



MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

ECF announces immediate \$1.85M-boost to early childhood programs and priority focus on Early Childhood Development in 2026

Funding to support new Indigenous-led preschool program, 5,000+ new library books for Edmonton families, critical early childhood education spaces, and more

Edmonton, AB — December 17, 2025 — Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) is immediately investing more than \$1.85 million in Edmonton's youngest community members. This latest round of funding brings ECF's total 2025 contributions to Early Childhood Development in the capital region to more than \$2.5 million through 59 grants.

"Early childhood is the most critical time for human development, and research shows more than half of Edmonton's children are starting kindergarten lagging in at least one of the key measures of early childhood development" says ECF's CEO **Tina Thomas**, "That's why ECF is investing in this important area. This is just the beginning."

This most recent funding supports 18 organizations providing programs and services for children from infancy through kindergarten including mobile early years programming, land-based oral storytelling, training for early childhood educators, counselling support for parents of young children and more. This funding ensures immediate stability for frontline programs while ECF continues broader sector work in 2026 and beyond.

"Investing in young children is the most powerful way to mitigate longer-term social challenges – like unemployment and mental health issues – and build a healthier, vibrant and more resilient city for the long term," adds Thomas. "Our goal is to ensure children in Edmonton grow up strong, healthy, and ready to succeed in life."

Examples of the projects and organizations receiving immediate funding include:

The Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society to expand their off-site land-based teachings and oral storytelling program.

"Land-based teachings and oral storytelling are vital in helping our Indigenous youth learn in ways that honour who they are and where they come from. These methods support the whole child — spiritually, mentally, physically, and emotionally," says **Jolynn Stevenson**, Director of Bent Arrow. "With the support from ECF, we're able to expand programming to bring more families onto the land and further deepen these connections so that children and families can walk forward grounded in culture and belonging. When children are able to grow up rooted in culture, it supports their sense of self, which supports their whole journey — now and into the future."

The Edmonton Public Library (EPL) to promote childhood literacy by purchasing 5,342 new picture books for its children's collection.

"Early literacy has the power to shape a child's entire future," says **Pilar Martinez**, CEO of EPL. "With ECF's support, we're able to add thousands of new picture books that spark curiosity, imagination, and a love of reading from the very beginning. These books will help families build strong literacy foundations that last a lifetime."

The ABC Head Start Society to help renovate a newly secured West Edmonton site that will consolidate four classrooms currently operating in short-term, standalone leases.

“ECF’s investment arrives at a pivotal moment for us. The children and families we support often face multiple barriers, and having a safe, consistent learning environment can make all the difference,” says **Erin Gobolos**, CEO of ABC Head Start Society. “This funding jump-starts our efforts to create a purpose-built space that will finally bring four classrooms together and give our families the stability they deserve.”

Looking to 2026, ECF will continue broader sector work by launching a research collaboration with the **Community University Partnership (CUP)** at the University of Alberta. CUP will map the sector, provide an updated picture of how young children in Edmonton are doing, and identify where data and service gaps remain. Their findings will guide ECF’s long-term early childhood development focus.

For interviews with Tina Thomas (ECF), Pilar Martinez (EPL), Erin Gobolos (ABC Head Start), and representatives from Bent Arrow, contact Edmonton Community Foundation.

For visual assets of EPL, ABC Head Start, and Bent Arrow, [click here](#).

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About Edmonton Community Foundation

ECF is committed to building a vibrant city and enriching the lives of all Edmontonians. We do this by providing an average of over \$35 million in community grants and scholarships each year, thanks to the generous support of more than 2,600 donors. Through our endowment base of more than 1,750 funds, ECF has provided more than \$439 million to the community since 1990. As the largest non-governmental funder of the charitable sector in our city, ECF is in a unique position to address long-term, complex community needs by working with donors, charities, volunteers, government and community partners. For more information visit ecf.ca.

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