

## **Emmanuel at Brighton Child Care Centre Protest and Advocacy**

### **Official Statement from Staff**

**Day of Action: Monday, April 19, 2021**

To preface this statement, the staff of Emmanuel at Brighton Child Care (EaB) recognize that our decision to protest on April 19, 2021 impacts not only our own lives, but those of the children and families we are happy to learn with and care for every day.

Importantly, it should be noted that our protest in no way reflects our direct working conditions. EaB has gone above and beyond for us during these tumultuous times, including doubling our generous contractual sick days to twenty this year.

We are protesting to call on the government to prioritize ECEs and all child care workers in the vaccination schedule, as well as to highlight the need and importance of a comprehensive Universal Child Care Plan.

### **Prioritize Vaccination of Child Care Workers**

On April 19<sup>th</sup>, the first day of Doug Ford's expansion of the Emergency Child Care Plan, we protest the government's doubling down on the safety provided by childcare with no prioritization for vaccines for child care staff; this is dangerous and negligent. With COVID-19 numbers skyrocketing across this province, and the troubling projections, we could wait no longer.

We stand here today on behalf of all early childhood education workers, to **call on the government to finally recognize the importance of the child care sector and the risks its workers face daily by prioritizing ECEs and all child care workers in the vaccination schedule.**

The absence of vaccinations for early child care workers has only increased the risk of exposure for children and staff at child care organizations, particularly those who will accommodate the influx under the Emergency Child Care Plan. Every vaccination in the arm of a child care worker protects not only themselves, but the children, families and, therefore, greater community.

As essential workers, we are proud to support other essential workers during this time. But the reality is that during this pandemic, "education workers" has only meant unionized education workers. Yet despite school board closures, childcare has been open and early childcare workers have remained on the front lines, putting our lives, and our families, at risk every day. If education workers means ALL education workers, we would not be protesting on the sidewalk.

During these confusing and scary times, we are happy to offer support and loving care to the youngest members of our communities; they are unable to wear masks and to expect social distancing would be developmentally inappropriate. Despite the risks, we will always open our arms and our laps to a distraught child who just needs a hug.

## End the Gender Wage Gap

In addition to the risks undertaken daily by child care workers, our sector also suffers from long standing inequities. For decades, long before the pandemic swept the world like wildfire, the approximately 42,000 Early Childhood Educators in this province have felt unheard and unnoticed by both the provincial and federal governments. The early childhood sector is also governed by the Ministry of Education, yet time and time again, ECEs are left at the bottom of the list as an afterthought, if not left out entirely.

Often branded as simple 'women's work', there seems to be little understanding by our government of the pedagogy, planning, professionalism, hard work and commitment that child care workers bring to the table each and every day. Our job is so much more than wiping noses and changing diapers.

Early childhood educators carry a heavy workload that includes observation, documentation, customized emergent curriculum development, as well as engaging in ongoing professional development, and all while making connections and building relationships all day long. We do all of this and more, while wearing masks that protect the children from us, however, we are afforded no safety for ourselves.

Child care workers have worked so very hard to meet and exceed cleaning protocols set forth by Public Health during these uncertain times. In the absence of a Universal Child Care model, the budgets of individual child care centres run a tight line, so the enhanced cleaning measures were added to the duties of already over-worked and underpaid child care workers with no further compensation.

Yet despite this, the gender wage gap is fully felt in our sector, in which we are grossly under compensated and under protected. The AECEO wrote in their Submission to the Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee, "The ongoing invisibility and devaluation of care work in our public discourse limits full recognition and support of the child care workforce, as well as our collective ability to argue for public support of this work."

It has taken a global pandemic to highlight just how essential childcare is to the economy and what a key element it is for economic recovery and growth. While we recognize that we are so very fortunate to be employed by this stellar organization, we recognize that Premier Doug Ford's unwillingness to provide paid sick days to the people of Ontario during a global pandemic has devastating effects on the vast majority of child care workers and further exacerbates the existing wage gap.

EaB staff are protesting on April 19<sup>th</sup> on behalf of all early childhood education workers, **to call on the government to prioritize ECEs and all child care workers in the COVID-19 vaccination schedule, as well as to highlight the need and importance of a comprehensive Universal Child Care Plan.**

## Call to Action

### Support EaB staff:

If you are able, drive down Noecker Street in Waterloo and honk your support between 9:00am-3:00pm on April 19, 2021

(we ask that no one shows up for in-person support, given the current 'Stay-at-Home' order. Staff will be wearing PPE and spaced along the sidewalk in small groups in our current teaching cohorts, with whom we spend each workday)

### Support all staff working in child care:

- call your local MPPs office (In Waterloo, call Catherine Fife's office at (519) 725-3477 or email is [cfife-co@ndp.on.ca](mailto:cfife-co@ndp.on.ca))
- write to your local elected government officials, pressing the importance of this message (copy and paste any/all from above)
- use your social media presence to advocate for child care @Sfleece @fordnation @RodPhillips01 using the hashtags #ECEPower #StandWithEaBChildCare #VaccinateChildCareWorkers #endthegenderwagegap #paysickdays
- write to your local Public Health unit on the issue of child care worker vaccination prioritization
- if you work at a child care centre, consider organizing a similar single day initiative, so we can continue to send the message to all levels of government that despite our lack of collective bargaining, we are not expendable pawns; we are essential and deserve to be heard and respected
- help amplify the calls for ECEs, child care workers and providers to receive the vaccine immediately by signing the Protect and Respect Open Letter here: [https://www.childcareontario.org/protect\\_respect\\_ecec](https://www.childcareontario.org/protect_respect_ecec)