



# O Canada!

Homeschooling has always had a place in Canada.



by Michelle Beazer

**2**017 was a very special year for Canada and Canadians. We celebrated our Sesquicentennial Anniversary! 150 years ago, on July 1, 1867, the Dominion of Canada was formed with only four provinces (Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick) The rest of the provinces and territories joined over time, Nunavut being the most recent, which officially separated from Northwest Territories in 1999. Canadians all over the country joined in the celebration. From the nation's capital in Ottawa, Ontario to the smallest of villages, there were parties! One of the

freedoms many Canadians celebrate is the freedom to homeschool.

### **Homeschooling in Canada**

Homeschooling has always had a place in Canada. In fact it was the norm for early Canadian settlers. Communal schooling gradually came into being as enough people populated the settlements to make it practical to share resources. These schools were optional and only available for those living close enough and with the means to contribute to the building of the schoolhouse and pay the teacher. These early

schools were much more like our modern homeschooling co-ops than modern public schools.

Home-educating fell out of favour as the government began to fund public education. During the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, "Leading educators, or school promoters, argued that mass schooling could instill appropriate modes of thought and behaviour into children. In their minds, the purpose of mass schooling did not primarily involve the acquisition of academic knowledge. School systems were designed to solve a wide variety of problems ranging from crime to

poverty, and from idleness to vagrancy . . . many parents supported schooling because they wanted their children to learn to read, write and do arithmetic.”<sup>1</sup>

In the 1970’s and 1980’s culture of re-discovering our roots, begun by the Centennial Celebrations of 1967, the modern homeschooling movement began.

Canadian homeschooling pioneer, Wendy Priesnitz, explains it very well on her website, [www.Life.ca](http://www.Life.ca). “It was informed by an alternative education movement that developed out of the various sorts of counter cultural activism in the 1960s in North America. At that time, some parents and activist teachers, who believed that the public school system was authoritarian, competitive, and unlikely to change, established “free schools.” These were small, child-centered, and run democratically. However, by the 1970s, many of these schools had evolved into what were called “alternative schools” and were under the jurisdiction of public boards of education.”

“For some families, like mine, this was a step in the wrong direction. We continued to question the politics of, and wanted to be independent from, what we saw as a monolithic, unimaginative, backwards-looking, factory-style mode of education. So, like a growing number of our counterparts in the U.S., we didn’t enroll our children in any sort of school and, instead, helped them to learn at home. We knew nobody else who was homeschooling and there were no support groups or sources of information available. Homeschooling then was like what is

called “unschooling” today: child-led and unstructured.”<sup>2</sup>

### Homeschooling Growth

Homeschooling growth in Canada has exploded in recent years.

As the popularity of homeschooling gradually increased supports for home-educating families also increased. According to The Fraser Institute, there was a 29% growth of Canadian children homeschooling between 2007 and 2015.<sup>3</sup>

**“We . . . wanted to be independent from what we saw as a monolithic, unimaginative, backwards-looking, factory-style mode of education.” – Wendy Priesnitz**

Bonnie Way, homeschool graduate and homeschooling mom in B.C. has this to say, “When I was a homeschool student in the 90s, it was definitely something new and strange to most people. My Kindergarten bus driver was adamant that there was ‘no such thing’ as homeschooling. When people asked us why we weren’t in school



and we said we were homeschooled, they often asked, ‘What’s that?’ or something similar. Now, as a homeschool parent, it’s awesome to see that homeschooling is becoming more mainstream and well-known. When my girls explain why they’re not in school, they just get nods. We have a huge community of fellow homeschoolers, and I have tons of resources as a homeschool mom.”<sup>4</sup>

When I started homeschooling my kids 20 years ago, we only knew one other home-educating family. Our homeschooling journey began with the public school teachers’ strike in 1997. The Internet was still a fledgling entity, but the Ministry of Education for Ontario provided some downloadable activities parents could do with their kids. The strike only lasted two weeks but the effects of the government retaliation can still be felt today. In Ontario at least, the strike was the catalyst for the massive budget cuts and program reductions of the first decade of the 2000s. It was during these years provincial governments began to take notice of

## Homeschooling Requirements by Province or Territory

Here is a quick look at what each Province or Territory requires\*

Province or Territory	Funding Available	Letter of intent	School Board Registration	Report Required
British Columbia	Yes	No	Yes	Yes if enrolled in Distributed Learning
Alberta	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Saskatchewan	Yes, in some areas		Yes	Yes
Manitoba	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ontario	No	No	No	No
Quebec	No	Yes	Officially, No	Yes
New Brunswick	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nova Scotia	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Prince Edward Island	No	Yes	No	No
Newfoundland & Labrador	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yukon	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Northwest Territories	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nunavut	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

\*Based on information from [thecanadianhomeschooler.com](http://thecanadianhomeschooler.com)

the increase in homeschooling and began to put legislation in place to define it.

While it is legal to homeschool in every Province and Territory of Canada, each Province or Territory has its own regulations. There is a wide range of Provincial regulations. Some provide Provincial funding, but most do not provide any funding. Some require a lot of School Board oversight and some require no reporting at all.

Ana Willis, homeschooling mom from P.E.I. who recently moved to B.C. with her family states, "In PEI we only had to submit a letter of intention to homeschool—and that was it! We could use whatever curriculum we wanted and homeschool whatever way and pace we wanted . . . we're enrolled here in B.C. There are many pros and cons. The pros are the funding, curriculum library available, once-a-week free community classes . . . and a wonderful teacher adviser to support you. The cons are deadlines and B.C.'s learning outcome requirements that add so much pressure on my shoulders!"

Sarah Wall, homeschool mom in Ontario says, "Quebec has some of the most restrictive homeschool laws in Canada. There are active court cases against homeschoolers there, and the government is attempting

to discourage, or at least tightly control, homeschooling. But there are several families who still homeschool there, so it is possible. Many do so under the radar."

**If you live in Canada and are considering homeschooling your children, we invite you to come join the incredible numbers of homeschoolers here and find support!**

My home Province of Ontario does not require you to submit a letter of Intent to Homeschool to your local school board unless you are removing a previously enrolled student. There is no requirement to submit to oversight from your local school or board. There is some provision for

part-time enrollment but most school officials discourage it.

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*Michelle is a Canadian homeschooling mom to four great kids including two on the autism spectrum, one of whom is the owner of NoveltyTrades.ca. She also has two adorable granddaughters. They have been homeschooling for 20 years. Michelle is the Marketing Assistant, Canadian Division, The Old Schoolhouse® Magazine.*

Endnotes:

1. The Canadian Encyclopedia, History of Education in Canada, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/history-of-education/>
2. Wendy Priesnitz, A History of the Modern Canadian Homeschooling/Unschooling Movement
3. Page iv Home Schooling in Canada: The Current Picture-2015 Edition by Deani Neven Van Pelt <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/home-schooling-in-canada-2015-rev2.pdf>
4. [https://www.facebook.com/groups/1411714262434882/?ref=group\\_header](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1411714262434882/?ref=group_header)



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