

Review of
**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES IN
EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE SETTINGS
IN THE NWT**

What We Heard Draft Report
July 2024





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Malatest was hired to conduct a third party review of current inclusion-related practices and supports available within licensed early learning and child care (ELCC) programs on behalf of the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT). The results of this review will inform the development of a renewed approach to inclusion to promote equitable access to child care. The following research questions guided the research and data collection for this review:

- What is the current level of knowledge about inclusion practices among NWT early childhood educators?
- To what degree do NWT early childhood educators have access to professional development related to inclusion practices in ELCC?
- What are the common general inclusion approaches and/or individualized educational practices currently being used to support inclusive child care within NWT ELCC programs?
- What supports are available – at the community, regional and/or Territorial levels – that promote inclusive child care in ELCC programming across the NWT?
- What access do NWT ELCC programs have to specialists and consultation supports, to include children that require enhanced or individual supports?

Throughout the review, inclusion was defined as the practice of involving children with disabilities and/or those requiring enhanced or individual supports in the same early learning environment or setting as their peers, using specialized approaches and supports for them to be successful.

Methodology

The data for this review were collected through a series of interviews with relevant stakeholders. These stakeholders included: early childhood educators (including centre staff and day home providers), inclusion supports staff (including Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT), NGOs and advocacy groups), and elementary school staff (including junior kindergarten/kindergarten teachers, educational assistants, and regional inclusive school coordinators). Interview guides were provided in advance for transparency and to assist with participant preparation. The development of the guides was informed by a document review, literature review, and series of scoping interviews with key individuals who had a high level of understanding of ELCC in the NWT. A total of 38 interviews were completed with 42 participants.

What We Heard

Educator Knowledge Regarding Inclusion

ELCC staff tended to have a broad, generic understanding of the term inclusion and inclusive child care, equating both with equal access to programming. ELCC staff often conflated the terms inclusion and inclusive child care. When the terms were differentiated, inclusion was viewed as providing safe and welcoming spaces, while inclusive child care focused on the resources staff needed to support the individual needs of children.

ELCC partners noted that access to programming and supports, across the NWT, was a key aspect of inclusion. They also stated that cultural inclusivity, such as toys and books that teach about different cultures and abilities, should be incorporated into programming. In addition, inclusive child care required family engagement to promote continuous care between the home and child care settings and help parents/caregivers feel comfortable discussing concerns about their children.



Inclusive Child Care – Legislations, Policies, and Procedures

The implementation of inclusive child care is hindered by a lack of clear guidance and direction, resulting in inconsistencies in care across settings. Centres and day homes reported that they did not have formal policies to support the implementation of inclusive child care. The minority that did report general inclusion guidelines described statements that were more about making people welcome, rather than addressing the specific needs of children and families. However, in one instance, work at a centre with a special needs child did lead to discussions about developing a policy related to inclusive child care.

Despite the lack of formal policies relating to inclusive child care, ELCC staff had practices and procedures to meet the needs of children. These were generally universal practices that were useful for all children, rather than addressing specific needs (e.g., use of pictures and visuals). While ELCC staff commonly reported working with children with speech, language, or cognitive delays, most did not have formal supports to address these needs. Additionally, although some centres provided referrals to specialist supports (e.g., Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs)), it was more commonly reported that informal, staff-driven processes were used to meet the individual needs of children. Cultural inclusion also occurred along a continuum, with some centres and day homes outlining active efforts (e.g., incorporating resources about diverse cultures into programming), while others described their processes as passive (e.g., allowing parents from different backgrounds to bring in food related to cultural holidays).

Despite efforts by ELCC staff to provide inclusive child care, some indicated that children may be excluded if their needs could not be met. For example, if it was not possible to provide appropriate physical space to meet a child's needs. In fact, most ELCC staff reported not having worked with children with different physical needs, stating that their space could not support children with mobility issues. Further, some of the day home providers felt that the needs of one child should not trump the needs of the other children, and noted that implementing universal inclusive child care policies would be challenging given the range of setting and resources available to child care providers.

Access to Funding, Human Resources and Materials

It was widely recognized that adequate resources were required to implement inclusive child care. ELCC staff need access to education, tools, and resources to support their inclusion efforts, such as funding to adapt child care spaces, access to up-to-date resources, and guidance on setting up environments for children. ELCC partners in particular noted that increased funding for education and wages was necessary to develop stable, trained staff.

Despite this acknowledgement of the need for adequate resources, it was universally reported that accessing adequate funding and support was challenging. Day home providers reported limited awareness of available funding, and how it was accessed. ELCC staff also noted that when funding was available, it was sporadic and insufficient. For example, travel costs to attend professional learning were not included in available funding, meaning that centres outside of Yellowknife needed to cover those costs themselves.

Access to Professional Learning and Support Personnel

Support for education and professional learning for ELCC staff is required to provide high quality inclusive child care. ELCC staff need the skills to engage with parents, identify needs, and access supports for children. Given the role that day care centres have in facilitating contact between families and specialists, it is imperative that centre staff are able to both work with parents and specialists. ELCC partners noted that there is currently a shortage of trained ELCC staff who can work with parents to access supports for their children. While an online NWT Early Childhood Essentials course is available for



ELCC staff, the essentials nature of the course meant it did not have a large inclusive child care component.

Centres reported being unable to afford training, both in terms of fees and staff time. Staff shortages hindered the ability of centres to allow staff to attend training during business hours, when it was commonly provided. When professional development was provided to ELCC staff, it was general in nature (e.g., first aid) and had limited information about inclusive child care practices. ELCC staff who reported taking inclusion training stated that they had done so out of interest and on their own initiative, and typically paid for it themselves.

All stakeholders reported that there were challenges with accessing Support Personnel, including Occupational Therapists or SLPs, in the NWT. With the number of specialists in the NWT decreasing, waitlists were getting longer, and it was more difficult to access support, particularly outside of Yellowknife. It was also challenging for families to navigate the system and access supports. In addition to the difficulty of acknowledging concerns with their children, parents had to understand the requirements to access supports. The absence of trained ELCC staff to provide assistance made this process more daunting. For example, some day homes did not have awareness of, or access to, specialists.

The NWT Disabilities Council (NWTDC) was commonly identified as a valuable resource for ELCC programs in Yellowknife to obtain inclusive child care support without a formal diagnosis. Outside of Yellowknife, NWTDC funded respite workers, which do not support ELCC programs and require communities to hire for the position, which is challenging in remote communities. As such, NWTDC was seen as a valuable resource for Yellowknife, rather than the whole of the NWT.

Other efforts to mitigate support staff shortages included the use of private consultants and accessing Jordan's Principle funding. However, Jordan's Principle funding was not guaranteed and was limited to Indigenous children.

Transitional supports

School staff stated that children were transitioned from early learning and child care settings into junior kindergarten or kindergarten by inviting families to visit the school in advance of the school year. This allowed children and families to familiarize themselves with the environment, and provided staff with information about who would be in their class in the new year. Having this information allowed school staff time to plan and develop resources and supports. However, ELCC partners identified the lack of bridging supports hindered this transition and the continuity of care for children and families.

