

Early 
Childhood 
Development
ASSOCIATION OF PEI

Rooted In Care

Fall Conference 2025



November 6th & 7th, 2025

Charlottetown, PEI

FALL CONFERENCE



PARTNERS

Thank you partners! Without your help, Our
Fall Conference wouldn't be the same!



Lambe & Associates, Inc.
Independent Financial Services



The Great George
Charlottetown's Historic Boutique Hotel



COX & PALMER



Thank You!

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SCHEDULE

Thursday

- 7:45 - 8:35 Registration
- 8:45 - 12:15 Keynote Experience
- 12:30 - 1:45 Lunch
- 1:45-4:00 Keynote Experience



- Doors Open 8:30
- Morning Breakout Experience 9:00 - 12:00
- Lunch 12:00 - 1:15
- Afternoon Breakout Experience 1:15 - 4:00

Friday

WELCOME

The ECDA Team and Board are excited to welcome you to the 2025 Fall Conference: *Rooted in Care!*

This year's conference facilitators will inspire your professional journey and support the work you do with children and families. We have a variety of unique *experiences* to choose from and we feel confident that you'll have the opportunity to explore what matters most to you and the work you do.

Our *Rooted in Care* Conference invites you to reflect on our shared journey in Early Learning and Child Care: where we've been, what we've learned, and how we can continue to grow, personally and professionally. Through engaging sessions, thought-provoking discussions, and opportunities for connection, we'll explore how care – for children, families, educators, and ourselves – remains at the center of high-quality early learning.

Whether you're just beginning your path in the field or have been part of it for years, there are experiences waiting for you!

Join us as we reflect on resiliency, finding our well, and how we can all impact the future for children and families



THANK YOU

A heartfelt thank you to everyone involved in this event! To our contributors, sponsors, volunteers, attendees, we would like to extend our deepest thank you.

The support, contributions, and the time you devote are invaluable and this event would not be a success without you and the commitment you bring.

We are proud to host you and present this conference to you our valued members, your voices and passion are reflected throughout these pages. We hope you gain new perspectives and insights to apply to your practice and leave feeling ready to conquer the world! Above all, we hope you leave feeling a little more inspired and passion-filled. Thank you! ❤️





REMINDERS

CHILDREN AT THE CONFERENCE

While we love to watch children run and play, this is an adults only kind of day. However, you are welcome to bring infants under 9 months.

We hope you will understand our decision to make the conference children-free, and take the opportunity to learn and network care-free!

AN INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

To ensure a safe and respectful environment please be considerate of the following guidelines during the conference:

- **Cell phones on silent** during the sessions
- **Scent Free** spaces
- No chatting; **Save the networking conversations for the breaks and lunch**
- Be respectful and polite - we are all in this together!



"The simple act of caring is heroic."

— Edward Albert

DAY 1

THURSDAY

NOVEMBER 6TH

DAY 1

KEYNOTE

Experience



EastLink Centre, Charlottetown



Dr. Deborah MacNamara

The Science Behind Roots and Wings: Why relationship and play are the foundation of early learning and growth

Growing Resilience: The Role of Emotion in Raising Resourceful Kids

Jessica Janzen

The Blueprint for Resiliency and Joy



Lucas Arsenault

Professional Athlete / Shark Attack Survivor

It Gets Better

And Special Guests!



DAY 2

FRIDAY

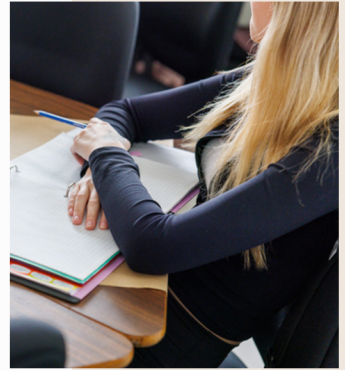
NOVEMBER 7TH

DAY 2

BREAKOUT *Experience*

A NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

This year, we're introducing a brand-new format for the Fall Conference! Instead of being hosted in a school, this year's conference has been reimagined to better serve our growing membership and provide a richer, more inspiring learning environment. On **Day Two**, participants will take part in a Breakout Experience, where you'll **select one of 14 unique breakout streams**. Each Breakout Experience is designed with **paired morning and afternoon sessions** held close together, so you can immerse yourself in meaningful topics without needing major travel between venues. This new approach is **built from your feedback**, and we can't wait for you to experience it!



VENUES



Various locations in Charlottetown

- The Guild
- Red Shores
- Hotel on Pownal
- Murphy's Community Centre
- The Mack
- Confederation Centre
- Holiday Inn
- Belvedere Golf Course
- Quality Inn & Suites
- Atlantic Technology Centre



Experience One

Making Sense of Anxiety & Finding Your 'Well': An Educator's Unexpected Path to Long-Term Well-Being

Experience Two

Finding Your 'Well': An Educator's Unexpected Path to Long-Term Well-Being & Letting Children Feel, Think, and Problem Solve

Experience Three

Creating Classrooms that Work: Strategies for Success & “You’re Not the Boss of Me”: The Science of Resistance in Kids

Experience Four

Supporting Sensory Overload in Toddlers and Preschoolers: Tools for Calm and Connection in a classroom & Designing for Differences: Creating Sensory-Smart Classrooms That Support Regulation, Personality, and Emotional Wellbeing

