'*Setting Up a Solid Foundation*': Exploring the Capacity of Indigenous Not-for-Profit Early Learning and Child Care Programs in British Columbia – A Summary Report

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Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

This study was prompted by the recent closure, or threat of closure of several urban Indigenous early learning and childcare programs in BC. **The purpose of this exploratory study** was to: **(1)** generate a greater understanding of how organizational and funding factors and structures are currently shaping the operation of urban Indigenous early learning and child care (ELCC) programs in BC, and **(2)** generate recommendations for supporting the operational success of these programs.

Following ethics approval from the University of Victoria (UVic), the researchers (Gerlach and Gulamhusein) interviewed a total of 19 participants: 11 Executive Directors (EDs) of Friendship Centres and urban Indigenous organizations; 6 managers of ELCC programs in these organizations, and 2 experts in urban Indigenous ELCC in BC. Participants represented all regions of BC and their basic sociodemographic information was collected and collated. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and anonymized. Interview data and field notes were coded and analyzed to generate 4 inter-related themes and sub-themes that are described and discussed in relation to current literature in this report.

In summary, this study highlights multiple, inter-related factors that can influence the operation of urban Indigenous ELCC programs, including:

- Recruiting and retaining ELCC staff over the long-term who can work in a relational way; creating 'safe and trusted spaced' for families and children.
- Having the resources to support parents/caregivers' increased access to a wide range of health and social supports and services for themselves and/or their children.
- Having the resources to embed Indigenous worldviews, cultures and languages into programs, including the employment of Elders.
- Having good working relationships with local licensing officers.
- Being visible in the local community and have strong community relationships.

- Having a shared vision for an ELCC program and strong relationships between the ED, program manager and staff.

- Having an evaluation framework, (or engaging in research to develop a framework), in order to capture the impact ELCC programs are having on families, parents/caregivers and children.

- Having stronger local and regional collaborative networks and learning opportunities (communities of practice) for Indigenous ELCC programs and staff.

- Having resources to invest in staff's ongoing professional development and wellness.

- Having a single and stable funding model that recognize the costs of operating quality urban Indigenous ELCC programs for an increasing urban Indigenous population.

Preliminary recommendations were generated directly by participants or were identified by the research team during data analysis. A preliminary framing of the findings was subsequently shared and further refined with members of the research team (Gulamhusein and Varley), the BCAAFC Membership, and the Indigenous Engagement and Policy branch of the Provincial Office for the Early Years.
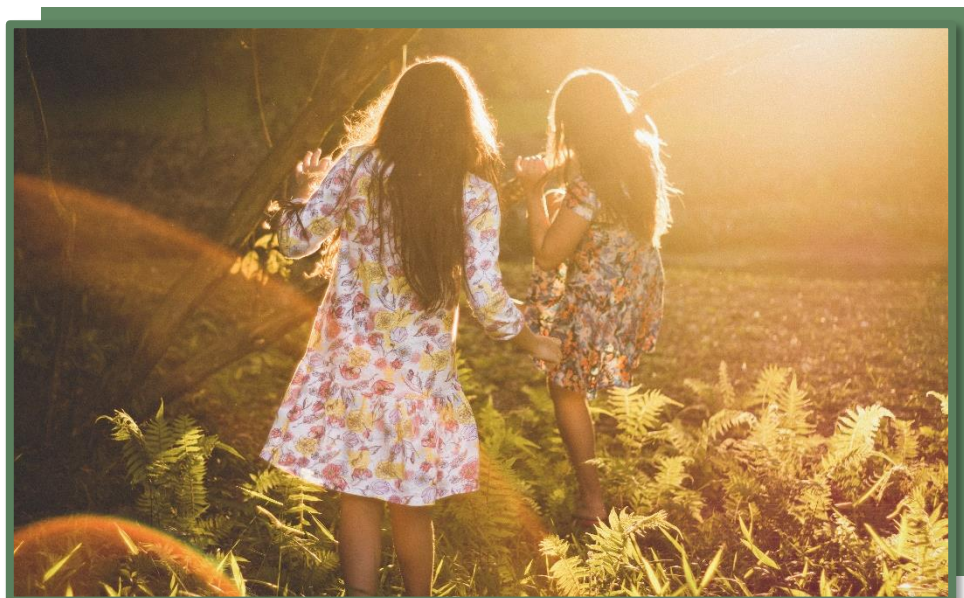
Introduction

1. Introduction

Project Background & Description

There is increase evidence that infants and young children's early life experiences and relationships can have profound effects on early brain development and health trajectory (Boyce & Hertzman, 2018; Halfon, Forrest, Lerner, & Faustman, 2018; Shonkoff, 2012; UNICEF, 2014). In addition, that quality early learning and childcare (ELCC) programs can support family's and children's health and wellbeing, and mitigate the impact of early adversity on children's life course (Britto, Yoshikawa, & Boller, 2011; Lake & Chan, 2014). Access to quality ELCC is increasingly recognized as an important determinant of population health (Bell, Donkin, & Marmot, 2013).

For Indigenous children - when ELCC programs are anchored in local Indigenous and community cultures, languages, practices, and histories, they play a foundational role in children's cultural identity and health trajectory, and provide a pathway for the collective health and well-being of their communities and Nations (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012; Greenwood & Jones, 2015; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Smylie & Adomako, 2009). Indigenous programming also upholds children's right to have access to culturally appropriate curricula and their heritage language (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009).

In BC, and across Canada, Indigenous not-for-profit ELCC programs are a feature of urban centres, where an increasing number of Indigenous families are accessing supports to raise their children (Government of Canada, 2018). These programs are aligned with the calls by Indigenous leaders, communities, and families to reassert their roles and rights with respect to what they want for their children (British Columbia Aboriginal Child Care Society, 2014; First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2012). Over 20 years ago, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) recommended that early childhood strategies expand early childhood education to all Indigenous children regardless of residence and that the federal, provincial, and territorial governments co-operate to support an integrated early

childhood funding strategy (RCAP, 1996). In recent years, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015) Call to Action #12 calls upon "federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families" (p. 190). The most prominent urban-based Indigenous ELCC programs in Canada, Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC), is supported and funded at the federal level by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). However, generally speaking, regulated child care for Indigenous families living in urban centres has no special status with the federal government.

Promising practices in Indigenous ELCC contexts include programs that: are community planned, designed and controlled; grounded in Indigenous knowledges, cultures and worldviews, aim to revitalize and protect language and culture revitalization; restore identity and incorporate a holistic approach (Halseth & Greenwood, 2019). Achieving these goals requires that programs are embedded within interdependent relational networks involving families, Elders, and community members (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2007).

Providing Indigenous children with early years programs that are rooted in community is a challenging process for multiple reasons, including: the enormous diversity of Indigenous peoples living in urban contexts (Place, 2012); the effects of colonization on the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous knowledges and cultures (Stout, 2012); the dominance of 'the sacred Western lens' in early childhood programs (Cannella & Viruru, 2004), and the constraints of current governance and funding structures. Having access to Indigenous ELCC programs, is a priority for many Indigenous families living in urban centres (Environics Institute, 2010) who represent the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2017). In the context of BC, it is estimated that 80% of Indigenous people now reside off reserve.

Over the past 20 years in BC, Indigenous ELCC programs have expanded to every region of the province. This expansion has been shaped by multiple factors including: governance and funding, the enormous diversity of First Nations, Inuit and

Metis people in BC, the particularities of demographic and geographical contexts, and pre-existing resources for families and children. In spite of growing national and international dismay and criticism, structural inequities in governance and funding continue to contribute towards many Indigenous children being denied equitable access to ELCC programs (Ball, 2008; Blackstock, Bruyere, & Moreau, 2006; Canadian UNICEF Committee, 2009; First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada & KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, 2011; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006; Wright, Hiebert-Murphy, & Gosek, 2005).

In 2017, a Multilateral Framework was signed by the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Early Learning and Child Care; and in which governments agreed to work together to address some of the key early learning and child care issues across the country (Government of Canada, 2017). In 2018, the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the Métis National Council and the Government of Canada jointly released a co-developed Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Framework (Government of Canada, 2018). This framework called for high quality, culturally specific and well-supported ELCC programs, services, and supports for First Nations, Inuit and Métis children aged 0 to 6 years old (Government of Canada, 2018). Identified challenges to achieving this goal included: unstable or insufficient funding; lack of continuity or alignment in a 'patchwork of programs or services' and limited or lack of access to culturally-relevant ELCC (Government of Canada, 2018).

