

Training program for early childhood educators to help keep Mi'kmaw language alive ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

HALIFAX—The federal and provincial governments are teaming up with a Mi'kmaw advocacy group and the Nova Scotia Community College to create an Indigenous-centred training program for early childhood education.

Eskasoni Chief Leroy Denny was joined by Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Zach Churchill on Monday afternoon in Wagmatcook, N.S. to announce the Nova Scotia Community College pilot program, which will train Mi'kmaw preschool educators.

Twenty Mi'kmaw early childhood educators with first-level training will have the chance to upgrade their skills and earn a second-level diploma in the accelerated workplace training program, which will launch in January.

Ann Sylliboy is a post-secondary consultant at Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, an advocacy group of chiefs and educators who promote the educational interests of Mi'kmaw communities to preserve the language rights of the Mi'kmaq.

"For many of our children, maybe they're not hearing their language at home," Sylliboy said. "That's who you are. If our language here is lost, there is nowhere else for us to go."

Sylliboy was at Monday's announcement and said the online training program will be available in all 13 First Nations in Nova Scotia and at the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre in Halifax.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) called upon all levels of government to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families.

Two years later, the federal government worked with Indigenous partners to develop the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework. The guide supports equal education opportunities for preschool-age Indigenous children.

That year the federal government also dedicated \$1.7 billion toward bettering Indigenous early childhood education programs over the next 10 years. However, Sylliboy could not confirm that the new ECE program is funded through this initiative.

According to the 2011 National Household Survey, there were 136,100 Indigenous children between the ages of zero to four in Canada, including 2,735 in Nova Scotia. However, Indigenous children are less likely than non-Indigenous children to attend early childhood education programs, the Conference Board of Canada says.

Currently, there are two main Indigenous-centred early childhood education programs: Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve, which is administered by Indigenous Services Canada and Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities, which is administered by Health Canada.

Both programs take an Indigenous approach to education, health and culture and promote Indigenous languages and skills.

However, due to difficulties maintaining a competitive wage for staff, these programs have struggled to attract early childhood educators, especially from Indigenous communities.

"I can't speak for the world, but in Nova Scotia, early childhood educators aren't compensated enough," Sylliboy said.

The training program, Sylliboy says, will help existing educators advance their career and allows them to work in classroom settings.

"We are very excited about this new partnership," she said. "Providing opportunities such as this to our teachers helps to bring even more Mi'kmaw language and culture into our early childhood education facilities, which benefits not only our children but our communities as well."

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Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

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