Experience Five

Culturally Relevant Pedagogical Practices in ECE: Supporting Newcomer Families and Children to Foster Belonging and Wellbeing in Early Learning and Childcare & Mentoring Matters: Supporting Growth in Every Role

Experience Six

Play and Regulation & An ECE's Role in the Care of Children and Families

Experience Seven

Move Smart, Stay safe: Workplace Injuries and Prevention for Early Childhood Educators & Rooted in Purpose: Reconnecting with Your Why as an Educator

BREAKOUT *experience*

BREAKOUT *experience*

Experience Eight

Centre Culture Check-In: Strengthening Belonging & Professional Identity & Culturally Relevant Pedagogical Practices in ECE: Supporting Newcomer Families and Children to Foster Belonging and Wellbeing in Early Learning and Childcare

Experience Nine

An ECE's Role in the Care of Children and Families & Play and Regulation

Experience Ten

From Sensory Processing to Sentences: Unlocking Early Learning Potential & Beyond Words: Giving Every Child a Voice

Experience Eleven

Feeding Children in Child Care: Building Healthy Habits Early & Fueling Growth, Energy and Joy: Nutrition Strategies for Early Childhood Educators

Experience Twelve

Literacy in the Early Years & Process Art

Experience Thirteen

Whole Brain Teaching in the classroom: Strategies to support positive emotional and behavioral growth in early childhood & Beautiful Books

Experience Fourteen

How to Improve Your Day: Use Visuals! & Use of Drama and Role Play to Support Emotional Growth

Making Sense of Anxiety in Kids

with Dr. Deborah MacNamara



Anxiety is the most common mental health issue among children and teens today, yet it is also one of the most misunderstood. From worries and compulsions to phobias and puzzling behaviors, anxiety wears many faces. In this keynote, Dr. Deborah MacNamara offers a fresh, developmental perspective on what anxiety really is, why it shows up, and how adults can create the conditions for children to find rest and resilience.



Confederation Centre: Memorial Hall

Finding Your 'Well': An Educator's Unexpected Path to Long-Term Well-Being with Mary Hewitt

This session examines the impacts of societal messaging and pressures ("the cultural backpack") on the educator today and explores ways to "return to self", following intuition instead of expectation, and approach life and work from a place of being 'well' (according to their own inner compass), instead of being 'good' (according to other's standards, needs, and expectations). This highly-liberating, heart-opening session is sure to empower educators to let go of what's unhelpful and diminishing... allowing true nourishment and intentional living to emerge both professionally and personally.



The Mack

Experience TWO

Finding Your 'Well': An Educator's Unexpected Path to Long-Term Well-Being with Mary Hewitt



This session examines the impacts of societal messaging and pressures (“the cultural backpack”) on the educator today and explores ways to “return to self”, following intuition instead of expectation, and approach life and work from a place of being ‘well’ (according to their own inner compass), instead of being ‘good’ (according to other’s standards, needs, and expectations). This highly-liberating, heart-opening session is sure to empower educators to let go of what’s unhelpful and diminishing... allowing true nourishment and intentional living to emerge both professionally and personally.



The Mack

Letting Children Feel, Think, and Problem Solve

with Ana Valle Rivera

In this session, we explore practical strategies to foster critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving skills in young children within Early Childhood Education (ECE) settings. The goal of this session is for educators to embrace pedagogical practices that create conditions that support confident, resilient, and independent thinking in young children.

In this session participants will:

- Explore the foundations that underpin critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving skills in early childhood.
- Discuss the role of play, exploration, and fostering growth mindset.
- Consider ways to foster emotional intelligence in young children.
- Reflect on pedagogical choices that promote self-awareness, empathy, self-regulation, and problem-solving skills.



Murphy's Community Centre Gym

Experience THREE

Creating Classrooms that Works: Strategies for Success with Ana Valle Rivera



Classroom management can be challenging for many Early Childhood Educators. Sometimes it feels like nothing is working, and burnout is coming for us. In this engaging and practical session, Early Childhood Educators explore the many aspects of classroom management and the effective strategies to set up classrooms for success. “Creating Classrooms that Work” focuses on empowering and inspiring educators with tools to support inclusive environments where all children can participate to the best of their abilities.

In this session, educators will learn:

- Establishing clear expectations with children and families
- Setting children up for success with predictable and smooth routines
- Meeting children’s needs with adaptations and modifications



Murphy’s Community Centre Gym

“You’re Not the Boss of Me”: The Science of Resistance in Kids with Dr. Deborah MacNamara

From toddler tantrums to teenage defiance, resistance is one of the most challenging behaviors adults face. Yet this instinct to oppose — what developmental science calls counterwill — is a normal, even healthy, part of growing up. In this session, Dr. Deborah MacNamara unpacks the roots of resistance, why children are driven to push back, and how adults can respond in ways that preserve connection while guiding growth.



Confederation Centre: Memorial Hall

Experience FOUR

Supporting Sensory Overload in Toddlers and Preschoolers: Tools for Calm and Connection in a classroom

with Bengisu Gonul



This session introduces sensory processing differences and explores how these differences can deeply impact behavior, learning, and social participation in young children. Participants will learn to identify common sensory challenges in toddlers and preschoolers - such as hypersensitivity to sound, touch, or movement - and how these might show up as distress, withdrawal, or “challenging behaviors.” Through real-life examples, case scenarios, and hands-on demonstrations, school staff will learn how to use developmentally appropriate sensory tools and strategies to support regulation and engagement in early learning settings.