Putting transitional supports in place relied on knowledge about incoming children that was not always available. Smaller communities used informal connections with ELCC staff to gather some information, but this tended to be limited to general information about the children (e.g., the number of students). Where children were meeting with a specialist prior to enrolment, school staff could receive information in advance. However, when children with special needs did not have access to supports, school staff needed triage and respond to these needs "on the fly."



1. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW QUESTIONS

1.1 Background

The purpose of this project was to review current inclusion-related practices and supports relevant to licensed early learning and child care (ELCC) programs across the NWT, with the aim of informing the development of a renewed approach to inclusion to promote equitable access to child care. To this end, an analysis of current knowledge, practices and resources available to support inclusion of children within ELCC programs across the NWT was conducted. Specifically, this project aimed to understand current levels of inclusion available through:

- Early childhood educator (centre staff, day home providers) knowledge of inclusion practices and access to professional development;
- Common general inclusion approaches or individualized educational practices being enacted within licensed NWT daycares and day homes;
- Supports that promote inclusion within ELCC programming, available at the community, regional and/or territorial levels; and
- Specialists and consultation supports.

For the purposes of this project, 'inclusion' was defined as 'the practice of involving children with disabilities and/or those requiring enhanced or individual supports in the same early learning environment or setting as their peers, using specialized approaches and supports for them to be successful.' Cultural inclusion was also considered as part of this review.

The original scope of this project included licensed ELCC programs (centre-based day cares and day homes) operated by Indigenous governments, municipal governments, community groups, non-profit organizations and/or parent groups. Data collection for this project also included external supports, such as non-government organizations (NGOs) and Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) departments. The scope of this project did not include unlicensed 'family and tot' style play groups.

1.2 Research Questions

This review was designed to address the following questions:

1. What is the current level of knowledge about inclusion practices among NWT early childhood educators?
2. To what degree do NWT early childhood educators have access to professional development related to inclusion practices in ELCC?
3. What are the common general inclusion approaches and/or individualized educational practices currently being used to support inclusive child care within NWT ELCC programs?
4. What supports are available – at the community, regional and/or Territorial levels – that promote inclusive child care in ELCC programming across the NWT?
5. What access do NWT ELCC programs have to specialists and consultation supports, to include children that require enhanced or individual supports?



2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Development of Review Materials

2.1.1 Preliminary Literature Review

A literature review was completed at the start of the project as a stand-alone report. The literature review provided a broad understanding of inclusive child care practices across jurisdictions. The results of this review, in conjunction with project research question (Section 1.2), informed the development of the data collection instruments.

2.1.2 Scoping Interviews

In addition to the preliminary document review, scoping interviews with individuals who have a high level of understanding of early childhood education in the NWT were conducted. The purpose of the scoping interviews was to help the project team begin to understand the context in which child care is offered, and available, across the territory. To this end, the following topic areas were discussed:

- How ‘inclusive child care’ is understood across the territory;
- General factors impacting the availability of child care, including inclusive child care, across different regions in the NWT (including other resources that support inclusive child care in ELCC settings within the NWT);
- Methods and language that will engage NWT early childhood educators and parents in the project; and
- Availability of program- or child-level administrative data.

In total, three virtual scoping interviews were conducted with stakeholders identified by the GNWT. Information collected through the scoping interviews was used to inform development of the data collection instruments.

2.2 Data Collection Activities

The data collection activities detailed in this section were employed to inform this review.

The literature review, provided as a separate, stand-alone document, informed the development of the data collection instruments. A complete bibliography of sources informing the literature review is provided in Appendix A of this report.

2.2.1 Stakeholder Interviews

The majority of data underpinning the findings of this review were collected via key informant interviews with stakeholders across different communities within the NWT. Specifically, interviews were completed with early childhood educators and operators (centre staff and day home providers), inclusion support service providers (including GNWT staff, NGOs, and advocacy groups) and parents/guardians. During the course of data collection, the scope of stakeholders was expanded to include school staff (including junior kindergarten and kindergarten teachers, educational assistants (EAs) and regional inclusive school coordinators (RISCs)). Recruitment for participation in a key informant interview commenced on September 29, 2023, with the final interview being conducted on March 13, 2024. Interview recruitment was paused starting November 21, 2023, in response to the election blackout, and resumed after winter holidays on January 15, 2024.



2.2.1.1 Design

All interview guides were designed to be semi-structured, in order to allow participants to tell their story while being guided by themes and topics relevant to the review. To support these conversations, communication materials were developed, including recruitment email and telephone scripts, as well as a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document for parents and guardians. All stakeholder interview guides were drafted and provided to the GNWT for review prior to being finalized. These guides are provided in Appendices B to G.

2.2.1.2 Administration

The GNWT provided the contact information for all stakeholders, with the exception of parents. After an introductory letter was sent by the GNWT, Malatest engaged in outreach efforts to recruit participants. Parental recruitment for the interviews was conducted by program operators. Regional Early Childhood Consultants (ECCs) sent a recruitment letter to program operators requesting that it be shared with parents. Interested parents could contact Malatest to arrange to participate in an interview.

Interviews were scheduled at a time and date most convenient for the participants and took place via telephone or Microsoft Teams. Participants were provided with the interview guide in advance, so they could review the questions beforehand. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes.

In appreciation of their time, centre staff, day home providers, and parents/caregivers were offered an honorarium of \$250.00 for participating in the interviews. Government and other staff, including regional Early Childhood Consultants, rehabilitation and school staff, were not offered an honorarium.

In total, 38 interviews were completed with 42 individuals. Table 2.1 presents the number of participants by stakeholder type, while table 2.2 show number by region

Table 2.1: Participants by Stakeholder Type

Stakeholder type	Number of interviews	Number of participants
Centre staff (day cares)*	12	14
Day home providers	7	7
ELCC partners**	11	12
School staff	7	8
Parents and guardians	1	1
Total	38	42

*ELCC Staff in this report refers to those working in Center based facilities and family day homes and includes educators and program operators

** ELCC partners includes: Regional Early Childhood Consultants, Regional Inclusive Schooling Coordinators, NWT Disabilities Council staff, and Rehabilitation professionals from the GNWT Department of Health and Social Services.



Table 2.2: Completed Interviews by Region

Stakeholder type	# interviews
North Slave	19
South Slave	7
Beaufort Delta	4
Dehcho	3
Sahtu	0
Cross region or not identified	5
Total	38

2.3 Data Analysis

Interview notes were reviewed for clarity and, where necessary, audio recordings were used to update or correct notes. Data were then analyzed using inductive content analysis. Rigorous first-level coding techniques were applied to ensure that concepts and themes emerging from the data were less likely to be impacted by the coder's biases, preconceptions or assumptions. In so doing, data were further classified and synthesized into themes and core conceptual categories that aligned with the research questions.

2.4 Challenges and Impacts

Challenges of the review are discussed below, highlighting their potential impacts on the findings.

2.4.1 Project timelines

There were three major impacts to the timeline of this project. First, this review was challenged by the annual closure of many NWT child care centres during the summer months, limiting access to centre staff and day home providers during the initial months of the data collection period (July and August 2023). Second, wildfires and flooding resulted in evacuation orders for some NWT communities during data collection, limiting access to stakeholders in those communities.¹ Third, there was a 'blackout' period which restricted recruitment for data collection during the territorial election, from November 21 to December 8, 2023.

