



# Annual Report 2024/25

New Name, Same Heart





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## Our Vision

Communities embrace diversity and uphold the rights of all children and their families.

## Our Mission

To build on the skills, knowledge, and confidence of families and educators to ensure that children are supported in inclusive settings and meaningfully participate in everyday routines.

## Our Values

### Family-Centred Practice

Parents hold a central role in decision making and choices for the well-being of their child and family. Parents experience active participation, learning, and gain confidence to positively influence their children's future.

### Inclusion

The belief that "we all belong." All children have the right to participate in natural settings. When children are included, they are active and valued participants in life.

### Learning Through Play & Everyday Routines

Play nourishes development and forms a strong foundation for learning. Through play, children make sense of their world, expand their imagination, gain independence, and develop friendships.

### Learning Community

The most valuable assets of an organization are engaged and passionate people. Together, they learn, seek knowledge, and discover innovative practices for their work.

## Message from the Board Chair



Recently I listened to a presentation about the impact an educator had on a student with a challenging communication disability. The student – now an adult – profiled the huge gap between being expected to demonstrate competence versus Potential. The entirety of her message was **expect more** – expect *Potential*.

The student told how expectations to demonstrate competence masked their potential. The belief that she could do more led her to do more.

At Kids Included – we did exactly that this year. More. We delved into reexamining who do we serve, who else can we serve, how do we serve and what is the next evolution to refresh this respected and revered early childhood education organization.

And the result of expecting more *Potential* is the evolution of GRIT to Kids Included. Naming what we do – increasing the ability of children living with disabilities to live inclusive lives boldly states our *Potential*.

Over the last year, Kids Included's board of directors ensured that the organization's reputation for efficiency, and effectiveness maximized its Potential. The outcomes of extensive committee work illustrate the importance of highly skilled directors guiding a rapidly evolving organization adopting best practices as recognized by

international organizations doing similar work. Policy work is the framework for nonprofit Boards of Directors and with the refinement of a catalogue of policies, the Kids Included board maturity started five years ago is now evident. All of this is included in this Annual Report, New Name, Same Heart.

There is an increasing recognition by funders – public and private – that Kids Included is the leading Canadian organization delivering inclusive program models for childcare centres and early childhood education classrooms.

The strategic leadership of CEO Amber Mack is elemental to these successes. I know the board shares in the respect her team members, clients, and stakeholders hold for her in her continuing focus on meeting *Potential*.

An effective board requires deeply committed volunteers with a variety of areas of expertise and governance experience. The foundation that this board has created is an extraordinary display of governance. My deep gratitude for the opportunity to serve Kids Included with them is only exceeded by my admiration for their contributions.

**Karen Lynch**

Kids Included Board Chair





## Message from the CEO



This past year has been one of incredible growth, learning, and connection. As I look back, I'm filled with gratitude for all of the people who make Kids Included such a strong, compassionate, and forward-thinking community. From our caring board, to every staff member, together, we've deepened our impact while staying true to our mission and our core value of inclusion.

Our new name marks more than a change in identity—it's a reflection of who we've become and where we're going. It speaks to our confidence, our clarity of purpose, and the trust we've earned across the sector. It's also a lot more fun, and not another acronym. The *Inclusion Summit*, *Connecting Canada*, and the launch of our unified bilingual resources further demonstrate how we are growing as both learners and leaders—sharing knowledge, building bridges, and shaping inclusion for tomorrow.

We've also embraced creativity in new and exciting ways. The *emPOWER Car* project reminds us what can happen when innovation meets compassion—volunteers, families, and engineers coming together to give children greater independence and joy through movement. It's inclusion in action, powered by creativity and community.

At the heart of everything we do is the understanding that inclusion happens in community and relationship. It's built through connection, shared effort, and the courage to keep showing up for one another.

I invite you to turn the page and see the stories, milestones, and moments that made this year so meaningful. I hope you feel as inspired as I do by what we've accomplished—and what's still to come.

