



Self - Advocacy Toolkit

A resource to empower early childhood educators
and support confident practice of self-advocacy

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AECEA

Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta

Acknowledgments

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Lastly, thank you to early childhood educators (ECEs). Thank you to the ECEs who shared their invaluable insights with us via focus groups, and to ECEs everywhere who contribute their time, energy, and expertise to making a difference in the lives of children and families.

AECEA

Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta



Introduction

What is the Self-Advocacy Toolkit?

The Self-Advocacy Toolkit is a collection of strategies, resources, tools, and templates designed to help early childhood educators (ECEs) advocate for themselves and their practice. The aim of this toolkit is to ensure educators have access to information and tools that will help in encouraging empowerment and advocacy.

Why was it created?

Self-advocacy was identified as an integral piece of transforming the childcare sector. AECEA recognized that information, support, and resources for ECEs to utilize were required. In creating this toolkit, AECEA aims to empower ECEs to advocate for themselves and their profession as a daily practice.

How was it created?

This toolkit utilizes an evidence-based approach. A team of students from Mount Royal University conducted research exploring best practices of advocacy, a scan of Canada-wide resources available for ECEs, and focus groups involving practicing ECEs. These processes helped identify which components to include.

Components of the Toolkit

Foundational Knowledge

This section discusses fundamental definitions and concepts for educators to understand advocacy and their rights.

Everyday Advocacy

This section discusses strategies and resources that educators can use to promote everyday advocacy and self-care within their life and practice.

Communicating with the Government

This section provides a checklist for educators to use when contacting the government with templates for writing letters/emails.

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Self-Advocacy

What is it?

Self-advocacy is a term to describe the act and ability to communicate your own needs or interests. While seemingly simple in concept, practicing self-advocacy can feel complex. The aim of this document is to reframe the understanding of self-advocacy in an attempt to deliver accessible, tangible resources for ECEs to practice self-advocacy.

Advocacy can be approachable.

It may be helpful to think of advocacy in two forms...

Little

a

“Little a” advocacy refers to the everyday operations of advocacy, such as the way you talk about your profession, displaying professionalism, practicing self-care, and having conversations about what matters to you.

Big

A

“Big A” advocacy refers to the large-scale operations of advocacy, such as being involved with policy changes, contacting local officials, or seeking opportunities to speak publicly about your experience.

The goal of understanding self-advocacy is re-writing the narrative that advocacy is inherently political, negative, or comes with exhaustive efforts. True efficient advocacy begins with **conversation** and takes place within the everyday tasks & decisions that ECEs make every day.

“We’re brilliant at conversation, we have conversations with people who don’t actually have language”

Erin Filby, AECEO

Why is Self-Advocacy Important for ECEs?

Self-advocacy is an integral part of supporting the early learning and child care sector.

Advocating is something ECEs do all the time. ECEs exercise their skills by speaking up for the children and families they work with. These skills can and should be also utilized by ECEs to advocate for themselves and their profession as well.

Through self-advocacy, we can work towards a well developed and supported early learning and child care workforce in Alberta.

Advocacy for the profession begins with the ability to recognize that, as ECEs, you hold the answers to change. The value of **lived experience** in the field equips ECEs with the tools and insights that are necessary to change & develop the system. The missing piece to transformation lies within sharing those important insights and answers - practicing self-advocacy!

Know Your Rights



What are the connections between knowing your rights and practicing self-advocacy?

Knowing your rights is important to self-advocacy as it allows you to be the driver of your own experience within the profession. By knowing what your expectations should be, you are better equipped to set boundaries and speak up for yourself and the profession.

You Have a Right To ...

A Workplace Free from Discrimination and Harassment

As per the Alberta Human Rights Act (2020), you have a right to work in a “respectful, inclusive environment free of discrimination”.¹ This means that every workplace has a duty to respect and value each employee equally, regardless of ethnicity, race, age, or gender.