Belvedere Golf Course *both sessions!*

Designing for Differences: Creating Sensory-Smart Classrooms That Support Regulation, Personality, and Emotional Wellbeing

with Bengisu Gonul

This session equips educators with practical tools to support diverse learners by combining two key lenses: sensory regulation and individual personality styles. Participants will explore how environmental factors interact with each student's sensory-emotional profile and impact nervous system regulation. Educators will also gain insight into how traits such as sensitivity, flexibility, introversion, or intensity often reflect deeper sensory and emotional processing patterns - not misbehavior. The session focuses on creating inclusive spaces and routines that help all children feel safe, understood and ready to learn.



As part of this training, educators are briefly introduced to the Foundational Model™ from Great Kids Place - a neurodevelopmental framework that highlights how sensory, motor, emotional, and relational foundations shape behavior and learning. This model helps educators recognize when challenging behaviors may stem from unmet foundational needs and respond with empathy-based strategies instead of behavior management alone.

Experience FIVE

Culturally Relevant Pedagogical Practices in ECE: Supporting Newcomer Families and Children to Foster Belonging and Wellbeing in Early Learning and Childcare

with **Nidhi Menon**



This interactive session invites Early Childhood Educators to engage in critical reflection and dialogue about supporting newcomer families and children in early learning environments. Grounded in love, commitment, emotional professionalism, and culturally relevant pedagogy, this session will create space to share practices, generate ideas, and build strategies that nurture belonging and wellbeing. Together, we will consider how diverse perspectives can enrich our work and open new possibilities for building strong, inclusive relationships within communities.



Confederation Centre: Studio #2 *both sessions!*

Mentoring Matters: Supporting Growth in Every Role

with **Marcia Nicole**

Whether welcoming new colleagues or guiding students in placement, mentorship is a vital and often informal part of early learning. This session explores how to approach mentorship with intentionality, empathy, and clarity fostering professional growth for both the mentor and mentee.

Educators will be invited to see their daily interactions as opportunities to lead, support, and inspire.



Experience SIX

Play and Regulation with Jess Finlay

with Jess Finlay



An information session on the vital role of play in supporting emotional regulation in children. This session will explore how different types of play—such as sensory play, imaginative play, and movement-based play—can help children explore emotions, build resilience, and develop self-regulation skills in a natural and engaging way. We will discuss how play provides a safe space for children to express feelings, experiment with coping strategies, and develop the foundations for social-emotional learning. Practical examples will be shared on how to recognize when children are using play to process emotions—such as repetitive themes, role-play scenarios, or changes in play intensity—and how adults can support and respond to this in the moment by joining in, offering co-regulation, and creating a safe, responsive environment.



Confederation Centre: Room 2209 *both sessions!*

An ECE's Role in the Care of Children and Families

with Amy Sullivan

Do you every wonder “does that I do really make a different?” Together, we will unpack your role as an ECE in the care of children and their families. We will dig into your image of a child, your image of a family and your image of an educator. Through a power point presentation, open discussion and interactive experiences you will learn about things like attachment, self-regulation and co-regulation. Let's get back to our root and answer the question, “does what I do really matter?”.



Experience SEVEN

Move Smart, Stay Safe: Workplace Injuries and Prevention for Early Childhood Educators

with Dr. Julia McKenna & Dr. Kelsey Haslam



Working with children is rewarding but can be tough on our body. This interactive presentation provides an evidence-based overview of common workplace injuries affecting early childhood educators and outlines effective prevention strategies. Participants will gain practical knowledge on safe work practices, ergonomic techniques for lifting and bending, and targeted exercises designed to reduce injury risk, promote musculoskeletal health, and support overall well-being in the workplace.



Holiday Inn *both sessions!*

Rooted in Purpose: Reconnecting with Your Why as an Educator with Nathalie Arsenault

In the day-to-day demands of early childhood education, it's easy to lose sight of the deep purpose that first inspired you to work with young children. This interactive session will help you reconnect with your 'why' - the core reason you chose this profession- so you can leave feeling re-energized and motivated. Through reflective exercises, engaging discussions, and hands-on activities, you'll gain clarity on what drives you, explore ways to sustain your passion, and connect with fellow educators who share your commitments to sharing young lives. Whether you're seeking inspiration, validation, or a renewed sense of purpose, this session will prove a meaningful space to reignite your passion for the vital work you do.



Experience EIGHT

Centre Culture Check-In: Strengthening Belonging & Professional Identity *with Marcia Nicole*



Culture is shaped by how we show up for each other every day. This session invites educators and leaders to explore the emotional and relational landscape of their Centre, and to examine how intentional practices can strengthen belonging, respect, and professional pride. Together, we will consider how to co-create environments where everyone feels welcome, engaged, and part of something meaningful.



The Guild *both sessions!*

Culturally Relevant Pedagogical Practices in ECE: Supporting Newcomer Families and Children to Foster Belonging and Wellbeing in Early Learning and Childcare *with Nidhi Menon*

This interactive session invites Early Childhood Educators to engage in critical reflection and dialogue about supporting newcomer families and children in early learning environments. Grounded in love, commitment, emotional professionalism, and culturally relevant pedagogy, this session will create space to share practices, generate ideas, and build strategies that nurture belonging and wellbeing. Together, we will consider how diverse perspectives can enrich our work and open new possibilities for building strong, inclusive relationships within communities.



