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CYCEA

CONSEIL D'AGRÈMENT DES CONSEILLERS AUPRÈS
DE L'ENFANCE ET DE LA JEUNESSE DU CANADA

CHILD AND YOUTH CARE EDUCATIONAL
ACCREDITATION BOARD OF CANADA



STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2030

<https://cycaccreditation.ca/>



WINNING PHOTO

This photo is the winning entry to the CYCEAB 2025 Photo Contest, submitted by Lakeland College student Princess Mhae Perez . The CYC program at Lakeland College achieved accreditation on February 17, 2021.

This photo depicts CYC students on a field trip to the Dreamcatcher Nature Assisted Therapy Ranch, 30 minutes east of Edmonton, Alberta. This field trip was a component of the "Introduction to Animal Assisted Intervention" course.



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Mission

Promote excellence and ongoing quality enhancement in Child and Youth Care education through the accreditation of post-secondary programs and advocacy for the Child and Youth Care profession.

Executive Summary

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS 2030

1

ENSURE ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY AND ADVOCACY CAPACITY

- ▣ Increase financial sustainability.
- ▣ Conduct an organizational review to build an effective governance model.
- ▣ Strengthen the organization's brand identity.

2

ADVANCE PUBLIC AND SECTOR UNDERSTANDING OF CHILD AND YOUTH CARE

- ▣ Launch a national awareness campaign to promote Child and Youth Care as a rewarding and essential profession to prospective students.

3

BUILD AND MOBILIZE A RESEARCH AGENDA

- ▣ Establish a dedicated research committee and develop a long-term strategy for advancing educational research in Child and Youth Care.

4

STRENGTHEN EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS AND LIFELONG LEARNING FOR CYC EDUCATORS

- ▣ Strengthen the post-secondary accreditation process for CYC programs while expanding access to training opportunities for educators to uphold high academic and professional standards.

Values

Integrity, Relational Practice,
Critical Reflection, Equity,
Community, Advocacy

Vision

A well-educated Child and Youth Care profession ensures that all children, youth, and families receive inclusive, skilled, ethical, and critically self-aware relational support.



INTRODUCTION

The Child and Youth Care Educational Accreditation Board (CYCEAB) was created to ensure quality education in Child and Youth Care (CYC) across Canada. Since our founding, we've stood for the belief that strong, critically reflective education forms the backbone of ethical, skilled, and relational CYC practice -- practice that makes a meaningful difference in the lives of children, youth, and families.

As we look to the next five years, the need for a clear, forward-thinking strategy has never been greater. The child- and youth-serving sectors continue to evolve in complexity and diversity. Systems are demanding more of practitioners -- more accountability, more training, more adaptability -- while practitioners need education that prepares them not only with technical skills but with critical awareness, cultural responsiveness, and the capacity to work relationally in ever-changing contexts.

With this strategic plan, we renew our commitment to quality enhancement in CYC education and chart a bold course forward. From strengthening our organizational infrastructure to expanding our national voice and leadership in research, this plan reflects our belief that accreditation is more than a process. It is a pathway to equity, excellence, and belonging.



VOICES OF CYC

True strategic change begins with listening.

Early in the process, we recognized that broadening our usual circle of input and feedback -- welcoming voices both within and beyond our organization -- would deepen our understanding of the complex landscape of post-secondary Child and Youth Care education and those it serves.

To gather insights, we engaged students through surveys and held structured interviews with employers and decision-makers at educational institutions. We also explored the history of regulated programs, specifically Social Work, using generative AI to compile credible literature into a concise timeline. This research helped highlight historical challenges and identify key areas for focus when developing recommendations.

Internally, we ensured broad representation. Board members and committee participants responded to online surveys, along with staff, students, and graduates from both CYCEAB-accredited and non-accredited programs. We facilitated focus groups with reviewers, including those serving on our Recommendation Panel, to gain further perspective.

Despite limited resources, we were selective in our outreach and were challenged in gathering input from a large number of individuals and groups. Still, the insights we received proved enlightening and invaluable in shaping our first-ever strategic plan.



ENVIRONMENT AND TRENDS

Understanding our environment will help us plan for our future.