Part of this is your right to report behaviours of harassment or discrimination happening in your workplace. Your employer is obligated to address and investigate reported incidents in a prompt and thorough manner in an effort to create a fair, equitable workplace for ECEs of every background.

Quick Stats

- According to the 2016 census, 33% of child care workers were Canadian immigrants or non-permanent residents.^{3, p.5}
- As of 2016, child care was among the top five of all occupations with the highest proportion of women at 96%.^{3, p.5}
- Early childhood educators are also likely to be younger than all other workers. 64% of ECEs in Canada were between the ages of 15-44. This was previously up to 81% in 1991.^{3, p.4}

The child care sector is densely populated with professionals who exist in marginalized groups. This makes it all the more important to remember your establishment's duty to be a workplace void of discrimination and harassment, and advocate for rectification if discrimination or harassment is taking place.⁴

Health and Safety at Work

What comes to mind when you think about health and safety at work?

Every workplace can have safety risks. Such risks should be addressed with the proper consideration of safety protocols to avoid harm.

Sanitization & Chemicals

ECEs may come in contact with different chemicals in the workplace for sanitization procedures. It is important that the labelling, user instructions, and storage of these chemicals are in alignment with the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) at all times.⁵

Ratio

While the child-educator ratio exists to ensure the safety of all children, it is also important to maintain the safety of educators. Any pressure from your workplace to not abide by the ratio or unexpected situations that may leave you outside of ratio may be unsafe.

To learn more about current ratio regulations, click: [Here](#)

Some potential hazards in an ECE setting could be...

Biohazardous Material

A key responsibility for many ECEs involves assisting with personal care routines, like diapering and hygiene tasks for young children. For the protection of both the child and yourself, centres must provide adequate resources for these protocols to be followed according to regulations set by Alberta Health Services.⁶

As an employee, it is your right to...

- **Know about hazards in your workplace**⁷
- **Participate in health and safety discussions**⁷
- **Refuse dangerous work and know you are protected from reprisal**^{7,8}

Breaks, Leave and Compensation

The Alberta Employment Standards⁹ outlines entitlements that all employers must provide to their employees. Topics of the employment standards might include, but are not limited to:

- Overtime pay
- Job Protected leave
- Breaks
- Minimum wage + statutory pay
- Deductions from earnings

By knowing and staying up to date with these entitlements outlined by the Alberta Employment Standards, you can feel knowledgeable and confident to set boundaries and practice self-advocacy for your rights as an employee!

Compensation may look different or each profession, workplace, and employee. In connection with your right to a workplace free from discrimination, the compensation you receive must be determined free from bias of your age, gender, or ethnicity.¹

Part of advocating for the ECE profession is ensuring that the compensation you are receiving is relative to the work being done and the expertise that you bring to the table.

See AECEA's wage grid recommendations below...

This wage grid was developed through research to describe what fair compensation should look like based on both certification level and professional experience - referred to here as grade levels.

The wage grid also outlines the suggested percentage increase associated with additional certification & experience

| Level | Grade 1 | Grade 2 +3% | Grade 3 +3% | Grade 4 +3% | Grade 5 +3% | Grade 6 +3% | Grade 7 +3% | Grade 8 +3% |
|--------------|---------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| ECE 1 | 20.20* | 20.8 | 21.43 | 22.07 | 22.73 | 23.42 | 24.12 | 24.85 |
| ECE 2 +12.9% | 22.81 | 23.49 | 24.19 | 24.92 | 25.69 | 26.44 | 27.23 | 28.05 |
| ECE 3 +12.9% | 25.75 | 26.52 | 27.31 | 28.13 | 28.99 | 29.85 | 30.74 | 31.67 |

To view the full wage grid document, click [here](#)

Everyday Advocacy and Self-Care

Purpose

The purpose of this section is to provide educators and individuals working in the sector at any level with strategies and resources they can use to participate in their own self-care and self-advocacy. This section provides educators with an opportunity to advocate for themselves, the profession, and the sector on a smaller, more accessible scale. As you may recall, this can also be called ‘little a’ advocacy!¹²

What is Everyday Advocacy and Self-Care?

