

NOTICE OF PUBLICATION BAN

In the matter of College of Early Childhood Educators and Rebecca Wardhaugh, this is notice that the Discipline Committee ordered that no person shall publish or broadcast the identity of, or any information that could identify, any person who is under 18 years old and is a witness in the hearing, or the subject of evidence in the hearing or under subsection 35.1(3) of the *Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007*.

**DISCIPLINE COMMITTEE
OF THE COLLEGE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS**

PANEL: Kristine Parsons, RECE & Chairperson
Barbara Brown, RECE
Barney Savage

BETWEEN:)
)
COLLEGE OF EARLY) Vered Beylin
CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS) for the College of Early Childhood Educators
)
)
- and -)
)
REBECCA ANN WARDHAUGH (née) Self-Represented
BOLTON))
REGISTRATION # 55781)
)
)
)
) Elyse Sunshine
) Independent Legal Counsel
)
)
)
) Heard: December 4, 2019

DECISION AND REASONS

This matter was heard by a panel of the Discipline Committee of the College of Early Childhood Educators (the “Panel”) on December 4, 2019.

PUBLICATION BAN

The Panel ordered a publication ban following a motion by College Counsel, on consent of the Member, pursuant to section 35.1(3) of the *Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007* (the “Act”). The order bans the public disclosure, publication and broadcasting outside of the hearing room, any names or identifying information of any minor children who may be the subject of evidence in the hearing.

THE ALLEGATIONS

The allegations against the Member as stated in the Notice of Hearing dated September 12, 2019, (Exhibit 1) were as follows:

1. At all material times, Rebecca Ann Wardhaugh (née Bolton) (the “Member”) was a member of the College of Early Childhood Educators (the “College”) and was employed as an Early Childhood Educator (“ECE”) at the Stirling Little Sprouts Child Care Centre (the “Centre”) in Stirling, Ontario. The Centre is located within Stirling Public School (the “School”).
2. On or about March 8, 2017 the Member and a non-RECE staff member, S.C. (collectively the “Staff”) were supervising a group of 13 preschool aged children, including a 3½ year old girl (the “Child”). That morning the Member and S.C. decided to take the children off premises to a neighbourhood park. At approximately 10:00am the Staff lined the children up along a walking rope at the Centre’s fenced yard. The group then left the Centre. The Child remained in the yard, alone and unsupervised. The temperature at the time was -11 degrees Celsius and it was windy.

3. Approximately 20 minutes after starting the walk, the Member noticed that the Child was missing, and the group began walking back to the Centre.
4. At approximately 10:30am a passerby who walked by the School observed the Child alone in the Centre's yard. The Centre's Supervisor was notified and she found the Child sitting against a wall, upset and crying hysterically.
5. At approximately 10:45am the Member and the other children returned to the Centre. The Member asked the Supervisor in a harsh tone where was the Child hiding and blamed the Child for the incident.
6. Between 10:00am and 10:45am the Member failed to do the following:
 - a) Prior to exiting the yard, she did not properly count the children and did not use an attendance binder to verify that all the children were lined up and present.
 - b) She did not conduct a headcount after exiting the Centre's gate, as well as before and after crossing at least two roads and/or parking lots.
 - c) Once she noticed that the Child was missing, she did not take immediate steps to locate the Child and did not call the Centre to report the Child's absence.
7. By engaging in the conduct set out in paragraphs 2 – 6 above, the Member engaged in professional misconduct as defined in subsection 33(2) of the Act, in that:
 - a) The Member failed to supervise adequately a person who was under her professional supervision, contrary to Ontario Regulation 223/08, subsection 2(2);
 - b) The Member failed to maintain the standards of the profession, contrary to Ontario Regulation 223/08, subsection 2(8), in that:
 - i. The Member failed to maintain a safe and healthy learning environment, contrary to Standard III.A.1 of the College's Standards of Practice;
 - ii. The Member failed to know, understand and abide by the legislation, policies and procedures that were relevant to her professional practice and to the care and learning of children under her professional supervision, contrary to Standard IV.A.2 of the College's Standards of Practice;
 - iii. The Member failed to observe and monitor the learning environment and anticipate when support or intervention was required, contrary to Standard IV.B.3 of the College's Standards of Practice;

- iv. The Member failed to work collaboratively with colleagues in her workplace in order to provide safe, secure, healthy and inviting environments for children and families, and/or failed to build effective relationships with colleagues and other professionals by using clear verbal and written communication, contrary to Standard IV.C.1 of the College's Standards of Practice; and/or
- v. The Member conducted herself in a manner that could reasonably be perceived as reflecting negatively on the profession of early childhood education, contrary to Standard IV.E.2 of the College's Standards of Practice;
- c) The Member acted or failed to act in a manner that, having regard to the circumstances, would reasonably be regarded by members as disgraceful, dishonourable or unprofessional, contrary to Ontario Regulation 223/08, subsection 2(10); and/or
- d) The Member acted in a manner that is unbecoming a Member, contrary to Ontario Regulation 223/08, subsection 2(22).