Malatest worked with the GNWT to mitigate these challenges by 1) reaching out to closing child care centres early, to invite them to participate; 2) preparing to include centres towards the end of data collection; and 3) extending the project end date, to ensure that data could be collected from as broad a range of stakeholders as possible.

2.4.2 Difficulties in Accessing Regional Representation

In order to ensure that feedback was obtained across the NWT, enhanced recruitment efforts were targeted at regions outside of Yellowknife. These efforts included an extended recruitment period (extending until March versus January for Yellowknife stakeholders) and more outreach efforts (up to 10 contact attempts for participants located in regions outside Yellowknife versus 5 for participants in

¹ Hay River was evacuated in May and August-September; Fort Smith was evacuated August-September; Behchokǫ̀ was evacuated in July; and Yellowknife was evacuated in August-September.



Yellowknife). Despite these efforts, feedback from regions and communities outside of Yellowknife was limited. As a result, it was not possible to report findings by region in the interest of privacy.

2.4.3 Limited engagement from parents/caregivers

Only one parent contacted Malatest to participate in the review. Unfortunately, this parent's feedback could not be included in this report in order to preserve the privacy and confidentiality of their comments.

While we are unable to include this parent's feedback within the report itself and would like to extend our gratitude for this parent's willingness to share their experiences with us. Their feedback provided insight into the lived experience of navigating inclusive child care supports in the NWT.



3. WHAT WE HEARD: STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The findings from the interviews are presented below.

3.1 Educator Knowledge Regarding Inclusion

Early Childhood Educators tended to have a broad, generic understanding of the term inclusion and inclusive child care. When center staff and day home providers were asked to define these terms, the most common responses referred to equal access. In particular, it was stated that inclusion meant finding ways to ensure that no person was excluded for any reason (e.g., gender, disability). Some of the respondents further refined their definition of inclusion noting that it was not just about equal access, but about meeting individuals where they were and providing required support. For example, some centre staff indicated that inclusive child care referred to including children with special needs within the learning environment with their peers by removing barriers to their participation in regular programming. Some day home providers also noted that inclusion meant adapting care to meet the needs of the child. These respondents stated that inclusion was about equitable access, not just equal access, to programming.

“[Inclusion] means including everybody regardless of any particular reason, whether it be disability, something social – literally just including everybody.”

– Day home provider

Centre staff and day home providers often conflated the terms inclusion and inclusive child care, treating them interchangeably. Among the centre staff that did differentiate the terms, a key difference was the need for support and resources. For example, inclusion was discussed as creating safe and welcoming spaces that contributed to a child’s growth. Discussions of inclusive child care, however, focused on the need for staff to receive adequate education, resources, and supports to address the individual needs of children. Further, it was noted that inclusive child care also included working and engaging with parents and Elders, as children were not simply individuals, but part of larger community and kinship structures.

Among day home providers, there was less distinction between inclusion and inclusive child care. Inclusive child care, similar to definitions of inclusion, was treating children as individuals and providing an environment that met each child’s needs and allowed them to thrive. A few of the day home providers were unclear about the relationship between inclusive child care and addressing the special needs of children with disabilities, stating that it was about including all children and not focusing the specific needs of individual children. A few day homes indicated that child care needs unique to one child should not trump the needs of any other child.

ELCC partners had a similar definition of inclusive child care as early childhood educators. They noted, as discussed above, that inclusive child care should ensure that all children have access to programs, and whatever supports and services they need, regardless of what community they live in. Further, they noted that programming should incorporate activities and learning opportunities that promote inclusivity, such as having toys and books that teach all children about different cultures, abilities, and skillsets. They went beyond the idea that programs should just be welcoming to all children and stated that all children should have ready access to appropriate programming throughout the NWT, regardless of ability.

ELCC partners also agreed with centre staff in stating that inclusive child care required family engagement. They noted that there should be ongoing communication between staff and parents/caregivers to build relationships and support information sharing, including techniques that can be practiced at home. This would promote continuous care between the home and child care settings and help parents/caregivers feel comfortable discussing concerns about their children.



Most ELCC partners and centre staff stated that inclusive child care meant that everyone should have access to whatever supports and services they needed, regardless of what community they live. ELCC partners stated that the provision of child care, both within and between child care settings, should be seamless, integrated, and comprehensive. In this way, the administration of child care should be easy and user-friendly for both staff and families.

ELCC partners also noted that there needed to be a focus on the inclusion of Indigenous children. They noted that cultural inclusion (i.e., care that addresses, supports, and values the diverse cultural backgrounds of children) should be incorporated into early childhood education and identified community engagement as a key component of addressing this gap.

3.2 Inclusive Child Care – Legislations, Policies, and Procedures

The implementation of inclusive child care is hindered by a lack of clear guidance and direction. At the territorial level, ELCC partners indicated that they were not aware of any legislation or government policies, guidelines or other documentation that support centres and day homes with their provision of inclusive child care. As such, centres and day homes faced a range of gaps and challenges, resulting in inconsistencies in care across settings.

The lack of inclusive child care policies also extended to individual child care providers. All centres and day homes reported that they did not have formal policies to support the implementation of inclusive child care. A minority of child care providers did note that they had general guidelines related to inclusion such as: *“a blanket statement talking about supporting and accommodating all families,”* *“everyone is welcome,”* *“be all that you can be”* and *“no one is left out.”* However, these statements were more about making others welcome and comfortable than addressing specific needs of children and families. One centre did report that including a child with special needs required them to reach out and seek help from external organizations to ensure appropriate supports were available. As a result, there had been an increasing number of discussions around developing a policy or process related to inclusive child care. As the centre worked with external organizations, they were exploring how to formalize these processes.

Although there was a general lack of formal policies relating to inclusive child care, centres and day homes still tended to have procedures in place to identify and provide needed supports to children. Rather than address specific needs, these supports were typically universal practices or resources that could be useful for all children. These included the use pictures and visuals, use a quiet space, observation and identification of different triggers, use a shared staff notebook for communication, and sharing information with parents. However, policies and procedures at centres and day homes to meet address the specific special needs of a child were not as pervasive. While ELCC staff commonly reported having experience working with children with speech, language, or cognitive delays, most centres or day homes did not have formalized supports in place to address these needs. Although some centres did provide referrals to external supports (e.g., Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs), Occupational Therapists (OTs)), most outlined an informal, staff-driven process to meet the needs of a specific child, with one centre staff describing the process as *“doing observations to figure out what works for the child.”*

In terms of children with physical needs, the majority of centre staff and day home providers reported not having children with different physical needs in their program. Almost all day home providers reported that their space was not appropriate to support children with significant mobility issues, either because their space is too small (e.g., hallways or doorways are too narrow for a wheelchair) or because



there are stairs into or within the property. In contrast, some centres noted that they could accommodate children with physical needs.

