

Government of
Northwest Territories

2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy

A Commitment and Vision for Action



FEBRUARY 2022

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Anglais

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Français

Kīspin ki nitawihtīn ē nīhīyawihk ōma ācimōwin, tipwāsinān.

Cree

Tlıchö yati k'èè. Dı wegodi newo dè, gots'o gonede.

Tłicho

ʔeरiħtł'í's Dëne Sųłiné yati t'a huts'elkér xa beyáyatı theʔą ɬat'e, nuwe ts'ën yólti.

Chipewyan

Edi gondı dehgáh got'je zhatié k'ée edat'eh enahddhę nide naxets'ę edahńi.

South Slavey

K'áhshó got'ıne xədə k'é hederı ɂedıħtl'é yeriniwę nídé dúle.

North Slavey

Jii gwandak izhii ginjik vat'atr'ijahch'uu zhit yinohthan jii', diits'at ginohkhii.

Gwich'in

Uvanittuaq ilitchurisukupku Inuvialuktun, ququaqluta.

Inuvialuktun

Inuktitut

Hapkua titiqqat pijumagupkit Inuinnagtun, uvaptinnut hivajarlutit.

Inuinnaqtun

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2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy

A Commitment and Vision for Action

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Honourable R.J. Simpson

Minister of Education, Culture and Employment

Minister's Message

A high-quality early learning and child care system benefits everyone. It supports families and gives children the foundations that influence their wellbeing, learning and development for the rest of their lives.

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) recognizes that early learning and child care plays a role in helping children develop the skills that are needed in life. Improving access to affordable and inclusive licensed early learning and child care for families with children in all communities is a priority of the 19th Legislative Assembly.

I am pleased to present the *2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy*, a 10-year vision to transform the early learning and child care system in the NWT. This strategy includes a number of broad-based key commitments that will help reduce barriers and transform our approach to early learning and child care over time. Moving towards a robust, mature, and sustainable system that meets the needs of children is a shared responsibility. The commitments from this document and the initiatives described in the subsequent action plans will launch us on this journey.

The first years of this transformation will focus on building the foundation for a community-based, Canada-wide system of child care. This will include creating new early learning and child care spaces, developing the early childhood workforce and improving wages and incentives for those employed in early childhood. We will develop a system that addresses the needs of Indigenous

families and communities which is a vital part of reconciliation. In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) call to action 12, the territorial government is called upon to "develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families." Through this strategy we will continue to work with Indigenous governments and local communities to create a system that is culturally responsive and grounded in Indigenous cultures and languages.

I would like to thank the Indigenous Governments, early childhood educators, licenced early learning and child care program operators and staff, and key stakeholders who participated in the engagement. Your suggestions and recommendations helped shape this strategy. We look forward to a continued collaboration with our partners in support of optimal child development. Improving access to high-quality, affordable, and inclusive early learning and child care options will support the lifelong foundations of success for Northerners.

The Strategy is intended to support the development of an early learning and child care system for children and families across the Northwest Territories (NWT).

Hon. R.J. Simpson

Minister of Education, Culture and Employment

Background

The Department of Education, Culture, and Employment (ECE) is committed to building an effective and integrated early learning and child care system with the ultimate goal of helping more families access high quality programs that meet their needs. The *Right from the Start: A Framework for Early Childhood Development in the Northwest Territories* (NWT), released in 2013, signalled the importance of early childhood development as an area of focus for the GNWT.

The GNWT's efforts relating to early learning and child care were augmented in 2016 by the signing of the federal *Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework*. The federal government, along with provincial and territorial ministers most responsible for early learning and child care, agreed upon a shared vision and approach to long-term federal investments toward enhancing the quality, affordability, flexibility, and inclusivity of early learning and child care. This set the foundation for governments to work toward a shared long-term vision where all children can experience the enriching environment of quality early learning and child care that supports their development.

Guided by the principles set under the *Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework*, Canada provides funding through bilateral agreements. The *Canada-NWT Early Learning and Child Care Bilateral Agreement* was the first federal funding agreement provided to the NWT under this framework. From 2017-2021, ECE has focused the funding on investments in areas of high-quality and accessibility. In fall 2021, the *Canada-NWT Early Learning and Child Care Bilateral Agreement* was extended to 2021-2026. Additional federal funding is provided directly to Indigenous governments through Canada's *Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework*.