EVIDENCE

Counsel for the College and the Member advised the Panel that agreement had been reached on the facts and introduced an Agreed Statement of Facts (Exhibit 2), which read as follows:

The Member

1. The Member has had a certificate of registration with the College for approximately 4 years. She is in good standing with the College and does not have a prior discipline history with the College.
2. At all material times, the Member was employed as an RECE at the Centre in Stirling, Ontario. The Centre is located within the School.

The Incident

3. On March 8, 2017, the Staff were supervising a group of 13 preschool aged children, including the Child. That morning the Staff decided to take the children to a neighbourhood park. At approximately 10:00am, the Staff brought the children out into the Centre's fenced yard and lined the children up along a walking rope. The Staff then opened the gate in the fence, brought the children out of the yard and closed the gate

behind them. The group then left the Centre. The Child remained in the yard, alone and unsupervised.

4. Approximately 15 – 20 minutes after starting the walk, the Member noticed that the Child was missing and the group began walking back to the Centre.
5. At approximately 10:30am, a passerby who walked by the School observed the Child alone in the Centre's yard. The Centre's Supervisor was notified and she found the Child sitting against a wall, upset and crying hysterically. The Child was alone and unsupervised for approximately 30 minutes.
6. At approximately 10:45am the Member and the other children returned to the Centre. The Member asked the Supervisor in a harsh tone where was the Child hiding, which the Supervisor viewed as blaming the Child for the incident.
7. Between 10:00am and 10:45am the Member failed to do the following:
 - a. Prior to exiting the yard, she did not properly count the children and did not use an attendance binder to verify that all the children were lined up and present.
 - b. She did not conduct a headcount after exiting the Centre's gate, as well as before and after crossing at least two roads and/or parking lots.
 - c. Once she noticed that the Child was missing, she did not take immediate steps to locate the Child and did not call the Centre to report the Child's absence.

Additional Information

8. As a result of the incident, the Member was suspended from the Centre for the remainder of the day on which the incident occurred. The Centre also issued a verbal and written warning to the Member and imposed a 30 day probation period on her employment.
9. If the Member were to testify, she would advise the following:
 - a. The Member did not intend to blame the Child for the incident. The Member asked where the Child was hiding because she was worried about her whereabouts and safety.

- b. The Member reflected on what had happened in this “terrible” incident and learned from it. Following the incident she undertook professional development to improve her practice and assisted the Centre’s management in training new staff members.

Admissions of Professional Misconduct

10. The Member admits that she engaged in and is guilty of professional misconduct as described in paragraphs 3 – 7 above, and as defined in subsection 33(2) of the Act in that:

- a. The Member failed to supervise adequately a person who was under her professional supervision, contrary to Ontario Regulation 223/08, subsection 2(2);

- b. The Member failed to maintain the standards of the profession, contrary to Ontario Regulation 223/08, subsection 2(8), in that:
 - i. The Member failed to maintain a safe and healthy learning environment, contrary to Standard III.A.1 of the College’s Standards of Practice;
 - ii. The Member failed to know, understand and abide by the legislation, policies and procedures that were relevant to her professional practice and to the care and learning of children under her professional supervision, contrary to Standard IV.A.2 of the College’s Standards of Practice;
 - iii. The Member failed to observe and monitor the learning environment and anticipate when support or intervention was required, contrary to Standard IV.B.3 of the College’s Standards of Practice;
 - iv. The Member failed to work collaboratively with colleagues in her workplace in order to provide safe, secure, healthy and inviting environments for children and families, and/or failed to build effective relationships with colleagues and other professionals by using clear verbal and written communication, contrary to Standard IV.C.1 of the College’s Standards of Practice; and/or
 - v. The Member conducted herself in a manner that could reasonably be perceived as reflecting negatively on the profession of early childhood education, contrary to Standard IV.E.2 of the College’s Standards of Practice;

- c. The Member acted or failed to act in a manner that, having regard to the circumstances, would reasonably be regarded by members as disgraceful,

- dishonourable or unprofessional, contrary to Ontario Regulation 223/08, subsection 2(10); and/or
- d. The Member acted in a manner that is unbecoming a Member, contrary to Ontario Regulation 223/08, subsection 2(22).