Cultural inclusion was commonly reported by child care providers, with a range of supports for working with children from diverse cultures or languages included in their programs. Many of the centre staff and day home providers described how their program actively incorporated both children and staff from different cultural backgrounds and included resources such as books, posters and other visuals. Some centre staff stated that they emphasized and incorporated Indigenous cultures, languages and practices (e.g., crafts, drumming, dress up clothes, on-the-land activities, bannock) into their programming. However, some child care providers described a passive, rather than active, approach to cultural inclusion. For example, if parents from a different culture wished to bring in food on a particular cultural holiday, they were welcome to do so.

Despite the on-going efforts of ELCC staff to provide inclusive child care, some indicated that they may need to exclude children if their needs could not be met. For example, some day home providers noted that the inability to provide appropriate physical spaces may result in children with special needs (e.g., mobility challenges) being unable to attend. A few day home providers also noted that the needs of one child should not trump the needs of the other children, which could result in the need to exclude. It was further suggested that universal policies relating to inclusive child care would be a problem given the different settings and resources of the various care providers. Finally, one centre stated that they had processes in place for when the program was not considered to be the 'right fit' for a child, meaning that the child could not continue in the centre. As such, more work is still needed to ensure that workers have the training and support to implement inclusive child care.

3.3 Access to Funding, Human Resources and Materials

All stakeholders noted that accessing adequate funding and resources to provide inclusive child care was challenging for both child care providers and parents. Both ELCC partners and centre staff noted that adequate resourcing is required to appropriately implement inclusive child care.

ELCC partners reported that families needed to navigate complicated bureaucratic funding systems to access inclusive child care supports. These systems were also prone to changing from year to year requiring parents to navigate a new system to maintain any funding they may have been previously awarded. ELCC partners noted that accessing this support was further complicated by the lack of funding to secure trained ELCC staff through the NWT.

The implementation of practices to promote inclusive child care requires that early childhood educators have access to any education, tools and supports they require. Appropriate resourcing would make funding available to modify and adapt child care settings to match the needs of the children (e.g., special lighting, sound dampening). This would better enable children with specific needs to access programming, rather than being excluded due to a lack of appropriate space.



Resources and supports suggested as beneficial to the provision of inclusive child care include:

- a resource to visit programs and provide guidance about how to set up environments to benefit all children;
- supports to set up sensory rooms;
- a list of up-to-date (quality, trustworthy) resources;
- a resource room that operates as a library, where child care providers can borrow materials;
- access to training for staff (including funding to close the centres and pay staff); and
- a week-long, in person training programs that run when centres can close.

“When I first started, I had a couple of [children] that were particularly challenging. ECE had a ‘resource room’ that had toys, materials, reading materials that you could check out, like a library service. At the time, I contacted my consultant because they used to send out a list of all the resources available, like ‘how to manage challenging behaviour in a positive manner’. ECE doesn’t offer that any longer.”

– Day home provider

ELCC partners noted that stable, trained staff are key to ensuring inclusive child care is implemented across the NWT. As such, increased funding for education, training, wages and benefits for child care providers is necessary. One participant stated that it was common for ELCC workers to treat their positions as a stepping stone to school positions, noting that “EAs earn \$8 more, get aid, [and] time off in their weekly schedule.” Given these additional incentives, it was challenging to keep trained staff in child care positions. In addition, the centres reported that it was difficult to recruit trained ELCC staff in small or remote communities and that incentives or high salaries were needed to fill positions.

Day home providers had limited understanding about funding, including what funding was available, what it could be used for (e.g., allergies considered as ‘special need’) and how it was accessed. One day home provider suggested that a document outlining what was considered a ‘special need,’ and how funding for different ‘special needs’ could be accessed, would be useful. Another day home provider explained that an SLP used to come into her day home, but that this support was no longer available.

Funding to support ELCC staff training was reported as being sporadic and insufficient to meet need. When applying to the GNWT for funding to obtain training, some centre staff reported they had been successful, while others reported not being successful. When funding was provided, it tended not to meet the needs of the centres. For example, travel costs for professional learning were not included in the funding, meaning anyone in communities outside Yellowknife had to cover these costs themselves. Additionally, when PD was provided, it was predominantly online and, sometimes, in locations outside of NWT, further increasing travel costs. One centre reported that while they were offered Supporting Child Inclusion and Participation (SCIP) funding,² it was only for one staff member to complete an online course, despite the fact that although all centre staff could benefit from the additional training.

² SCIP is a funding program administered by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment for organizations to promote access to early learning for children who require enhanced or individual supports. It is an application-based program for children up to 6 years. No diagnosis is required. SCIP funds Inclusion staff (one-on-one staff, ratio management for multiple children), Program Consultation, and Inclusion Grants for staff training and resources.



3.4 Access to Professional Learning and Support Personnel

Support for education and professional learning to ensure that there are well-trained staff, who are trauma³- and culturally⁴-informed and recognized as professionals is required to provide high quality inclusive child care. Centre staff indicated a need for additional training to develop their skills and confidence to engage with parents to help identify needs and potential supports for their children, as well as knowledge about how to access referrals to support personnel or resources such as community nurses. Without these bridges, families could become increasingly isolated by not receiving needed supports, especially if they do not have the capacity to advocate for themselves or their children.

Given the role that day care centres have in facilitating contact between families and specialists (e.g., speech therapists), it is imperative that centre staff have the education and skills needed to both work with parents and specialists to assist in the identification of needs and the development of appropriate supports. ELCC partners stated that there is currently a shortage of trained ELCC staff who can work with parents to navigate the system to access appropriate supports for their children.

Cost, timing, and access were listed as barriers to accessing training and professional development for early childhood educators. Centres are generally unable to cover the costs, both in terms of training fees and staff time. In particular, centre staff noted that they were often stretched in terms of staffing resources. As most training was provided during hours that centres are open, this meant it was generally not possible for staff to attend. Additionally, it was noted that online training could only be completed by staff with access to a computer and reliable internet access, something that could be limiting in rural communities.

It was explained that ECE did offer an online NWT Early Childhood Essentials course for ELCC staff who did not have formal Early Child Care education. However, due to the essentials nature of the course it did not have a large inclusive child care component. Thus, much of the training readily available to child care providers was focused on foundational knowledge of child development rather than inclusive child care.

Despite these challenges, centre staff regularly reported completing professional development and training. In fact, many centres described how the staff were required to participate in at least one professional development day per year. To complete this requirement, centres would typically close for a day and complete the training as a group. However, the centres noted that the training offered at these professional development days focused on general child care information (e.g., first aid, basic early childhood) rather than inclusive child care practices.

Centre staff who did indicate that they had taken inclusion-specific training (e.g., supports for children with autism) stated that they had done so out of interest and on their own initiative. As such, they typically paid for the training themselves. Similarly, the few day home providers who described taking any training stated that they did so out of interest rather than because it was mandatory or required. Further, these day home providers were generally unaware of training related to inclusive child care practices.

³ Trauma-Informed care understands and considers the pervasive nature of trauma and promotes environments of healing and recovery rather than practices that may inadvertently re-traumatize.

⁴ Culturally informed care refers to the ability of care professionals to work and communicate well with people of different cultures by being respectful of and responsive to beliefs, practices and linguistic needs.



