

Caring Out Loud

Transformative Community Building Through Care



Creating US

Engagement & Being in Community with Early Years Professionals

The AECEO intentionally builds relationships with Early Years Professionals because we understand the power of personal connections.



*ECE meet & greet in Sudbury, ON

We use strategic and organic methods of engagement that respect the entirety of each educator. We always aim to welcome folks without judgment or extractive intentions. We do not lead with how individuals or organizations can contribute to AECEO work. Instead, we take the time to reveal shared values and the capacity building potential that emerges when we lead with co-learning. This is not a pyramid, but rather a circle.

This may sound familiar and that's no coincidence. The AECEO intentionally places the expertise of Early Years Professionals as the foundation of learning and care. The values and principles early years professionals use to guide their work are rightfully positioned as the framework to effectively support the potential of all human beings, including educators themselves.

**Care has made advocacy
and activism accessible
for me because I no
longer think that I can
only do the right thing
when I remain objective,
but I can do the right
thing when I care.**

*Thō, RECE &
Early Years Rise Up TO Co-Lead

The ECE Identity

Desire Focused Narratives

The AECEO understands that in order to collaborate with Early Years Professionals, we must respect the diverse identities of everyone involved. We also know identity creation is an ongoing process. With respect to these truths, we see our role is to elicit realistic and positive reflections of ourselves and our work to form the foundation of our shared ECE identity.

Care workers uniquely and strongly identify with their choice of career. The ways in which early years professionals approach their duties are influenced by their knowledge and experience in the practice of care. These values and principles continue to be strengthened in our programs, despite mixed messages from societal norms, including low compensation and inadequate working conditions. The kindness and passion of ECEs are celebrated, but lack of decent work and limited pathways for escalation or retirement are prevalent.

By supporting the authentic selves of our community and amplifying that self-determined narrative, we are strengthening the capacity for Early Years Professionals to articulate their own worth and decide for themselves how systems should be built.



*ECE meet up at a local park

Radical Transparency

Being Comfortable with Being Accountable

The AECEO understands that community is built at the speed of trust. We approach this truth with having our intentions be clear in theory, as well as in practice.

For example, prior to engaging any part of the workforce, we acknowledge that the identity of the AECEO plays a critical role in that relationship. Whether built from personal experience or a public narrative, those ideas influence where our relationships begins. We take our time to reflect on how the public perceives our work *and* the people who make up the AECEO team. This awareness is meant to create an honest starting place, but also a grounding point for the organization to lean into parts of our identity, while also actively working toward curating other parts to accurately reflect our mission.

While we remain committed to being a place for Early Years Professionals to feel taken care of, we also leave space for reciprocal vulnerability and non-hierarchal collaboration; another way we live our values. Our organizing methods are a way of moving through the world and encourage meaningful connections.

When we encounter difficulty as an organization or as individuals, we allow for those experiences to be shared with the public in a way that prioritizes safety, but also encourages co-learning. We are a safe space for joy, dissent, and curiosity.

We are breaking new ground and aiming for societal transformation!



*AECEO Staff in Severn Bridge, ON



Wayfaring

What We Have Learned So Far

Initially, AECEO CARE Collectives relied on individuals as “leads” and members were organized by geographical region or identity. For example, the Early Years Coalition Waterloo Region was meant to serve Early Years Professionals in that area of Ontario, while the Community of Black ECEs is organized by self-identifying with the Black Community.

Leads were recognized as advocates, faculty, RECEs, etc., and invited to be a connection point in the early years landscape in Ontario.

Soon we learned that “leads” were more satisfied when doing work in pairs or trios. We adapted our structure to incorporate “co-leads” and even began to facilitate more connections between communities. Through monthly meetings with all leads across the province and our inaugural AECEO Retreat in 2023, we foster relationships between all leads, as a key to sustainability.

Another lesson that is now embedded in our organizing is how important it is to take the time to build a shared understanding of our work and our values.

“Joining the AECEO changed the trajectory of my career. I was celebrated for having big ideas, being an entrepreneur, and being a kindergarten professional. I’ve waited 25 years for this.”

*Nicole Cummings, Co-Lead of the Community of Black ECEs

We intentionally unpack the meaning of “care” or “justice” before we move to strategy or action. For example, in our community, “inclusion” allows for participation in any capacity and the natural ebb and flow of life is recognized as an influencing factor to that capacity. Sometime we have more time, sometimes we have less.

A common language and translation into practice is how we build trust and bravery.