THE MEMBER'S PLEA

The Member admitted to the allegations in the Agreed Statement of Facts.

The Panel received a written plea inquiry (Exhibit 3) which was signed by the Member. The Panel also conducted a verbal plea inquiry and was satisfied that the Member's admission was voluntary, informed and unequivocal.

DECISION ON THE ALLEGATIONS

Having regard to the facts set out in the Agreed Statement of Facts, the Committee accepted the Member's admission and found that she committed all of the acts of professional misconduct set out in the Notice of Hearing as outlined above.

REASONS FOR DECISION

The Panel considered the Agreed Statement of Facts and the Member's plea and found that the evidence supported findings of professional misconduct as alleged.

The allegations of misconduct contained in paragraph seven of the Notice of Hearing are supported by the facts set out in the Agreed Statement of Facts. The evidence shows that the Member contravened the standards of practice when she failed to conduct a headcount after exiting the Centre's gate. She then left the Centre with her class, but failed to notice the Child was not with the group, resulting in the Child remaining unsupervised in the Centre's yard.

In so doing, the Member failed to adequately supervise the Child, who was under her professional supervision. She contravened the standards of practice when she neglected to properly follow established procedures for transition off the Centre property, as described in paragraphs three through seven of the Agreed Statement of Facts. By engaging in such

conduct, the Member admitted, and the Panel finds, that the Member's conduct would reasonably be regarded by members of the profession as disgraceful, dishonourable or unprofessional. In addition, the Member did not comply with the Act, and thereby failed to meet her obligations as an RECE. Finally, the Member engaged in conduct unbecoming a member. The Panel noted that the Member was one of two employees supervising the group on the day in question. Both the Member and the other staff failed to work together to ensure supervision of, and a safe environment, for the children under their care.

POSITION OF THE PARTIES ON PENALTY

Counsel for the College and the Member made a joint submission as to an appropriate penalty. The joint submission as to penalty proposed that the Panel make an order as follows:

1. Requiring the Member to appear before a Panel of the Discipline Committee to be reprimanded immediately following the hearing of this matter.
2. Directing the Registrar to suspend the Member's certificate of registration for a period of 7 months. The suspension will take effect from the date of this Order and will run without interruption as long as the College has not otherwise prohibited the Member from practising or suspended the Member for any other reason.
3. Directing the Registrar to impose the following terms, conditions and limitations on the Member's certificate of registration:

Mentorship

- a. Prior to the Member commencing or resuming employment as a Registered Early Childhood Educator ("RECE") or engaging in the practice of early childhood education, as defined in section 2 of the Act the Member, at her own expense, will arrange a mentoring relationship with a Mentor, who:
 - i. is an RECE in good standing with the College,
 - ii. is employed in a supervisory position,
 - iii. has never been found guilty of professional misconduct and/or incompetence by the Discipline Committee of the College,
 - iv. is not currently found to be incapacitated by the Fitness to Practise Committee of the College,
 - v. is not currently the subject of allegations referred to the Discipline Committee or the Fitness to Practise Committee of the College, and

- vi. is pre-approved by the Director of Professional Regulation (the “Director”). In order to pre-approve the Mentor, the Member will provide the Director with all requested information, including (but not limited to) the name, registration number, telephone number, address and résumé of the Mentor.

For clarity, the Member can commence or resume employment as an RECE after arranging a mentorship relationship with a pre-approved Mentor.

- b. Within 14 days of commencing or resuming employment as an RECE, the Member will ensure that the Director is notified of the name, address and telephone number of all employers.
- c. The Member will provide the Mentor with a copy of the following documents within 14 days of being notified that the Mentor has been approved by the Director, or within 14 days after the release of such documents, whichever is earliest:
 - i. the Panel’s Order,
 - ii. the Agreed Statement of Facts,
 - iii. the Joint Submission on Penalty and Costs, and
 - iv. the Panel’s Decision and Reasons.
- d. The Member will meet with the Mentor at least every 2 weeks after the Mentor has been approved by the Director to discuss the following subjects:
 - i. review of the College’s Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice,
 - ii. the acts or omissions by the Member, which resulted in the Discipline Committee finding the Member guilty of professional misconduct,
 - iii. the potential consequences of the misconduct to the parents/children affected, and to the Member’s colleagues, profession and self,
 - iv. strategies for preventing the misconduct from recurring, and
 - v. the Member’s daily practice and any issues that arise, to ensure that she is meeting the College’s Standards of Practice (without disclosing personal or identifying information about any of the children under the Member’s care, or clients of her employer(s)).
- e. After a minimum of 5 sessions, the Member can seek the Director’s permission to stop participating in the mentorship sessions by providing the Director with a report by the Mentor that sets out the following:
 - i. the dates the Member attended the sessions with the Mentor,