With gratitude,

**Amber Mack**  
Kids Included CEO



# New Name, Same Heart

## GRIT is now Kids Included.

Our biggest story this year was the renaming of our organization after more than 40 years as GRIT. In June 2025, we proudly unveiled our new name: Kids Included.

This new name more clearly reflects who we are and what we stand for: an inclusive early childhood experience where every child is valued, supported, and included.

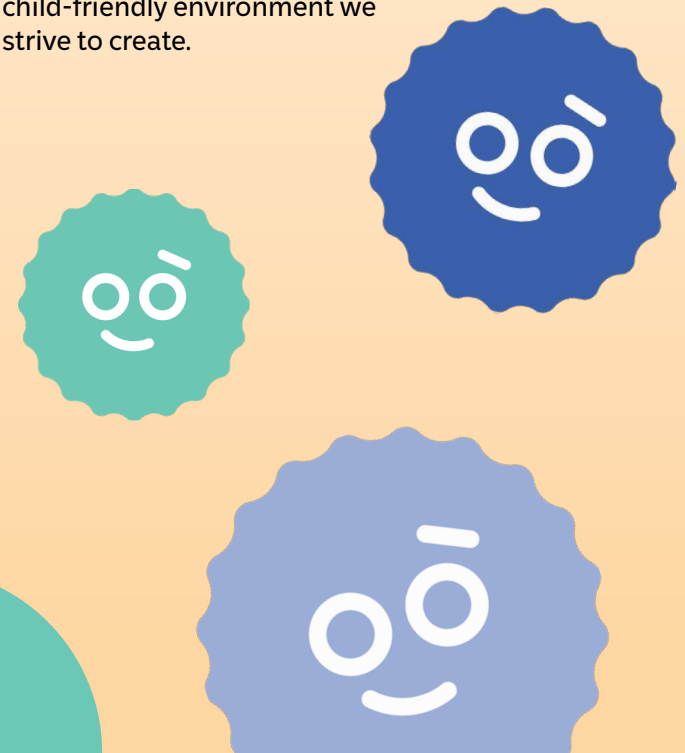
The process of selecting a new name included engagement with the Board of Directors, all agency staff, and current and alumni GRIT families. Based on common themes in the input from all these sources, we arrived at Kids Included as our new name: a bold, succinct expression of our core goal and purpose.

While our name has changed, our mission remains the same. As always, we are deeply committed to supporting young children with disabilities or complex medical needs and their families through expert, family-centred services. We continue to collaborate with early childhood educators and child care programs to build inclusive environments that benefit all children. To our families, partners, and supporters, thank you for being part of our journey. Kids Included is more than a new name; it's a renewed promise to keep building a world where all kids belong.



## Meet Fuzzy!

The friendly face you see in our new logo is Fuzzy – a warm and welcoming mascot inspired by the expression “that gave me a warm fuzzy.” Many of us also have happy memories of making our own “warm fuzzies” with pompoms and googly eyes at school! This little character brings personality and heart to our branding that reflects the joyful, nurturing, and child-friendly environment we strive to create.



# Introducing the *emPOWER* Car

Co-created by Kids Included and APEGA

Independent movement enhances children's cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional development, especially during critical periods of brain development in the early years. The problem? Very few power mobility devices are designed to fit small children with mobility challenges during this critical window of early brain development.



The few options that did exist were expensive, too large and heavy for families to transport, not adaptable to accommodate children's growth or different steering needs, and often not available in Canada at all.

In 2019, a group of volunteers from Kids Included and APEGA came together to create a solution: the *emPOWER* Car.

After five years of prototyping, testing, and refining the design of our new power mobility vehicle, we delivered our first batch of *emPOWER* Cars to families in December 2024. This was a proud moment for the volunteer engineers, physical therapists, and occupational therapists who worked together to develop the cars, and a transformative gift for the children who received them.