Everyday advocacy is something you can do every day! It can be quick, with activities taking as little as 5 minutes. These strategies and methods can be used to begin your advocacy journey or can be used as your go-to advocacy method of choice. Self-care involves participating in things that will look after your own health and well-being. It is about taking care of yourself, for yourself and your profession.¹³

Self-care and self-advocacy work hand-in-hand to build more empowered educators!

Why Practice Everyday Advocacy?

These strategies can help in embracing concepts such as reigniting passion for the profession, finding balance in work and life, knowing your supports, promoting connection with others in the field, children, families, and the community, knowing the value of you and the work you do, preventing burnout, and finding energy.

The Value of You and Your Work

The profession of early childhood education involves being and learning with children during the most formative years of their lives. Early childhood educators are caregivers, mentors, and the backbone of our community. Their impact on society, and the work they do deserves to be recognized as they are forming the basis of current and future communities.

Here are some ways to embrace your value as an ECE!

- Understand your rights¹⁵
 - This will inform you of which boundaries are appropriate to set.
 - You can refer to our resource on your rights and where to find them (*Pages 3-7*).
- Know your value and set boundaries.
 - For example, advocate for leaving work on time - this supports a healthy work-life balance. Making time for yourself is important!
- Know your practice.
 - Take time to read over articles, such as the ones at the end of this resource, to inform your learning and awareness of the field.
- Discuss being an educator with people who are not in the field.
 - This will help them understand your value. (Tips on page 10)
- Celebrate your victories.
 - Be proud of yourself and the work you do!



Reframing Your Role

How to Speak About Your Profession with Confidence

Instead of saying: "I'm just an ECE"

Try saying:

"I support young children in developing critical thinking, creativity, and social skills."

"I help build brains!"

"I nurture children by providing a safe and engaging environment for learning and growth."

"I am an early childhood professional, specializing in child development and education."

"I create meaningful learning experiences that foster curiosity, resilience, and a love for learning."

"I design play-based learning experiences that set the foundation for academic success and well-being."

"I work in early learning, where I guide children in their most crucial developmental years."

"I lay the foundation for lifelong learning."

Why Language Matters ¹⁶

- Using strong, professional language elevates the early learning and child care sector.
- It helps advocate for better recognition, wages, and working conditions.
- It reshapes public perception of ECEs as skilled professionals.

Connections and Support

- Share stories about your day/experiences with other educators.¹⁷
 - What was the best part of your day?
 - What are you looking forward to for the next day?
 - Any challenges?
 - Tip: Ensure you maintain confidentiality.
 - Tip: This is practice for speaking well about the profession to others who are not part of it, which amplifies ECE's value!
- Listen to an educator podcast.
 - To find a podcast, try searching “early childhood educator” or “child development” in your favourite podcast app!
 - Tip: Podcasts are usually 30 minutes to 1 hour long, so dedicate time to listen.
 - Tip: Since podcasts are audio, you can listen while participating in other activities, or during your commute!
- Take 5 minutes to get an [AECEA membership](#).
 - A membership ensures you stay up to date about what's happening in the sector and contributes to your professional identity.
- Take 5 minutes to follow AECEA on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [YouTube](#).
 - Share posts with friends, family, and other educators to spread the value of your work and like posts to show your support.¹⁹
- Take 5 minutes to celebrate yourself and other early childhood educators.
 - Write thank you cards (thank yourself too!)
 - Provide words of affirmation and praise to yourself and those also in the field.
 - Tip: AECEA celebrates Early Childhood Educator Day on the 3rd Friday of May!¹⁹



Promoting Balance and Decompressing

- Take 5 minutes to reflect on how your body is feeling.
 - Ask yourself, “what do I need?”
- Take 10 minutes to get active. You can do some stretches,¹³ yoga, go for a walk outside, or move around in any way you are able to.
 - If your activity takes you outside, spend some time connecting with nature.
- Colour-in colouring pages.
 - You can find some in Appendix A!
- Read a book.
 - Bring a book to work to read during your break!
- Make time to spend time with friends, family, and/or pets.
 - This is a low-cost activity that can be easily added to a daily routine.¹³
- Try this 5-minute grounding exercise!¹⁹

Dedicate time to participate in these activities!

