



College of New Caledonia receives national bursary funding to support innovative work-integrated learning model for early childhood educators

Prince George

The College of New Caledonia (CNC) received bursary funding through CEWIL Canada's iHUB program to support Innovation in the North: Maximizing Work-Integrated Learning for Early Childhood Education Certification, an initiative designed to help local childcare workers earn Early Childhood Education (ECE) certification while remaining employed in their communities. The bursaries help reduce financial barriers by offsetting tuition costs, making certification more accessible to those who might otherwise be unable to leave paid employment to attend school full-time.

"Protecting access to affordable childcare means ensuring more trained workers enter the field. This initiative strengthens local workforce and quality childcare in Prince George," said the Honourable Anna Gainey, Canada's Secretary of State (Children and Youth).

The program supports up to 10 students currently working in licensed childcare centres in Prince George, enabling them to complete credit-bearing coursework through CNC while developing new skills.

Unlike traditional classroom-based programs or short-term practicums, this model embeds learning directly into the workplace. Students complete required courses through structured observation, reflective practice, and weekly instruction linked to their daily work with children. Faculty provide ongoing mentorship, assessments are based on real-world experiences, and students participate in a community of practice alongside their peers.

"This project reflects CNC's commitment to finding practical, community-driven solutions to workforce challenges in the North," said Cindy Heitman, President of the College of New Caledonia. "By meeting learners where they are and supporting them to gain certification while continuing to work, we are strengthening the early childhood education sector and improving access to quality childcare for families in our region."

Jessica Fee, Early Childhood Care and Learning Faculty, said the program provides opportunities for learning to begin directly in childcare programs, working alongside children.

“This approach allows students to begin with the children and their real experiences in childcare settings,” said Fee. “From there, we choose the readings, videos, and learning resources that deepen understanding. It builds stronger professional confidence and learning that is grounded in real relationships with children, families, and colleagues.”

Candis Johnson, ECCL Program Coordinator, notes that the WIL model reflects the high quality of CNC Early Childhood Care and Learning programs, offering students consistent mentorship, instructor support across courses, and intentional reflective learning that strengthens professional growth.

“The Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) option in the Early Childhood Care and Learning (ECCL) program expands the already flexible learning pathways available to students. In addition to full program delivery both face-to-face and online, as well as a successful dual credit program for high school students, WIL offers another meaningful way to combine learning with practice. Students can continue their employment while receiving on-site mentorship and ongoing instructor support across multiple courses. Weekly reflective meetings help students connect theory to practice, build professional judgement, and develop the critical thinking skills essential for early learning environments.”

Fee noted the bursary funding plays a critical role in ensuring equitable access to certification.

“Many early childhood educators want to become certified but simply cannot afford to step away from work or manage tuition costs,” said Fee. “These bursaries and Work Integrated Learning opportunities remove a significant barrier and open the door for talented, committed educators to advance their careers while continuing to support their families and communities.”

“This program has helped me in my learning because I'm a hands-on learner, and connecting with the little ones in my territory has helped me to continue healing and connect me more with my culture. It gives me a chance to teach my traditions and language and has been a rewarding and grateful experience,” said Jaimie Poirier, student and member of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation.

“As a mom who needs to work full-time, going back to school in a traditional setting wasn't really an option for me. Honestly, the traditional school system has never fully supported my learning style, even though I truly love to learn. The WIL program has given me the opportunity to participate in post-secondary education in a way that actually works for my life and responsibilities,” said student Sadie Pointer.



MEDIA RELEASE

March 3, 2026

“This program has not only allowed me to continue working while studying, but it has also helped me grow in confidence and deepen my understanding of early childhood education in a very real, practical way. I feel like I’ve truly been able to excel and, for the first time, feel genuinely understood and supported as a learner.

I’m really grateful for this opportunity and for how much this program has supported both my professional and personal growth.”

Through partnerships with local childcare centres, the program also helps address ongoing labour shortages in the early learning sector by creating a sustainable pathway for uncertified staff to become fully qualified educators. Upon completion, graduates are eligible for provincial certification and increased wages, strengthening both individual career prospects and the stability of childcare services in northern communities.

This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada’s Innovative Work-Integrated Learning Initiative and CEWIL, Canada’s iHUB.

Funded in part by the
Government of Canada’s Innovative
Work-Integrated Learning Initiative

Canada

CEWIL | ECAIT
CANADA

Holly Plato

Manager, Communications and Advancement

College of New Caledonia

media@cnc.bc.ca | +1 778 349 5634