## What makes the *emPOWER* Car different?

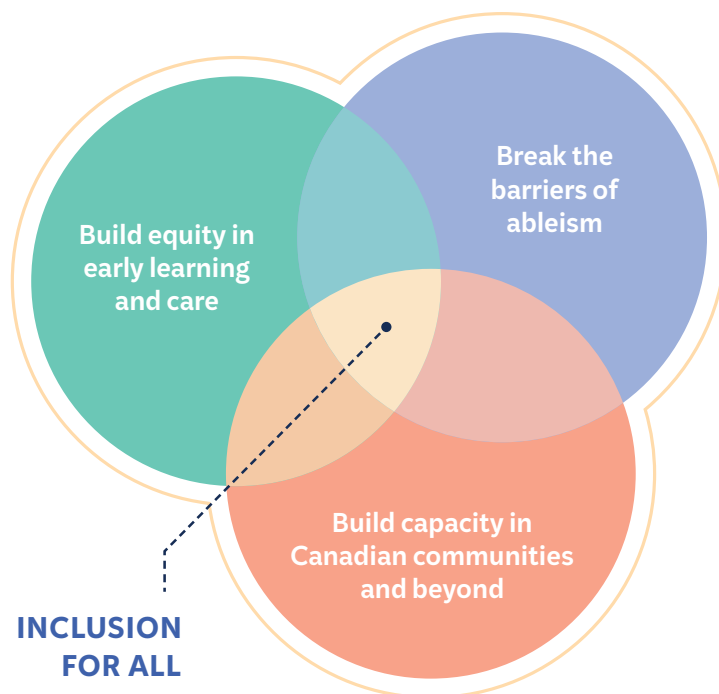
- Affordable (\$1000 to build vs. \$12,000+ for other devices)
- Portable (fits in the back of a small sedan)
- Customizable (many options for controls, adjustable tray)
- Design/plans are open source (not sold for profit)
- Provided on long-term loan to families at no cost



# Key Achievements in 2024-25

## Progress on our Strategic Priorities

Last year, Kids Included Board of Directors and staff set three strategic directions to guide and focus our work in 2025-2030. We are in Year 1 of implementing this five-year plan and already have many successes to celebrate.



## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: Break the Barriers of Ableism

### Establishing Shared Strengths-Based Language

- Training for team leads on CanChild's F-Words for Child Development
  - » The F-Words: *Functioning, Family, Fitness, Fun, Friends, Future*
  - » Shared framework of strengths-based language for families and staff
- Progress on embedding individualized program plans in our ECS program

### Free Learning for Families on Supporting Children's Mental Health

- Opening Minds Series (six sessions)
  - » Breaking silence/stigma and sharing strategies to support children's wellbeing
- Inclusive Solutions Design Sprint
  - » Hosted a design sprint with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Child Care, policymakers, and community partners to co-create solutions for three key challenge areas in inclusion during the early years

### More Support for Inclusive Practices in Family Dayhomes

- Over 50% more family dayhome operators were supported through our ICC and ASaP programs this year

### emPOWER Car Licensing and Launch

- emPOWER Cars licensed by Health Canada and distributed to families
- Power mobility helps children join in play and supports inter-abled friendships



## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2: Build Capacity in Canadian Communities and Beyond

### Name Change for Clarity and Transparency

- New name makes our purpose clearer at a glance for potential partners
- Updated branding reflects joy, playfulness, approachability, child-centred approach

### Enhanced Online Resources for Users Across Canada

- New Kids Included website available in both English and French
- New bilingual resource library with improved search tools
- Stepping up as the Canadian hub for inclusion in the early years

### Building Internal Capacity: Supporting Employee Wellbeing

- Gathered feedback from all staff about their psychological safety at work
- New training and tools to help leaders support employee mental health and wellbeing
- Ongoing work to ensure our staff get the tools they need to be at their best

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3: Build Equity in Early Learning and Child Care