Take a deep breath in & out
What are 5 things you can see?
What are 4 things you can touch?
What are 3 things you can hear?
What are 2 things you can smell?
What is 1 thing you can taste?
Take another deep breath
Bring yourself back to your space

Reflections

- Take 10 minutes to write a note/letter to yourself. You can use these guiding questions or find a template in Appendix B to fill out!
 - What are your values?
 - In what ways are you proud of yourself?
 - What do you love about being an early childhood educator?
 - What are some things you are looking forward to?
 - What is a success you are feeling right now?



- Take 10 minutes to set some goals, create a vision, or a growth plan. You can use these guiding questions or find a template in Appendix B to fill out!
 - Consider 2 short-term goals (things you want to accomplish this week and/or month).
 - Consider 2 long-term goals (things you want to accomplish this year and/or in the next 5 years).
 - What are you going to do to achieve these?
 - What are you currently doing that will lead to this achievement?
 - What strengths are you exhibiting?
 - What areas need growth?
 - How are you going to work on this?



These activities can be done more than once, and ongoing participation with the ones that feel right for you will help you advocate for yourself, the profession, and other educators.

Remember: conversation is a starting point for advocacy. Consider bringing these talking points to other ECEs or those outside the sector to shed light on the value of the profession.



Additional Resources

5-10 Minute Reads:

[What Does Advocacy Do For You?](#)

[Workplace Wellness](#)

[Compassion Fatigue vs Burnout](#)

[Workplace Mental Health](#)

[Self-Care For ECE's](#)

[Advocacy in ELCC: Why Your Voice Matters](#)

[Why We Love Early Childhood Educators](#)



In-Depth Reads:

[ECE's as Childcare Advocates](#)

[Nurturing the Nurturers: Understanding Support Systems for Early Childhood Educators in Alberta](#)

Podcasts:

[Circle Time Podcast](#)

[The Inspiring Early Childhood Educator Podcast](#)

Video:

[Care for Caregiver CCCF](#)

Government Communications

This section will help you learn how to contact the provincial government and what to say. Use the checklist on page 16 to write your own message, use the template on page 17 to guide your structure, and explore examples in Appendix C for more ideas.

Why is Government Communication Important?

It helps shape policies that reflect real needs and improves outcomes for educators, children, and families.²⁰

It builds trusting relationships between educators and policymakers through clear communication.²⁰

It helps ECEs understand decisions and hold policymakers accountable.²¹

It provides opportunities for educators to seek more information and insights.

Government communication is an example of...

“Big A” Advocacy



“Big A” Advocacy is processes and practices that are large-scale operations. It “represents advocacy on a larger scale and involves changing policies that impact a person’s life.”¹²



More information can be found on page 3

Government Communications

A checklist for self-advocating with policy makers

Know What an MLA Is and Where To Find Them

- Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) are individuals who are part of the Government of Alberta and represent the wants and needs of individuals, working to enact policies that meet these wants and needs.

How do you find your designated MLA?

- Click [here](#) or scan the QR code to use an MLA finder that also features an interactive map.
 - **Tip:** All you need is your address, or area of the province that you live in!



MLAs represent individuals who...

- Voted (regardless of their chosen candidate)
- Did not vote
- Are not eligible to vote²³

Identify Your Main Message

Tips to identify your key messages

- **Observe** - What's working? What's challenging?
- **Talk** - Share concerns and ideas with peers.
- **Reflect** - What keeps you here? What needs to change?
- **Listen** - What do families need and value?
- **Stay Informed** - Know policies and their impact.
- **Speak Up** - Your voice matters.!