- ii. that the Mentor received a copy of the documents referred to in paragraph 3(c),
 - iii. that the Mentor reviewed the documents set out in paragraph 3(c) and discussed the subjects set out in paragraph 3(d) with the Member, and
 - iv. the Mentor's assessment of the Member's insight into her behaviour.
 - f. All documents delivered by the Member to the College or the Mentor will be delivered by email, registered mail or courier, and the Member will retain proof of delivery.
 - g. The College may require proof of compliance with any of the terms in this Order at any time.
4. Requiring the Member to pay the College's costs fixed in the amount of \$1,000, to be paid within 4 months of the date of this Order and in accordance with the following payment schedule:
 - a. \$250 on the date of this Order;
 - b. \$250 thirty (30) days following the date of this Order;
 - c. \$250 sixty (60) days following the date of this Order; and
 - d. \$250 ninety (90) days following the date of this Order.\

Submissions of the Parties

Counsel for the College submitted that the proposed order was appropriate and reasonable in light of the facts agreed upon.

Counsel for the College provided two cases in support of the proposed penalty and submitted that these cases represented conduct of a similar nature and established that the proposed penalty was reasonable and would not bring the administration of justice into disrepute. These cases were:

- *College of Early Childhood Educators v Sarah Louise Cameron*, 2019 ONCECE 7 (CanLII),
- *College of Early Childhood Educators v Jenny Ng-Nakatani*, (unreported) Order dated November 14, 2019.

The College submitted that the prime aggravating factors in this case were:

- The incident involved a three year-old child.
- The Child was left unsupervised for approximately 30 minutes.
- The Member did not realize the Child was missing for approximately 15 to 20 minutes.
- A bystander noticed that the Child was alone, in the playground, and brought this matter to the attention of the Centre.
- The Member failed to follow practices such as reviewing her attendance binder and conducting head counts.
- The Child was emotionally impacted, as evidenced by the Child crying.
- The Member failed to take immediate action upon realizing that the child was not accounted for to contact the Centre or locate the Child. This delay could have resulted in a far more serious outcome.

The parties agreed that the mitigating factors in this case were:

- The Member acknowledged her wrongdoing, and took responsibility.
- The Member pled guilty to the allegations of professional misconduct.
- The Member has been registered with the College for four years and has had no prior incidents of misconduct.
- The Member voluntarily undertook professional development to improve her practice and used her knowledge to train new staff.

Other considerations in determining penalty were brought to the attention of the Panel. These included the fact that:

- The Child was not physically harmed and
- This was an isolated incident, and not part of a pattern of behaviour.

PENALTY DECISION

The Panel accepted the joint submission on penalty and makes the following order as to penalty:

1. Requiring the Member to appear before a Panel of the Discipline Committee to be reprimanded immediately following the hearing of this matter.
2. Directing the Registrar to suspend the Member's certificate of registration for a period of 7 months. The suspension will take effect from the date of this Order and will run without interruption as long as the College has not otherwise prohibited the Member from practising or suspended the Member for any other reason.
3. Directing the Registrar to impose the following terms, conditions and limitations on the Member's certificate of registration:

Mentorship

- a. Prior to the Member commencing or resuming employment as an RECE or engaging in the practice of early childhood education, as defined in section 2 of the Act, the Member, at her own expense, will arrange a mentoring relationship with a Mentor, who:
 - i. is an RECE in good standing with the College,
 - ii. is employed in a supervisory position,
 - iii. has never been found guilty of professional misconduct and/or incompetence by the Discipline Committee of the College,
 - iv. is not currently found to be incapacitated by the Fitness to Practise Committee of the College,
 - v. is not currently the subject of allegations referred to the Discipline Committee or the Fitness to Practise Committee of the College, and
 - vi. is pre-approved by the Director. In order to pre-approve the Mentor, the Member will provide the Director with all requested information, including (but not limited to) the name, registration number, telephone number, address and résumé of the Mentor.

For clarity, the Member can commence or resume employment as an RECE after arranging a mentorship relationship with a pre-approved Mentor.