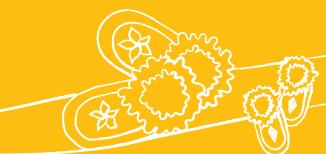
In 2021, the federal government announced additional enhanced funding as part of a *Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan* that aims to give every Canadian the same head start. The first five years of this transformative investment will focus on building foundations for a community-based, Canada-wide system of child care and includes working with provinces and territories, and Indigenous governments to support the growth of the sector.

As the NWT continues to invest and grow its early learning and child care sector, addressing the early learning and child

care needs of Indigenous families and communities is a critical part of reconciliation. The NWT is home to 33 vibrant communities, each with their own early learning and child care needs. Home to 11 official languages, the people of the NWT represent multiple cultural belief systems, values, and ways of life. In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) call to action 12, the territorial government is called upon to "develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families." Article 4 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) recognizes Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination, which includes "the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs." Article 14 recognizes Indigenous people's "right to establish and control their education systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning." ECE also acknowledges the importance of supporting the 231 calls for justice identified in the *Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*. Through the *2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy* (Strategy), the GNWT will continue to work with Indigenous governments and local communities to collaboratively build an early learning and child care system that enacts these actions and provides families with culturally responsive programming.



PHOTO: ANGELA GZOWSKI



Introduction

Parents and caregivers have the greatest influence and impact on a child's wellbeing, learning and development. Raising a child requires support and access to community-based services at various points in a child's early years. Early learning and child care opportunities can complement learning that occurs in the home or on the land and is an important example of community-based support for families with young children.

The early years, from birth to school entry, set the foundation for development, growth, and learning. Child development is an interconnected and holistic process of the mind, heart, body, and spirit. Early learning and development is influenced by connections with the people, places, culture, languages, values, and beliefs that exist within families and communities, including the early learning environment.

Enhancing the quality, accessibility, affordability, and inclusivity of early learning and child care is an ongoing and continuous focus for ECE. The *2013 Right from the Start: A Framework for Early Childhood Development in the NWT* and subsequent action plans marked an increased focus and investment within the early learning and child care sector in the NWT. This work included the territorial implementation of Junior Kindergarten (JK) in 2017, which was a significant step toward enhancing access to quality and affordable early learning programming. JK and Kindergarten (K) provide all families with four- and five-year-old children, with an option to access free, play-based early learning programming within their community school.

Since 2017, ongoing federal funding for early learning and child care has augmented territorial investment aimed at improving quality and access to licensed programs in the NWT. This has included funding to support the development of new child care spaces, enhanced funding for existing licensed programs, professional learning for early childhood educators, and post-secondary early learning and child care education programs in the NWT.

This Strategy has been developed to build upon current strengths within the sector and to advance universal child care by increasing availability and affordability of early learning and child care for families in NWT communities. As a 10-year approach, it is based on key elements that are known to contribute to quality early learning and child care programming in the NWT, and includes a vision, values, broad goals and commitments that describe what will be accomplished to support the early learning and child care sector up to the year 2030.

The specific steps and timelines related to the goals of the Strategy will be outlined in short-term actions found within the Canada – Northwest Territories Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement and subsequent action plans that will be developed and implemented over the next 10 years. These action plans will provide further details, including how specific targeted goals will be met and will adapt in response to changes over the duration of the Strategy.

Where Are We Now?

In order to effectively take steps toward transforming the early learning and child care sector, it is important to know and understand current strengths and realities.

Licensed programs in the NWT consist of centre-based programs and family day homes for children from birth to school entry, and out-of-school spaces for children ages 4-11 years old. The NWT also offers a two-year, free, play-based early learning JK and K program available to every four-and five-year-old child in every community before entering formal education in Grade 1. Therefore, the Strategy primarily focuses on increasing early learning and child care opportunities for families with infants and preschoolers, where costs are often the highest and care is most difficult to find.

While ECE does not operate licensed programs, ECE licenses, inspects, and provides funding subsidies and other supports. In the NWT, licensed programs are community-driven and operated by Indigenous governments, non-profit organizations, and individuals who are in the best position to understand and meet the needs of families within their community.

Research and Reviews of Early Learning and Child Care in the NWT

Governments and policymakers around the world are focused on expanding and improving the availability of high-quality early learning and child care experiences for children and families. There is an ever-growing body of research to support these investments, suggesting a multitude of benefits from increased parental participation in the workforce to positive developmental outcomes that last a lifetime.

