

Student leadership in action ^[1]

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Full text:

The March 8th "National Childcare Now" rally was a student initiative about a national issue. It was important for us to stand up and advocate for better childcare provisions across Canada -- and to mobilize the ECE community to participate in more advocacy efforts to continue demanding change.

There were various motivators that lead to the organization of the rally. The idea was first discussed at Ryerson University in Dr. Rachel Langford's class, Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood Education. This is a fourth year ECE class in the bachelor of Early Childhood Education program that focuses on the history of child and family policies in Canada and the current challenges, barriers and issues that affect the field today.

As we began to learn about the historical attempts to establish a national policy on early learning and childcare in Canada, we also began to understand how such policy decisions affect our children, families and society. We attempted to look beyond the issues that affect us as students, as well as the multitude of issues that affect us as early childhood educators -- as young advocates we were encouraged to consider what is best for our country and for all Canadians, which we know, is an accessible and affordable choice for families who need early childhood care and learning for their children.

When we discussed the real issues in early childhood education in Canada and the implications for children and families we began to ask "why is the current state of ECEC in Canada so poor compared to other OECD countries?" and "how can we change this?" The challenges are vast and there has been very little progress since the Conservative government came into power in 2006 and abolished the bilateral agreements for a national childcare plan, replacing it with a measly \$1,200 a year to offer a "choice" to families.

As students, many of us are entering the ECE workforce for the first time, we see ourselves in the role of not only educators of young children, but also as researchers and advocates. We had the opportunity to share our voices at a time when there is a possibility that change can be made in Canada.

The rally was a great success due to hard work and the collaboration of many people. Although this can be a challenge, working with groups of people who are just as passionate and full of ideas makes it easier to pool and access resources. Reaching out to the community and getting the word out through social media, emails, phone calls and media was a critical part of the organization. By networking throughout the ECE community we were able to have guest speakers Toronto City Counselor Janet Davis, and Jane Mercer from the Toronto Coalition for Better Child Care attend and speak at our rally.

The NCCN rally was the beginning of a larger **campaign for a national childcare system** ^[3] in Canada and increased advocacy in the ECE field. We plan to continue demanding for significant improvements in the social policies that are meant to support children and families. Poverty and childcare are age-old issues that have been holding Canada back from attaining international standards for child rights and should be a focal point of this election.

Please follow the campaign for a national childcare system in Canada on Facebook as we will continue to give updates on the election and our future plans to mobilize and advocate for better childcare. It is critical that we come together at this time to make our voices heard.

If you have any information or ideas that you would like to suggest please email us at nationalchildcarenow@gmail.com ^[4], or visit our Facebook page ^[3].

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