In recognition that "over half of Indigenous children and families in Canada are resident for some or much of the time in urban settings, and face unique challenges in terms of access to culturally safe ELCC", this Framework notes that "it is important to support urban Indigenous children at a young age, in culturally-safe spaces surrounded by culturally-appropriate leaders and opportunities, so they feel connected to their languages and cultures (Government of Canada, 2018 p. 23). It may therefore be surmised that although some of the building blocks for quality

Indigenous ELCC programs in BC are already in place, much work lays ahead for urban Indigenous ELCC programs. In this context, it is a serious concern that two urban Indigenous ELCC centres in BC closed in 2018 while operating within the mainstream model, experiencing ongoing financial, licensing, recruitment and subsidy challenges and constraints. The BC Association of Friendship Centres is committed to gaining a greater understanding of why these urban Indigenous not-for-profit centres have closed when there is an increasing demand for ELCC among urban Indigenous communities and families.

Methods

2. Methods

Research Purpose & Objectives

This study aimed to explore how organizational and funding factors and structures are currently shaping the operation of urban Indigenous not-for-profit ELCC centres in British Columbia. The research objectives include answering the following questions:

1. What organizational and funding factors and structures support the success of urban Indigenous not-for-profit ELCC centres?

2. What organizational and funding factors and structures contribute towards the enforced closure of some urban Indigenous not-for-profit ELCC centres?

3. What are the recommendations and implications arising from this study for supporting the operational success of urban Indigenous ELCC centres?

Research Design

Rooted in community-based participatory action research, this qualitative research project was co-developed through a partnership between the leadership of the BCAAFC and Dr. Alison Gerlach at UVic. The goal of the project was to gain a provincial picture of the urban-Indigenous ELCC landscape within the parameters of the funding available through a SSHRC grant. Ethical approval was provided by the Research Ethics Board at UVic in December 2018, and the study was launched at a BCAAFC Members meeting in Richmond, BC in January 2019.

Recruitment: We used purposeful and snowball sampling strategies in order to recruit participants. We recruited Executive Directors (EDs) of organizations that hosted an ELCC program in person at the January 2019 Members meeting and/or in a subsequent email invitation. EDs who expressed an interest in participating, provided the name of the manager of their ELCC program on understanding that their

manager may/may not be contacted given the scope of the study. Some EDs and managers subsequently contacted the researchers to say that they would like to be interviewed together, which we did.

Participants: The researchers (Gerlach and Gulamhusein) interviewed a total of (N=19) participants made up of EDs (n=11) and Indigenous ELCC managers (n=6). Participants represented 9 distinct Indigenous ELCC programs and 4 AHSUNC programs in all 5 health regions[1] of BC. The length of time these programs have been operating ranged widely with some newly opened and others in operation for over 20 years; the average was 6-7 years. Participants' experience in their current positions also ranged widely from 10 months to 24 years, and there were 4 male and 15 female participants. The primary researcher Gerlach, also identified provincial experts (n=2) in the field of Indigenous ELCC programs. The identity of the research participants was kept confidential and was not shared with the research partner, Varley.

Data Collection & Analysis: Following signed consent, the researchers conducted individual or dyad semi-structured interviews based on an interview guide that explored questions such as: (1) can you tell me about some of the ways your centre has been successful in operating/running your child care program? (2) What are some of the operation challenges you experience, or have experienced in the past? And, (3) what do you think needs to be done differently in order to support the successful operation of centres like yours? Six interviews were conducted in person including one interview with a provincial expert. All other interviews were conducted by phone. The researchers also recorded field notes immediately following each interview. Interviews and fieldnotes were transcribed and anonymized. The researchers codeveloped a code book, and coded a sample transcript to strengthen and refine the coding process. All transcripts and field notes were subsequently coded using HyperRESEARCH©. The coded data was then analyzed by Gerlach who identified inter-related themes and subthemes which were further refined in alignment with the

research objectives and a reading of the current literature. A preliminary framing of the findings was subsequently shared and further refined with members of the research team (Gulamhusein and Varley), the BCAAFC Membership, and the Indigenous Engagement and Policy branch of the Provincial Office for the Early Years.

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[1]Participants were based in the following health regions in BC: Fraser (n=1), Interior (n=2), Vancouver Coastal (n=2), Northern (n=4), and Vancouver Island (n=10).

Findings

3. Findings

Analysis of the data resulted in the identification of four inter-related themes: **(1)** program capacity to 'set up a strong foundation'; **(2)** being 'the difference maker'; **(3)** programming 'takes a lot of money', and **(4)** 'our number one operational challenge'. These themes and sub-themes are discussed in detail in the following section of this report and linkages and made to the current literature.
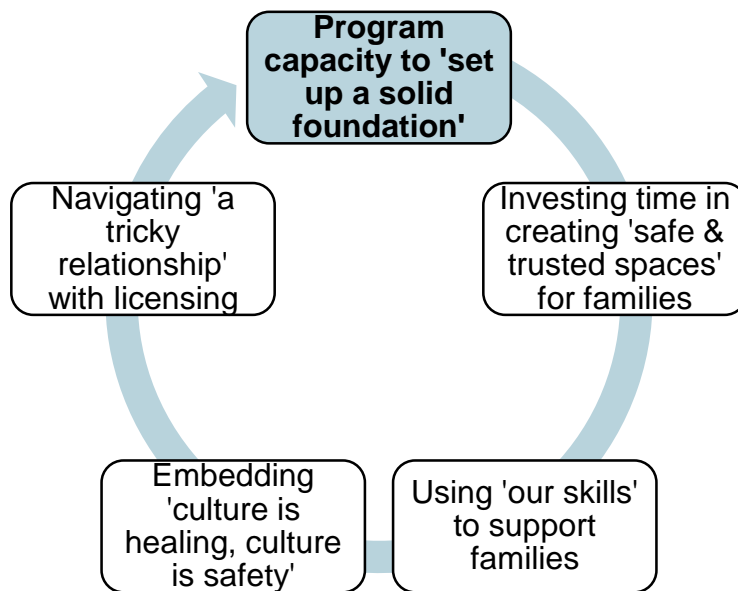
Program Capacity to 'Set Up a Solid Foundation'

Research participants described a successful and high quality Indigenous ELCC program as one that 'set up a solid foundation' for families and children. As an ED and ELCC Program Manager from different regions of the province state: "*my goal is that we have the highest quality programs; our children deserve the best care that we can give them*" (P7) and, "*we want to call it a quality program. And so, we're not skimping. So that is the one thing that [program staff] are making sure that we're offering families the best service that we can*" (P4). Working towards the capacity of programs to 'set up a solid foundation' for families and children is also evident in the following quote:

> *And we know the children are in a safe place; that added outcome for a supportive early years in that child's life - a supported early years in that family's experience as parents is valued. And will contribute to ongoing success and well-being for families beyond and so it sets up that solid foundation. A solid foundation requires investment and recognition of investment of time, resources, funding, energy and attention to caring for the caregiver.* (P11)

Participants also described inter-related factors that contribute towards the capacity of programs to 'set up a solid foundation', that is a quality program, that requires an 'investment of time, resources, funding and energy'. These factors are represented in the subthemes which are summarized in Figure (1) below and discussed in the following section.

Figure 1: Summary of Subthemes in 'program capacity to 'setup a solid foundation'

Program capacity to 'set up a solid foundation'

Navigating 'a tricky relationship' with licensing

Investing time in creating 'safe & trusted spaces' for families

Embedding 'culture is healing, culture is safety'

Using 'our skills' to support families

Investing Time in Creating 'Safe and Trusted Spaces for Families'

Consistent with the spirit of Friendship Centres, participants talked about the importance of focusing their time, efforts and resources on providing healthy, 'safe and trusted spaces' for urban Indigenous families and children. As two EDs comment:

I think one of the biggest things for our families is that we just have a really safe comfortable environment so families feel safe to come in and talk about whatever is going on for them whether it's good, bad. And know that we're there without judgment to help their family through the process. (P14)

We had the evaluators come in to evaluate the new universal childcare programs. And all the families met and there was no staff in the room and the thing that they said was the best part of the program was that they felt safe there and they felt their children were safe there. So that spoke volumes to me.... I go there [to the childcare programs] and all the kids are coming to me and, you know, 'grandma, grandma, grandma', and that's just such a great feeling to know that parents trust us to be a part of their little one's lives. (P6)

Similarly, from a program manager's perspective:

> *[Families are] not in their homeland, they're not surrounded by their immediate blood. So, we have this beautiful opportunity to sort of navigate new family connections... this sort of adopted village from the early stages of life - that foundation I think just translates immensely.* (P12)

The capacity to 'create safe and trusted spaces' for families and children requires that ELCC program leadership and staff prioritize time to building relationships so that staff can become viewed by families as 'extensions of their family'. This is evident in the following quote which highlights the importance of investing in retaining staff in order to provide a continuity in family-staff relationships:

> *We want those caregivers to be consistent, to be long term because it's based on relationship. The families look to these educators as aunties, uncles; as surrogate aunties and uncles; extensions of their family. But if these people keep leaving and new staff keep coming on you're not creating that familiar place, the continuity. And really more replicating the areas that challenge families - of inconsistent people in their lives; lacking continuity. And really more replicating the areas that challenge families of inconsistent people in their lives, lacking continuity but if we can demonstrate in our delivery of early years programs continuity and knowing that we're relied upon and we're reliable. We also are then creating those trusting spaces and demonstrating this is, be an example of trusting relationships and what is healthy relationships and healthy expectations? I'm committed to be here because I value your child, I value our relationship, I will be here when you come back tomorrow.* (P11)

Also, as the following ED highlights, the capacity to create strong relationships with families and children requires that staff are the 'right fit':

> *You really want to make sure that they're the staff you want. Not everybody is a fit... our goal is to have the best center that we can have and it's also love-centered so we want to make sure that the people that come in there,*

that's what they're about – it's not just a job for them. So, you know, that's one of the things we learnt in hiring, you want to be really careful about that. (P1)

The data in this subtheme highlights why it is particularly salient for leadership of urban Indigenous ELCC programs to prioritize efforts towards recruiting and retaining staff who are able to work in this relational way.