There have been a variety of recent NWT-related research, reviews, and discussions of early learning and child care that have helped inform the development of the Strategy, including:

- The **2015 Feasibility Study of Universal, Affordable Day Care in the Northwest Territories** (Feasibility Study), which noted a number of factors that the NWT needs to address to achieve a universal child care system in the NWT.
- Two national status reports on early learning and child care in Canada:
 - **2020 Early Childhood Education Report** (ECER) developed by the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Starting in 2011 it is released every three years to evaluate the quality of provincial/territorial early learning and child care services against a 15-point scale on which the NWT has progressively shown improvements in each publication.
 - **2019 Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada** (ECEC) was released in December 2020. Since the early 1990s, the Childcare Resource and Research Unit has published pan-Canadian compilations of early learning and child care data approximately every two years. It is a main source of consistently collected, longitudinal, cross-Canada data and information about regulated child care and kindergarten.
- Reviews of three ECE funding programs: **GNWT Early Childhood Program (ECP) funding**, Early Childhood Scholarships, and **Early Childhood Staff Grant**. The purpose of these reviews is to understand the extent to which ECP funding adequately subsidizes licensed programs to operate effectively, and to better understand the financial requirements of these programs.
- The **Imagining the Future of Early Childhood Education in the NWT** and the **Universal Child Care: Making it work in the NWT** event, co-hosted by the Children First Society, Yellowknife Daycare Association and Garderie Plein Soleil to promote a dialogue between various stakeholders involved with early learning and child care.

In addition to the above research and reviews, ECE engaged with licensed early learning and child care operators and educators and held government-to-government discussions with Indigenous governments in 2021 to directly inform the development of the Strategy.

What We Heard

To inform the development of the Strategy, ECE engaged in discussions with Indigenous Governments, operators and educators working in licensed programs throughout the NWT.

A discussion paper was developed to help guide meaningful conversations. This included a foundational discussion about honouring Indigenous worldviews, languages, and cultures, and framed conversations within the following five key elements known to be involved with expanding the availability of early learning and child care for families in the NWT:

- qualified early learning and child care staff;
- creating inclusive environments that are responsive to the needs of children and families;
- community-driven programming that meets the needs of families with young children
- available infrastructure to accommodate programs; and
- early learning and child care programs that are affordable for families.

Through these discussions, the following themes were identified:

- the importance of grounding early learning and child care programs in local, Indigenous cultures and languages;
- balancing staff qualifications with formal post-secondary early childhood education with desirable qualities, such as local knowledge, commitment, and passion for working with children;
- supporting the sustainability of programs including suggestions to replace attendance-based funding with a model that provides more stability of payments;
- increasing wages and benefits for educators working in licensed centres to address the recruitment and retention of qualified staff; and
- addressing affordability for parents. Some programs in small communities offer free programming for families; however, of those that do charge parent fees, it was recognized that costs are too high.

Discussions and details within these main themes are outlined in the *2021 Early Learning and Child Care What We Heard* Report and were used to help inform the development of this Strategy.

What We Believe

Our vision and values for high-quality early learning and child care in the NWT

Children are the future. The early learning and care that children receive in their early years has deep and lasting effects. The young children of the NWT will grow to become healthy, productive and capable citizens who will share their gifts, talents and services; they will be the ones who continue to care for the land, lead and strengthen their communities.

Our vision for early learning and child care is based on a foundational belief that **high-quality early learning and child care should be available for all NWT families who want or need it.**

Although there is no single definition of quality early learning and child care, researchers agree that many factors contribute to high quality. Some aspects include programming that reflects the cultures of families and communities, warm and welcoming staff that understand early childhood development, age-appropriate physical environments that are compliant with health and safety practices, and an integrated system that supports ongoing quality improvement of services and smooth transitions from preschool to school.

The following values are grounded in evidence-based practices that support families to feel welcomed and children to be able to fully participate within early learning environments that are responsive to their individual needs and foster healthy development of their mind, body, spirit, and heart.

Vision and Values



- **Culture-based early learning and child care**

A child's connection to their culture and language is essential for their wellbeing and helps foster a strong sense of belonging. Early learning and child care should be responsive and reflective of each child's culture and include languages used at home. In the NWT, this also includes welcoming families within early learning environments that centre, respect and promote Indigenous worldviews, cultures and languages of the community in which they live. This is the heart of all programming, supports, and services.