Experience NINE

An ECE's Role in the Care of Children and Families with Amy Sullivan



Do you every wonder “does that I do really make a different?” Together, we will unpack your role as an ECE in the care of children and their families. We will dig into your image of a child, your image of a family and your image of an educator. Through a power point presentation, open discussion and interactive experiences you will learn about things like attachment, self-regulation and co-regulation. Let’s get back to our root and answer the question, “does what I do really matter?”.



Murphy's Centre Room 207 *both sessions!*

Play and Regulation with Jess Finlay

An information session on the vital role of play in supporting emotional regulation in children. This session will explore how different types of play—such as sensory play, imaginative play, and movement-based play—can help children explore emotions, build resilience, and develop self-regulation skills in a natural and engaging way. We will discuss how play provides a safe space for children to express feelings, experiment with coping strategies, and develop the foundations for social-emotional learning. Practical examples will be shared on how to recognize when children are using play to process emotions—such as repetitive themes, role-play scenarios, or changes in play intensity—and how adults can support and respond to this in the moment by joining in, offering co-regulation, and creating a safe, responsive environment.



From Sensory Processing to Sentences: Unlocking Early Learning Potential *with Allied Therapy*



Supporting Late Talkers through Collaboration and Occupational Therapy and Speech-Language Pathology.

For many children, delayed speech is not just about language, it is connected to how their bodies process and respond to the world around them. This session highlights how Occupational Therapy (OT) and Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) work hand-in-hand to support late talkers by addressing the whole child.

Through real-world examples, we will demonstrate how sensory regulation, play skills and motor development set the stage for language growth. Parents and professionals will discover practical strategies to build a strong foundation for communication, from creating supportive daily routines to encourage interactive play.

Participants will leave with tools to foster both sensory and language development.



Red Shores: Grand Stands *both sessions!*

Beyond Words: Giving Every Child a Voice *with Allied Therapy*

Exploring Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) for Non-Speaking Children.

Every child deserves the chance to express their thoughts, needs and personality. This may be through speech, signs, or technology. This session introduces families and educators to the power of Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) for children who are non-speaking or have significant communication challenges.

We will explore a range of AAC options, from picture systems and communication boards to high-tech speech-generating devices, and discuss how to choose tools that fit a child's unique strengths.

Participants will learn how to support communication growth at home, school, and in the community, and how AAC can reduce frustration while opening doors to social connection and learning.



Experience ELEVEN

Feeding Children in Child Care: Building Healthy Habits Early *with Health PEI*



This engaging and practical presentation is designed for daycare staff who play a vital role in shaping children's eating habits. Led by registered dietitians, the session will explore age-appropriate nutrition, strategies for managing picky eating, and the importance of creating a positive mealtime environment. Participants will learn how to support children's growth and development through balanced meals and snacks, understand portion sizes, and foster independence and curiosity around food. The presentation will also address common challenges in group feeding settings and offer actionable tips for promoting healthy relationships with food from an early age.



Hotel on Pownal *both sessions!*

Fueling Growth, Energy & Joy: Nutrition Strategies for Early Childhood Educators *with Crystal MacGregor*

Are you ready to feel more energized at work and better support the children in your care? Join award-winning dietitian Crystal MacGregor for an engaging 2.5-hour session that blends the latest nutrition science with hands-on activities you can use right away. Together, we'll explore how to boost your own energy and resilience, fuel children's growth and brain development, and turn everyday meals and snacks into powerful learning opportunities. Through interactive demos, fun food activities, and practical take-home tools, you'll leave inspired, confident, and equipped to make healthy eating simple, joyful, and impactful—for you and the kids you care for.



By the end of the session, participants will:

1. Understand the latest science on how nutrition fuels both educator energy and child development.
2. Learn practical, evidence-based strategies to apply in daily routines with children.
3. Experience interactive activities they can bring back to classrooms and homes.
4. Leave inspired, energized, and confident in their ability to make nutrition a fun part of learning.

Experience TWELVE

Literacy in the Early Years with Laura Lockie



This session highlights the critical role of storytelling and read-aloud experiences in building early literacy skills. Participants will explore how intentional story selection, expressive reading, and interactive storytelling foster language development, comprehension, and a lifelong love of reading. Practical strategies and engaging techniques will be shared to help educators create rich literacy experiences that support communication, imagination, and connection in the early years.



Red Shores: Lounge *both sessions!*

Process Based Art with Laura Lockie

This session explores the value of process-based art as a foundation for creativity, problem-solving, and self-expression in early childhood education. Participants will examine the differences between product-focused and process-focused approaches, discovering how open-ended materials and experiences foster critical thinking, resilience, and intrinsic motivation. Practical strategies, real-life examples, and hands-on activities will demonstrate how educators can create environments that encourage exploration and creativity while supporting early literacy and developmental goals.