Using 'Our Skills Set to Support Families'

'Setting up a solid foundation' also requires that programs are able to respond to and support families' priorities and needs beyond child care. As the following participants comment: *"I tell everyone that we don't run childcare centers, we run family centers".* (P16) Also - *"I'm a strong believer in early childhood education because it's just stepping out of our roles as daycare providers and looking at how we use our skill sets to support families"* (P18). Supporting families in this way included supporting foster parents, young families who were *"having those first steps into adulthood"* (P12); *"a large number of grandparents raising grandchildren"* (P10), and families *"who are wanting to go to school, needing to go to school, needing to work full time, wanting to work full time"* (P11). Consistent with the Friendship Centre ethos, there was also recognition of supporting families who are *"hoping for a better life"* (P10) in an urban centre.

Programs and staff also need the time and resources to respond to the multifaceted social challenges that families and children experience, which can include: *"children who are either in care or in jeopardy of being in care so many of them are in foster homes"* (P1); *"a lot of poverty"* (P1008), families not having secure housing, intergenerational family histories of having children removed[2], and young children who have experienced trauma and/or have 'special needs'. As one ELCC

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[2]As of 2018, there were over 4,252 Indigenous children in care compared to 2,446 non-Indigenous children in BC. Moreover, while the rate for non-Indigenous children has been reduced from 5,776 in 2002, Indigenous children have had only a slight downward trend from 4,273 in 2002 (Ministry of Children & Family Development, 2018).

manager notes: *"we generally have more kids coming with more high needs and cognitive issues coming from our Indigenous families and this stems back to the marginalization that that they deal with and then poverty"* (P12). The capacity of program staff to 'use their skills set' to support families is evident in the following quote: *"what we need to do is we need to address the family's concerns first, support them in their concerns and then over time once they have those things dealt with they're able to open up to the other things that we may offer"* (P18).

A 2017 study involving AHSUNC program sites across Canada concluded that programs strengthened Indigenous community resilience by emphasizing healthy child development in the context of a child's social system, focusing not only on the child but on their family and the larger community (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2017b). Similarly, the data in this study points to the importance of programs and staff having the capacity to expand beyond focusing on individual children and invest time and resources in responding to each family's circumstances and priorities. This finding supports the co-location of Indigenous ELCC programs within an organization hub model to promote families use of a broad range of timely, low barrier, wrap around services (Ball, 2005). However, this finding also raises concerns about the need for programs to have the resources to invest in a family support worker.

Embedding - 'Culture is Healing, Culture is Safety'

'Setting up a solid foundation' is also dependent on the capacity of programs to foster families and children's long-term wellbeing by *"reconnecting and reclaiming cultural identity and language"* (P10); providing opportunities for families to *"express themselves in all the myriad of cultural ways without sort of having a lot of awkward moments"* (P12), and *"families being proud of being Indigenous and wanting to.. live that life as best they can"* (P12). Elder involvement was viewed as *"a critical piece to everything we do"* (P12). Two EDs reflect on the centrality of embedding Indigenous cultures:

> *Culture is healing, culture is safety. Connection is safety - the more positive connections we build around these children earlier in life the less likely they'll end up in a system that's probably going to eat them up and spit them out.* (P10)

> *Of course a big deal for us is, as an Aboriginal organization - we're always trying to present our material and role model what it is to be a healthy Aboriginal person. So, we really try to find ways to ensure that whatever we deliver it's embedded in culture.* (P3)

Embedding cultural revitalization into programs is supported by recommendations made by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2009) and the Call to Action #12 of the TRC (2015). However, as a program manager notes, the implementation of these recommendations requires appropriate funding:

> *With everything that we work so hard to do for our families the one thing I'm really proud of is that we are really answering the TRC's Call to Action for the families. Like we are doing it. We have everything in place and what I'd really love to get the message back to the government is - if you're serious about the Call to Action then you really need to be making sure that our demands for what we're looking for, for our centres, for our families are being answered.* (P12)

In addition, participants discussed how their capacity to embed 'culture is healing, culture is safety' in 'everything that we do' was constrained by not being able to have and respectfully reimburse Elders for their knowledge and time. Participants also described legislated 'colonial' policies, including provincial licensing and food safety policies. Also, as the following participants describe, 'colonial policies' were also identified as a challenge to embedding cultural revitalization in programs:

You're fighting so hard for revitalization of culture and tradition and then you have to abide by colonial measures. It's always difficult but the way I look at is, you know, I look at my role here and I think, you know, we have to check all these boxes to make sure we can go forward with what we really want to do for our families. So, and I think that goes for everything when we talk about revitalization - we want to bring back as much as possible in revitalization but we're knowledgeable on the fact that we still have to maintain colonialism in everything we do. (P12)

We want to promote connection to the earth and culture and our connection to the land around us and promote [a] natural environment. So, we had a log put inside the play area. Licensing says the kids are not allowed to touch it or play on it. We have kind of like a manmade lake with no water in it of rocks and they're not allowed to climb on the rocks because it's dangerous. So, I mean they have this big huge space back there but they can't even use half of the space because 'it's all dangerous'. And it's like whoa, it's like natural consequences if you go out in the woods you climb on logs and you jump, you know, you go to the ocean, you climb on rocks so to have all these limitations just makes it more difficult for the daycare providers. And I mean the kids want to climb right, I mean they're being in their natural environment, they want to do those things. So that kind of control or power; those policies just don't even make any sense whatsoever. (P16)

There has been a number of sticky points for communities particularly when they're getting into cultural practices, particularly where they're getting into

food preparation... And so, you know even if they're going to do something like we're going to cook a salmon here, we're, you know, we're talking about salmon, we've seen the salmon in the stream and we've, we've still have been in there and looking at, you know, our families and fishermen, you know, catching salmon and cleaning salmon but we can't serve it to the children. So, this is one of the major issues that needs to be dealt with is to understand that, yes, you have your standards and, yes, they are so but we need to place cultural relevance ahead of standards or we need standards to look at how to accommodate that. (P18)

These findings reinforce Friendship Centres as safe places for intergenerational learning, belonging and identity formation among urban Indigenous peoples (Langford, 2016), the mandate of AHSUNC programs (Ball, 2014; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2017a) , and previous research with Indigenous ELCC programs in Canada (Ball, 2014; Gerlach, Browne, & Greenwood, 2017). Pertinent to this study, previous research with AHSUNC programs in Canada highlight their capacity to provide a sense of community and promote Indigenous knowledge development and exchange by having knowledgeable people in their planning, development and operation (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2017b). The findings in this study also reinforce the importance of programs being able to employ Elders and knowledgeable community members, and raise concerns about the impact of 'colonial policies', including licensing, which are discussed in more detail in the following subtheme.