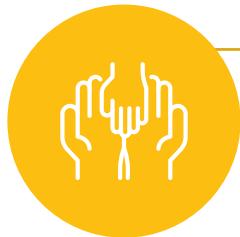
- **Inclusive and responsive early learning and child care for everyone**

Families and young children should feel welcomed, recognized, respected, and valued. Each child should be supported to actively participate in early learning experiences that focus and build from their uniqueness and diversity.



- **Child care when and where families need It**

It is important that child care options meet the needs of families and communities. The early learning and child care system in the NWT needs to have flexibility to support community members as they build early learning and child care programs that best meet the needs of families in their communities. For example, some communities require additional licensed spaces, while others would benefit from a family and child drop-in program.



Community-based partnerships

Early childhood development requires partnerships with families, caregivers, Elders, Indigenous governments, health-care workers, licensed child care operators, early childhood educators, local communities, and the federal government. By working collaboratively, we can ensure children receive the very best care and attention, to enable them to grow and develop to live fulfilled lives as capable people and contribute to strong, healthy communities.



Valuing early childhood educators

Early childhood educators make a difference in the development of the children in their care. They must feel supported as they access professional learning and post-secondary education opportunities that are responsive to their learning needs as professionals. Early childhood educators deserve to feel valued and adequately compensated for the important work they do.

This Strategy outlines a path toward making our vision a reality. As we work with our partners to build upon current strengths within the early learning and child care sector, we are committed to providing supports to increase access to high-quality, affordable, early learning and child care for families.

It will take time to achieve this vision. The following section outlines our commitments and broad goals that will help us better support our partners who offer high-quality early learning and child care for families in the NWT.

Our Commitments

These commitments were developed in response to what we heard during engagements, as well as current best practices to support the ongoing development of the early learning and child care sector. The commitments encompass key areas known to enhance access to community-driven, high-quality early learning and child care in the NWT, including support for licensed programs to:

- honour Indigenous worldviews, languages and cultures within early learning and child care environments;
- reduce the fees they charge to families;
- access infrastructure;
- provide inclusive environments that are responsive to the diverse cultures, needs, and identities of children and families; and
- recruit and retain qualified early childhood educators.

Each of these key areas are intricately related and are embedded within the following four commitments that work collaboratively to incrementally transform the early learning and child care sector to ultimately provide high-quality early learning and child care for all NWT families who want or need it.

Improving Affordability of Early Learning and Child Care

Reductions in cost will make child care available to more families.

According to the *Feasibility Study*, and more recently, the *2019 Statistics Canada Survey*, families in the NWT reported difficulty finding and paying for child care.

Following the territorial implementation of free, play-based JK/K for all four-and five-year-old children, the focus has shifted to supporting access to affordable child care for infant and preschool-aged children where costs are often the highest.

During our engagements, we heard that there is a wide discrepancy in child care fees charged to families throughout the NWT. Indigenous governments and some licensed centres reported that their programs do not charge child care fees. Many of the free programs are located in small communities, whereas the fee-based programs tend to be located in larger

communities, regional centres, and Yellowknife, where child care fees continue to be too expensive for many families, especially single parent families and those with multiple children. Of those licensed programs that do charge fees, the monthly costs for centre-based programs ranged from \$500 to \$1,380 per child per month; licensed family day homes reported their monthly fees ranged from \$900 to \$1,100 per child per month.

Goal: Early learning and child care is more affordable for families

How do we get there?

We are exploring ways to make licensed early learning and child care more affordable for everyone, regardless of their income and where they live in the territory, by:

- working with our partners, including the federal government and Indigenous governments;
- developing a plan to incrementally reduce the costs of licensed early learning and child care; and
- providing Income Assistance (IA) for families that require additional support to access early learning and child care programming.

Supporting the Creation and Sustainability of Licensed Programs

More spaces will mean more opportunities for families to access early learning and child care.

There are many factors involved with increasing access to licensed programs, such as creating welcoming, culturally-responsive environments for families, having qualified and trained staff available to work, and having access to high-quality infrastructure that is suitable and safe for early learning and child care programs.

We know that creating new child care spaces takes time. In the NWT, licensed programs are community-driven. They are initiated and maintained by Indigenous governments, non-profit organizations, and local individuals who are in the best position to meet the needs of children and families they serve. Improving access to early learning and child care requires working closely with our licensed operators and providing funding and various supports that are responsive to their needs.