### Inclusion Grant Pilot

- Pilot developed and submitted to the Government of Alberta
- Aims to promote collaboration between Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services and Ministry of Education and Child Care

### Supporting Excellence in Inclusive Early Learning Practices

- Pyramid Model framework of inclusive practices includes evaluation component
- With support from Kids Included coaches, 19 more programs across Alberta reached demonstration/exemplar status this year in implementing Pyramid Model practices

### Building and Sustaining Relationships with Indigenous Partners

- Relationship building and knowledge exchange has taken place this year with the Alberta Aboriginal Head Start Association and Maskwacis

# Program Highlights

## Early Childhood Services (ECS)

ECS offers multidisciplinary supports for children with disabilities and their families. This year, our ECS teams made

**OVER 2000 VISITS** to support  
**112 Edmontonian families**

in their children's homes and community settings.

### Highlights for the ECS program this year include:

- Delivering a free virtual learning series for families on supporting children's mental health (Opening Minds: Building Family Resilience), funded by Edmonton Family and Community Support Services
- Presenting on the Neuro-Relational Framework at the 2025 Division of Early Childhood Conference in New Orleans
- Applying Envisage training from CanChild to enhance family-centred practice
- Developing video training for families and staff on supporting children using AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) devices
- Rolling out improved communication technology for front-line ECS staff, including new work phones with enhanced security features
- Adding three emPOWER Cars to the ECS equipment lending library



## Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD)

FSCD is a Government of Alberta program that provides services and supports for families of children with chronic developmental, physical, sensory, mental, or neurological conditions or impairments. Kids Included is one of many organizations across Alberta that receives funding through FSCD to support families enrolled in this program.

This year, Kids Included saw a **50% increase** in the number of children and families we support through FSCD. We also continue to pilot a new format of service delivery that is aimed to make the program more flexible and responsive to children's needs without increasing costs.

## Access, Support, and Participation (ASaP)

ASaP provides coaching support and professional learning on inclusive practices for licensed early learning and child care programs, supporting each program for up to two years. Additional group coaching is also available for ASaP alumni programs who have completed their initial engagement with ASaP.

### 2024-25 Highlights

By the end of the program year, our ASaP Coaches had made **2,745 VISITS** to the **259 early learning programs** receiving support through this program across Alberta

**47 ASaP alumni programs** continued their learning this year by participating in group coaching.

### Goals Set by Participating Programs

Program directors and educators choose the goals they want their ASaP Coach to help them achieve. This year, programs enrolled in ASaP were most interested in learning about:

- Teaching behavior expectations
- Schedules, routines, and activities
- Teaching problem-solving skills
- Responding to children with persistent challenging behavior
- Teaching social skills and emotional competencies

### Professional Development Through ASaP

**1687 early learning and child care professionals** attended live professional development sessions through ASaP this year. **390 participants** also accessed self-directed learning modules on inclusive practices through the ASaP website.



## What Participants are Saying

“Our educators really enjoyed the ASaP modules, learning strong skill sets to utilize in our everyday work with children to make them feel included, responded to, and have their needs met. We have added ASaP modules into our onboarding process. The resources we share with our families are greatly appreciated, with many of them sharing that they gained new strategies they would not have thought of before. We have incorporated the Pyramid Model framework and practices into our yearly staff evaluations, peer coaching sessions, and parent meetings, which has helped us stay consistent with our practices.”

“This program is great! We have learned so much from our coach since she started visiting our centre. We LOVE the ASaP resources and share them with families all the time.”

**PAULA AND RYLEE**, Little Owls Learning Centre



Left to right, Tami Vick (Program Director), Melissa Martinet (Program Coordinator), Lizzy Gorgonio (Site Lead)

I think every program and educator in Alberta should have the opportunity to participate in ASaP, as they will learn to be more reflective and learn strong practices to support all children and families.”