Navigating 'a Tricky Relationship' with Licensing[3]

As previously discussed, licensing was mentioned by participants as being particularly challenging in the context of embedding culture into programming. Analysis of the data also highlights that a key factor that can influence the success of urban Indigenous ELCC programs to 'set up a strong foundation' is the ability of a program manager to navigate the potential 'tricky relationship' with their licensing officer. As these participant highlight: *"we have a new licensing supervisor who only sees black and white so we're having some challenges"* (P6). Another participant adds: "*I think that it's a tricky relationship for sure no matter what I think even if you have a really good relationship with them there's always going to be something else and that's their job"* (P9). Participants also expressed concerns that the licensing approval process was dependent on a licensing officer's personal interpretation of the legislation. As two program managers note:

> *Unfortunately, what I'm seeing is that some of that is dependent on the licensing officer perspective and attitude and it shouldn't be right. It should be a very consistent regulation across the board but we're finding that it's not.* (P16)

> *I think if they all were just on the same page as each other and just made it fair all across like why should one center have it that an [ECE] assistant can open and close but then another center is being told, no.* (P9)

As the following participants highlight, building a trusting relationship with the licensing officer can be particularly important for Indigenous programming:

> *I see the good of licensing but I also see there needs to be wiggle room within that to be able to have those discussions on why we're doing our practice the*

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[3]In BC, the Community Care and Assisted Living Act, the Residential Care Regulation, and the Child Care Licensing Regulation establish the minimum health and safety requirements that must be met. Licensed childcare programs are monitored and regularly inspected by regional Health Authority licensing officers to ensure programs are meeting specific requirements for health and safety, staffing qualifications, record keeping, space and equipment, child-to-staff ratios, and programming (Government of British Columbia, 2008). Provincial funding is contingent on programs being licensed.

way we are. Best practice needs to be what's best practice for the type of center you have, the work you're doing.... I think that once you build relationships in your licensing officer we have a good working relationship with our licensing officer and it's that trust and its being able to say, okay, I understand this but here's why we do it our way. (P6)

We're really fortunate, we've had the same licensing officer since we opened so we have an amazing relationship with her and... she trusts how we work and operate and knows that we're a stand-up program. So, an example would be other places aren't allowed to use traditional food because it's not licensed approved but if we get parents to sign off on a letter saying that they're okay with their child eating traditional food we're allowed to serve it. (P4)

Participants in northern BC also expressed concerns about the need for licensing to recognize and accommodate programs that are not able to open some days due to severe weather conditions.
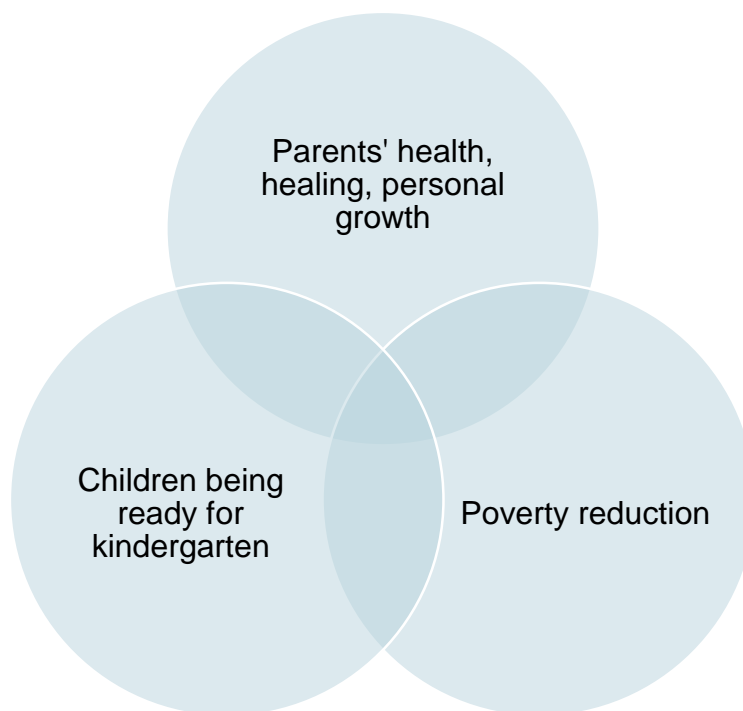
The purpose of licensing is to ensure "the provision of quality child care services in British Columbia . . . [and] protect the health and safety of children in care" (Government of British Columbia, 2008). Health authority licensing officers have authority in relation to implementing licensing rules and regulations in order to ensure that the care provided meets minimum health and safety requirements and ensures that recipients of public funds comply with standards established by the province (British Columbia Aboriginal Child Care Society, 2013). The concerns about licensing raised in this study echo those raised by a study conducted by the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (2013) and more recently in the Indigenous Early Learning Framework (Government of Canada, 2018). Currently, licensing officers do not distinguish Indigenous programs from other programs and have been critiqued for not recognizing the cultural context of programs, the role and importance of Elders and Indigenous approaches to raising healthy children (BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, 2013).

Being 'the Difference Maker'

While perhaps not directly related to the objectives of this study, the subtheme of 'being the difference maker' relates to participants' perspectives on the positive and intergenerational impacts of quality Indigenous ELCC programs for urban families and children; providing evidence for further investment. As noted by the following ED:

> *I've seen the growth of Aboriginal Head Starts in communities and off reserve. And in my opinion, it has made the difference, it has allowed many communities the ability to provide early years services. Without Aboriginal Head Start... I doubt that many communities would have any kind of early years services. I think it has been the difference maker.* (P18)

Figure 2: Summary of Subthemes in 'being the difference maker'

Parents' health, healing, personal growth

Children being ready for kindergarten

Poverty reduction

Participants talked about the critical role of ELCC programs in supporting parents to 'do their own personal development' knowing that their children are being cared for in a 'happy, healthy space'. As one program manager states: *"We have a 16-year old mom who has a three-month old baby who is able to go to treatment at detox. She couldn't do that without a program like this"* (P17). Also, as this participant highlights:

> *The value of the investment in the early years, the value of knowing that a family who is supported and know they have a happy, healthy safe space for their child while they're doing their own personal development and are going to school or working.* (P11).

There was also recognition of the potential of ELCC programs to contribute towards 'reducing poverty'. As an ED reflected:

> *From my perspective this is not just child daycare. This is a tool by which we can make changes in the community and those changes can basically reduce marital violence, reduce families living in poverty.* (P14)

The following field note by Gerlach also speaks to the potential impact of programs:

> *Child care is an important way of families getting out of poverty. So, although these programs don't provide revenue for Friendship Centres – they provide critical financial benefits to families in the long-term.*

Participants also described the positive impact programs have on children *"being prepared to go to kindergarten and [being] ahead of other children for a change.... Aboriginal children finally have a head start over other children"* (P10). Importantly another participant questions:

> *I wonder all the talk by the government about child welfare and trying to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care. I wonder whether they actually understand the role of Head Start in keeping families together or reuniting families?* (P7)

However, for some programs, their potential positive impact for families and children is constrained by waiting lists, as this ED describes:

> *Our new center opened six months ago and we have 100 children on our waitlist. That hurts my heart. The fact that we have to tell families 'no' is the fact that we can't hit all the areas of our city; that we have pockets that I know need services that we can't reach right now.* (P6)

There was also evidence of how 'being the difference maker' is in part contingent on a program's visibility and reputation within the local community, and on program leaders' relationships with local family- and child-related services and leadership. As the following participants state:

> *It's knowing that community engagement, community buy-in and people working together to know and understand the value of the early years programs and services and all contributing... You're building up community, you're creating connections to families and children. So, it's looking at those partnerships... Organizations that include community partners are much more visible to the public and there is greater public awareness of and celebrating their accomplishments and achievements.* (P11)

I think we're really lucky in [name of city]. Our community is very connected so we are able to refer to anywhere that our families need assistance. So, we have a good working relationship with the child development center, health authority, we have eye doctors that work with us, we have an amazing relationship with the school districts so that really helps with getting children into kindergarten. (P4)

We're just in the process of developing our relationship with the child development center here in [location]. We've never had that connection before with past leadership but the current leadership at the child development center really wants to work with us and it seems really supportive. So, we'll be able to have speech pathologists, occupational therapists come and be part of the program where needed as well, which hasn't been an option. And so, then our families just don't go there or they might go once and they never go back again. So, bringing it into our turf just makes it more accessible for families. So, it's been pretty positive too. (P15)

There was also evidence that the capacity of program to 'be the difference maker' is dependent on EDs and program managers having a shared understanding about ELCC through an ongoing reciprocal sharing of information. Two program managers from different regions share their different experiences:

I don't know how feasible this is but it would be great if the ED could come and spend a week here [in the program] or even a day, a whole day.... I think it's incredibly important that a relationship is maintained and especially for - I think the gap though sometimes comes with not understanding exactly the difference... [about] working in a daycare. (P19)

I mean [the ED] and the Board have been extremely supportive.... Without [the ED's] guidance and her support I couldn't do my job and I mean I can't imagine doing my job without that support. (P7)

An ED also shares her experience of this relationship:

The relationship between the [ELCC program] and the ED is to help them understand the benefit of the program because it is hard to understand why a family ceremony is going to prevent a child from going into care later, for example. Unless you come from that lens, I come from that lens so I've got it.... I go to bat and protect that program almost on a monthly basis. I've worked many weekends writing proposals and funding applications and lobbying and advocating to build strength around that program so I am their ally but I haven't always felt like I've been treated like an ally. (P10)