Experience THRITTEEN

Whole Brain Teaching in the Classroom: Strategies to support positive emotional and behavioral growth in early childhood

with Nicole MacRae



The past decade has seen significant advancements in understanding how children learn, and how their brains develop. This research has changed the way in which we parent and teach children, as we now understand that learning occurs when we engage children across multiple senses. In the classroom, it means we are utilizing mind AND body as often as we can, and creating hands-on, experiential learning whenever possible. It means moving away from just auditory and visual learning, and utilizing emotional social goalposts to guide our way. By utilizing Whole Brain Teaching in the classroom, we are also uncovering new and innovative ways to engage children, develop their social and emotional learning centres, access both hemispheres to optimize learning as well as deal with challenging behaviors in a more grounded, empowered and confidence way. During this session we will explore various skills and outcomes we want children to develop in an early learning environment, and how Whole Brain Teaching can give us the tools and strategies to help them achieve these goals. This session will use real-world examples and case studies, as well as small and large group activities to ensure Whole Brain activation during our session too!



Quality Inn & Suites

Beautiful Books with Janet Campbell and Erica Ross

Myth: “my kiddos just aren’t into books” Fact: we just haven’t found a better book and a better way to share a story with our kiddos. Spoiler Alert: SLPs rarely read all the words on the page in our speech therapy sessions. In this session, we work together to find ways to make sharing stories more engaging and accessible for preschool children of all ages and skills levels. You are encouraged to bring a few books with you to this session. We hope the ideas from this session can be used when hosting circle time and when reading with your children throughout the day.



Atlantic Technology Centre

Experience FOURTEEN

How to Improve Your Day: Use Visuals!

with Janet Campbell and Erica Ross



Using visuals provides predictability and reassurance throughout the day. They offer a sense of certainty, helping children understand what's happening and what's expected. For educators and SLPs, visuals are a powerful tool to ensure that our messages are being received clearly—they're an additional layer of communication that supports comprehension.

Visuals aren't just about managing behavior—they're about supporting understanding, expression, and engagement. They help children process language, express themselves, and participate meaningfully in classroom routines and play.

This presentation will explore how to use visuals effectively to:

- Support receptive language (understanding what we say)
- Encourage expressive communication (sharing thoughts and needs)
- Promote positive interactions and play
- Foster smoother transitions and classroom routines

This will be an interactive session, with opportunities for hands-on participation and discussion!



Atlantic Technology Centre

Use of Drama and Role Play to Support Emotional Growth

with Nicole MacRae

For several decades research has been investigating how various forms of prosocial play supports child development. Through this research, we have uncovered that using imaginary role play and drama based interventions can significantly improve a child's social, emotional and cognitive development. Skills such as enhanced communication, problem solving, processing and regulating emotions improved self-confidence and self-awareness have all been observed. Additionally, kids who engage in these creative interventions in their learning environments also develop increased empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution skills. This session will be evidence-based and will walk participants through the importance of Drama and Role Play, as well as creative ways to utilize these play-based interventions in their day to day work. Participants will be asked to participate in small and large group activities during this session, as well as have the opportunity to discuss real life case examples and how Drama and Role Play might support the kids they are working with.



Quality Inn & Suites

FACILITATORS

Jessica Janzen (she/her)



Jessica Janzen is a motivational speaker, coach, entrepreneur, author, philanthropist, wife to 'Hot Ronnie', mother of three and go-getter. Born and raised on her family farm in Manitoba she now owns the title of city slicker and calls Calgary, Alberta home. Jessica is not only an advocate for mental health, rare diseases, and all things joy, but also a total live wire.

As the Co-Founder of The Love for Lewiston Foundation, Jessica has raised over \$2.5 million to support SMA research and medical care, and was pivotal in implementing Newborn Screening for Spinal Muscular Atrophy in Alberta. And continues to support the Alberta Children's Hospital. Her best-selling book, *Bring The Joy*, encourages readers to reconnect with themselves and find joy during the most difficult times.

Jessica's contributions have been recognized with several prestigious awards, including Calgary's Top 40 Under 40.

Behind all of her titles and awards, she is a helper who wants you to unlock a clear pathway from adversity to achievement that will help you accomplish any goal or dream.

Her mission is to help you shift your perspective, get curious and teach you how to bring the joy, to whatever you face.

Lucas Arsenault (he/him)



Lucas Arsenault is a professional kiteboarder, national champion, and internationally recognized athlete from Prince Edward Island, Canada. For years, he dominated the sport, pushing the limits of what was possible on the water. But in May 2024, his life took a dramatic turn when he survived a harrowing shark attack—an experience that tested every ounce of his strength, resilience, and will to live.

His incredible survival story is one of quick thinking, unbreakable determination, and the power of the human spirit. Facing life-altering injuries, Lucas refused to let the moment define him. Instead, he embraced the challenge head-on, proving that adversity can be the foundation for an even greater comeback.

Now, as a speaker, Lucas shares his journey of resilience, adaptation, and perseverance, inspiring audiences to overcome their own obstacles. His powerful message resonates with athletes, business leaders, and anyone navigating change, reminding them that true strength comes from how we rise after the fall.

Your FACILITATORS

Dr. Deborah MacNamara (she/her)

Dr. Deborah MacNamara is a clinical counsellor, author, and educator who makes developmental science come alive for parents, educators, and helping professionals. A faculty member of the Neufeld Institute and founder of Kids Best Bet, she translates relational and developmental science into practical wisdom that restores confidence in the adult's role.

Deborah is the author of the bestselling book *Rest, Play, Grow: Making Sense of Preschoolers (or anyone who acts like one)*, and *Nourished: Connection, Food, and Caring for our Kids (and Everyone Else We Love)*, as well as the children's picture book *The Sorry Plane*. Her work has been translated into multiple languages and has reached audiences around the world.