**MELISSA MARTINET**, Program Coordinator,  
Inglewood Child Development Centre

“Since implementing ASaP I have seen so many positive differences, and licensing has been so impressed as well... I feel all rooms [in our program] have benefitted from ASaP. I have noticed more positive teacher interactions. I see all educators using a variety of tools to support the children, from visuals to naming and validating emotions to communicating differently with children... I see calmness over chaos and a reduction in challenging behaviours. I see enhanced social skills where there are more positive interactions among peers. I see educators communicating with clearer expectations – being firm, however also being kind – and creating bonds with the children. The children seem to feel valued for who they are, and they are more actively engaged in activities.”

**SHARRON AMMANN**,  
Director, Kids Cove Daycare



## Inclusive Child Care (ICC)

ICC provides brief, intensive coaching support and professional development opportunities for licensed early learning and child care programs. Programs apply for support in one room at a time, with some centres receiving support in multiple rooms.

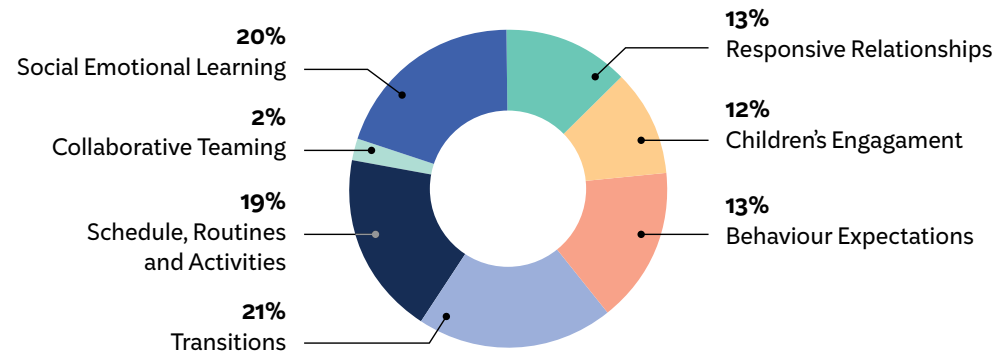
### ICC Checklist: Measuring Improvements

The ICC Checklist tracks educator implementation of inclusive practices. Across all programs supported by ICC this year, the average baseline score was 36.5% before coaching, which increased to an average of 59% at the end of six months of coaching – **a 22% IMPROVEMENT in observed inclusive practices.**

### Educators reported significant changes in their practice, including:

- Increased use of visual supports and inclusive materials
- Creating more predictable routines and smoother transitions
- Stronger emotional regulation and social-skill-building strategies
- Greater focus on individualized supports for children

Percentage of Programs Supported by Area



### Engaging Program Directors and Multi-Disciplinary Teams

Director engagement was another critical factor in sustaining change. **64% OF ICC COACHING VISITS included director involvement**, focusing on mentoring, planning, and providing infrastructure to support ongoing implementation of inclusive practices.

ICC coaches also engaged with other professionals such as speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, social workers, behavior consultants and Early Learning Inclusion Navigators. **16% OF ICC COACH VISITS involved collaboration with multi-disciplinary teams**, including consultations, resource sharing, joint visits, and developing strategies to strengthen educator capacity and child engagement.

### Engaging Families

A key addition to ICC in 2024-25 was the use of family meetings to proactively support child care placements. In several cases, this helped prevent expulsion by aligning the child's strengths and needs with program capacity and appropriate supports. Through these meetings, families, educators, and Kids Included staff developed shared plans that prioritized skill-building and inclusion.

## Connecting Canada Project Wrap-Up

Connecting Canada (funded by the Government of Canada's Early Learning and Childcare – Innovation Program) was a multi-year project that brought early learning sector leaders across Canada together to fill in the gaps when it comes to providing inclusive child care for children with disabilities.

