply, meaningfully, and reflexively in all aspects of their work, contributing to a more supportive ECEC system for children, families, professionals, and the community throughout the regions.





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