The capacity of existing and future ELCC programs to be a 'difference maker' is also dependent on their ability to capture the positive impacts they are making in the lives of the families and children in their programs. As two participants from different regions of the province note:

I think what we need to take a look at is more qualitative measurements as opposed to quantitative. If you're making a difference in the lives of one or two families look at what the difference is making, use that as a measure of success because... the word gets around the community and then it may take months, it may even take years but you have success for one or two families then you're going to get three or four families then you're going to get five or six families, it builds slowly. (P18)

Is there a way we can measure [family] wellbeing and then we can remeasure that because of the work that we're doing; that we are making an impact on the general wellbeing of the people that come to us? [For example] they're getting more confident to be able to go to school. (P3)

The findings on 'being the difference maker' are consistent with the increasing evidence that a robust system of high quality Indigenous ELCC programs will make a genuine difference in the early experiences of Indigenous children; supporting their development, overall health and wellness, school readiness and academic success, and improved life outcomes across their life course (Government of Canada, 2018;

Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012, 2016). High quality ELCC services are also increasingly recognized as being a key poverty reduction strategy – reducing the intergenerational transmission of poverty by providing low-income families or single parents the ability to work while their children are young, and strengthening children's academic success; leading to greater career prospects and lower likelihood of experiencing poverty (Waldfogel, 2017). Moreover, the findings in this study support the need for future research to develop appropriate ways of measuring the impact urban Indigenous ELCC programs are having on families and children's health, wellbeing and life trajectories; including the role of programs in improving parental access to healthcare, education and employment, and in reuniting or keeping families together and children out of the foster care system.

Programs 'Take a Lot of Money'

An affirming and not surprising key finding related to the success of urban Indigenous ELCC programs, in 'setting up a solid foundation' and being a 'difference maker' – is participants' perception that programs 'take a lot of money'. As the following participants note, investing in an ELCC program is a long-term venture and the 'returns' (as discussed above) on this investment may not be fully evident for several years:

> They [programs] do take a lot of money to run as you can imagine especially being a no fee service but the outcomes and the cost reduction on the other side of the prevention plan is showing, it's showing that spending the money upfront is working. (P12)

> There needs to be an understanding that childcare requires a lot of resources to be high quality. It is not a financial gaining endeavor. It will deplete resources more than contribute. [But] the resources it contributes are higher - better opportunities for children and families with high quality experiences. Then understanding that, you aren't going to make money delivering childcare but the outcome of investing in childcare is huge.... The advice to Friendship Centers is if you don't have a childcare program and you want one it, you need to be well positioned before opening one and going into that knowing and recognizing that it's going to use up services and added resources and funding rather than contribute to the pot. (P11)

As the following ED points out, when parents cannot pay the fees, the financial and administrative burden on programs and host organizations increases and providing a quality program can be challenging:

> We have pretty low fees but to pay our staff better we need higher fees so it's a catch 22. And we don't want to increase our fees... in fact, we've waived fees because we want the families to be able to have their children there. (P10)

Given the funding needs, and as will be discussed, the frequent inadequacy of

operational funding, the relationship between the ED and the program manager and the sharing of information about funding is key. As this participant explains:

The manager of the early years program, that day to day person in those childcare programs needs to know everything. They should have a copy of the budget, they should have a copy of the contribution agreement, they should have a copy of and know and understand all reporting whether they're responsible for it or not. They should be given monthly financial reporting's and [be] up to date on what is funded, what is fundable and what is their authority in and around spending and knowing and understanding what the budget is and where they're at throughout the year in the expenditures. (P11)

Also, as the following ED points out, challenges related to the lack of funding for urban Indigenous ELCC programs reflects the wider issue related to the underfunding of Friendship Centres for Indigenous urban populations:

If I can be really cynical for a moment... Nations are getting a lot of the funding but the people who live off reserve, we get zip.... If people go to their Nations and they live in the urban center the Nations say go to the Friendship Center but there's absolutely no resources financially or human that follow. So totally inundated, all our programs are really well attended.... So for example, last year our total service population was 7,700. So, when you see, you know, local Nations getting all the funds and they're basically servicing 200 people it's really frustrating. (P15)

Within the overarching theme of 'programs take a lot of money', there are two inter-related sub-themes identified, as summarized in Figure (3).

Figure 3: Summary of Subthemes in 'Programming Takes a Lot of Money'
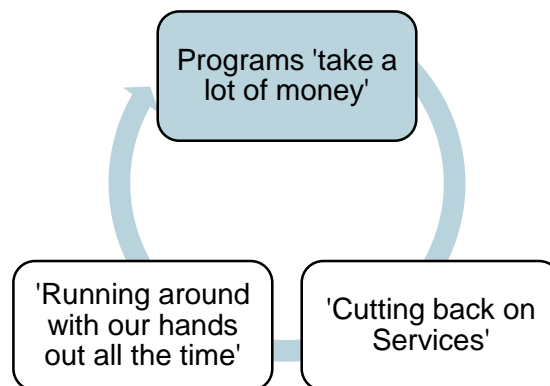
'Cutting Back on Services'

The historical stagnation in funding for urban Indigenous ELCC programs has resulted in programs 'cutting back on services' in order to stay open and/or within budget. As the following participants describe:

> *I'd love to have like I said wages that are affordable for [name of city in lower mainland] not just a living wage for the province.... And also, maintenance and dollars for basically capital dollars to take care of all of our maintenance that we need plus be able to get our materials.* (P8)

> *Well we try to cut down some staff hours so like our family involvement workers are part-time now, our bus drivers part-time, our cook is part-time and those all used to be full time positions… putting money back into a facility and making sure that it's taken care of but it's also not just that – it's like how do you do technological upgrades, you know, computers, telephones, cell phones, you know, all of that other infrastructure that stuff ages and you have to be able to replace it.* (P4)

> *The program is very challenged by [a] limited budget. Because it operates on parent fees, the income for their budget is low and cannot address the ongoing needs for the childcare [program] to deliver enhanced program and curriculum. The staff reported that they have not received any supply budgets and therefore have to do without or purchase materials with their own*

money. Also, there is no funds to have janitorial support so the staff focus a
lot of time in general daily maintenance of the building missing out on key
learning opportunities with the children. (P11)

Funding for Indigenous ELCC programs has not kept pace with a rapidly growing urban Indigenous population[4] or increasing operational costs, including infrastructure costs, a living wage with benefits for staff, and the training and resources required to support children with diverse abilities (Halseth & Greenwood, 2019). Consistent with the recommendations in the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (Government of Canada, 2018), the findings in this study reinforce once more the need for appropriate and stable funding that reflect the realities and responsibilities of operating quality Indigenous ELCC programs in urban centres.

'Running around with our hands out all the time'

Data indicates that the current capacity of many programs to meet their operating costs is dependent on EDs spending large amounts of time writing proposals, competing for limited funds and reporting back to multiple funders[5] in order to cover the operational costs of their ELCC programs. As the following EDs state:

We're operating in the red all the time. So, its taxing to the organization as a
whole to keep it open... We run around with our hands out all the time and we
apply for every possible [funding name] that we possibly can which takes a
huge amount of staff time.

It's difficult when you put say 28 hours in a proposal and you get nothing back
in return. That happens way too often. (P15)

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[4]As previously noted, Indigenous families living in urban centres represent the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2017). In BC, it is estimated that 80% of Indigenous people now reside off reserve – creating an enormous demand for Indigenous ELCC programs.

[5]Primary funding sources for the programs in this study included: parents fees, MCFD, PHAC, and individual grant applications crafted by host organizations.

I think a weakness of PHAC[6] is that it doesn't really allow any administration of the program and so that has been a challenge for us - constantly fund raising to kind of manage programs within the rules of CRA and good governance and management. We have to find that funding elsewhere because all it pays for is the programs. They don't necessarily pay for the running of the facility.... The utilities, internet, grounds maintenance, licensing which is a provincial requirement, all of that is generally the responsibility of the non-profit … that's always been a struggle with that program. (P10) *Two years ago, I was looking at all the books, we had 50 funders in here for this one society. And so up keeping 50 funders with 50 reports and 50 proposals all the time obviously wasn't working and so it dwindled down…so my next year is going to be spent trying to find funding for daycare.* (P8)

These findings also affirm that building or maintaining programs' capacity, particularly in communities that do not have the resources to write strong proposals, requires sustainable, long-term and non-competitive funding. As this ED notes:

We need more sustainable funding. But one of the problems I've faced in my 20 years of service in communities was the competitive nature of funding. The system is set up that communities have to compete against each other to get pots of money, whoever writes the best proposal whoever has the best infrastructure is able to access the money. (P18)

The current inadequate funding available for operating costs results in many EDs having to compete and be accountable to multiple funders in order to keep their ELCC program running; requiring significant time and resources with no guarantee that funding will be forthcoming or stable. This finding supports a single source funding model, which is a feature of the recent provincial investment in 'growing Aboriginal Head Start programs in BC' (Aboriginal Head Start Association of BC, 2019).