- b. Within 14 days of commencing or resuming employment as an RECE, the Member will ensure that the Director is notified of the name, address and telephone number of all employers.
- c. The Member will provide the Mentor with a copy of the following documents within 14 days of being notified that the Mentor has been approved by the Director, or within 14 days after the release of such documents, whichever is earliest:

- i. the Panel's Order,
 - ii. the Agreed Statement of Facts,
 - iii. the Joint Submission on Penalty and Costs, and
 - iv. the Panel's Decision and Reasons.
 - d. The Member will meet with the Mentor at least every 2 weeks after the Mentor has been approved by the Director to discuss the following subjects:
 - i. review of the College's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice,
 - ii. the acts or omissions by the Member, which resulted in the Discipline Committee finding the Member guilty of professional misconduct,
 - iii. the potential consequences of the misconduct to the parents/children affected, and to the Member's colleagues, profession and self,
 - iv. strategies for preventing the misconduct from recurring, and
 - v. the Member's daily practice and any issues that arise, to ensure that she is meeting the College's Standards of Practice (without disclosing personal or identifying information about any of the children under the Member's care, or clients of her employer(s)).
 - e. After a minimum of 5 sessions, the Member can seek the Director's permission to stop participating in the mentorship sessions by providing the Director with a report by the Mentor that sets out the following:
 - i. the dates the Member attended the sessions with the Mentor,
 - ii. that the Mentor received a copy of the documents referred to in paragraph 3(c),
 - iii. that the Mentor reviewed the documents set out in paragraph 3(c) and discussed the subjects set out in paragraph 3(d) with the Member, and
 - iv. the Mentor's assessment of the Member's insight into her behaviour.
 - f. All documents delivered by the Member to the College or the Mentor will be delivered by email, registered mail or courier, and the Member will retain proof of delivery.
 - g. The College may require proof of compliance with any of the terms in this Order at any time.
4. Requiring the Member to pay the College's costs fixed in the amount of \$1,000, to be paid within 4 months of the date of this Order and in accordance with the following payment schedule:

- a. \$250 on the date of this Order;
- b. \$250 thirty (30) days following the date of this Order;
- c. \$250 sixty (60) days following the date of this Order; and
- d. \$250 ninety (90) days following the date of this Order.

REASONS FOR PENALTY

The Panel understands that the penalty ordered should protect the public and enhance public confidence in the ability of the College to regulate registered early childhood educators. This is achieved through a penalty that addresses specific deterrence, general deterrence and, where appropriate, rehabilitation and remediation. The penalty should be proportionate to the misconduct.

In considering the joint submission, the Panel was mindful that a jointly proposed penalty should be accepted unless its acceptance would bring the administration of justice into disrepute or it is otherwise not in the public interest.

The Panel is aware that no two cases are exactly alike. However, reviewing earlier cases can help determine the level of appropriate penalty. The Panel therefore considered the previous cases that were presented. The Panel would note that the fact that the Member failed to take immediate action upon realizing that the Child was not accounted for supported a slightly higher suspension than the other cases before the Panel. The Panel also was concerned about the fact that the Child, who was left alone in the playground, was reported to be emotionally upset and crying hysterically and that this was a factor in determining the penalty.

The Panel considered that the Member cooperated with the College and, by agreeing to the facts and proposed penalty, has accepted responsibility for the misconduct.

Having considered all of these factors, the Panel was satisfied that the proposed penalty in this case is appropriate and in the public interest.

The Panel found that the suspension is generally consistent with the range of suspensions that were imposed in the previous cases that were put before the Panel. This suspension is appropriate given the aggravating factors in this case. The suspension, along with the reprimand, will act as specific deterrent to the Member, and a general deterrent to other

members of the profession, from engaging in such conduct. The terms, conditions and limitations imposed will help to protect the public. The Member will also be rehabilitated through the mentoring sessions.

ORDER AS TO COSTS

Subsection 33(5)(4) of the ECE Act provides that in an appropriate case, a panel may make an order requiring a member who the panel finds has committed an act of professional misconduct to pay all or part of the College's legal costs and expenses, investigation costs and hearing costs.

The parties are in agreement with respect to costs and the amount of costs to be ordered. The Panel agrees that that this is an appropriate case for costs to be awarded and the amount proposed by the parties is reasonable.

The Panel orders that the Member pay the College its costs, fixed in the amount of \$1,000, to be paid in accordance with the payment schedule noted above.

I, Kristine Parsons, sign this decision and reasons for the decision as Chairperson of this Discipline panel and on behalf of the members of the Discipline panel.



Kristine Parsons, RECE and Chairperson

December 16, 2019

Date