Examples^{24, 25}

- Investing in early childhood education invests in brighter futures.
- Fair wages and better working conditions for ECEs.
- Clear, accessible policies.
- Public recognition of ECEs as essential educators.
- Collaboration with ECEs to improve early learning and child care.

Examples of Action Items

- Increasing public funding
- Developing clear, transparent, and accessible policies
- Launching a public awareness campaign
- Engaging ECEs in policy-making

Ensure Effective Communication²⁶

Purposeful communication is integral to getting your message across clearly and effectively.

Avoid Jargon

- Use plain, concise language that is easily digestible to a non-ECE audience.

Be Personal

- You are the expert of your story, and hold the insights necessary for effective change in the field. Share your story, values, successes and strengths.

Strength Based Language

- Empower the profession through your words and representation. Avoid focus on the deficits, rather highlight the positives that would come from the change you are seeking.

Professional & Respectful

- Illustrate that ECEs are professionals through formal and respectful language. Address the recipient by their respective title and authority.

Check out the example letters in Appendix C

Government Communication Template^{27, 28, 29}

Your MLA's name
MLA's Address
[MLA's City or Town], Alberta
MLA's Postal Code

*void sender and recipient mailing
information if sending this letter
digitally*

Your name
Your address
[City or town], Alberta
Your Postal Code
Date

Hello,

Start with a small introduction. Introduce yourself with your name, role, and workplace. Briefly state the purpose of this letter, and why it is important to you. Find a balance between professional and personal.

My name is [your name] and I am a [position title] from [centre/business name], and a member of your designated constituency, [constituency]. I am writing to ...

_____ [Purpose of communication] _____

Body of letter

Here you will write the body of your message. Keep it simple & concise. Share enough details to give a well rounded idea of your initiative to reach out. Utilize structures like bullet points if effective for the purpose of your message.

Tip : Always have a proposed solution or 'action item' that aligns with the context of your letter. MLAs are there to support your requests and your input for an efficient solution/strategy can be integral to the right outcome.

Close off the letter with a conclusion that briefly summarizes the content, as well as expresses gratitude for taking the time to read & consider the cause. State your interest in hearing back.

Thank you for taking the time to read my request regarding [brief summary of cause]. Your engagement with this matter is appreciated greatly, and I look forward to hearing from you and further discussing this matter.

Sincerely,
[Your name]

Conclusion

Advocating for yourself can start with small, everyday actions like practicing self-care, knowing your worth, setting boundaries, and speaking up when something doesn't feel right. As an ECE, you already advocate for others everyday. You deserve the same care and support.

We hope this toolkit gives you the confidence and tools to advocate for yourself, support other educators, and take steps toward positive change in the ELCC sector.

You are not alone. Your voice is powerful. Keep going!

