

FACT SHEET



CHILD CARE

The way it is

Early childhood care and education programs make a large contribution to health child development, provide a solid preparation for further learning and provide a head start for disadvantaged children and children at risk. A child's brain development in the first six years sets the foundation for life-long learning, behaviour and health.

Lack of access to child care is also a key factor that prevents women from participating in training or education. Without affordable, reliable child care women may be forced into poorly paid part-time employment and dependent on public assistance and they and their children condemned to poverty.

"Research has shown that not for profit child care has shown to have better ratios and better health and safety conditions, to provide caregiving that is more sensitive, developmentally appropriate and less harsh, to have lower staff turnover and stress, better trained staff and better wages and working conditions." (Martha Friendly, University of Toronto Children's Resource and Research Unit)

The need for high quality child care has grown continually as more women work and more women return to work after having children. 70% of mothers with young children under the age of six are in the paid workforce and almost 9 in 10 return to work after giving birth.

Compare this to the fact that only 10% of children from infant to age 12 have access

to a regulated child care space. Two comprehensive studies released in 2000 which looked at the quality of child care in seven provinces and territories in Canada reported that fewer than 1 in 3 preschoolers and 1 in 4 infants were in programs that stimulate the child's social, language and thinking skills. Researchers noted that while the majority of child care is okay, okay in child care is not good enough. The researchers also concluded that severe underfunding and cuts to grants by some governments during the 1990s were responsible.

In September 2000, the federal government agreed to provide some \$2.2-billion over five years to the provinces to support investments in early childhood development programs and services. While this sounds good, the fact is that child care is competing with other services such as programs for parents and pregnant mothers for these funds.

Direct federal spending on child care was eliminated in the 1995 budget. While the government transferred \$300-million to the provinces in 2001 as part of the \$2.2-billion package, it is less than the government spent in 1992 when it spent an estimated \$310-million on direct child care services under the Canada Assistance Plan. Ten years later, a plan to spend less money, spread over a variety of programs of which child care is just one, is not going to work.

The way it can be

After decades of study and research and in spite of overwhelming evidence, there is still no move to establish a publicly funded, high quality, not for profit child care system.

However, amid the patchwork of services, funding arrangements, eligibility formulae, monitoring and enforcement regulations, there are some models to look to.

The province of Quebec has had a child care program since 1997 which provides not for profit child care. Parents pay \$5 a day for children between the ages of 1 and 4 who are enrolled in a regulated program. Early childhood centres (Centres de la petite enfance) are community-based, not for profit and controlled by parents. The centres also offer other child care and family support services such as weekend and evening care. School age children in kindergarten and the elementary grades receive care provided by school boards before and after classes.

Collective bargaining can also play a role in support the expansion of non-profit child care. In 2000, the Union of Postal Communications Employees (UPCE) component of the PSAC bargained a child care fund. The fund is administered jointly with the child care fund negotiated by Canadian Union of Postal Workers. Since 1995, CUPW has been working with selected non-profit child care organizations and has developed child care projects in 11 different communities across the country, as well as Canada-wide projects their members' children with special needs.

The projects are aimed at providing affordable, flexible, high quality, regulated early childhood care and education. Typically, funding is provided to enhance an existing service in the community, often to extend the program's hours to meet the needs of shift workers. As a result, the projects benefit other parents in the community too.

In May 2001, the unions jointly conducted a child care needs assessment of their members in Fredericton and Oromocto. As a result, a new child care centre has been opened, just a two-minute walk from the call centre where UPCE members work. The centre can accommodate children from birth to age 12 and has flexible hours. The unions have provided the start-up costs, as well as operating support and provide subsidies for their members for the programs.

While these initiatives are welcome, much more is needed. Child care needs to be universal, publicly funded, non-profit, high quality and available from birth to age 12. A comprehensive program is needed which includes the integration of children with special needs and children of shift workers. Child care services must also reflect our diversity, be flexible, linked to user needs and accountable. Due attention must also be paid to the caregivers through better wages, benefits and training opportunities.

(Sources: CUPE 2001 Annual Report on Privatization; "You Bet I Care" report from the Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being)

