



Have you heard about the Spark Guide and Spark Mentorship Program?

The Spark Guide is a resource created by PolicyWise to inform culturally responsive practice in Alberta's Early Learning and Child Care sector.

Developed in consultation with the early learning community, it complements several support services, including the Spark Mentorship Program.

The Spark Mentorship Program, developed by ARCQE, works directly with programs to mentor implementation strategies reflected in the Spark Guide.

Cultural Partners collaborate with Program Leaders to recognize and guide responsive practices that reflect the rich cultural diversity within their programs and communities.

The pilot phase of the Spark Mentorship Program has concluded with 15 child care sites participating across multiple regions in Alberta. This year, the work has transitioned into a full-year program initiative, and we are excited to be onboarding eight new programs, including two Francophone sites! A warm welcome to all of the programs and educators joining the Spark Mentorship Program this year, along with our appreciation for the first 15 "early adopter" programs for their effort and commitment in shaping cultural lens perspectives reflective of the needs of children and families in Alberta.

[Click here to download the Spark Guide in English or French!](#)

Who do we serve?

Early Learning and childcare programs and agencies serving children aged birth to 12 years old.

Where do we deliver?

The SMP is delivered through a combination of on-site support and virtual engagement, exploring culturally responsive practice conversation threads.

From Pilot - To Project

SMP began as a pilot in the fall of 2024. These early adopter sites will conclude their initial phase of support in September 2025, at which point we look forward to their continued thoughts and perspectives as they engage more broadly as members of the Spark Engagement Network (S.E.N.).

In April 2025, the project expanded to onboard eight additional sites. Starting in September 2025, the project will begin accepting expressions of interest for an October start.

Get Involved!

If your program is interested in Spark Mentorship support as part of the October intake, [complete a Service Request form available on the Spark Mentorship Program site page!](#) Program spaces for this initiative are limited, so expressions of interest are requested as soon as possible for those interested in the next intake phase.

Program space is limited, so those interested are encouraged to submit their expression of interest as soon as possible.

Reflections from AECEA 2025 and the Journey Ahead

The Spark Mentorship Program, continues to grow as a meaningful initiative supporting childcare programs in building culturally responsive practices rooted in both community knowledge and sound professional foundations.

In the first year of Spark, Cultural Leaders Mary Lynne Matheson and Carole Massing played a key role in guiding the Cultural Partners (CPs), who in turn supported individual programs across the province. A key feature of this work has been our *Community Conversations*, a space where CPs and program educators come together to share learning, challenges, and stories that ground our collective practice in real experiences.

We were proud to highlight this journey at the **2025 AECEA Conference** in June as the CPs and program leaders presented on the Spark Mentoring Project. During the session, CPs brought their roles to life through both recorded and live reflections, offering a glimpse into the collaborative, sometimes complex and always meaningful work they have engaged in with early learning programs.

Program leaders reflected thoughtfully in recounting initial reactions, the resources and strategies they found most impactful, and the key moments that shaped their experience with the Spark Mentorship Program. They spoke of challenges, breakthroughs, and, most importantly, what they have learned and how they hope to carry this work forward.

Some of the key lessons that stood out from the presentation through the initial stage of the project were:

- **Cultural Partners are essential** to the success of this work and benefit from the support and mentorship of Cultural Leaders.
- **Culture is often misunderstood.** Deep engagement is needed to shift understanding and practice.
- **A variety of tools and resources** helps localize and contextualize curriculum meaningfully.
- **Trusting relationships** are at the heart of effective mentoring.
- **Time is a challenge.** Integrating new ideas takes time and patience.
- **Flight offers a strong foundation** for integrating culturally responsive focus of the Spark program.
- **Change does not look the same everywhere.** It unfolds in unique ways across programs.
- **The diversity in our ELCC workforce is a strength** bringing richness to the work of cultural responsiveness.

These insights will guide our work as we enter a full year of the Spark Mentoring Program. We are excited to continue learning with our Cultural Partners and the dedicated educators leading change in their centres. Thank you for walking this journey with us.

A Message from SPARK Project Coordinator, Amaka Amadike

Working as the Spark Mentorship Program Coordinator has been extremely fulfilling. As someone passionate about cultural practices and seeking ways to incorporate cultural connection and responsive practice as part of the early learning context in Alberta, it is rewarding to be supporting the Spark Mentorship Program as a first provincial step toward making this dream a reality. I invite every educator, program, organization and individual in Alberta and across Canada to embrace the Spark Guide and to welcome the strategies shared, so that together, we can build an authentic, inclusive, and culturally responsive early learning and care sector in Alberta.

You can request participation for your program on the ARCQE website or contact Amaka Amadike at amendy7200@gmail.com to learn more about how your program can participate.

Look Forward To...

Monthly Professional Learning Communities

Each month, up to two educators from each participating program, along with their Cultural Partners, attend the Spark Mentorship Program's PLC sessions. This shared space provides an opportunity for programs to showcase their culturally responsive practices and inspire others on their journeys toward inclusive and reflective early learning environments.

Meet a Cultural Partner

This edition we shine the spotlight on Cultural Partner: Kari Morris!

Kari's passion for cultural understanding began at the age of six, during a life-changing visit to Japan. That early experience opened her eyes to the richness and beauty of different ways of life, sparking a curiosity that has shaped her personal values and professional path ever since. Over the years, Kari has intentionally sought out opportunities to deepen her cultural awareness—through travel, exploring global cuisine, meaningful conversations, and building relationships with individuals from a wide range of backgrounds.

With more than 35 years of experience in the early learning and child care sector, Kari has held various roles supporting children, educators, and families. Her current role as a Cultural Partner has been a natural and deeply fulfilling progression of her lifelong commitment to equity, inclusion, and belonging. Kari works alongside early learning professionals to explore identity, cultural practice, and the importance of creating inclusive spaces that reflect and celebrate the diversity of the communities they serve.

Through her work, Kari supports others in developing culturally responsive practice that honours each child's story and fosters meaningful relationships between educators, families, and communities. She believes that culture is not a separate "add-on," but an essential and ever-present part of who we are—and that recognizing and respecting this is key to nurturing safe, supportive, and empowering environments for all.

Kari approaches her role with humility, curiosity, and care. She sees every interaction as an opportunity to learn and grow—both personally and collectively—and is committed to walking alongside others on their own journeys of cultural reflection and discovery. Her work continues to reinforce the transformative power of culture in shaping strong foundations for early learning, identity, and community connection. Kari has two children 26 and 18 and she loves gardening, cooking and traveling.

June Highlights

June 21

National Indigenous Peoples Day: This day is dedicated to celebrating the rich cultures, heritage, and contributions of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples across Canada. Communities across the country marked the occasion with a variety of events and activities.

[Click the link to explore some of the celebrations that took place:](#)

June 19

Juneteenth: This day marks a significant moment in history when enslaved Black Americans in Galveston, Texas, were informed of their freedom signalling the end of slavery in the United States. Celebrated annually on June 19th, Juneteenth is a blend of the words “June” and “nineteenth” and stands as a powerful reminder of liberation, resilience, and the ongoing pursuit of justice.