Effective strategic planning in our field begins with a comprehensive understanding of the academic environment. Without insight into the evolving landscape -- its pedagogical trends, regulatory shifts, and institutional challenges -- we risk implementing standards and initiatives that fail to promote meaningful educational outcomes.

Regulatory Gap

Despite its vital role in supporting vulnerable children, youth, and families, the very foundation of our communities, Child and Youth Care remains an unregulated profession. This regulatory gap presents challenges for accountability, consistency, and recognition in a sector that demands the highest standards of care and ethical practice.

Advocacy

Advocacy for quality Child and Youth Care education and training has grown over time but there is still much to be done. Advocacy plays a pivotal role in elevating professional standards and ensuring programs align with the complex needs of vulnerable populations. Championing accreditation helps legitimize the field, reinforce accountability, and promote the development of a skilled, ethical workforce equipped to support children, youth, and families effectively.

Understanding Accreditation and the Role of CYCEAB

There remains a significant lack of understanding about the purpose and function of accreditation within the Child and Youth Care field. Many educators, practitioners, and others are unaware that CYCEAB plays a critical role in upholding standards, ensuring accountability, and safeguarding the quality of education and training programs that prepare individuals to serve vulnerable populations.



ENVIRONMENT AND TRENDS

(continued)

Understanding our environment will help us plan for our future.

Institutional Challenges

Post-secondary institutions in Canada are facing significant challenges:

- **Budget shortfalls** - Budget shortfalls are exacerbated by federal restrictions on new international students, ongoing domestic tuition caps or freezes, and stagnant provincial funding.
- **Reduced Access** - The financial strain has led to the elimination of courses and services, impacting students' access to quality education.
- **Public Confidence** - There is a growing disconnect between funding and public confidence in the value of higher education, leading to concerns about the sustainability of post-secondary education.
- **Economic Performance** - Despite high rates of postsecondary education, productivity and economic outcomes lag, indicating a need for innovative solutions.
- **Adaptation to Change** - Institutions must adapt to new policies and priorities, including the integration of online learning and addressing the needs of vulnerable populations.



ENVIRONMENT AND TRENDS

(continued)

Understanding our environment will help us plan for our future.

Employers

Employers expect CYC graduates to:

- Understand code of ethics and professional competencies (CYCCB).
- Have foundational knowledge of Trauma-Informed Care, resilience, strengths-based practices, needs-based practices, relational practice, and cultural competency.
- Apply the "25 Characteristics of Practice" while engaging with young people.
- Provide care, supervision, and support to children and youth.
- Have a foundational understanding of frameworks used in the Child and Youth Care (CYC) field.

Employers expect CYC graduates to have the following values, beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes:

- Coachability, self-awareness, willingness to learn, and engagement with feedback.
- Understanding of professional developmental models such as Jack Phelan's levels of CYC.
- Awareness of role, boundaries, and scope as a Child and Youth Care Worker (CYCW).

Employers place emphasis on attitude and foundational training as essential qualities.



ENVIRONMENT AND TRENDS

(continued)

We asked "why accreditation", and this is what we heard.

- Legislative or regulatory requirements.
- Condition for employment.
- Alignment with national or provincial certification exams.
- Using accreditation to advocate for resources.
- Attracting prospective students by promoting the quality and standards of education.
- Ensuring graduates are safe, competent, and practice ready.
- Building public trust in graduates.

We asked "what are the challenges and opportunities?"

- Time and human resources constraints.
- Balancing achieving accreditation with other institutional priorities.
- Maintaining engagement throughout the accreditation period.
- Difficulty in demonstrating the return on investment of accreditation when quality is already perceived as high and accreditation is not a regulatory requirement.
- Substantial workload for faculty and other staff who don't have accreditation responsibilities as part of their job descriptions.

Dedicated roles was identified as a key factor in successfully managing accreditation processes.



KEY INSIGHTS

In developing this plan, we held space for hard truths, open questions, and ambitious hopes. We asked ourselves what it would mean to not only sustain our work, but to deepen and extend it with courage and clarity. In doing so, we surfaced several key insights that will shape our path ahead:

Accreditation is an act of advocacy.