During discussions with our partners, we heard their thoughts about many factors related to opening new spaces and maintaining existing programs, including:

- **Infrastructure:** There is a need for early learning and child care infrastructure in many NWT communities. Often, existing buildings are not available and/or not worth investing in retrofits that are necessary to meet the safety and environmental health requirements of early learning. In addition to the high costs associated with construction in the NWT, planning and securing contractors and materials must be done many months, and in some cases over a year, in advance.
- **Staffing:** Early learning and child care programs are operated by local community members and organizations. There needs to be qualified and interested staff willing and able to work as early childhood educators. Staff recruitment and retention is directly related to the sustainability of early learning and child care programs, including the ability to open new programs.

Some communities in the NWT may never have the population or desire to maintain a licensed program. This could be due to a number of factors, such as community population, birth rate, employment rate, or cultural childrearing preferences.

In this way, increased access to quality early learning experiences will vary greatly across the territory and may not always result in licensed child care. There is no one-size-fits-all approach and increased access may include additional early learning programming, such as family and child drop-in programs.

Goal: More families have access to early learning and child care

How do we get there?

We will support our partners as they create and maintain early learning and child care programs that best meet the needs of families in their community by:

- investing in infrastructure for early learning and child care programs;
- working with our government partners and community-based organizations to explore ways to create new spaces, particularly in communities that need it most;

- exploring alternate ways of providing operational funding to offset the costs for licensed programs and support sustainability; and
- incentivizing early childhood educators to pursue and/or remain employed in licensed early learning and child care programs, and to acquire post-secondary education with a direct focus in early learning and child care through increased wages and other supports.

Enhancing Inclusion and Participation

Inclusive early learning environments that are safe and caring spaces, embrace diversity, and remove barriers will increase the participation of all children.

Every child and family deserves to feel welcomed and safe to enroll and participate in early learning and child care programs. With a strengths-based approach, inclusive early learning environments embrace diversity and respond to the varied interests, needs, and strengths of each child and family.

Inclusive environments require an understanding of each child's background and interests, as well as materials and resources that reflect diverse experiences, interests, families, identities, and cultures. In the NWT, this also involves programming that is deeply rooted in the culture, language, worldviews, and practices of the community.

Supporting an inclusive environment may require additional training for staff and timely access to supports and resources, such as:

- human resources, including qualified staff to support early learning and child care programs and keep spaces safe, caring, and responsive to the varied needs and cultures of children;
- modifications to the physical environment to remove barriers and provide the needed supports to increase access and promote learning and development; and
- timely access to professional learning opportunities for early childhood educators in centres and family day homes on topics relevant to particular needs, interests, and cultures of children in their licensed programs.

Sometimes, inclusion may also require a collaborative team-based approach between families and other service providers; for example, some children require support from occupational therapists and speech and language pathologists. These health professionals can help families and early childhood educators better understand a child's specific needs and strategies for support.

During engagements, our partners told us that it can be difficult to access these rehabilitation services, especially in smaller communities, as there are often waitlists and infrequent travel clinics.

We heard that additional funding to support the participation of children who are vulnerable or have specific developmental needs was essential in providing early learning opportunities for all children.

Additionally, we heard of the need for more support, resources, and material to provide culturally responsive and welcoming programming, such as the need to include Elders and to access resources and materials that are specific to the cultures and languages of the NWT.

Goal: More children participate in early learning and child care

How do we get there?

We will explore ways to further support early learning and child care programs to welcome all children by:

- enhancing access to ongoing professional learning opportunities for early childhood educators in licensed centres and family day homes on a variety of topics that are responsive to various developmental needs and reflective of the diverse cultures, families, and identities of young children in the NWT;
- providing licensed programs with resources and materials that represent NWT Indigenous worldviews, cultures, and languages;
- collaborating with NWT early childhood educators to pilot and finalize the Early Learning Framework;
- working with other GNWT departments to implement an integrated service delivery model that will provide a team-based approach to working with families and other service providers to support children who are vulnerable and with specific developmental needs; and
- responding to the needs for additional supports including people, materials, and resources required to welcome and enable participation for all children.

Fostering a Qualified Early Childhood Workforce

Attracting and retaining qualified early childhood educators will improve the quality and sustainability of early learning and child care.

One way to foster high-quality early learning and child care is to support our early childhood educators in licensed centres and family day homes. Research shows that early childhood educators with knowledge and skills necessary to deliver high quality programs make a difference in the developmental outcomes of children in their care.

