

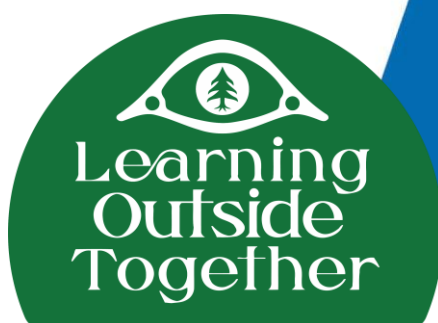


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Learning Outside Together

Year 2 Interim Report Phase 2

November 28, 2025



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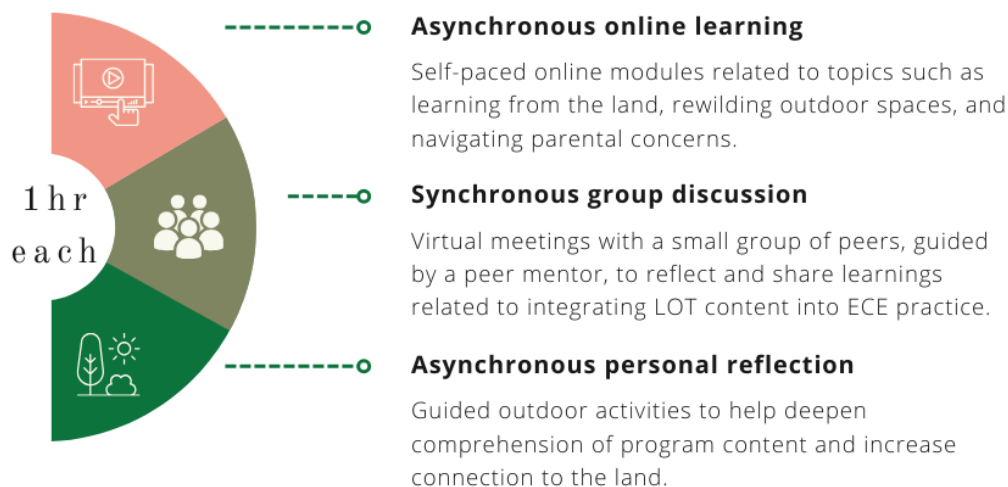
INTRODUCTION

This Phase of LOT runs from 2024 – 2027, funded by the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care. The overall goals are to create a self-sustaining program that increases Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) professionals’ knowledge of land-based experiences and improves the quality and duration of children’s land-based experiences. This report reflects an update on Year 2 (Cohort 6) of Phase 2.

PROGRAM UPDATES

The components of the LOT program are visualized in [Figure 1](#). The curriculum and structure remains unchanged from the last cohort, and minor tweaks were made to the timeline of Cohort 6 with all meetings taking place from Sept – Dec 2025. Main changes relate to program eligibility, described below.

Figure 1 **Weekly LOT Program Components**



Planned Expansion of Program Eligibility

Starting in Cohort 7, LOT is to be made available to early childhood professionals beyond certified ECEs as well as StrongStart Facilitators, who work in family programs (and thus not previously eligible for LOT). In preparation for this, two main changes were made in Year 2:

- Inclusion of StrongStart Facilitators into Cohort 6, and
- Additional “partner pods” outside of the regular cohort, consisting of staff from BCACCS and ECEBC in self-contained mentor groups. These pods started in Oct 2025 and were ongoing at the time of this

report. The ECEBC pod represented early childhood professionals who don't predominantly work with children in their day-to-day routine.

Additionally, course module modification to adjust program content for other early childhood professionals who do not currently work with children, such as licensing officers or ECE instructors, will begin in early 2026. Similarly, SRDC tested evaluation materials with these partner pods to help adjust survey questions for this new group.