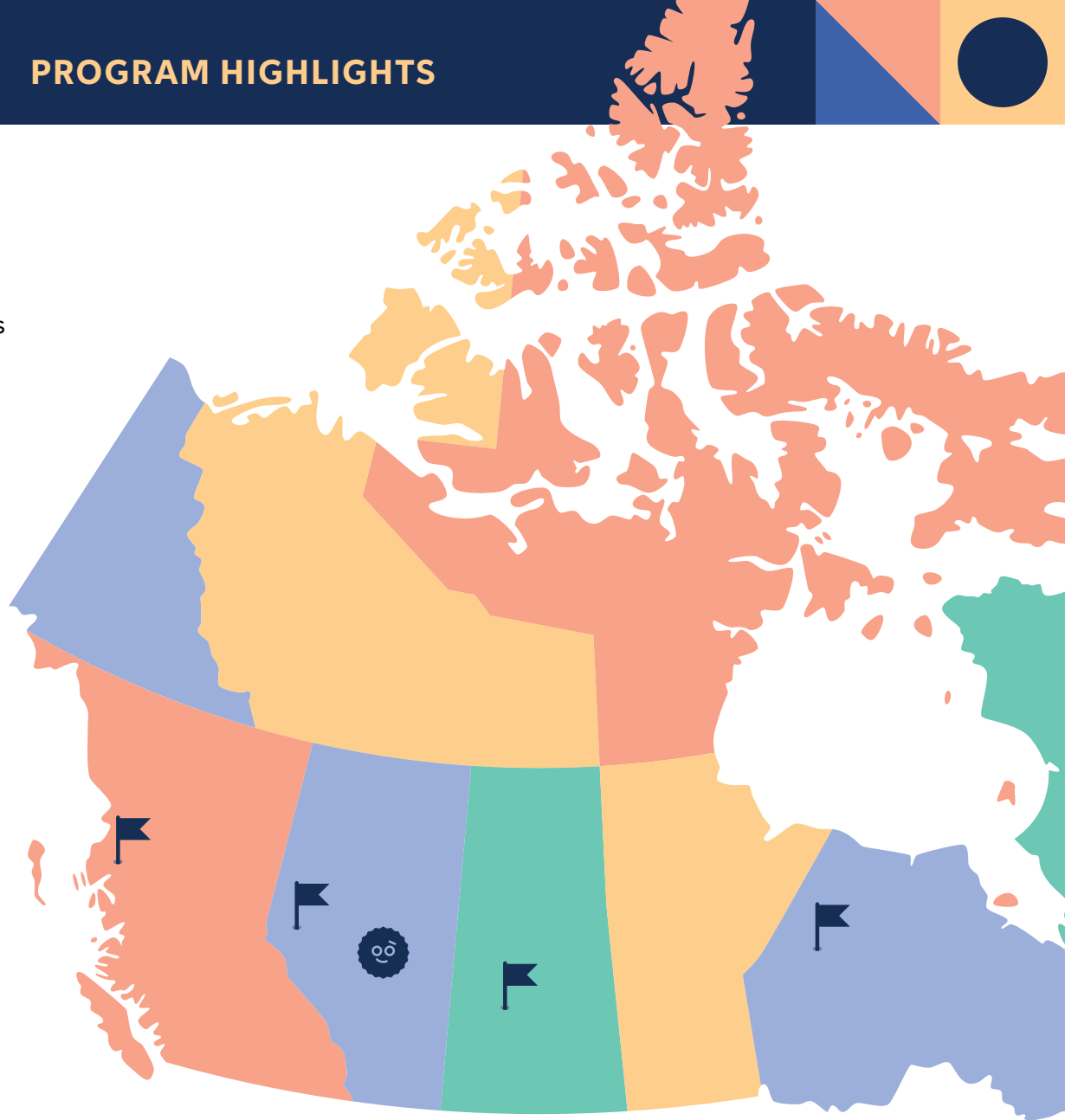
As we wrapped up this final year of the federally funded Connecting Canada project grant, Kids Included focused on providing opportunities for partners to share their learnings, celebrating with the partner organizations who participated, and finding ways to continue this work now that the grant period has concluded.