During our engagements, we heard about many challenges associated with recruiting and retaining qualified early childhood educators in licensed centre-based programs.

Early childhood educators shared many challenges associated with accessing post-secondary education, including challenges related to leaving home communities, high financial costs, time, and other personal barriers involved with pursuing additional education. Other issues also play a role with accessing online learning, such as access to technology and adequate internet services.

Our partners shared concerns about the poor wages and benefits offered to early childhood educators working in centre-based programs and the high cost of living in NWT communities. We heard that this often leads to a high turnover of early childhood staff who ultimately leave the field to take other jobs in the community (i.e., within the health sector, schools, or other areas of government) that come with a higher wage and better benefits, including paid holidays. This is often exacerbated by increased education since staff members often leave after they receive more training and education.

Goal: More qualified early childhood educators enter and remain working in the early learning and child care sector

How do we get there?

We will explore new ways to further support our early childhood educators in centre-based programs and family day homes, including recruiting new educators to the field, and supporting those who are already working by:

- providing support to NWT post-secondary institutions for the delivery of full-time and part-time early learning and child care programming;
- providing those interested in entering the early childhood field with relevant information, financial support, professional learning opportunities, or other applicable supports;
- exploring options for developing a certification system for early childhood educators that is based on education and experience; and
- exploring options for developing a wage grid that can be implemented throughout the territory.



Measures of Success

The primary measure of success for the Strategy will be an increase in the number of licensed early learning and child care programs and spaces throughout the NWT over time. This information will be made available through annual reporting on the Canada-NWT Early Learning and Child Care Bilateral Agreement (2021-2025) and Action Plan (2021-22) and subsequent bilateral agreements, including the Canada-NWT Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (2021-2026) and Action Plan (2021-2023). The results will also be included in ECE's evaluation schedule for early learning and child care programs. Specific measures of success, related to the goal indicated for each commitment, are highlighted within the summary table below.

While increasing the number of licensed child care spaces has been defined as a measure of success, it is important to note that some communities in the NWT may never have the population or desire to maintain a licensed child care program in the community. This could be due to a number of factors, such as community population, birth rate, employment rate, and cultural childrearing preferences.

In this way, increased access to quality early childhood experiences will vary greatly across the territory and may not always result in licensed care. Increased access may include additional early learning and education, such as the support for family/child drop-in programs. Measures of success will include increased access to early learning as well as licensed early learning and child care programs.

The table below includes the four goals and the performance measures related to each goal, each of which may be related to more than one goal within the Strategy.

Commitment	Goal	Theory of Change	Performance Measures	Direction of Change
Improving affordability of early learning and child care	Early learning and child care is more affordable for families	Reductions in cost will make child care available to lower income families	Average cost of child care by community type	Decrease
Supporting the creation and sustainability of licensed programs	More families have access to early learning and child care	More spaces will mean more opportunities for families to access early learning and child care	Number of licensed early learning and child care spaces	Increase
Enhancing inclusion and participation	More children participate in early learning and child care	Inclusive early learning environments that are safe and caring spaces, embrace diversity, and remove barriers will increase the participation of all children	Number of children participating in early learning and child care programs	Increase
Fostering a qualified early childhood workforce	More qualified early childhood educators enter and remain working in the early learning and child care sector	Attracting and retaining qualified early childhood educators will improve the quality and sustainability of early learning and child care	Number of licensed early childhood educators with training and/or post-secondary education in early childhood	Increase



PHOTO: ANGELA GZOWSKI

Conclusion

Every child is born capable. The collective efforts of a child's family and community to create positive and nurturing environments contribute to a child's overall growth and development. The GNWT is committed to supporting families, Indigenous governments, community organizations, licensed early learning and child care programs, and educators involved in the upbringing of young children.

As we build upon successes within the sector, this Strategy will guide incremental steps that can be taken to increase affordability and accessibility of early learning and child care in the NWT. We know this work is complex. As child care becomes more affordable, more families will want to access child care, resulting in an increased need for new spaces, infrastructure, and additional educators. Reducing the costs for families while simultaneously increasing the costs for programs to adequately compensate educators working in licensed centres is another complexity. The nuance of juggling these important and interrelated issues will require ongoing discussions, innovative solutions, and significant time and money to support the sector.

The GNWT believes these collaborative efforts toward enhancing the quality, affordability, accessibility, and inclusivity of early learning and child care will make a significant difference in the lives of young children and their families throughout the territory.

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