The motivation for including these groups came from requests to take the program previously, as well as an acknowledgement that the ELCC sector is complex and involves adults with various certifications who interact with children and ECEs. As the LOT program waitlist decreased, partners became more comfortable expanding program eligibility so that more members of the ELCC sector could experience the program.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The Phase 2 evaluation framework moves away from implementation and formative evaluation to focus on summative components. The high priority outcomes to be evaluated relate to changes within participants as a result of the LOT program. The broad goals of the evaluation of the current funding period are to tell the story of the LOT program (including who participated in it and the lives touched by it); what changes occurred because of the program (for the individual, sector, and broader community); and to demonstrate the benefits and value of the LOT program. Hence, the intent is that evidence from the evaluation can be used post-project to demonstrate the effectiveness of the LOT program and ultimately to inform, support and sustain the implementation of LOT approaches in the future.

KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The key evaluation questions for LOT Phase 2 are:

1. To what extent does the LOT program influence participant's knowledge and skills related to land-based experiences?
2. To what extent does the LOT program influence participants' engagement with Indigenous knowledge?
3. To what extent does the LOT program provide new mentorship opportunities to participants?
 - a. In what ways can LOT support participants, via the peer mentors, to work through any implementation barriers to increasing time spent outdoors (including but not limited to licensing, physical space, and workplace policies)?

Additional sub-evaluation questions may be developed related to new modules or populations of interest added to LOT. As Cohort 6 eligibility was expanded to StrongStart Facilitators and partners (ECEBC and BCACCS employees), an additional question was developed to explore the experiences of these newly eligible LOT participants:

4. What is the applicability of LOT program for participants in the ELCC sector beyond ECEs who work directly with children in child care settings?

METHODOLOGY UPDATES

Phase 2 Program and Evaluation Timeline

See [Table 1](#) for a program timeline and evaluation activities related to the current funding period.

Table 1 LOT Phase 2 Program Timeline and Evaluation Activities

Cohort 5		Cohort 6	Cohort 7
September to October 2024	Baseline Survey sent out to Cohort 5 participants		
October 2024 to January 2025	Cohort 5 participates in LOT programming		
February 2025	End-of-Program Survey sent out to Cohort 5 participants		
August 2025	Photovoice data collection with mentors	Baseline Survey sent out to Cohort 6 participants	
September 2025 to December 2025		Cohort 6 participates in LOT programming	
December 2025		End-of-Program Survey sent out to Cohort 6 participants	
August 2026			Baseline Survey sent out to Cohort 7 participants
September 2026 to December 2026			Cohort 7 participates in LOT programming
December 2026			End-of-Program Survey sent out to Cohort 7 participants

Data Sources

Photovoice (Mentors)

In June 2025, all former mentors for whom contact information was available (approximately 80) were invited to take part in the Photovoice evaluation. Ten former mentors were selected to participate in the three-phase evaluation process, nine of whom completed the evaluation activities. Photovoice participants were asked to reflect on their time in the LOT mentorship program and share their experiences using photography, written and oral narratives, and discussion. A full description of the process is available in the attached report *LOT Mentorship: Learning That Lasts*.

Baseline Survey & End-of-Program Survey (Cohort 6 Participants)

The main quantitative data source for this report is a baseline survey administered when participants started LOT. Administrative data on the program implementation is provided by LOT administrators. The baseline survey used to evaluate Cohorts 1-3 was modified to create a new survey tool for Phase 2 in Cohort 5; minor changes were applied to the Cohort 6 baseline based on results from Cohort 5.¹ The partner cohort were given their own baseline survey.²

