2025-2026 ECE Report

The 2025-2026 school year was a year of learning, connection, and growth in our kindergartens. Alongside the everyday joys and challenges of working with young children, we continued to strengthen our program, support our educators, build relationships with the wider early years community, and explore the possibility of becoming a licensed ECE facility.

Our Kindergartens

We had two kindergarten groups this past year:

- **Junior Kindergarten:** 11 students, with Monika Wildemann as lead teacher, Arrow Herbert as assistant, and Jule Papenhagen (volunteering through the VIA program) in the afternoons.
- **Senior Kindergarten:** 9 students, with Camille Wilkins as lead teacher, Moonshell Paradine as assistant, and Jule volunteering in the mornings.

Elisabeth Downing led the Parent and Tot program during the fall semester but was unable to continue due to the long commute. We were grateful for the time she gave to the program and the families it served.

Moni and Camille shared the role of ECE Chair, with Taylor Hansen, John Corker, and Camille as active members of the ECE Committee. We appreciated the time, care, and collaboration that everyone brought to this work.

Professional Development and Community Connections

Supporting the growth of our educators was an important part of the year. During the fall semester, the kindergarten team, with the exception of Moni, who had previously completed the training, participated in a Waldorf kindergarten assistant course offered through Sophia's Hearth.

Taylor Hansen also coordinated a professional development day through her work at MSVU, in collaboration with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Taylor and Camille welcomed early years educators from across Nova Scotia into the senior kindergarten classroom and forest to share our approach to rural, outdoor, and inclusive education. The day was well attended and offered a valuable opportunity to share our work, learn from one another, and strengthen connections with other educators, MSVU, and the Department. We hope to continue offering these opportunities in the future.

In April, Camille attended the World Early Childhood Conference at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland, celebrating 100 years of Waldorf kindergarten. She joined more than 1,000 Waldorf kindergarten teachers from around the world for an inspiring opportunity to learn

and connect with the wider Waldorf community. Kaitlin Brown of Seraphim Homeschool Pod also attended, and it was lovely to have our local community represented. Moni had planned to attend but unfortunately had to withdraw due to illness.

Camille was also accepted into the part-time Birth-to-Seven Professional Development program for Waldorf Early Childhood Teachers at Rudolf Steiner College Canada. The start date was postponed several times, most recently to March 2027, but the opportunity remains an important part of her ongoing professional development.

At the very end of the school year, Eleonora Ebata, Tesia Brown, and Omaima Debbagh from Rising Bay School, a new Waldorf initiative in Hantsport, Nova Scotia, reached out to visit our kindergartens. Eleonora and Omaima were able to join Camille for a day during summer camp in July, seeking inspiration and guidance as they developed their own program. We also began exploring the possibility of an ongoing mentorship relationship. We were delighted to share our experience and support the growth of Waldorf early childhood education in our wider community.

Working Toward Licensed ECE

A significant focus of the year was exploring the possibility of becoming a licensed ECE facility. We completed a community consultation and consensus process, and there was strong agreement that pursuing licensing would be a valuable opportunity for SSWS and the wider community.

Camille applied to the Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education (NSCECE) for a six-month program beginning in September 2025. The goal was to work toward Level 1 certification, followed by the possibility of having her 23 years of teaching experience recognized toward Level 2 through the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) process. Although she was accepted, she was placed on a waiting list because the cohorts were full. We later learned that subsequent cohorts at NSCECE, as well as programs at NSCC, were restricted to applicants already working in licensed childcare facilities.

We also met with representatives from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to seek guidance on licensing requirements and potential funding. Finding clear answers proved difficult due to staffing changes and other departmental challenges. The minor infrastructure grant we had been considering closed, and the timing of its return is unknown. A previously available major infrastructure grant was also no longer available.

Although this part of our journey proved more complicated than expected, we remained committed to finding a path forward. The process helped us better understand the requirements and challenges ahead, and we ended the year with renewed determination to continue exploring the possibilities.

Supporting Children and Planning for the Future

During the winter semester, Camille, Michaela, Kerry, and Ben met with Senior Kindergarten parents to discuss Grade 1 readiness, the assessment process, and the many factors that influenced a child's transition to first grade. The meeting provided an opportunity to support families as they considered this important next step in their children's educational journeys.

Camille also ran a week of March break camp, and several of those children returned to join SSWS for summer camp. It was lovely to see these connections continue!

In preparation for Moni's retirement, we began interviewing candidates early in the school year for the lead Junior Kindergarten position for fall 2026. After a lengthy recruitment process with some unexpected turns, we hired Katelyn Smith in June. Katelyn brought many years of experience, a Level 3 classification, and a natural affinity for Waldorf education and the thoughtful approach that shapes our kindergartens. We were delighted to welcome her to the team and felt very fortunate to have found such a wonderful fit for our community.

Looking Back

We were grateful to our teachers, assistants, volunteers, families, and ECE Committee members for all they contributed throughout the year. The work of early childhood education is built through many small, meaningful moments, as well as the larger efforts to support and sustain our program.

Despite some challenges and delays, we made meaningful progress in professional development, community connections, and planning for the future. Most importantly, our kindergartens remained places of warmth, discovery, and growth for the children in our care. We ended the year grateful for what we had accomplished together and hopeful about the path ahead for Waldorf early childhood education at SSWS.