### Outcomes and Impact

Preliminary project evaluations show that Connecting Canada had a significant impact on the early learning and child care programs that participated. Educators demonstrated increased understanding and application of inclusive practices by:

- Proactively teaching social-emotional skills
- Accommodating diverse learning needs
- Using evidence-informed tools to support their practice and measure progress
- Shifting from reactive practices to reflective practices

Many organizations reported noticeable decreases in challenging behaviour and improved classroom environments within their programs.



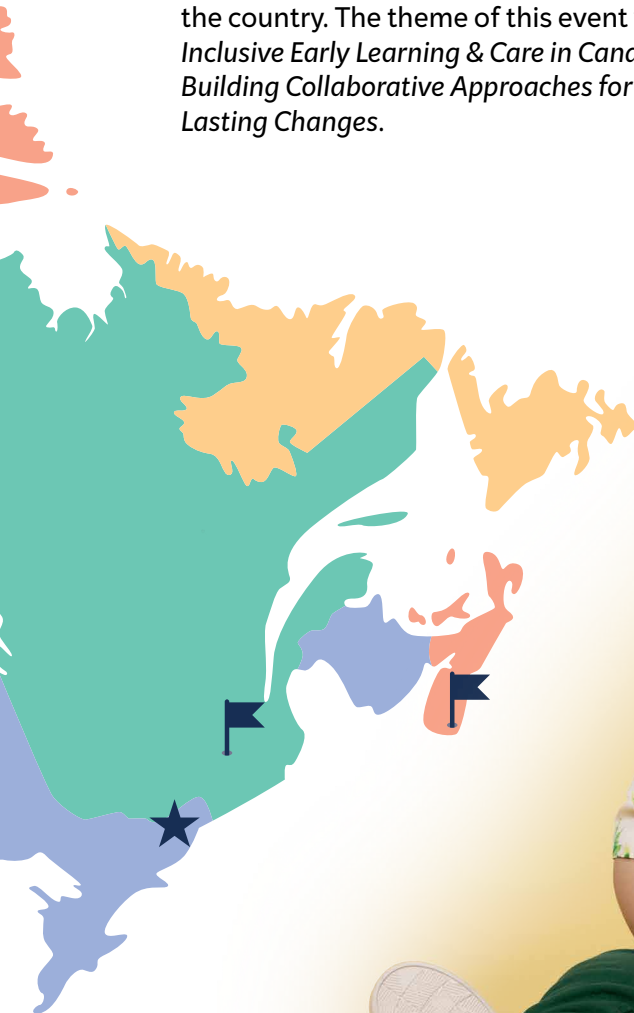
## Connecting Canada Partner Gathering: March 2025

On March 26 and 27, Kids Included hosted a spring gathering for our Connecting Canada partners from across the country. The theme of this event was *Inclusive Early Learning & Care in Canada: Building Collaborative Approaches for Lasting Changes.*

## Connecting Canada Project Partners

**13 PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS** from **11 provinces and territories** participated in Connecting Canada:

- Early Childhood Development Association of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, PEI
- North Hastings Children's Services, Bancroft, ONT
- New Brunswick Dept. Of Education and Early Childhood Development, Anglophone, NB
- New Brunswick Ministère de l'Éducation et du Développement de la petite enfance, NB
- The Centre for Child Development, Surrey, BC
- Child Development Centre (Early Learning Program Support), Whitehorse, YT
- Family and Child Care Connections, Newfoundland & Labrador, St. John's, NL
- Amiskwaciy Cultural Society (Head Start Program), Edmonton, AB
- Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services, Halifax, NS
- Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association, Weyburn, SK
- Newfoundland and Labrador Dept of Education, St. John's, NL
- Northwest Territories Early Childhood Association, Inuvik, NT
- YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg, MB



# Professional Learning at Kids Included

## Quick Facts

From September 1, 2024 to August 31, 2025, Kids Included provided a total of **151 WORKSHOPS** to **7,119 PARTICIPANTS**.

