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COALITION HOSTS ANNUAL STUDENT ADVOCACY FORUM

By Gyda Chud, May 2012

As has been our tradition for over 25 years, the Coalition recently hosted a content packed and inspirational Student Advocacy Forum for about to be graduates from ECE studies at lower mainland Continuing Studies programs. Held in early May at Vancouver Community College to mark Child Care Month, our space was virtually "sold out" with nearly 200 participants – all of whom were totally engaged in the day's agenda.

Morning Plenary sessions highlighted that advocacy and activism are indeed essential attributes of our professionalism! Sharon Gregson introduced students to the ECL Plan and shared the presentation that has been so well received and well acclaimed province wide. Susan Harney, Coalition Chair, showcased 'Child Care is a Right'. Susan spoke about her trip to Geneva to present on this issue and shared a very powerful and compelling presentation on Canada's shameful performance in Early Childhood and the critical nature of respecting Child Care as a fundamental right for children, families and our workforce. These two presentations were not only informative, but were clearly integrative and affirming in content. And what an experience to meet and be 'Femtored' by two such stellar advocates!

The Afternoon provided students with workshops of choice from Coalition Board members.

Ruth Bancroft, well recognized and respected for her work in our sector, presented a session "Advocating for Quality Inclusion in Child Care". Caroline Kent and her union sister Andrea Duncan offered a workshop – "Unionization and You" – where they had the opportunity to lift up the work of unions on behalf of the workforce and press for salary and benefits that respect our work; Gyda Chud presented "Presentation Tips for the Almost Terrified" where our goal was to build confidence in public speaking as a key part of our advocacy work; and Sharon facilitated a workshop "Becoming an Advocate for the ECL Plan".

Our day concluded with a plenary that gave students some history about Child Care Month as a community initiative and introduced them to ECEBC, our partner in developing and promoting the ECL Plan. We highlighted our Child Care Month theme "Educate, Advocate, Celebrate", invited participants to offer ways in which the Forum inspired and informed them to move forward on these fronts and welcomed their feedback and "Take Aways".

The Student Advocacy Forum was an unconditional success as evidenced in verbal and follow up feedback from those who participated.