Drawing on over 25 years of clinical and teaching experience, Deborah weaves together neuroscience, developmental psychology, and attachment theory to help adults make sense of kids — from tantrums to anxiety to mealtimes — and to create the conditions where children can truly thrive.

She lives in Vancouver, Canada, with her family, where she continues her writing, speaking, and teaching with a passion for bringing insight, heart, and humanity back to parenting, education, and emotional well-being.



Ana Valle Rivera (she/her)

Ana is a proud mother of three, a consultant, and the founder of Early Years Thriving. Since 2007, Ana has worked in various capacities in the early years field to support children, families, and educators. Ana has a background in ECE, a Bachelor's Degree in Child & Youth Care, and is nearing the completion of a Master's of Professional Education in Early Childhood Education.



FACILITATORS



Nidhi Menon (she/her)

Dr. Nidhi Menon is an Early Childhood Educator, mother, and advocate, as well as an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick. She holds a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education from Iowa State University and a PhD in Social Justice Education from the University of Toronto.

Her scholarship and advocacy are situated at the intersections of post-structural and marginalized feminist ontologies, ethics of care, and questions of power in the field of Early Childhood Studies. Drawing on perspectives of women of colour, her work examines and challenges dominant constructions of childhood and their impact on the lived experiences of marginalized families, children, and educators. Across her research, teaching, and advocacy, Dr. Menon is deeply committed to making visible the powerful, knowledgeable voices of underrepresented communities who continue to be positioned at the margins of society.



Jess Finlay (she/her)

Jess is an Australian trained Occupational Therapist with 13 years' experience in a variety of OT areas of practice, including pediatrics, palliative care, the cute care, case management, return to work rehabilitation and mental health. She graduated in 2010 with a bachelor of occupational therapy from the University of Sydney, Australia.

Jess is driven by understanding the uniqueness of neurodiversity, particularly in children and how this impacts their way in the world. Jess has additional training and experience in Sensory Processing, Autism/ ADHD, Self-regulation and Coaching and health care. Jess' therapy tends to be guided by her sense of developing connection with others, attunement to individual sensory and nervous system needs and engaging adults and children in their own therapeutic process.

Your

FACILITATORS

Bengisu Gonul (she/her)

Bengisu Gonul is an Occupational Therapist and founder of Your Nextdoor OT, where she blends her expertise in pediatric therapy with her training as a children's yoga teacher. She holds an MSc. (A). OT from McGill University and has worked across early childhood centres, schools, homes, and community programs. Her practice is rooted in neurodivergent-affirming, family-centered approaches, with a focus on sensory processing, regulation, and authentic participation. Bengisu is passionate about creating sensory-smart classrooms and individualized strategies that support resilience, meaningful learning, and connection in early learners. Beyond her clinical work, she draws inspiration from movement, mindfulness, and the arts, reflecting her belief in holistic, creative, and collaborative approaches to therapy.



Marcia Nicole (she/her), M.Ed., B.Ed., OCT

Marcia Nicole, M.Ed., B.Ed., OCT, is an accomplished Early Childhood Educator and thought leader in the field of early learning. Over the course of her 20+ year career, she has specialized in advancing professional standards, championing educator wellness, and fostering inclusive, play-based pedagogies. As founder of Ispyr to Educate, Marcia designs evidence-informed professional development programs and hosts The Inspiring ECE Podcast, amplifying educator voices and sharing strategies that inspire transformation across the sector.



Your

FACILITATORS

Laura Lockie (she/her)



With over 20 years of experience in early childhood education, Laura is passionate about creating meaningful learning experiences that inspire curiosity and creativity. Her work emphasizes process-based art, early literacy development, and the importance of outdoor learning in the early years. Committed to lifelong learning, she advocates for approaches that nurture both children and educators through play, exploration, and intentional practice.

Nathalie Arsenault (she/her)



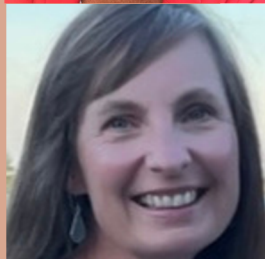
Nathalie Arsenault is bilingual consultant, coach, and facilitator based in Epekwitk/Prince Edward Island. She is the founder of Align Solutions, a consulting and coaching practice that supports purpose-driven organizations and entrepreneurs in aligning their mission, values, and vision with clear strategy and meaningful action. With a background in strategic planning, community development, and coaching, Nathalie brings a grounded and thoughtful approach to her work - creating spaces for clarity, connecting, and renewal. She is passionate about helping leaders and changemakers reconnect with their purpose so they can grow with intention and impact.

Erica Ross (she/her) and Janet Campbell (she/her)



Erica Ross, SLP, graduated from University of Toronto and Janet Campbell, SLP, graduated from Dalhousie University with their Masters in Speech-Language Pathology.

Between the two of them they have over 39 years of experience building and supporting communication opportunities for preschoolers. They are both continually learning so that they can have a therapy practice based on current research, having fun, finding joy, and building on each client's strengths.



Erica and Janet share a love of golden retrievers, beach days, peanut butter cups, and lift the flap books. Both 'Islanders', Erica lives and works in Summerside and Janet is in Charlottetown.