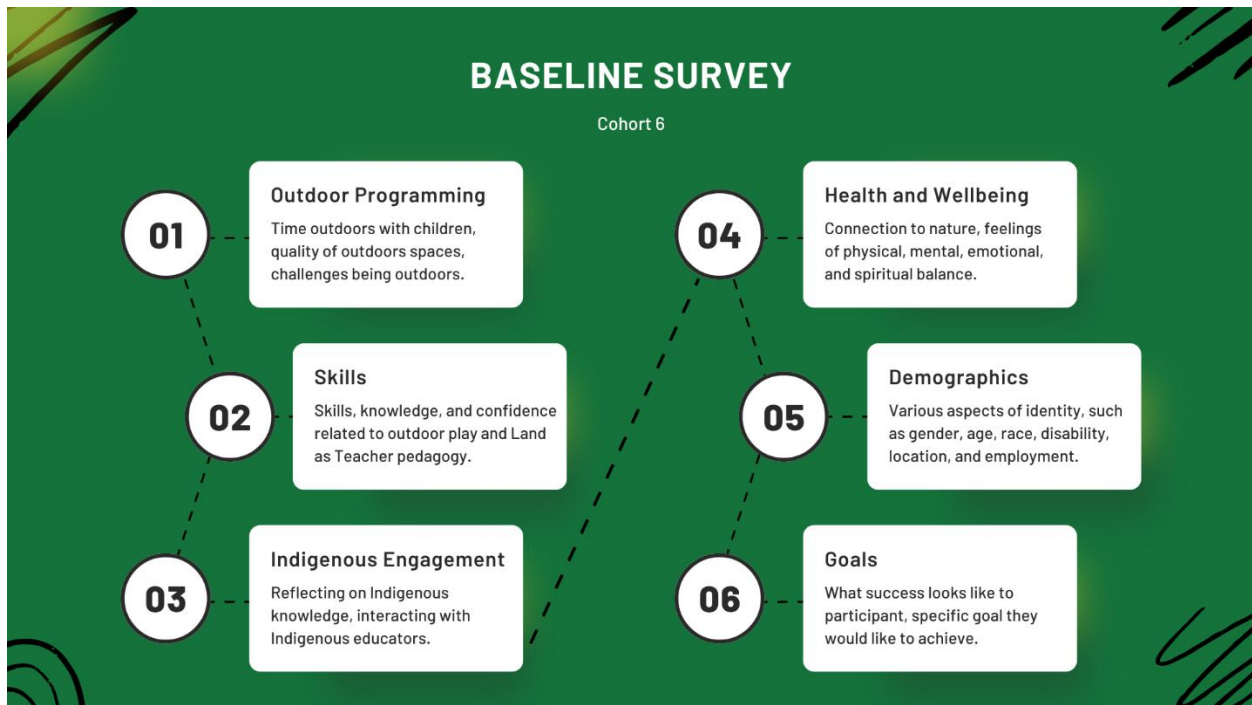
The baseline survey covers several important themes, including experience with outdoor programming/Land as Teacher pedagogy, relevant skills and knowledge, Indigenous engagement as an ECE, health and wellbeing, and reflections on program goals/measures of success. The survey also captures participants' demographic characteristics to better understand how these factors relate to participants' experiences in the program. See [Figure 2](#) for an overview of the six sections of the baseline survey.

The end-of-program survey records the same information as the baseline survey, except for demographic information for those who already completed the baseline survey. Additionally, the end-of-program survey includes a section related to program satisfaction and feedback. Results of the end-of-program survey and any changes since baseline will be reported in the next annual report.

¹ An indicator was also added to distinguish whether a participant is a StrongStart Facilitator.

² The partner cohort baseline survey included the same questions as the regular cohort, with an additional indicator for whether a participant works regularly with children. Since the partner cohort received training specific to them that is outside of the regular cohort, their survey responses are not included in the main Cohort 6 survey analysis. However, their survey responses are analyzed to evaluate the *applicability* of the survey questions for LOT participants who may not work directly with children and we found that the existing LOT baseline survey questions are largely still relevant.

Figure 2 LOT Cohort 6 Baseline Survey Structure



Potential New Data Sources for Participants Not Currently Working with Children (Cohort 7)

There is a planned expansion for LOT program eligibility for Cohort 7 to include participants who may not work directly with children, such as licensing officers or Child Care Resource and Referral staff. Understanding experiences of the Cohort 6 partner cohort will be valuable for determining whether changes to the LOT program and evaluation instruments are necessary. At the end of the partner cohort baseline survey, respondents are asked for their interest in participating in an interview with SRDC and SRDC will be contacting them at the conclusion of the partner cohort for an interview.