In addition, almost all centre staff and all day home providers, identified the current lack of inclusive child care as gap in the NWT. However, there was willingness across centre staff and day home providers to access training and professional development opportunities. When asked, early childhood educators stated that they would be interested in receiving training about the following topics:

- Training focused on inclusive child care;
- Speech and language training;
- Working with children with FASD;
- Working with children with autism (how to recognize and manage it); and
- Team building.

All stakeholders reported that there were challenges with accessing Support Personnel including OTs or SLPs in the NWT. It was noted that the number of these specialists was decreasing in the territory meaning that waitlists were becoming longer, with stakeholders reporting wait times of over one year, for assessment alone. As such, access to these specialized supports was extremely limited and becoming increasingly so, particularly outside of Yellowknife.

It was reported that families unfamiliar, or uncomfortable with, health care found it difficult to navigate the system and access supports. For example, there was a perception that children require a diagnosis to obtain supports. Accessing medical services and support documentation for diagnosis to access additional support can be challenging in many communities in the NWT as a few ELCC staff noted there was no one qualified to provide this documentation, or qualified medical staff only visited the community infrequently. Additionally, stakeholders reported parents find it difficult to hear that there may be concerns with their child's development and can be unwilling to discuss the possibility that their child might require additional supports. Some day home participants did not have an awareness of, or access to, specialist and consultation supports. In contrast, others explained how helpful it would be for them to have specialized supports come into their day home, to observe the children in the space and provide some general guidance to the program providers: "I can have as much adaptive equipment as I like, but I need to be able to chat with someone about it, maybe get help setting it up and learning how best to use it".

The NWT Disabilities Council (NWTDC) was identified by a range of stakeholders, including centre staff, ELCC partners and school staff, as a valuable resource for obtaining inclusive child care support. Specifically, centre staff reported that they could apply to NWTDC to get developmental support for a child, without a formal diagnosis. NWTDC offers the Early Childhood Intervention Program (ECIP), to provide one-on-one support workers to assist children with enhanced needs to attend early learning. As well, NWTDC provides ad hoc resources (e.g., grant for a leg brace), and respite services in communities outside of Yellowknife. Although NWTDC was considered an excellent resource for early intervention services, stakeholders identified two limitations. First, while the ECIP program is not formally limited to Yellowknife, one to one staff to support children in early learning is not offered in smaller communities. Second, the NWTDC provides funding for support workers, however, communities had to find and hire the workers. Hiring appropriate support staff in remote communities is difficult. As such, for many stakeholders, NWTDC was seen as a valuable resource for child care providers operating as a Yellowknife, rather than across the territory.

Efforts to mitigate the increasing shortage of rehabilitation services has led to an increased use of private consultants. One respondent described how "programs have been accessing ECE or Jordan's Principle funding to get private specialists into the centre. This is not ideal because Jordan's Principle funding is not guaranteed and is only available to Indigenous children, so not all children can access it."



3.5 Transitional supports

School staff stated that transitioning children from early learning child care settings into junior kindergarten or kindergarten often involved inviting new students and their families to visit schools in advance of the school year. This was intended to give children and families the opportunity to familiarize themselves with teachers and Education Assistants (EAs), as well as with the classroom and the school building. In addition, school staff also stated that having time to plan and put resources and supports in place was hugely valuable for everyone involved. This might include obtaining reports from rehabilitation services already working with a child, so that classroom environments could be modified to meet the child's needs.

However, ELCC partners noted the lack of bridging or transition supports between child care settings and schools impacted the availability and continuity of care for children and families. The ability to put transitional supports in place depended on schools knowing the children who would be attending their classes in the upcoming school year. This knowledge was not always readily available to school staff. In smaller communities, informal efforts were used by school staff to learn about incoming students. School staff may interact with early childhood educators and, therefore, be aware of the number of children who will be transitioning into school soon. These informal efforts to collect information, however, tended to only provide general information about the children (e.g., the number of students).

On some occasions, a meeting might be set up with a specialist providing rehabilitation services to a child prior to the start of the school year. These meetings help school staff to get support in place to meet the needs of the children in advance. However, children requiring supports that are not working with rehabilitation services may start classes without pre-arrival information. In these situations, school staff need to “triage as [they] go and pick up on the fly.”

The transition to junior kindergarten and kindergarten was easier for children who attended a centre-based day care or day home, with the majority of school staff stated that they observed significant differences between children. They stated that children who had attended a child care setting showed advanced skills (e.g., how to hold a pair of scissors), increased social skills (e.g., how to play with other children), more independence (i.e., dressing themselves, going to the bathroom on their own), less separation anxiety and less fear of new people and new places. They also tended to have more familiarity with child-adult relationships, because they had experience relating to adults who were not their parent.

“There is a huge difference! I can tell within 10 minutes. Kids who have daycare have socialization skills. They are able to participate, communicate their needs, play with their friends, follow more routines. There was one [child] who started later in the year, who had no daycare experience, and it was like starting over: having to explain everything, breaking things down further, such as how to play with toys, how to play with friends.”

— School staff

4. SUMMARY OF WHAT WE HEARD

This section provides a summary of the findings presented in Section 3, by research question.

4.1 What is the current level of knowledge, among the NWT early childhood educators, of inclusion practices?

Findings from the stakeholder interviews indicated that the current level of knowledge of inclusion practices among ELCC program providers (daycare and day home staff) is limited. While stakeholders identified having to care for children with a broad range of physical challenges and neurodiversity, stakeholders reported not having the education, training awareness or supports required to care for



children who required additional supports. Further, the provision of inclusive childcare across settings was not supported by common policy or guidelines, meaning that early childhood educators did not have consistent documentation upon which to rely on to guide their practices.

Knowledge of inclusion practices was underpinned by inconsistent views of what inclusion and inclusive childcare mean. This was likely due, in part, to the fact that there have been ongoing discussions of inclusion for many years and that, throughout those discussions, the meaning of 'inclusion' has changed. This was exemplified by stakeholders who defined inclusion at its broadest conceptual level, rather than having an operational understanding that would allow them to develop institute inclusive practices. For some, inclusion meant autism; for others, inclusion meant 'children with special needs,' which in turn meant children with speech and language delays.

The lack of an operational understanding of inclusion also meant that exclusion was also not clearly understood. While very few stakeholders stated that they had excluded children from their program, there were descriptions of 'having to ask parents to stop bringing their child to the centre.' Rather than being understood as exclusion, some stakeholders seemed to just understand this as typical practice – the program is a 'good fit' for some children and not for others.

Finally, it was noted by ELCC partners that understandings of inclusion needed to address cultural inclusion. Inclusive efforts should be instituted in a manner that addresses, supports and values the diverse cultural backgrounds of children. In particular, it was noted that a focus on Indigenous children would help support their engagement with child care centres and day homes.

4.2 To what degree do the NWT early childhood educators have access to professional development related to inclusion practices in ELCC?

Findings from the stakeholder interviews indicate that the NWT early childhood educators do not have access to PD related to inclusion practices. Centre staff and day home providers described accessing PD, however, the PD offered and accessed by was general and not specifically geared to inclusion practices.