Your FACILITATORS

Nicole MacRae (she/her)

Nicole is a Mental Health Therapist specializing in Trauma, Reproductive Counselling/Infertility, Grief/Loss, Perinatal Mental Health, Anxiety as well as working with Children, Adolescents and Parents. She owns Oak and Cedar Counselling Services, currently located in Cornwall, PEI but also provides services across New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

As a practitioner for almost 20 years, Nicole is highly skilled and educated in a wide variety of areas. This includes being Certified in EMDR and is one of a handful of Certified Perinatal Mental Health Therapists in Atlantic Canada. Of special note, she also has specialized Play and Art therapy training, and has worked with kids and adolescents of all ages. Though her private practice works mostly with Adults now, her passion for Child and Adolescent Mental Health is still an important part of her work and she is looking forward to connecting with everyone at this year's Conference.



Jessica Maxwell (she/her), OT - Allied Therapy

Jessica is an Occupational Therapist who is passionate about supporting individuals with behavioural and emotional regulation challenges by helping them build a strong sense of self, connection, and confidence. Jessica is always aiming to incorporate unique values, culture, and life experiences into daily occupations by ensuring therapy is both meaningful and respectful of their identity.

When not working as an Occupational Therapist, Jessica loves staying active through recreational sports, golfing, and trying out new workout classes. She spends her free time outdoors with her dog (Zola) and indulging in a good meal!



Paige Kavanaugh (she/her), SLP - Allied Therapy

Paige is a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist. She completed her Master of Communication Sciences and Disorders at the University of Maine, following a Bachelor of Science in Human Kinetics from St. Francis Xavier University.

Paige is dedicated to providing individualized, evidence-based care, and has experience working with diverse populations. She strives to build strong relationships with families to support communication and overall development.



In her free time, Paige enjoys running, reading, and baking.

FACILITATORS

Amy Sullivan (she/her)



Amy lives in beautiful St. Margaret's Bay, Nova Scotia. She has two adult children, Simon (20) and Hannah (24) and they are well on their way into adult hood. Amy currently lives with her three feline fur babies. Her passion for Early Childhood started as a young girl and she ended up graduating from Holland College with her ECE in 2000. Amy has since continued on the path of supporting individuals of all ages by graduating with her Counselling Skills diploma in 2017 followed by receiving her credentials as a Registered Counsellor in 2018. Throughout her career as both as an ECE and Counsellor, Amy has had the honor and privilege to support early childhood educators for over 20 years. Amy believes that lifelong learning is a gift and is happy to be a part of it with all of her interactions.

Mary Hewitt (she/her)



Mary Hewitt, founder of Unlocking Childhood, is an experienced public speaker, writer, and consultant specializing in the well-being of children, parents, educators, and child-centered professionals. With 15 years in the Early Learning field as a classroom educator, early childhood education professor, and early years system leader— she leverages her expertise to develop engaging and meaningful learning experiences for her clients. Mary holds a Masters degree in Early Childhood Education, a Bachelor of Education degree, a diploma in Early Childhood Education, and a Psychology degree.

Mary dedicates much of her work to topics such as: well-being and mental health; the 'childhood trauma-informed' approach; how to develop an 'attachment lens'; and nurturing emotional competence. She has captivated audiences with hundreds of attendees and has delivered her work in a variety of contexts from large-scale arenas to individual classrooms. Mary offers keynotes, sessions, conferences, virtual sessions, and even one-on-one coaching and consultations. She has appeared as a guest on several podcasts and as a writer for various publications.

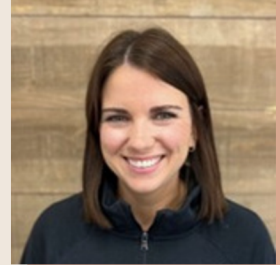
Mary credits her eclectic experiences, extensive education, and neurodivergent mind for her dynamic approach—and is passionate about sharing it with the world!

Mary resides in rural Ontario with her husband and three beloved dogs.

Your FACILITATORS

Dr. Julia MacKenna (she/her)

Dr. Julia McKenna is a graduate of the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College in Toronto and has a master's in human sciences from UPEI. She is a lifelong multi-sport athlete. Passionate about movement and strength training, Dr. McKenna empowers her patients to stay active and build resilience through evidence-based care.



Dr. Kelsey Haslam (she/her)

Dr. Kelsey Haslam is a graduate of the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College. Prior to her education at CMCC, she received her Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology from the University of New Brunswick. Dr. Haslam is dedicated to promoting healthy living and helping patients move better.



Crystal MacGregor (she/her)

Marketer, Product Innovator, Registered Dietitian, Personal Trainer, & Creative Cook. Crystal loves researching, tasting, making, sharing, and talking about FOOD! She offers over 20 years of experience in the field of nutrition working in many innovative areas of dietetics: food industry, sport centers, grocery stores, hospitals, marketing, and product development. She has been a popular guest, with over 100 TV appearances.

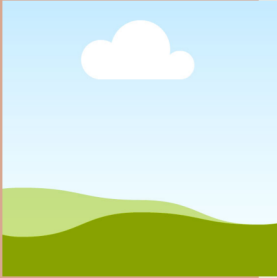
Previously, she spent the past 14 years working for one of Canada's leading direct sales companies, Epicure, most recently as their Vice President of Product Development & Merchandising where she led teams in product innovation, merchandising, product marketing, and social media. She was the previous Dietitian's of Canada Food & Culinary Network Co-Chair and has completed media tours with IDE Canada to spread awareness about economic development in both Cambodia & Vietnam.