Accreditation is not merely a technical process but a statement about what kind of care we believe children, youth, and families deserve -- and what kind of education best prepares practitioners to deliver it.

The CYC field needs champions.

The CYC field needs champions. Despite the crucial work being done across Canada, Child and Youth Care remains widely misunderstood. Educators and practitioners alike need consistent, credible messaging to advance understanding and legitimacy of the profession.

Financial sustainability is foundational.

To continue supporting programs and advocating for the field, CYCEAB must diversify and strengthen its revenue streams through membership, services, and partnerships.

Our community is a resource.

Member programs, educators, reviewers, students, and graduates hold deep wisdom. We must find more ways to mobilize that knowledge through research, mentorship, storytelling, and peer-to-peer engagement.

Governance must match our mission.

As the organization grows, so must the clarity and capacity of our board, committees, and staff structures.

Recognition matters.

The visibility and credibility of the CYCEAB brand will determine our influence -- not only in academic settings, but with employers, governments, and the broader public.

These truths call us to action, with both humility and determination.



VISION, MISSION, VALUES

Mission, vision, and values are the backbone of a not-for-profit's identity -- they guide decision-making, inspire those who have an interest in the organization, and ensure alignment across programs and partnerships. They help the organization stay focused on its purpose, build trust with members and communities, and create a shared sense of direction and integrity.

Our Vision

A well-educated Child and Youth Care profession ensures that all children, youth, and families receive inclusive, skilled, ethical, and critically self-aware relational support.

Our Mission

To promote excellence and ongoing quality enhancement in Child and Youth Care education through the accreditation of post-secondary programs and advocacy for the Child and Youth Care profession.

Our Values

Integrity:

We uphold fairness, transparency, and accountability in all of our accreditation and organizational processes.

Relational Practice:

We uphold fairness, transparency, and accountability in all of our accreditation and organizational processes.

Critical Reflection:

We are committed to learning from experience, examining assumptions, and adapting thoughtfully in response to the needs of diverse communities and the evolving CYC field.

Equity:

We strive to recognize and dismantle barriers to participation and excellence in CYC education, and we commit to inclusion across identities, geographies, and perspectives.

Community:

We recognize our member programs, reviewers, educators, and graduates as essential partners in our mission. Together, we shape the future of the profession.

Advocacy:

We are dedicated to strengthening the recognition and legitimacy of Child and Youth Care as a vital, ethical, and socially just profession.



STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Strategic Direction #1

Ensure Organizational Sustainability and Advocacy Capacity

Organizational sustainability and advocacy are essential for an organization dedicated to promoting excellence in Child and Youth Care (CYC) education and accrediting post-secondary programs. Organizational sustainability encompasses financial stability, strategic growth, and operational resilience, ensuring we can consistently support rigorous accreditation processes, provide resources for organizational development, and maintain high standards of quality over time.

Simultaneously, advocacy for the CYC profession elevates its visibility, reinforces its societal value, and empowers educators and practitioners by influencing policy, education, and public perception.

Together, sustainability and advocacy enable the organization to fulfill its mission with integrity and long-term impact -- ultimately ensuring that CYC professionals are well-prepared, respected, and supported in their vital work with children, youth, and families.



STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Strategic Direction #1

Ensure Organizational Sustainability and Advocacy Capacity

Organizational sustainability is not just about surviving. It's about building the capacity to thrive, adapt, and deliver lasting impact in a constantly changing world.

Goal One

Increase financial sustainability.

We believe it is important to take a balanced approach to increasing revenue while maintaining fiscal discipline. A balanced approach involves strategic growth, cost-effective operations, and continuous evaluation to ensure resources are maximized without compromising mission impact.

Goal Two

Build an effective governance model.

Since its inception in 2012, CYCEAB has continually evolved in response to the changing needs of its members and the broader child and youth care education landscape. As the organization matures, conducting a thorough organizational review is essential to ensure its governance model remains responsive, effective, and aligned with its mission.

Goal Three

Develop a comprehensive brand kit.

To enhance recognition and trust among its communities, we will strengthen our brand identity by developing a comprehensive brand kit. This initiative will reinforce CYCEAB's credibility and visibility within the child and youth care education community.



STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Strategic Direction #2

Advance Public and Sector Understanding of Child and Youth Care

We are committed to promoting broad awareness and accurate understanding of this not-for-profit organization and Child and Youth Care (CYC) practice, philosophy, and impact across post-secondary institutions, government agencies, and allied professions.

By fostering dialogue, sharing evidence-informed resources, and highlighting the unique contributions of accredited post-secondary CYC programs, we aim to elevate the visibility and credibility of the field and the work of CYCEAB. This initiative will support greater collaboration, informed policy development, and enhanced educational opportunities, ultimately strengthening the profession's role in supporting children, youth, families, and communities.

Goal

Develop and launch a national awareness campaign to promote Child and Youth Care as a rewarding and essential profession to prospective students.

We will develop and launch a national awareness campaign to promote Child and Youth Care as a rewarding and essential profession, targeting prospective students through strategic partnerships with educational institutions, professional associations, and media outlets.

Public awareness is the heartbeat of every not-for-profit -- without it, even the most vital mission can go unheard. A well-crafted campaign doesn't just inform; it inspires action, builds trust, and turns compassion into collective impact.



STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Strategic Direction #3

Build and Mobilize a Research Agenda

Through our members, partnerships and others, we want to strengthen the Canadian Child and Youth Care (CYC) research ecosystem by identifying and addressing critical gaps in educational research.

By fostering collaboration among scholars, practitioners, and institutions, the initiative will generate evidence-based insights that inform and enhance accreditation standards, teaching methods, curriculum development, and student support strategies. Ultimately, this work will contribute to more effective educational practices and improved outcomes for both CYC students and the young people they serve, ensuring the profession continues to evolve with integrity, relevance, and impact.

Goal

Establish a dedicated research committee and develop a long-term strategy for advancing educational research in CYC.

We will establish a dedicated research committee and develop a long-term strategy for advancing educational research in CYC, focusing on evidence-based insights and solutions to enhance educational practices and outcomes.

Building and mobilizing a research agenda in the CYC ecosystem is not just about generating knowledge -- it's about empowering communities, informing practice, and shaping policies that honor the lived experiences of children, youth, and families.



STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Strategic Direction #4

Strengthen Educational Standards and Lifelong Learning for CYC Educators

To ensure excellence in Child and Youth Care education, the strategic focus is on strengthening the post-secondary accreditation process for CYC programs while expanding access to ongoing training opportunities for educators.

This dual approach reinforces high academic and professional standards across institutions by aligning curriculum and pedagogy with evolving sector needs. By implementing new educator training initiatives annually, the strategy supports faculty in deepening their expertise, integrating emerging best practices, and fostering inclusive, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive learning environments.

This commitment not only enhances the quality of CYC education but also ensures that graduates are well-prepared to meet the complex realities of practice.

Goal

Schedule and actively promote and disseminate professional development opportunities that will strengthen connections between ongoing learning and quality improvement in CYC practice and foster a culture of continuous growth, collaboration, and excellence in the sector.

Professional development is the heartbeat of a thriving CYC community -- where every opportunity to learn becomes a catalyst for deeper care, stronger connections, and lasting impact.



CLOSING STATEMENT

This strategic plan is a commitment to the future of CYC education in Canada -- a future that is inclusive, bold, and grounded in relationship. It acknowledges the real challenges facing the field, from systemic under-recognition to resource limitations. But it also speaks to our immense potential: as educators, as leaders, and as advocates for the young people and families at the heart of our work.

The CYCEAB is a small but powerful organization. We have built trust across institutions and across the country. This plan builds on that foundation, setting clear goals and courageous aspirations.

As we move forward, we will need the collective strength of our board, our staff, our member programs, and our wider community. Together, we can ensure that every CYC student is prepared not just to do the work -- but to transform it. And in doing so, we reaffirm what we've always known: that high-quality, critically informed education is essential to justice, care, and belonging in this country.

Let's get to work!



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Strategic planning is the compass that guides a not-for-profit's mission -- but it is the passion and commitment of its board, volunteers and members that give it momentum. Without their support, even the best-laid plans remain ideas; with them, those ideas become impact.