NWT early childhood educators were only able to take a minimal amount of PD each year, due a range of barriers, including cost of training, limited staffing resources, travel cost, etc. In addition, many of the early childhood educators working in centres and day homes did not have any formal early childhood education, meaning that PD provided focused on child care basics rather than covering more advanced or complex topics. Finally, there is extremely little training related to inclusion practices available in the territory.

Day home providers and Centres report that participating in training or PD is difficult as they would need to close their programs. For day homes this means a loss of income and they have minimal spare-time outside of work hours in which to complete work-related training. This sentiment was also echoed by centres who stated that they would have to close their centres.

4.3 What are the common general inclusion approaches and/or individualized educational practices currently being used to support inclusive child care within the NWT ELCC programs?

The practices most commonly identified by centre staff and day home providers as 'inclusive' included the use of visuals for routine and emotional regulation and the implementation of 'quiet spaces' within their programs where any child could go to self-regulate. While daycare centres were more likely to have the space and infrastructure to support children with physical challenges, both daycare and day home staff reported ongoing capacity issues in supporting children with physical challenges.



Findings from the interviews also indicated that cultural inclusion practices were being implemented sporadically. While some stakeholders recognized and emphasized the inclusion of Indigenous cultural norms and practices, other stakeholders reported minimal cultural inclusion practices currently being implemented within their program. This included a lack of Indigenous cultural inclusion as well as a lack of broader, multicultural inclusion to reflect the increasing diversity in the territory.

4.4 What supports are available – at the community, regional and/or Territorial levels – that promote inclusive child care in ELCC programming across the NWT?

Overall, stakeholders described minimal availability of supports that promote inclusive child care. The most commonly identified supports for inclusive child care were rehabilitation services providers, namely OTs and SLPs. Unfortunately, these resources are becoming increasingly scarce across the territory as the number of OTs and SLPs are decreasing, resulting in longer waitlists. The process to access these supports is complex and difficult for families. While a few centre staff described sporadic access to rehabilitation services, day home providers reported a lack of awareness of, and access to such supports.

Some stakeholders were able to work with NWTDC to obtain inclusion supports, such as one-on-one care providers. For those that were able to access NWTDC supports and services, it is seen as a valuable resource that filled a growing gap. However, outside of Yellowknife, NWTDC services are extremely limited and challenging. While NWTDC is willing to offer funding to hire personnel, it is the responsibility of the community to find and hire personnel and that can be very difficult in many communities.

While SCIP funding is available to NWT early childhood educators for inclusion staff, program consultation, and inclusion grants for staff training and resources, the funding cycle is awkward and there was typically no funding left by the time the new school year started. Stakeholders reported that it was not always clear what SCIP funding could be used for and how it could be accessed. In addition, stakeholders reported that the SCIP funding offered for training was not enough to the needs of all of their staff.

4.5 What access do NWT ELCC programs have to specialists and consultation supports, to include children that require enhanced or individual supports?

This question was answered in the previous section (Section 4.4).

5. CONCLUSION

Malatest would like to thank all of the individuals who participated in this review. The feedback shared during our discussions provided necessary information to support the transformation of the ELCC sector toward renewed and enhanced supports for early learning and child care.



APPENDIX A: LITERATURE REVIEW BIBLIOGRAPHY



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APPENDIX B: CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR DAYCARE AND DAY HOME OWNERS AND OPERATORS



Inclusive Child Care in NWT Early Learning and Child Care Programs

Conversation Guide: Owners, Managers and Staff

ECE has developed a 2023 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy, with the aim of advancing universal child care and enhancing the quality, affordability, flexibility and inclusivity of early learning and child care in NWT. To support the Strategy, ECE is conducting a review of current knowledge, practices and resources available to support the inclusion of children within early learning and child care programs across the Territory.

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) has contracted Malatest, an independent research firm, to conduct a review of inclusive child care across NWT.

To inform the review, we would like to chat with owners, managers and staff of early child care centres and programs. As the people on the front line, you are best placed to tell us of how inclusive child care is understood and delivered in your community.

This conversation is expected to take approximately about an hour of your time. To thank you for participating, you will be offered an honorarium of \$250.00.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Your participation in this conversation is voluntary. You are not obligated to answer any questions, you may skip any question that you cannot or do not wish to answer, and you may end the conversation at any point without any negative consequences.

With your permission, we would like to record this conversation to ensure our notes are accurate. If at any point during the conversation you feel uncomfortable or wish to stop, please let me know and we will stop.

All information that you provide will be kept strictly confidential and will be protected under the provisions of the *NWT Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. The information gathered through this conversation is considered confidential by Malatest. For reporting purposes, your responses will be aggregated with information received from other conversations and no identifiable information will be reported.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact:

Sheila Harper
Assistant Research Manager at Malatest
1-877-665-6252 (ext. 224)
s.harper@malatest.com



Section A: Introduction

- A1. Please tell me a bit about your history in child care.
 - a. What is your current role?
 - b. How long have you worked in your current program?
 - c. How long have you worked in early learning and child care more generally?
 - d. Have you taken any formal early learning and child care education?
 - e. What age group do you look after?

Part of this review is trying to understand how ‘inclusion’ and ‘inclusive child care’ are understood across NWT, if there are common understandings or if they differ across the Territory. With that in mind...

- A2a. What does ‘inclusion’ mean to you?
- A2b. What does ‘inclusive childcare’ mean to you?
- A2c. How does your licensed program define ‘inclusive childcare’?

Section B: Supported workforce

For this set of questions, we want to understand if you and your colleagues have access to any formal supports that help you support children with special needs.

- B1. Can you tell me about your experience working with children who have special needs or difficulty participating in your program? *How do you support these children?*
- B2. Are you aware of any policies that your licensed program uses to promote inclusive childcare?
- B3. So far as you are aware, has your licensed program had to ask a child to stop coming to daycare because of their behaviour?
- B4. What resources are available to early childhood educators to support children who have difficulty participating in your licensed program? *How do you ask for help? How is the help provided?*
- B5. Have you/early childhood educators at your licensed program received any training or PD related to inclusion practices? What are the barriers to accessing training about inclusion practices?
- B6. What training or PD opportunities, relating to inclusion, are available to early childhood educators in your area?
- B7. Is there someone in your licensed program who is a leader when it comes to inclusive childcare? If yes, what makes them a leader in inclusive childcare? If no, would having such a person be helpful?



In the following sections, we are interested in hearing about any types of support you have to help you do your job, when you are working with different types of children and their families.

Section C: Promotion and Prevention Supports

- C1. One element of inclusive childcare is to use “universal supports” that are beneficial for all children who are attending the program. Examples include the use of a quiet center or visual structures to support routine. Do you use any class-wide strategies to support the children in your program? *If yes, please describe how you are currently using these strategies.*
- C2. How does your licensed program promote social-emotional development in children?
- C3. How does your licensed program support children with...
 - a. Different speaking or thinking needs?
 - b. Different physical needs?
 - c. Different languages or cultures?
- C4. Are there any parts of your licensed program that are physically inaccessible to children (i.e. that some children can get to, but others cannot)?
- C5. Are there times in the day that the children in your program have the most difficulty participating?