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[6]Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) fund Aboriginal Head Start Programs.

'Our Number One Operational Challenge'

There was some variation in the data on programs' capacities to keep staff. Some participants reported having staff in their programs for 10 years or more, and other participants described not being able to keep staff beyond two years. These different experiences may relate to the data discussed later on the ability of programs to support staffs' ongoing professional development and well-being. Regional variations may also account for different experiences in recruiting and retaining staff. For example, in the lower mainland ECEs are more mobile and have multiple employment options. Recruiting and keeping ECE staff in this region and job market may therefore be more challenging. Nonetheless, a recurring theme in the data identified that *"our number one challenge operationally is staffing"* (P16). Or as the following participant points out 'qualified staff': "*The biggest issue is qualified staff. Previous governments have said we're going to invest money and build new spaces. You can build the building, you can fill it full of children but you cannot staff it".* (P18) To address this operational challenge, a program manager made the following observation:

> One thing that we try and do whenever we can is... [letting] kids at the high school level that are interested in working in the early childhood field know that they can take a program that's less than a year, have it paid for and they can be out working within the industry within the next year. (P12)

Within this broad theme related to recruiting and keeping staff, analysis of the data identified three inter-related sub-themes, summarized in Figure (4) and discussed in the following section.
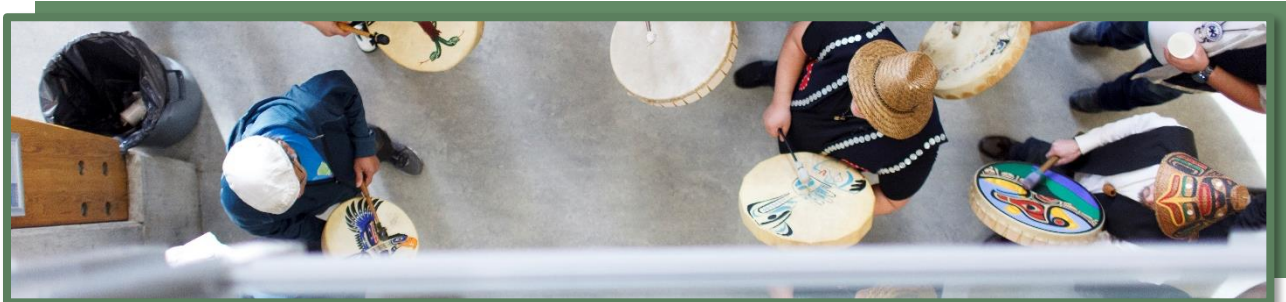
Figure 4: Summary of Subthemes in 'Our Number One Operational Challenge'
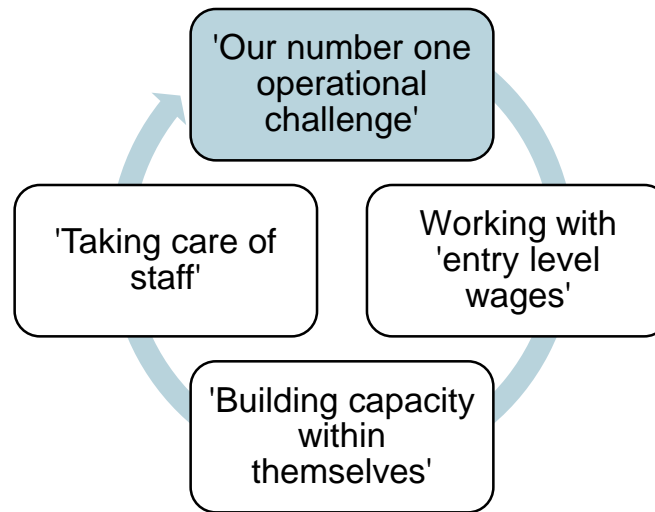
Working with 'Entry Level Wages'

Participants frequently linked challenges with staff recruitment and retention with the burden of low wages for ECEs. As the following participants sum up: "*The average person that works in the daycare only sticks around for two years, it's an entry level job... and they don't stick around very long because the wages aren't sufficient right?*" (P1003). Other participants note:

> *The wage people are making [is] the same wage as a check-out clerk. And so why should they go to college, why should they take on the extra burden and stress of being an early child educator when they simply go and be a check-out clerk and make the same money and have better benefits. And it's always been a challenge and we are hitting a wall, there is not enough educators out there. Many programs are struggling just to staff their programs with regular employees and many places have closed because they cannot staff it or find substitutes. (P18)*

> *What we have been told is that a lot of people have not gotten their infant and toddler [ECE certification] because it really wasn't much of an increase in wage for them. So, it didn't feel like it was worth their while to spend another year or two years to get the certificate. And so, yeah, we're finding that that is*

a challenging position to get. We have one now. We had two before and we

lost both of them. (P1)

A program manager also expresses the toll a high staff turn-over can take on her own well-being and motives to stay:

It's been hard and there's definitely been times where I'm just like, oh gosh, is

it even worth it anymore? When I have another staff whose like on the verge

of quitting... And then turnover here at the center too - it gets a bit much.

Yeah, I'm feeling like I'm constantly fighting for like my staff and then having

someone just leave and it's a slap in the face. I'm definitely affected. (P9)

The need to address the challenges related to the recruitment and retention of ECEs in BC is increasingly recognized and there are numerous initiatives underway in the province to incentivize ECEs to maintain their employment, include a provincial wage enhancement initiative and a higher hourly rate through the 'growing Aboriginal Head Start' initiative. Currently it is too early to know how effective such strategies will be. As this program manager reflects:

Head Start offers the staff a really good wage but even so we got very little

interest in the position and I think that's because ECE's don't come out of

their educational programs feeling prepared to work with the Indigenous

community if they're not from Indigenous communities.... Also with the

provincial wage enhancement initiative I think that's, you know, that puts us

up around $21 an hour or 23 which seems to be a decent wage but even so

the interest is really low. (P16)

There was also evidence of some concerns about the consequences of the higher hourly rate being paid through the 'growing Aboriginal Head Start initiative'. As the following participants note:

The new daycare money that we get from [AHSABC[8]] - there was a

requirement that the staff were paid $25 an hour. [If] they had their ECE

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[8]The Aboriginal Head Start Association of BC (AHSABC): https://www.ahsabc.com/

certificate, they had to be paid $25 an hour.... There's an inequity created now because we don't have the funds to pay those staff [in our other ELCC programs] $25 an hour. (P13)

We are only funded by whatever comes in through parent fees and childcare subsidies. So, paying our staff has been really difficult; like a decent wage. And as a result we lost a number of staff as soon as the Aboriginal Head Start money came through to other centers. And centres who managed to poach our staff. And so that was extremely challenging for our center in trying to recruit new staff because we would no sooner recruit somebody and they'd be poached from us. So that's been a really, really tough road. And we were actually in the spot where we were considering shutting the childcare center down because honestly it was just way more headache than what it was worth at the time it felt like it was. (P1)

In BC, the current average ECE hourly wage is $18/hour, which is lower than the living wage[9] in many areas of the province. The provincial government's Child Care Fee Reduction initiative of $21 million will enhance wages in licensed facilities in 2018/19 at $1/hour retroactive to September 2018. An additional $1/hour wage enhancement is scheduled for April 2020, to bring the total wage up by $2/hour above current wages (Government of British Columbia, nd-b). As previously discussed in the findings, the capacity of ELCC programs to 'set up a strong foundation' is largely dependent on their capacity to provide continuity in terms of long-term qualified staffing. Thus, the low hourly wage and a high turnover of staff directly impacts the quality of Indigenous ELCC programs, and their capacity to be 'difference makers' in the lives of urban Indigenous communities, families and children. This is discussed in the following subtheme. Programs need adequate funding to be successful!

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[9]Using the 2018 Living Wage for Vancouver ($20.91) as a benchmark, an estimated 1/3 of child care staff in the metro Vancouver area have earnings below the local living wage (Forer, 2018).