We delivered **56% more on-demand workshops** to meet specific organizations' needs compared to the previous year.

Our team also presented **9 conference sessions** and hosted **5 information tables** at **11 conferences**, including provincial, national, and international learning events.

## New Learning Opportunities for Professionals and Families

This year we received a grant through Edmonton Family & Community Support Services to provide a new learning series on supporting young children's mental health, with streams for professionals and families.

**97 EDUCATORS** attended the Mental Health Core Competencies series for professionals, and **134 parents and caregivers** attended the corresponding Building Family Resilience series.

## Partnership with the Canadian Child Care Federation

In the fall of 2024, we partnered with the Canadian Child Care Federation to deliver a series of three workshops on inclusion for child care providers.

Each of these workshops was attended by **OVER 200 PARTICIPANTS** from across Canada.

## Participant Feedback

*"Before I would have said that I have quite a few difficult children in my room but now I'll be saying that I have more children in my room who experience the world differently and need some extra help."*

*"I appreciate these opportunities to further my understanding. Listening to fellow educators enriches my practices."*

*"I really enjoyed the entire workshop. It was inspiring, practical, and gave me a lot of useful ideas to use in my work."*

*"I appreciate the ability to capture the concept in such a short amount of time in plain language that anyone engaging in the session can understand."*





# Financials

## Statement of Financial Position

ASSETS	2024/2025	2023/2024
Cash & temporary investments	\$ 5,638,168	\$ 5,436,728
Accounts receivable	91,490	135,099
Prepaid expenses	19,758	32,853
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>5,749,416</b>	<b>5,604,680</b>
Long term investments	–	–
Capital Assets	190,859	238,106
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>5,940,275</b>	<b>5,842,786</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>	<b>2023/2024</b>
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>3,317,866</b>	<b>3,517,958</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>	<b>2023/2024</b>
Unrestricted	1,908,726	1,561,488
Investment in Capital Assets	186,223	235, 880
Restricted	527,460	527,460
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>2,622,409</b>	<b>2,324,828</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 5,940,275</b>	<b>\$ 5,842,786</b>

## Statement of Activities

REVENUE	2024/2025	2023/2024
Alberta ED	\$ 3,802,848	\$ 3,455,037
Other Alberta Government	5,640,141	4,754,737
Government of Canada	747,313	572,852
Alberta Municipalities	40,495	5,742
Donations	89,424	101,638
Fundraising	–	2,000
Investment/other income	626,539	301,036
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>10,946,760</b>	<b>9,193,043</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>	<b>2023/2024</b>
Program Services	9,538,771	8,039,309
Admin/Operations	1,110,408	1,096,950
Fundraising	–	–
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 10,649,179</b>	<b>\$ 9,136,259</b>
Change in unrestricted net assets	297,581	56,783
Change in restricted net assets	–	–
Net assets - beginning of year	2,324,828	2,268,045
Net assets - end of year	2,622,409	2,324,828

## Thank you to our donors.

Your support fills children's lives with joy,  
friendship, and discovery.

### \$250-\$999

Ally Stone –  
The Inspired Leader

Amelia Tritter

Catherine Sandmeyer

Emma Pivato

Evelyn Stolk

Garry Hayes

Jackie Cromie

Joni Turville

Karen Lynch

Lori Mack

Marilyn Armstrong

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PaperDoll Clothing Co.

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### \$5,000+

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Thank you to our Board Directors for their expertise and committed dedication, strategic insight and transformative leadership.



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Every gift matters. Help us make sure every child has the chance to belong, explore, and dream on their own terms.

### To Make a One-Time or Monthly Donation

Visit [kidsincluded.ca/donate](https://kidsincluded.ca/donate)

**DONATE HERE**

## Contact us

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