Section D: Intervention supports

- D1. Have you learned how to identify ‘red flags’ that might identify children in need of additional targeted support? *For example, have you received any internal or external PD? Other training?*
- D2. Have you ever developed an individualized development support plan for any child or children attending the child care licensed program? *If yes, how did it go? If not, why not?*

Section E: Connecting with families

- E1. How do you/does your licensed program engage with parents/guardians and families to work together to promote development and support their child?
- E2. Does your licensed program offer classes that promote continuity of practices between your licensed program and children’s homes? *If yes, is there uptake of programming?*

Section F: Conclusion

- F1. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is least important and 10 is most important, how important is the implementation of inclusive childcare practices at your licensed program?
- F2. Is there anything else you’d like to mention before we finish?

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today.



APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CONSULTANTS



Inclusive Child Care in NWT Early Learning and Child Care Programs Conversation Guide: Early Childhood Consultants

ECE has developed a 2023 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy, with the aim of advancing universal child care and enhancing the quality, affordability, flexibility and inclusivity of early learning and child care in NWT. To support the Strategy, ECE is conducting a review of current knowledge, practices and resources available to support the inclusion of children within early learning and child care programs across the Territory.

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) has contracted Malatest, an independent research firm, to conduct a review of inclusive child care across NWT. To inform the review, we would like to chat with Early Childhood Consultants.

This conversation is expected to take approximately about an hour of your time.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Your participation in this conversation is voluntary. You are not obligated to answer any questions, you may skip any question that you cannot or do not wish to answer, and you may end the conversation at any point without any negative consequences.

With your permission, we would like to record this conversation to ensure our notes are accurate. If at any point during the conversation you feel uncomfortable or wish to stop, please let me know and we will stop.

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Assistant Research Manager at Malatest
1-877-665-6252 (ext. 224)
s.harper@malatest.com



Section A: Introduction

- A1a. Please tell me a bit about your role. *How are you involved in supporting inclusive early learning and child care (daycare centers/day homes) in NWT?*
- A1b. How long have you been in your current role?
- A1c. As an ECC, have you worked in different regions in NWT?
- A2. What do you think inclusive childcare should look like in NWT? *What should it include?*
- A3. What do you think inclusive childcare actually looks like in NWT? *What does it include? What is missing?*

Section B: Supported workforce

- B1. What policies or procedures guide how you work with early learning and child care programs to promote inclusive care?
- B2. Are you aware of policies or procedures that may be helpful in promoting child inclusion in ELCC?
- B3. How do licensed ELCC reach out to you to ask for assistance?
- B4. How do you see inclusive childcare growing in NWT? *What do you see as your department's role in this?*
- B5. Is there anything specific or unique about childcare in NWT that should be considered when developing or implementing inclusive childcare practices across the Territory?

Section C: Promotion, Prevention and Intervention Supports

- C1. What resources are available to early childhood educators, to support children who have difficulty participating in licensed programs?
- C2. Have you or your department provided resources, training or support related to inclusion programming to early learning and child care programs? *If yes, please describe. If no, is this a possibility?*
- C3. Are you aware of any training that promotes inclusive childcare practices that you think would be helpful for the child care workers in your region? *If yes, can you please list these training opportunities?*
- C4. Are there formalized assessments within NWT for the identification of red flags? *If yes, how have these assessment tools been developed? How useful are they?*
- C5. Are there professionals within the Territory who support early childhood educators co-create developmental support plans?
- C6. How is your organization/department supporting families with children at risk or with persistent challenging behaviours?



Section D: Conclusion

- D1. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is least important and 10 is most important, how important is the implementation of inclusive childcare practices in licensed programs across NWT?
- D2. Is there anything else you'd like to mention before we finish?

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today.



APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SUPPORT PROVIDERS



Inclusive Child Care in NWT Early Learning and Child Care Programs Conversation Guide: Partner Organizations and Supports

ECE has developed a 2023 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy, with the aim of advancing universal child care and enhancing the quality, affordability, flexibility and inclusivity of early learning and child care in NWT. To support the Strategy, ECE is conducting a review of current knowledge, practices and resources available to support the inclusion of children within early learning and child care programs across the Territory.

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) has contracted Malatest, an independent research firm, to conduct a review of inclusive child care across NWT. To inform the review, we would like to chat with organizations and service providers that provide early childhood supports in NWT.

This conversation is expected to take approximately about an hour of your time.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Your participation in this conversation is voluntary. You are not obligated to answer any questions, you may skip any question that you cannot or do not wish to answer, and you may end the conversation at any point without any negative consequences.

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Section A: Introduction

- A1a. Please tell me a bit about your role. *How are you involved in supporting inclusive early learning and child care (daycare centers/day homes) in NWT?*
- A1b. How long have you been in your current role?
- A1c. In this role, have you worked in different regions in NWT?
- A2. What do you think inclusive childcare should look like in NWT? *What should it include?*
- A3. What do you think inclusive childcare actually looks like in NWT? *What does it include? What is missing?*

Section B: Supported workforce

- B1. What policies or procedures guide how you work with early learning and child care programs to promote inclusive care?
- B2. Are you aware of policies or procedures that may be helpful in promoting child inclusion in ELCC?
- B3. How do you assist ELCC in providing early childhood services and supports?
- B4. How do you see inclusive childcare growing in NWT? *What do you see as your organization's role in this?*
- B5. Is there anything specific or unique about childcare in NWT that should be considered when developing or implementing inclusive childcare practices across the Territory?

Section C: Promotion, Prevention and Intervention Supports

- C1. What resources are available to early childhood educators, to support children who have difficulty participating in licensed programs?
- C2. Have you or your organization provided resources, training or support related to inclusion programming to early learning and child care programs? *If yes, please describe. If no, is this a possibility?*
- C3. Are you aware of any training that promotes inclusive childcare practices that you think would be helpful for the child care workers in your region? *If yes, can you please list these training opportunities?*
- C4. Are there formalized assessments within NWT for the identification of red flags? *If yes, how have these assessment tools been developed? How useful are they?*
- C5. Are there professionals within the Territory who support early childhood educators co-create developmental support plans?
- C6. How is your organization supporting families with children at risk or with persistent challenging behaviours?



Section D: Conclusion

- D1. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is least important and 10 is most important, how important is the implementation of inclusive childcare practices in licensed programs across NWT?
- D2. Is there anything else you'd like to mention before we finish?

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today.



APPENDIX E: CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS



Inclusive Child Care in NWT Early Learning and Child Care Programs Conversation Guide for Parents and Guardians

ECE has developed a 2023 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy, with the aim of advancing universal child care and enhancing the quality, affordability, flexibility and inclusivity of early learning and child care in NWT. To support the Strategy, ECE is conducting a review of current knowledge, practices and resources available to support the inclusion of children within early learning and child care programs across the Territory.

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) has contracted Malatest, an independent research firm, to conduct a review of inclusive child care across NWT.

To inform the review, we would like to chat with parents and guardians, who have children, aged between one and five years old, who have physical, speech or behavioural exceptionalities. As a parent or guardian of a child with exceptionalities, you are best placed to tell us of how inclusive education in early child care settings has impacted your child and your family.