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Appendix A

Coloring pages

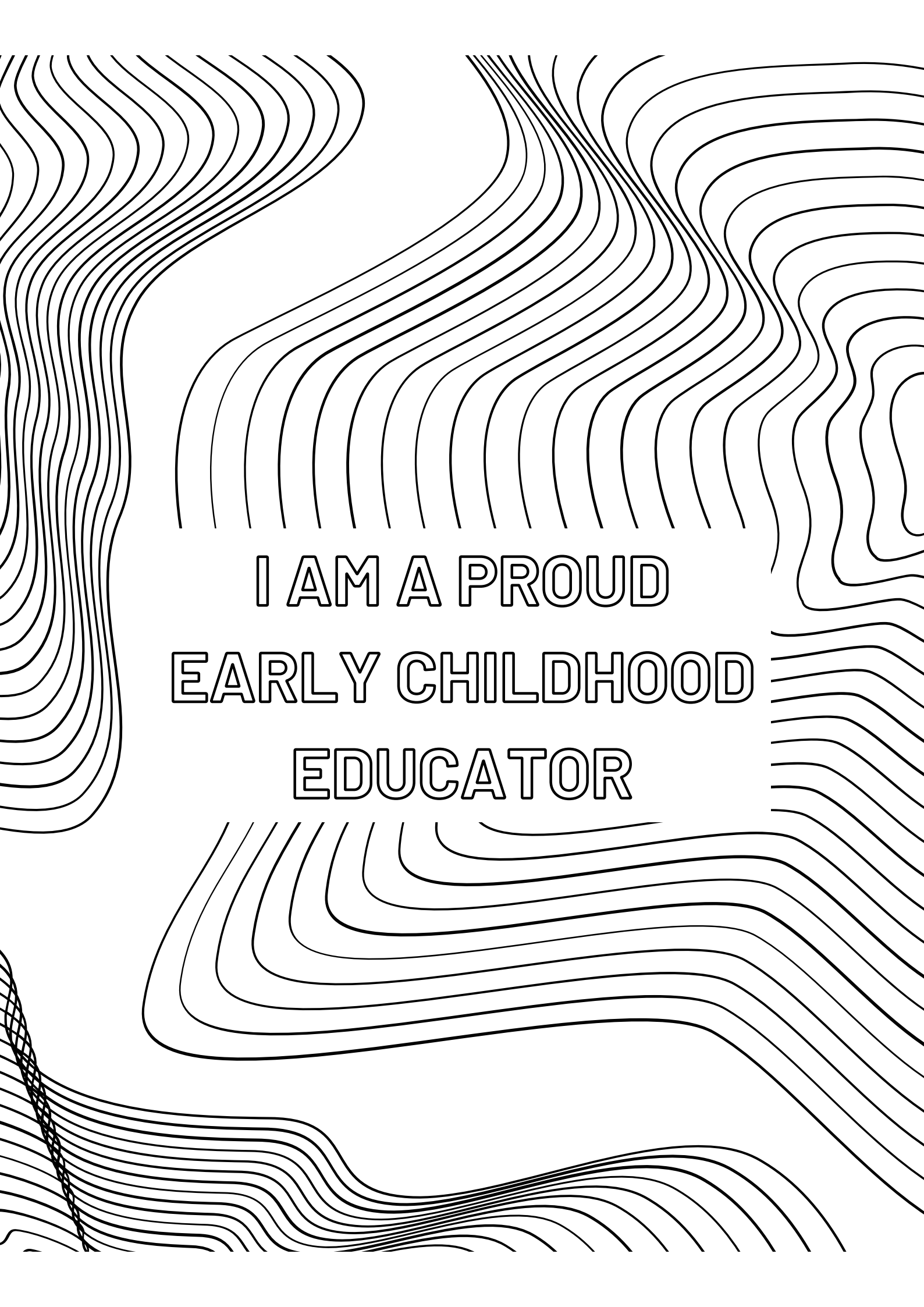


I HELP
BUILD
BRAINS!



I MAKE A
DIFFERENCE





I AM A PROUD
EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATOR



Appendix B

Professional reflections

Letter to Myself

What are 5 values I have?

What are 4 things I am proud of?

What are 3 things I love about being an Early Childhood Educator?

What are 2 things I am looking forward to?

What is 1 success I am feeling right now?

Goals, Visions, and Growth

List 2 short-term goals you want to accomplish this week and/or month.

List 2 long-term goals you want to accomplish this year and/or in the next 5 years.

What will you do to achieve these goals?

What are you currently doing that will lead to achieving these goals?

What are 5 strengths you have?

Goals, Visions, and Growth

What are 5 areas that need growth?

How are you going to work on this?



Appendix C

*Sample letters to
government officials*

Sample Letter - Seeking Information

Hello,

My name is Jane Apple and I am an educator from Wonder Seekers Early Learning and Childcare Centre, and a member of your designated constituency, Arelaly. I am writing to seek more information on your policies, views, and perspectives about supporting the early learning and child care sector.