'Building Capacity within Themselves'

Participants discussed how they mitigated the operational challenges related to recruiting and/or keeping staff and building quality programming by 'building staffs' capacity within themselves' – in other words, supporting and investing in their ongoing professional development[10]. As the following participants describe, finding the funding for staff education is a high priority for EDs and program managers:

> *We do encourage staff to submit a training plan at the beginning of the year. And if that training matches the job that they're doing and the goals that they have and where they want to go in the organization then I will match the Work B.C. funding.* (P10)

> *My job is to ensure that we have the best trained staff that we can and ... to build capacity in them because I want a high-quality program [because] our children deserve the best care that we can give them. And so always working with the staff to try and complete their ECE.... We could use ten more ECE's definitely but our staff is really seeing the need to build capacity within themselves and to help out the needs of the center. So, we have five staff right now working on their infant/toddler and we're supporting that. We're helping them pay for their courses, helping them pay to do their practicums, trying to keep it in house as much as possible. So, it feels really good to know that staff are that committed to the program.... When I build the budget I definitely push the need to our funders that we need training dollars and those need to be there to help us with that. And the funders are really good about that, you know, here's why we need these dollars, it's important. We're building capacity, we're doing better work for our families when we have better trained staff and the funders are really good about that.* (P7)

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[10]The current B.C. Child Care Sector Occupational Competencies (Government of British Columbia, nd-a) regulates the learning outcomes for studying to become an ECE. The BC ECE Registry provides certification for ECEs and ECE Assistants that complete recognized post-secondary programs, and recertification after five years working in the field and gaining professional development hours. Occupational competencies are currently being revised.

This participant went on to highlight the need for more work integrated learning opportunities to support professional development while also attending to the need for continuity as previously discussed:

> It hurts me to see people having to take six weeks off work to do a practicum in our province. We need people working and we need to find a way that they can train where they're working because why take them away for six weeks and pull them out and the children lose that person. Our kids can't lose people so we need that continuity and consistency for those children and those families but we also need to figure out a way that we can train staff in their work place. (P7)

The sub-theme of 'building capacity within themselves' is also inclusive of participants' perspectives on the need for more opportunities for ELCC programs to build capacity by having stronger relationships with other programs in their region and different parts of the province. An ED sums this up by saying:

> *[It is] those opportunities amongst Friendship Centers to build each other's capacity. You know, we feel pretty good about the program offerings that we have in terms of our daycares and our Head Start.... Like I think there could be a lot of different learnings and lots of sharing of different kinds of richness amongst the different communities that have Head Starts, for example right? And that we can be reaching out to each other and I know that there are communities that want to have Head Starts but for whatever reason sometimes, it being about capacity, are not able to get them up and going. Well we'd be more than happy to help other communities right?... It seems like there's more and more isolation from each other and that building capacity in that because early childhood is a relatively small world and yet unless you're going to some kind of big meeting you never ever really get together with anyone.* (P6).

The ongoing professional development of ELCC staff is a significant predictor of program quality (Government of Canada, 2017). The BC government projects that expanding the availability of licensed child care and achieving universal child care over the next 10 years will require an additional 12,000 ECEs and other child care professionals (Government of British Columbia, 2018a). It is unclear, whether this projection considers the increasing demand for urban Indigenous ELCC programs and staff. A lack of qualified, skilled staff remains one of the largest barriers to Indigenous ELCC programs (Government of Canada, 2018). These findings are in line with those from a recent study undertaken by the BC Childcare Sector Labour Market Partnership (Early Childhood Educators of BC, 2008), which found that: 1) there is a shortage of qualified ECEs in BC including a need for more Indigenous ECE's, 2) low wages are the most important consideration for losing quality staff,

3) a supportive work environment in childcare requires team building and healthy relationships between staff, 4) there is a lack of financial incentive for ECEAs [ECE Assistants] to pursue full ECE certification, 5) there are not enough quality ECE training programs in many areas, and 6) the current model for practicums is inadequate.

The Government of BC's 'Early Care and Learning Recruitment and Retention Strategy' (Government of British Columbia, 2018b) reinforces the need for: (1) an adequate and stable workforce, comprised of qualified and skilled early care and learning professionals, (2) acknowledging ECE as a viable, sustainable, and valued career, and (3) appropriate compensation plans and human resource strategies. This strategy is supported by $136-million investment over three years from provincial government and $16.3 million in federal funding. As a result, there are increasing educational opportunities and ECE bursary programs in BC in order incentivize and meet the projected increasing need for ECE in BC in effort to support ELCC professionals and universal childcare system in BC.

Professional development can also contribute to the retention of ELCC staff and this is explored in the following sub-theme.

'Taking Care of Staff'

Participants also talked about the importance of taking care of staff in order to keep long-term staff and strengthen their program capacity to 'set up a solid foundation'. As one participant clearly states: *"a solid foundation requires investment and recognition of investment of time, resources, funding, energy and attention to caring for the caregiver [staff]"* (P11). Another participant shares: *"your staff need to be taken care of so that that they can give quality childcare"* (P5). One manager highlights a proactive team approach:

> *So the staff are generally happy with the job satisfaction, our job hours and the pay – we're able to have benefits as well. And I think our new management team in place is really proactive. We have a really good team setting now. So, going forward I think we're going to see really good retention in our staff and that we've really worked hard on that the last couple of years to make sure that our staff were happy.* (P12)

An ED highlights the importance of program managers having the time to listen to program staff about how things are going in their classrooms and 'a voice' to inform and be involved in change:

> *Making sure that you're communicating with your staff regularly. It's really hard to make time to do that in a daycare situation because they're so busy... but you don't know what's going on in here (signaling with hands, space in a classroom) unless you're having conversations. And if you don't give opportunities to have those conversations; whatever is going on just builds up and you don't want that... We've implemented regular staff meetings and that's another thing that we think is very, very important for our staff to have a voice. But we also want to make sure that their voice is about change it's not about just complaining about situations but it's about also coming forward with some recommendations about how they see that change happening? And for us to act on that as quickly as possible but also have them involved then in the change.* (P1)

The need to take care of staff was linked by some participants to the particular demands of their work. As these participants describe: *"our centre has a lot of kids with trauma which demands a lot of attention from the teachers" (P19).* An ED highlights the challenges of working with families and children who are experiencing 'hardships' and the toll on staff:

> *When you are the daycare worker and you're seeing the child come in and you know that they're suffering some sort of a hardship that's really hard to shake off. And when it's happening on a regular basis with different people. One child might be okay but then you roll into another issue with another child and somebody that's not affording food or has a dilemma come up and they're no longer in housing or whatever is going on in their life. It's really hard not to absorb that when you're a daycare worker trying to look after a little spirit that just wants to be loved and happy. (P8)*

This participant went on to to describe the need for funding for staff wellness as a strategy for keeping staff longer:

> *If I could afford to have more wellness for my staff that would make a big difference because I think what happens here is they start to suffer burnout and it's easy to feel too stressed to come back to work or the sick time gets higher. And if I could do more wellness as a preventative measure it would make a big difference because right now they don't like taking time off because we don't have enough subs and also because we don't have that on our contract to offer them. But wellness is so important when you're working with our little guys right? You have to come with 150%, you can't come with less than that. And when you have less then they know it. And when you have less then your team also is affected. And so the more people I have coming with less the whole team is impacted, their stress gets higher. Like if I had more wellness happening then I'd definitely have a healthier staff that wanted to stay longer.* (P8)

Given the context of Indigenous ELCC programs described in this study, and

the critical role that staff play – 'taking care of staff' is a priority that may get overlooked given the multiple demands on everyone's time and energy. This finding also raises questions about how 'taking care of staff' can involve opportunities for staff in different programs to come together and experience of sense of belonging in strong local or regional Indigenous ELCC networks/communities of practice. 'Taking care of staff' from a strengths-based perspective can also encompass having programs that foster job role clarification, appreciation of strengths and work completed, a sense of teamwork and team cohesion, and good communication between staff and management (Deroy & Schütze, 2019).

Discussion

4. Discussion

'Setting up a Strong Foundation' using a Systems Lens

As the findings of this exploratory study show, Indigenous ELCC centres and programs are complex systems that interact both with diverse family and community factors and contexts and organizational, funding and regulatory structures. In this section, we provide a brief overview of a systems lens, which may be useful in future work and research by Friendship Centres on advancing Indigenous ELCC programs.

Using systems thinking acknowledges that children develop within a complex array of family and community relationships, each of which generates different impacts on their development, wellbeing and potential life course (Yoshikawa, Wuermli, Raikes, Kim, & Kabay, 2018). A systems perspective is increasingly recognized as being necessary for effective, equitable, sustainable and high quality ELCC programs across municipal, provincial and national levels (Kagan, Caridad Araujo, Jaimovich, & Aguayo, 2015). This approach may be particularly pertinent at this time in BC, given the recent fast changing landscape of ELCC funding and programming currently underway in this province and the increasing demand for urban Indigenous ELCC programs following decades of relative neglect by previous governments.