FINDINGS

MENTORSHIP FINDINGS

The mentor Photovoice photos and stories are available in a standalone report, *LOT Mentorship: Learning that Lasts*. That report presents the participating mentors' perspectives and voices as shared; here we summarize key findings (see [Figure 3](#)) and implications beyond the findings shared in the standalone report.

Photovoice Findings

Participating mentors identified the unique elements of the LOT mentorship program, including the emphasis on informal peer mentorship and shared experiences with ECEs outside of their workplace, as well as the opportunity to put the knowledge and skills learned as a LOT participant into practice by re-engaging with the program content. Photovoice participants shared how LOT mentorship had influenced their mentorship journey, typically by expanding or reinforcing their conceptualization of mentorship as a reciprocal relationship grounded in advocacy and intentionality.

The LOT program is guided by the principles of Two-Eyed Seeing, as described by Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall. Photovoice participants described LOT mentorship as being grounded in Two-Eyed Seeing through honouring storytelling, traditional wisdom, and lived experience; embracing the world from multiple perspectives; and encouraging mentors to slow down and be present in the current moment. As one mentor described, “[Two-Eyed Seeing] teaches me so many things to remember: to be open to experiences and being a mentor; it also invites me to slow down. These are moments that have connection and joy. I love the fact that Two-Eyed Seeing leaves room for connection not only with others, but with my land, my ancestors, and my own intuition.”

Participating mentors described the LOT program as helping to overcome barriers to outdoor play by providing a venue for explicit identification and discussion of such barriers, as well as an opportunity to learn about resources. Finally, Photovoice participants described the benefits of LOT mentorship extending beyond the program and into their workplaces, community, and sector. They deeply valued the opportunities provided in LOT as participants and mentors, and expressed gratitude for the program cultivating joy and care for an essential and often-overlooked workforce. Participating mentors identified LOT and LOT mentorship as helping to mitigate the ongoing retention crisis in ELCC.

Figure 3 Mentor Photovoice Summary of Findings



Photovoice Insights and Implications

LOT Mentorship Benefits are Largely an Extension of LOT Program Benefits

A key learning was that engaging with the LOT program again – as a mentor rather than a participant – was noted as extremely beneficial personally and professionally. In addition to the extra training and act of mentoring, simply re-experiencing the program content helped mentors further deepen their connection with the materials and integrate the learnings into their daily practice. This suggests that LOT mentorship helps support continuous learning and professional growth among mentors. Additionally, this finding validates the decision to include mentorship in the program design – that the mentorship component of LOT allows participants who wish to dig deeper the opportunity to do so, and that this extends the LOT program benefits.

The impact analysis of LOT (Cohorts 2 and 3) followed participants for up to 3 months after the program ended, making long-term impacts difficult to assess. Evaluating lasting outcomes and addressing persistent barriers to improving outdoor play may be more readily apparent among mentors, who have engaged with the material in a more ongoing and extensive way – this could be an area of future study.

Photovoice also highlights that mentorship provides real benefits to mentors (not just participants in their mentor groups); thus equitable eligibility for mentors should be given careful consideration if the program continues beyond Cohort 7. There has typically been higher demand to receive mentorship training than there are available mentorship positions, making mentorship selection relatively competitive. It is not clear whether mentorship opportunities will be available to StrongStart Facilitators and professionals not currently working with children, but given the benefits observed, it is worth careful consideration how to equitably approach this issue moving forward.

Inter-Workplace Groups Support Peer-Mentorship and Learning

Previous evaluation reports and related literature have suggested potentially better outcomes for participants who engage in LOT without their colleagues compared to with a colleague. This somewhat counter-intuitive suggestion was noted again in the mentorship Photovoice and participants shed further light on the advantages of mentor groups outside of their typical workplace environment. For example, one mentor reflected on how workplace mentorship tends to be “*instructional, imparting my own experiences*” and noted it is a professional responsibility that is constrained by the demands of the workplace. In contrast, peer mentorship in LOT encourages a different type of mentorship that is more relational and reciprocal. The mentor described it as being “*about ideas, interpretations, experiences; more give and take*”.

As noted in previous evaluation reports, the LOT partners have received multiple requests from workplaces to engage in “custom cohorts” in which an entire staff would participate as a mentor group (or multiple mentor groups). Once again, evaluation findings indicate that such configurations may deprive participants of some of the key benefits/experiences of LOT (i.e., new professional connections, reciprocal relationships, and ways of engaging with the program material). Such findings suggest that

custom cohorts are likely not the most ideal version of the LOT program and help explain why. Voluntarily enrolling (rather than being signed up by a manager) and having the opportunity to participate outside of a workplace environment appear to be valuable elements of the LOT experience. Nonetheless, there may be additional benefits to entire or specific workplaces, such as Indigenous centres, that have not been adequately captured to date because these have not been a focus of evaluation activities. The BCACCS pod – in which entire ELCC workplaces are participating in LOT as a group – may hint at potential trade-offs, which could be investigated further in a future study.

LOT (Mentorship) Embodies A Unique Approach to Professional Development

As ECEs, LOT mentors know the value of supportive learning environments. Photovoice participants largely described the emphasis on long-term, collaborative, and relational learning as uniquely beneficial. In particular, embracing principles of Two-Eyed Seeing, such as honouring storytelling and lived experience, supported a peer-mentorship model that created a positive learning environment for participants and mentors alike.

Some in the LOT community have previously suggested expanding on the LOT curriculum in the form of “LOT 2.0”, with more advanced material and increased focus on implementation in the workplace. While this may still be beneficial, it seems possible that LOT 2.0 already exists within the current program in the form of the mentorship training. Given the enthusiasm for the LOT mentorship program and the Ministry criterion for LOT increasing mentorship opportunities, further connection with mentorship within ELCC, such as the ECEBC Peer Mentoring Program, may be beneficial to continue to grow infrastructure and support. Future research investigating the direct impact of such mentorship opportunities on retention of ELCC professionals in BC may be worthwhile given the ongoing retention challenges locally and nationally.

COHORT 6 BASELINE UPDATE

Table 2 below presents the demographic profile of Cohort 6 participants (excluding partner pod participants) at baseline.

Table 2 **Description of the Cohort 6 Sample**

	Baseline n (up to n=207)	Baseline %
Gender		
Woman	192	93%
Man	<5	
Non-binary	<5	
Two-Spirit	<5	
Prefer to self-describe	<5	

	Baseline n (up to n=207)	Baseline %
Age range		
Up to 29 years	32	17%
30 - 44 years	99	52%
45 - 64 years	60	31%
65+ years	<5	
Indigenous identity	22	11%
First Nations		
Inuit		
Métis		
Experience working with children		
Less than 1 year	6	3%
1 - 4 years	50	26%
5 - 9 years	41	21%
10+ years	99	51%
Outdoor experience		
Beginner (almost no time outdoors)	<5	
Not very experienced (little time outdoors)	27	14%
Somewhat experienced (lots of time outdoors)	157	81%
Very experienced (outdoor expert)	9	5%
Self-employed	33	17%
Racialized identity	38	21%
Person with disability	16	8%
Francophone	9	5%
StrongStart Facilitator	14	7%
ECE certification	207	100%

Note: Cells with fewer than five respondents are suppressed to protect participant identity. Proportions are calculated based on the effective sample (number for whom information is available) and therefore may not match the n noted in the table header.

WORKPLACE	Baseline (up to n=207)	Baseline %
Health Authority Region		
Fraser Health	66	32%
Interior Health	40	19%
Northern Health	27	13%
Vancouver Coastal Health	36	17%
Vancouver Island Health	38	18%
Workplace setting		
Urban (e.g., in a city)	128	66%
Rural (e.g., adjacent to or outside a city)	51	26%
Remote (e.g., considerably distant from a city)	15	8%

Note: Proportions are calculated based on the effective sample (number for whom information is available) and therefore may not match the n noted in the table header.