As an early childhood educator in the sector within your constituency, I am invested in the care and development of children, creating relationships with families and the community, and supporting educators while ensuring they are well-compensated, and well-qualified. The educators, parents, children, and centres within this sector play such an integral role in learning, promoting growth, and nurturing children and the community. Although, it does face barriers and setbacks such as lack of funding, under-qualified educators, and accessibility and affordability. As an educator, I have witnessed these barriers first-hand and have seen the impacts they have had on children, families, and my colleagues. I believe that addressing these issues is crucial for the well-being of our community. I would like to be informed on policies and your specific views and perspectives regarding affordability and accessibility initiatives, funding for resources, centres, and educators, and ensuring early childhood educators are well qualified.

Thank you for taking the time to read my request regarding seeking information on your plans for support of the early learning and child care sector. Your engagement with this matter is appreciated greatly, and I look forward to hearing from you and further discussing this matter.

Sincerely,
Jane Apple

Sample Letter - Expressing a Request

Hello,

My name is Jane Apple, and I am an early childhood educator (ECE) at Wonder Seekers Early Learning and Childcare Centre. As a dedicated educator and a member of your designated constituency in the Arelaly community, I am writing to urge you to prioritize increased funding for early childhood education. This includes improved compensation, adequate classroom resources, and expanded professional development opportunities for ECEs.

I have seen passionate educators leave simply because they couldn't afford to stay, which is heartbreaking for both them and the children who lose trusted caregivers. Many struggle financially with low wages, minimal benefits, and out-of-pocket classroom expenses. Research shows that fair wages and benefits help retain skilled educators, leading to better learning and care for children (1). Yet nearly 50% of early childhood educators leave within five years due to low pay and lack of support (2).

Alberta currently lacks a standardized wage grid for ECEs. Despite five years in the field with a Level 3 certification, my wage has only increased from \$15.50 in 2019 to \$20 in 2022 after taking on a lead role. Without added responsibilities, most Level 2 and 3 ECEs earn a maximum of \$18–\$19 per hour before top-ups, which remain insufficient amid rising living costs. I urge you to review AECEA's ECE Wage Grid for fair compensation recommendations (3).

I am asking for your support in advocating for:

- Fair wages and benefits to retain skilled educators.
- Increased funding for professional development, guest speakers, and field trips.
- Proper funding for classroom materials, so educators aren't paying out of pocket.

Thank you for taking the time to read my request regarding the need for fair wages, benefits, and better support for early childhood educators. Your engagement with this matter is appreciated greatly, and I look forward to hearing from you and further discussing this matter.

Sincerely,
Jane Apple

1. Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (AECEA). [A workforce strategy for early childhood educators.](#)
2. Canadian Child Care Federation (CCCCF). [CCCCF vision for quality child care in Canada](#)
3. Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (AECEA). [ECE wage grid recommendations.](#)

Sample Letter - Inviting an MLA

Hello,

My name is Jane Apple and I am an early childhood educator from Wonder Seekers Early Learning and Childcare centre, and a member of your designated constituency in the Arelaly community. I am writing to invite you for a visit to tour our centre, and to engage in a conversation about early learning and childcare.

Wonder Seekers Early Learning and Childcare Centre strongly values a child-led, community involved approach to learning. This means we design our planned activities around the interests of the children, and include collaboration from the community to support their learning. We welcome you to visit our centre for a tour, an opportunity to share with you our values, practices, and the magic of learning happening in the day to day operations. The children in my pre-k classroom have been very interested in talking about community leadership, and have been asking lots of questions about the lawn posters and billboard advertisements they see within their community. I believe they would be very interested in connecting with you, and getting to hear a bit more about your role in our community! We welcome you to perhaps facilitate a short story time or question and answer session with the children.

Thank you for taking the time to read my request regarding a site visit, your engagement with this matter is appreciated greatly. I look forward to hearing from you, and getting the opportunity to share with you the learning that is happening within our centre.

Sincerely,
Jane Apple

**Together, we can shape the future of early
learning and child care**

AECEA

Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta