

# Practitioner, Pioneer, President

*A self-proclaimed pioneer, Lois Mahon brought 35 years of experience to her role on the Transitional Council for the College of Early Childhood Educators. After blazing that trail, she's tackling another one: President of the first College Council.*

BY JULIA LIPMAN

If you don't already know Lois Mahon, she's the kind of person you'd want to have dinner with. As the Executive Director of Child Care Resources in Sudbury she has extensive experience in the field, but she's also the first President of the Council of the College of Early Childhood Educators.

Mahon sat on the Transitional Council that worked to establish the College prior to being elected President of its Council earlier this year. "It was for me a life dream that I'd been working on since 1972 so I was very excited to do that," Mahon says about legislative recognition and the opportunity.

"Not only was I able to contribute with my experience, but it was also a fascinating time when we collected around table as nine people who had in their own right been advocates in a number of ways, not all for child care, but many of us came to the table expecting something and realized a regulatory body that comes from a piece of legislation is certainly not the world we'd been working in around advocacy," she remembers.

"It was another way, a different way, to move our profession forward. I enjoyed it and decided early on to run for council, which I did and I was successful. I consider myself to be a pioneer of sorts. Most of my life I've been starting things and I'm really energized for that."

Mahon's right about her tendency toward pioneering work.

Her career began when she graduated from Niagara College's ECE program in 1972 and returned home to Sudbury to work as a child and youth worker. "There were no day care centres, there was only one," she says. "That was in the day of funding and money, and our city built a brand new municipal day care so I went to work there as an ECE and then assistant supervisor," she recalls.

The next chunk of her career was varied, with Mahon helping to develop the ECE program at Cambrian College, taking time off to start her family, spent time in child care and then return to Cambrian to manage its lab school and licensed child care centre.

She also took a break from early childhood education for a short time and worked with adults with developmental disabilities, but it wasn't long before she was back in ECE, this time to assist in the development of a Toy Library.

During the early '90s Mahon returned again to Cambrian College, and worked on secondment for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. "It was the Bob Rae era and there was lots of money for development of child care. We were buying out for-profit centres and flipping them to non-profit," she says.

"I was leading that day care conversion project while doing a community process about children with special needs and how they could be best included in regular child care programs."

Within two years an agency called Child Care Resources came into being and Mahon took on the role of Executive Director. "It supported special needs resources and all of these brand new child care programs that were just implemented in board training, group purchasing, group benefits, networks for supervisors and cooks. The Ministry also put the Toy Library I'd previously worked on with us."

Funded directly by the province, Child Care Resources provided resources to Sudbury and Manitoulin. In her work there Mahon came into contact with many children with autism whose families were using the services provided.

"Part of the agency started growing around particular support for kids with autism, and it branched out and became a regional autism program," she explains. "In the meantime, I had gone back to Cambrian College a few times on a part-time basis to teach child care management and had done some work with Georgian College doing health and nutrition, particularly to a number of First Nations folks."

Breaking ground yet again, Mahon helped to establish the Wabaseabon Campus of Cambrian College on Wikwemikong First Nation and developed part of the ECE program and lab school there.

With years of experience in a variety of roles, Mahon had been to many parts of the province through her work on the Board of Directors for the Canadian Association of Toy Libraries. She'd also built up her governance experience through volunteer work with the AECEO, and her work on a child and family services review board in the early 1980s where she gained experience conducting hearings. "I'd had the opportunity to become part of a quasi judicial board, and that also gave me good background for the Transitional Council," she notes.

"My name was put forward, quite frankly I don't even know by whom, though I had been on secondment with the Ministry [of Children and Youth Services] before so I was known to some people. I was very excited to be part of the Transitional Council. I always had a keen sense of bringing a northern voice", jokes Mahon, who aptly points out that "the world doesn't end at Barrie".

More near and dear to Mahon than her relevant experience, however, was her own desire for more recognition for ECEs.

*Lois Mahon, right, shown here cutting a celebratory cake with Registrar Dainora Juozapavicius to mark the official opening of the College of ECE on May 12, 2009.*

Photo Courtesy of the College of ECE



"When I was a student at Niagara College we implemented a JK program for the Niagara School Board in Welland and it was successful, and then they hired teachers and said we couldn't do it," she recalls. "I was teaching JK teachers how to teach in the classroom but I couldn't teach myself."

Mahon took to her work on the Transitional Council immediately and as planned, when the opportunity arose she ran for a position on the College Council. Mahon was elected President of the first Council of the College of Early Childhood Educators at its first meeting held February 24-25, 2009 in Toronto.

Even as the Council's new President, Mahon says she relates to anyone who might feel confused or unsure about the role of the College.

"I understand [the confusion people have] because when we came to the Transitional Council, we were confused. It's a whole new world," she says.

"The College is not an advocate [for the profession]. We're here to protect public so we can't be as forthcoming perhaps as the AECEO can be," she explains, using the recently released Early Learning Advisor's report as an example of how the College differs from the AECEO.

"What we can do is say at the College 'here's our perspective, but here's the professional association's perspective [as well]. We are a regulatory body, our primary function is to protect the public interest. The AECEO can stand up and say 'here's who we are'. Now more than ever is the time to support and endorse and help grow our professional association [the AECEO]."

Mahon also knows that actions speak louder than words – she re-joined the AECEO at this year's Annual Provincial Conference in Windsor, ON.

"I felt as a leader in the College that I have a responsibility to my profession to use my leadership to help to support the continued development of our professional association. I was a member of the AECEO from '72 until I'd say probably about 10 years ago when I sort of lost my way," she shares.

"I had taken a small side step [professionally] to the adult world and my own children were small, I thought I needed to have a bit of a different perspective. I wasn't sure if I was an educator or a parent." Though Mahon's personal membership lapsed she maintained her support of the association as her work brought her back into ECE. "I realized quite early on in the Transitional Council the importance of a very strong professional association, recognizing that a regulatory body cannot at all provide that function," says Mahon.

"People ask why we have to have two [organizations] and why we have to pay twice [for membership with the College of ECE and the AECEO], but I think as time goes on we will recognize the importance of both."

When asked how she would like to see the relationship between the College and the AECEO develop going forward, Mahon said she hopes the organizations will continue to have a mutually respected and supported relationship.

"They play two separate and distinct roles but nonetheless need to work closely together," she points out. "There will be times when we can't work hand in hand because of the nature of our job, but I think it's peanut butter and jam – we need to stick together."

"There are things a professional association will help us keep in mind, help us do and help us think that's through a different lens, even more so after the release of Dr. Pascal's report," she says.

"I had a bit of trepidation about the report, but Eduarda (Sousa, executive director of the AECEO) really challenged my thinking as a professional and I am thankful for that perspective. She challenged me to think about kids. As an ECE, I value the support that we're going to get from our professional association."

Mahon's support is a welcome addition to the AECEO's membership, and she has her work cut out for her on the College Council. The only question will be what's next for this pioneer of early childhood education.