While Table 2 excludes partner cohort participants, SRDC reviewed the profile of these respondents and noted a few similarities and differences from the main cohort. First, of the 13 respondents³ to the partner cohort baseline survey, all were ECEs. Thus, this group will not be able to inform adjustments related to future non-ECE participants. Second, n=6 respondents indicated they are in a role where they work directly with children most of the day and n=7 respondents indicated they were not. The experience of those not working directly with children in the LOT program will be important for informing any potential program changes in preparation for Cohort 7.

Emerging Themes in Cohort 6

Analyses of open-ended survey responses point to some themes emerging among Cohort 6 participants and partner pod respondents:

Self-Described Goals in LOT:

- Previous analysis of participants' descriptions of success or goals for the LOT program identified five core themes: engagement with the outdoors; Indigenous engagements; skills, confidence, and knowledge; implementation; and collaboration. Analysis of goals identified by StrongStart Facilitators and partner pod participants revealed that these five themes are also mostly relevant among newly-eligible participants. However, "collaboration" was less relevant for partner staff, while "engagement with outdoors" was less common among StrongStart Facilitators.
- A theme emergent amongst partner pod participants who did not work directly with children was "better understanding of the LOT program" as a description of success in LOT. One participant indicated that they wanted to *"have knowledge of [organization]-offered programs and how they reflect our mission, values, and beliefs as an organization."* Another participant expressed their goal was to *"be fully aware of the research that backs the LOT program."*
- An emergent theme for StrongStart Facilitators was "personal growth", which was identified as a key takeaway among Cohort 5 LOT graduates. A respondent described their motivation for joining LOT as follows: *"to become more confident and capable in my role, but also to better understand myself—my strengths, my values, and the areas I want to develop. Success isn't just about mastering specific skills; it's about feeling inspired, supported, and empowered to take on challenges and make meaningful contributions in my work. If I leave LOT with a clearer sense of purpose, stronger relationships, and the courage to step outside my comfort zone, I'll consider that a true success."*
- While "collaboration" is a theme common amongst LOT participants, it should be noted that amongst StrongStart respondents, the theme is expanded beyond collaboration with children and colleagues to include collaborating with families participating in their programs. For example, participants expressed wanting to share knowledge gained from LOT with parents to promote outdoor learning.

³ Survey was sent to 14 total eligible partner cohort participants.

Challenges to Bringing Children Outdoors in Workplace:

A select-all-that-apply question in the survey asks respondents to identify challenges to bringing children in their program outdoors. Some new themes emerged in these results compared to Cohort 5, which may reflect expanded eligibility criteria as well as recent changes in the ELCC landscape.

- An emerging theme, presumably driven by StrongStart Facilitators, pointed to the unique challenges of having parents/caregivers involved in the ELCC program. For example, one respondent described: *“the caregivers who accompany the children are not very keen to be outside”*, noting that family programs such as StrongStart also need to address the comfort of adults other than staff towards outdoor play.
- Finally, respondents mentioned some challenges around sharing ELCC space with school districts, such as not having control over the outdoor environment and/or a time-consuming process for making improvements due to a large work-order system. As provision of ELCC expands in BC to increasingly share space with K-12 education, such challenges are likely to become more common amongst LOT participants.

CONCLUSION

Overall, Photovoice with mentors provided further evidence of the value of LOT mentorship and identified a few areas for further consideration. These include mentorship eligibility and long-term outcomes, as well as potential impacts on LOT participant retention in the ELCC sector.

Survey findings suggest that a) our evaluation instruments are largely still relevant to newly-eligible LOT participants and b) the LOT program may want to invest additional resources to supporting StrongStart Facilitators working with families in the program. Such investments would likely benefit all participants who work directly with children, as these professionals also need to manage familial expectations (though in a less direct way than StrongStart Facilitators).

NEXT STEPS

SRDC will distribute the end-of-program survey in December to everyone who was invited to complete the baseline survey, and will send a similar survey to the partner pod participants upon completion. Additionally, we will invite partner pod participants to join short one-on-one interviews about the evaluation materials and LOT program to further explore recommended adjustments for Cohort 7. These findings will be presented in the next annual report.

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