Systems thinking recognizes six conditions of change as outlined in Figure (4) below (Kania, Kramer, & Senge, 2018), and requires looking beyond any single organization or program to understand the system by identifying all of the actors that play a role; the relationship among these actors, distribution of power, institutional norms and constraints within which they operate, and the attitudes and assumptions that influence decisions (Kania et al., 2018).

Figure 5: Six Conditions of System Change (Kania et al., 2018)
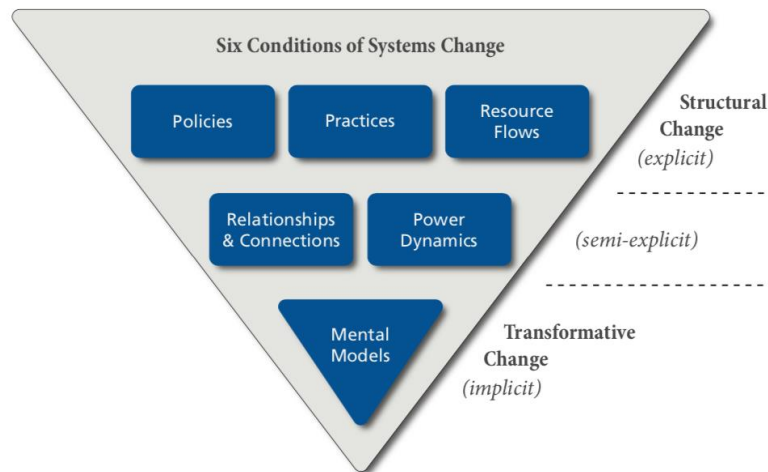
In the context of this study, systems thinking raises questions about who are the key actors and how are their relationships and the distribution of power contributing towards the capacity of their ELCC programs to 'set up a strong foundation' and make a difference. Also, from a systems perspective, 'mental models[11]' in this study represent research participants' shared understandings, including their views, beliefs and assumptions, about their ELCC programs and the families accessing these programs. According to systems thinking, "most systems theorists agree that mental models are foundational drivers of activity in any system. Unless funders and grantees can learn to work at this third level, changes in the other two levels will, at best, be temporary or incomplete." (Kania et al., 2018, p. 8). From this perspective, having shared understandings within the management, Board and ELCC program leadership in Friendship Centres and community stakeholders is key for building the capacity of programs to be able to provide a 'strong foundation' for families and children.

Taking up this perspective in this exploratory qualitative study highlights some of the interdependent conditions/forces that can influence the capacity and

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[11]Mental Models are "habits of thought—deeply held beliefs and assumptions and taken-for-granted ways of operating that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk (Kania et al., 2018, p. 4).

quality of ELCC programs. As noted by the authors of this framework (Kania et al., 2018) –

> These conditions exist with varying degrees of visibility to players in the system, largely due to how explicit, or tangible, they are made to most people...It is important to note that, while these conditions can be independently defined, measured, and targeted for change, they are also intertwined and interact with each other. [Thus] shifts in system conditions are more likely to be sustained when working at all three levels of change (Kania, et al, p. 3, 6).

As the authors of the above model state: "Transforming a system is really about transforming the relationships between people who make up the system.... Simply bringing people into relationship can create huge impact." (Kania et al., 2018, p. 7). Systems change can often mean challenging power structures and institutional norms, and the underlying assumptions that have defined, influenced and shaped mental models historically and in the present and which consequently influence decisions (Kania et al., 2018).

Recommendations

5. Recommendations

   In the following section are recommendations for supporting the operational success of urban-based quality Indigenous ELCC programs based on the themes identified in the data. These recommendations are inter-dependent and importantly require adequate, stable and long-term funding. The recommendations are directed at Friendship Centres' leadership, program managers of ELCC programs, and government decision-makers with the assumption that the operational success of urban Indigenous ELCC programs requires collaboration amongst these key players.

Recommendations: 'Setting Up a Solid Foundation'

ELCC programs are complex systems and 'setting up a solid foundation' for Indigenous communities, families and young children is a complex process that requires a team approach. Recommendations include:

a) Recruiting staff who understand the importance of, and have the relational skills and aptitude to create safe and trusted relationships with families and children.

b) Retaining long-term staff so that families and children can experience and trust staff as 'extended family'.

c) Having adequate staffing ratios so that providing 'a solid foundation for families and children' is possible.

d) Having funding to have a family support worker who has strong community relationships and networks and can understand and respond to the needs of the family as a whole.

e) Having adequate funding to respectfully reimburse Elders and purchase cultural resources.

f) Investing time in Indigenous ELCC programs have a strong visibility within the broader community with strong working relationships between the organizational and program leadership and leaders in family- and child-related programs and resources in the local community.

g) Investing time to have positive working relationships between ELCC leadership and local licensing officers.

h) Engaging in a provincial dialogue about the capacity of programs to navigate current licensing and related policies that can conflict with embedding and revitalizing culture in Indigenous ELCC programs.

In line with systems thinking, this study highlights that having a good working relationship between the ED and ELCC program manager is key to ensuring they, and the Board, are 'on the same page' and working towards a shared vision of what it takes to have a quality program and be 'a difference' maker.

Recommendations: 'Being the Difference Maker'

The capacity of Indigenous ELCC to make a difference in communities and families' lives and trajectory out of intergenerational poverty requires structural changes at local, provincial and federal levels so that programs have the necessary resources – primarily adequate, stable, and long-term funding. Recommendations include:

a) Having funding that allows for a family support worker and/or program manager/coordinator to invest in community relationships with family- and child-related services and leaders.

b) Having structural and relational supports and mechanisms in place to address the priority of increasing funding for communities that have large waiting lists.

c) Conducting research on capturing and evaluating promising practices and innovations in urban Indigenous ELCC policies and programs.

d) Generating evidence on the short- and long-term differences programs make in communities, families and children's current and future lives and opportunities, including how programs are effective at reuniting families or preventing children from being removed from their family.

Recommendations: 'Programs Take a Lot of Money'

Currently, structural inequities that have resulted in inequitable and inadequate funding for urban Indigenous ELCC programs is not keeping pace with the increasing number of Indigenous families seeking quality programs for their children. Similar to the Indigenous Early Learning Framework (Government of Canada, 2018), but in the context of *urban-based* Indigenous ELCC programs, the findings in this report further support the need for stable, sufficient and single-source funding. Recommendations include:

a) Developing a model or template to help guide organizations in the development and funding of new Indigenous ELCC centres and programs.

b) For Friendship Centres and urban Indigenous organizations that are thinking of opening or expanding their ELCC programs to visit organizations that are doing this successfully to help with decision-making and business planning.

c) In planning a new program, consider what else families need and how the ELCC program can be part of a hub model that includes low barrier access to a range of programs and resources in house or in local community.

d) Ensuring that the ELCC program manager is fully informed about budgeting and reporting requirements.

e) Investing time in fostering good working relationships with licensing and starting this before finalizing plans for any new centres or programs in order to gain their input and engagement and have a strong understanding of all regulatory requirements.

f) For the BCAAFC to collate data on waiting lists for ELCC services around the province and use this to advocate with the province and the PHAC for funding.

**Recommendations: 'Our Number One Operational Challenge':
Recruiting/Keeping Staff**

BCAAFC leadership, EDs and managers of ELCC programs are encouraged to explore a system change approach to recruiting and retaining staff. Recommendations include:

a) For ELCC managers and staff with greater opportunities to network, and have stronger professional connections and collaborations including sharing resources, successful capacity building strategies and training initiatives.

b) For ELCC programs to have greater collaboration for professional development initiatives.

c) For the BCAAFC to create a private FaceBook page, or other social media page, for ELCC programs in Friendship Centres.

d) For the training and professional development of ECE to include cultural safety and relational approaches to working with families in Indigenous ELCC programs.

e) For program staff to have individualized professional development plans that are reviewed on an annual basis with their manager.

f) For the leadership and Board of the BCAAFC to have greater collaboration with the leadership and Board of the BCAHSA.

g) Having a team approach where the views of the program management and staff are listened to and acted on – key for staff retention.

h) Relevant to the findings in this study on 'taking care of staff' are the recommendations from Deroy and Schütze (2019) on enhancing the wellbeing of Indigenous staff working in health services which advises that staff wellbeing is enhanced when staff:

    o Feel culturally safe and secure within the workplace

    o Have opportunities for teamwork and collaboration

    o Have job role clarification

o Have supervision and strong managerial leadership and support from peers (e.g., debrief, reflect, receive emotional support and strengthen coping mechanisms)

o Have professional development (i.e., the opportunity for skill development and role progression)

o Are recognized for their skills and strengths (i.e., of work load, quality of work performed, being trusted to work autonomously, and financial remuneration that reflected the high pressure of the role)

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