

# Becoming a Force To Be Reckoned With: ECEBC's 53rd Annual Conference

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**E**CEBC's annual conference, held May 23 to May 25, 2024, provided time to stop, reflect, listen, and connect with other educators, learn about the work happening in our sector, and appreciate different educators' work, skills, and knowledge in the early childhood field.

Elder Shane Pointe of the Musqueam Nation opened the conference on Friday and welcomed us to the land of the Musqueam People. He spoke about the power of collective wisdom and asked us to use our learnings from the conference and our co-educators to share, listen, mentor, and be mentored—to “inspire genius” to unleash our strength and to work with each other. He talked about the wisdom he'd gained from the women in his life, including his granddaughter, who he said would be a “force to be reckoned with” because she was loved.

This inspiring welcome made me reflect on the collective wisdom and force each one of us has within and how we unleash our fierceness. Throughout the conference, I spoke with many educators, some were ECEs or students attending the conference for the first time and many were returning attendees; in fact, some educators I spoke to had attended up to 35+ conferences over the years. I was curious about what drew people to the conference, so I spent part of my time at the conference talking to the attendees. Here's a sample of



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responses by why people came:

- To connect with other educators in the early childhood field and build a community of like-minded people. I heard this response a lot from educators attending from remote communities
- To network, meet with peer mentors, pedagogists, and other educators and to make new friends
- To nourish their mind, body, and soul as an act of self-care
- To learn new skills and strategies to support the children in their care; to stay up to date in their chosen field
- To hear from a variety of speakers on multiple topics and to work on the skills needed to strengthen their practice
- To look for inspiration; to become reenergized and invigorated
- To share their knowledge

While there were multiple reasons why educators attended, the responses all had one thing in common: attending the conference positively impacted their practice. By the end of the second day, educators shared:

- They had an increased understanding of ECEBC's role in our sector; they understood the positive impact ECEBC had in the early childhood field and had learned more about the current government initiatives.
- They had learned new information to share with and support

their communities, facilities, co-educators, and the children/families they worked with. In addition, they learned how to work in partnership with others and stretch themselves.

- They felt more connected and less isolated. They had an early childhood community that they could turn to in times of need.
- They had renewed passion for their work; they were encouraged and were inspired to continue moving forward.
- They had hope for our sector because they saw the passion, knowledge, and skill in the new ECEs and were reassured that the sector was in safe hands.
- They felt inspired to speak out and advocate for the field, other educators, and children; they felt confident and better prepared to speak up about topics that mattered to ECEs.
- They felt cared for; they had filled their bucket, worked on their self-care and were ready to return to their careers.

The energy at the conference was indescribable. Walking into a room with like-minded individuals who care for the sector and future of early childhood education, who speak our ECE language, engage in topics, and share strategies, was beyond wonderful. It filled hearts, increased passion in our sector, and connected and strengthened our community.

At the end of the conference, I asked people to share their takeaways, what they would implement immediately, share with others, and model when they returned home. Here are some of the responses:

- Trauma-aware communication: knowing what they have control over in a discussion; understanding



more about their own communication skills and implementing tips on how to build stronger connections with children and families.

- A positive new approach regarding difficult conversations and discussions surrounding grief.
- Increased advocacy for the sector and the children they care for; conference provided inspiration and courage to speak out and talk about topics that mattered to ECEs; they realized that if they did not speak up, someone less knowledgeable would.
- Understanding the impact the environment has on the children in the program; they are more aware of what they bring into the program and will reflect on the impact their interactions and materials create; they have new lenses to observe the world around them.
- Understanding how documentation can enrich the children's environment and how they can use it to create connections with parents.
- A better understanding of the changes that occurred in our sector and how "healthy anger" and advocacy has positively impacted it.

- A better appreciation of who they are and what they needed to thrive; they were able to stretch their practice, finding strength to continue moving forward, educating families and providing experiences knowing they have the tools to make a positive impact on children, families, and communities.

I think back to Elder Shane's welcome: how love, connection, and wisdom can shape how we engage the world, how it can open opportunities and make us a force to be reckoned with. At the end of the conference, educators made their way home, bringing knowledge and collective wisdom with full hearts into a strengthened sector. In three days, educators were able to grow, share, be mentored and mentor others all at the same time. We left knowing we are a positive force for our sector and programs and for the children and families we work with.

*Dawn Way, ECE, is a former member of the ECEBC Board of Directors and is a current member of the ECEBC Journal Committee.*