Crystal is honored to have moved home to Prince Edward Island and be working with the brilliant Food Island Partnership team as their Director of Communications & Marketing. She is also the founder of Crystal MacGregor Consulting which fuels her personal mission to help others live their best life through recipe development, program development, and speaking engagements. She has worked with clients such as Canada Beef, Half Your Plate Canada, Epicure, Canada Food Focus, and Egg Marketing Boards.



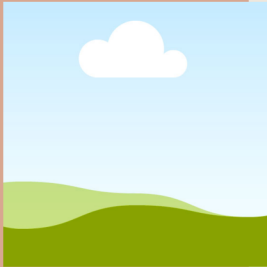
FACILITATORS

Lisa Gollop, RD (she/her) - Health PEI



Lisa Gollop is a bilingual registered dietitian and current manager of community nutrition who has a passion for helping children and their families build strong, healthy relationships with food. Lisa has supported many clients of all ages in healing their relationships with food and body image, creating a foundation for lifelong well-being - something that is most beneficial when nurtured from the earliest years.

Jackie Vloet-Koughan, RD (she/her)



Jackie Vloet-Koughan is a Registered Dietitian with over 40 years of experience, primarily in Public Health. Her career has focused on providing nutrition guidance to prenatal clients, infants, and children, with a deep commitment to supporting families through early childhood nutrition challenges. Jackie has a special interest in working with newcomers and families of children with complex needs, and has helped countless families navigate nutritional concerns with compassion and expertise.



Jennifer Nangreaves (she/her)

Executive Director

Jenn has been leading the ECDA of PEI as Executive Director since March 2021, bringing over a decade of experience in the Early Learning and Child Care sector across both PEI and Alberta. With a background in sociology, early literacy, and Indigenous Peoples studies, and as a passionate Early Childhood Educator, Jenn is deeply committed to ensuring children and ECEs are supported, valued, and heard. She believes that when ECEs are supported, children thrive; and she's here to make that happen.



Megan McPhee (she/her)

Professional Learning and Operations Manager

Megan joined the ECDA team in 2019, after working as a frontline Early Childhood Educator for 12 years. Her diverse educational background and extensive experience in the field have equipped her with a unique perspective on early childhood. Megan believes in creating inclusive learning environments where every child feels valued and empowered. She is a creative mess maker, and loves to learn with her heart and soul. Her innovative approach to education, combined with her commitment to continuous learning have fueled her journey at the ECDA.



Karoll Aguila (she/her)

Office Administrator

Karoll joined ECDA in June 2025 with over seven years of experience in customer service and office management. Passionate about workplace culture and people operations, she brings a creative, solution-oriented mindset. Karoll is committed to continuous learning and contributing to a positive, productive work environment.

Meet YOUR TEAM

Julian Taylor (he/him)

Marketing and Communications Manager

Julian Taylor is the Marketing, Communication, and office prankster at the ECDA of PEI. He loves goals, quality, and working as a team to accomplish projects. Julian is here to make sure the ECDA's visions become a reality.



Jay Baglole (they/them)

Associate Professional Learning Coordinator

Jay is the Associate Professional Learning Coordinator, who originally joined the ECDA in 2022 as the Pyramid to Retention project Coordinator. They are a passionate advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the early years, valuing visibility and well-being for all children, families, and educators.



Megan Drummond (she/her)

Special Projects Coordinator

As Special Projects Coordinator, Megan Drummond plays a role in helping the organization achieve its mission to support early childhood educators, contribute to building a strong early learning system across PEI, and creating awareness of the impact of positive learning experiences in licensed quality care in the early years. Her passion lies in creating environments where educators, children, and families feel truly welcome—and where a love of learning can flourish. Megan believes that strong, supportive early childhood experiences are foundational to healthy communities.



Ujay Aja-Onu (she/her)

Handle with Care Coordinator

Ujunwa Aja-Onu, known as Ujay, is a project manager and development professional with over 10 years of experience in program design, management, and stakeholder engagement. Before joining the ECDA, Ujay served as the project manager for the Cleantech Academy project at Holland College and had previously worked with organizations such as ActionAid and Oando Foundation in Nigeria, before transitioning to Canada.



Fall Conference

ACCOMMODATIONS



Rodd Hotels & Resorts are pleased to provide a special accommodations rate for conference delegates attending the 2025 ECDA Fall Conference: Rooted In Care

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Rates starting at \$122 for a
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Rodd Royalty

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Rates starting at \$118 for a
Standard Single Room, plus taxes.*

The hotel offers complimentary breakfast,
parking and Wi-Fi.

Click on: Special Code | Rate Access Code
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[RatePlanId=10437682](https://reservations.travelclick.com/85522?RatePlanId=10437682)

*Rates are quoted: per night, based on single/double occupancy, rates offer based on
availability at time of booking.

For Reservations, please call 1-800-565-7633 and request the Early Childhood Development
Association rate offer at the preferred hotel along with Group Booking Number and for the
dates required (Rodd Charlottetown #1935406 |
Rodd Royalty #1935409).

Fall Conference PRICING

Members: \$205+ tax*

Not yet a Member: \$410 + tax*

*Payment is due in full one no later than November 1st, 2025

Let's get in touch



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