This conversation is expected to take up to an hour of your time. To thank you for participating, you will be offered an honorarium of \$250.00.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Your participation in this conversation is voluntary. You are not obligated to answer any questions, you may skip any question that you cannot or do not wish to answer, and you may end the conversation at any point without any negative consequences.

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Section A: Introduction

A1. Please tell me a bit about yourself and your family.

Section B: Understanding Child Care in NWT

Part of this review is trying to understand how ‘inclusion’ and ‘inclusive child care’ are understood across NWT, if there are common understandings or if they differ. With that in mind...

B1a. What does the word ‘inclusion’ mean to you?

B1b. What does ‘inclusive childcare’ mean for you and your family?

B2. Is there anything specific or unique about childcare in your community that might impact how inclusive childcare is implemented?

Section C: Your Experiences with Early Child Care (Daycare or Day homes)

C1. Tell me a bit about your child. *What sorts of challenges do they experience?*

C2. Tell me about trying to find a space for your child in a licensed daycare or day home. *For example, Have you ever had difficulty accessing child care because of your child’s exceptionalities?*

C3. Have you ever been asked to stop bringing your child(ren) into a program? *If you are comfortable, can you please tell me about it?*

C4. What specific strategies are your child’s early learning and child care program using to support your child?

C5. How does your child’s program help your child to participate in the activities within the program? *For example, how does the program help your child to interact with the other children?*

Section D: Resources to Support You, Your Child and Your Family

D1. What resources are available to families to support children who have difficulty participating in early learning and child care programs?

D2. Does your child have a development support plan? *Were you involved in creating it? Did the plan include things that you could do at home?*

D3. Has the licensed program your child goes to ever talked with you about how to work together to promote development and support your child? For example, have you been offered supports or classes to help you manage behaviours that may be challenging at home? *If yes, did you take the training? How was it? If no, what inhibited your attendance?*

Section E: Conclusion

E1. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is least important and 10 is most important, how important is the implementation of inclusive childcare practices at your child’s licensed program?



E2. Is there anything else you'd like to mention before we finish?

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today.



APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS (JK AND K)



Inclusive Child Care in NWT
Conversation Guide: Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers

ECE has developed a 2023 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy, with the aim of advancing universal child care and enhancing the quality, affordability, flexibility and inclusivity of early learning and child care in NWT. To support the Strategy, ECE is conducting a review of current knowledge, practices, and resources available to support the inclusion of children within early learning and child care programs across the Territory. Within the context of this review, we are defining the phrase 'children with diverse needs' as those children who require/could benefit from enhanced or additional supports to participate in JK/K.

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) has contracted Malatest, an independent research firm, to conduct a review of inclusive child care across NWT.

This conversation is expected to take approximately about an hour of your time.

Confidentiality and Privacy

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With your permission, we would like to record this conversation to ensure our notes are accurate. If at any point during the conversation you feel uncomfortable or wish to stop, please let me know and we will stop.

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Section A: Introduction

- A1. Please tell me a bit about yourself, your role and the school you work in.
- A2. What does 'inclusion' mean to you?
- A3. What does it mean to have an 'inclusive classroom'?

Section B: Working with Children

- B1. Are you supported to plan for children with diverse needs coming into your classroom?
 - a. If yes, please describe how you are supported.
 - b. What would improve your ability to plan?
- B2. What do you think children with diverse needs require to experience a smooth transition into the school system?

Section C: Gathering Information to Support Children

- C1. Information from families regarding a child's abilities and interests is critical to get to know a child and plan to meet their needs when entering the school system.
 - a. Are you able to communicate with families or guardians to access information about a child to support their transition into school?
 - b. Are you able to communicate with early learning and child care to access information about a child to support their transition into school? If so, please describe how this typically occurs.
 - c. Are you able communicate with any other supports to access information about a child to support their transition into school? If so, please describe who this is and how this typically occurs.
- C2. In your opinion, are there ways to improve gathering information about a child's abilities and interests to facilitate their transition to school?

Section D: Supported Workforce

- D1. As a JK/K teacher, how are you supported to set up your teaching environment to include children with diverse needs who require enhanced supports?
- D2. What do you think could better support children who have diverse needs when transitioning into JK/K?

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about this important topic!



APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR REGIONAL INCLUSIVE SCHOOL CONSULTANTS



Inclusive Child Care in NWT
Regional Inclusive School Consultants

ECE has developed a 2023 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy, with the aim of advancing universal child care and enhancing the quality, affordability, flexibility and inclusivity of early learning and child care in NWT. To support the Strategy, ECE is conducting a review of current knowledge, practices, and resources available to support the inclusion of children within early learning and child care programs across the Territory. Within the context of this review, we are defining the phrase 'children with diverse needs' as those children who require/could benefit from enhanced or additional supports to participate in JK/K.

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) has contracted Malatest, an independent research firm, to conduct a review of inclusive child care across NWT.

This conversation is expected to take approximately about an hour of your time.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Your participation in this conversation is voluntary. You are not obligated to answer any questions, you may skip any question that you cannot or do not wish to answer, and you may end the conversation at any point without any negative consequences.

With your permission, we would like to record this conversation to ensure our notes are accurate. If at any point during the conversation you feel uncomfortable or wish to stop, please let me know and we will stop.

All information that you provide will be kept strictly confidential and will be protected under the provisions of the *NWT Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. The information gathered through this conversation is considered confidential by Malatest. For reporting purposes, your responses will be aggregated with information received from other conversations and no identifiable information will be reported.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact:

Sheila Harper
Assistant Research Manager at Malatest
1-877-665-6252 (ext. 224)
s.harper@malatest.com



Section A: Introduction

- A1. Please tell me a bit about yourself, your role and the school(s) you work with.
- A2. What does 'inclusion' mean to you?
- A3. How do the school(s) you work with define 'inclusion' in terms of the school or classroom setting?

Section B: Working with Children

- B1. Does your region have a process for identifying children who register in JK/K who require/could benefit from enhanced or additional supports?
 - a. If yes, please describe the process.
 - b. What is the best way for schools to receive information about children (e.g. from early learning or parents) to help children with diverse needs transition and be successful in school?
- B2. How are teachers supported to plan for children with diverse needs coming into their classrooms?
- B3. What do you think children with diverse needs require to experience a smooth transition into the school system?

Section C: Gathering Information to Support Children

- C1. Information regarding a child's abilities and interests is critical to get to know a child and plan to meet their needs when entering the school system.
 - a. Do your schools currently communicate with families or guardians to access information about a child to support their transition into school? Please describe how this typically occurs.
 - b. Do your schools currently communicate with early learning and child care to access information about a child to support their transition into school? Please describe how this typically occurs.
 - c. Do your schools currently communicate with any other supports to access information about a child to support their transition into school? Please describe who this is and how this typically occurs.
- C2. In your opinion, are there ways to improve gathering information about a child's abilities and interests to facilitate their transition to school?

Section D: Supported Workforce

- D1. What resources are available to teachers or schools to support children entering JK/K who require additional supports?

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about this important topic!