

Topic #1 - Your Parent Voices: Making the Case for Child Care Advocacy

This topic area includes:

- introducing the Parent Voices project
- understanding the ABC's of child care terminology
- contributing to advocacy through sharing personal stories
- considering the relationship between personal stories, collective stories and child care issues
- adding your parent voices

1. Parent Voices: Making the Case for Child Care

for further information check out the web pages at: www.childcareadvocacy.ca

Parent Voices: Making the Case for Child Care is a two year project sponsored by the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (December, 2001 to December, 2003). With funding from the Social Development Partnerships Program of Human Resources Development Canada, the project focuses on working in partnership with parents, advocacy organizations and others to:

- ✓ provide public educational opportunities for parents to better understand local, provincial/territorial and pan-Canadian child care issues
- ✓ share information, experiences and bring parent perspectives to child care advocacy efforts
- ✓ build strong links in communities, regionally, and across Canada
- ✓ develop and support a Parents' Network from coast to coast to coast
- ✓ influence child care policies at all levels of government.

What is the Parent Voices Network?

It's a virtual network that welcomes all parents who are interested in public education about child care issues and in advocacy activities and campaigns. Communication in the Network is through e-mail and the web site. Any parent can submit their name and e-mail information to info@parentvoices.ca to be added to the Parent Voices e-mail list.

From within the Network, parents will be identified as regional representatives. Regional Parent Representatives agree to assume added responsibilities and enjoy opportunities for linking and volunteering with other advocates.

Through the Network we will bring parents together to share information, provide support and resources, and facilitate regional and pan-Canadian linkages between individuals and organizations. The Network will bring parent perspectives to child care advocacy efforts.

Budget permitting, representatives from the Network will be invited to participate in advocacy discussions of the CCAAC Council of Child Care Advocates. The Council consists of geographical representatives from the child care community and sectoral representatives from the social justice movements.

2. The ABC's of child care terminology

When we talk about child care within Canada, we tend to use some key words and phrases. While some of these may be considered generic to child care, and are used to mean the same thing, other definitions may vary from one region to the next and reflect unique aspects about the delivery of child care in that area. Some people use the phrase “early childhood education and care”, and others “child care”. CCAAC uses the words child care.

Child Care: the Child Care Advocacy Association defines **child care** as a range of regulated, licensed child care services for all children from birth to 12 years, including:

- full and part time care
- group, family, school age, pre-school (nursery school)
- in-home care.

We talk about **advocating** for a **comprehensive** range of **universal** child care programs and services that are **accessible, affordable, high quality, inclusive, regulated/licensed, publicly funded** and **provided as a not for profit service**.

Explanations are provided for the following words and phrases:

- Accessible
- Advocacy
- Affordable
- Comprehensive
- High quality
- Inclusive
- Not for profit
- Publicly funded
- Regulated/Licensed
- Universal

ACCESSIBLE CHILD CARE

When we talk about accessible child care, we are referring to enough licensed, quality spaces for all children whose families want or need child care. When child care is accessible, it is available regardless of a child's abilities or disabilities, where she/he lives, and/or what the family income or employment status is.

According to a report utilizing statistics from 2001:

- regulated child care was not accessible to the majority of Canada's children because there were not enough spaces
- there were only enough regulated child care spaces in Canada to accommodate 12.1% of children aged 0 -12 (e.g., 4.2% in Saskatchewan; 5.5% in Newfoundland and Labrador; 8.9% in Ontario; 9.9% in New Brunswick; 12.4% in Manitoba; 14% in PEI; 21.1% in Quebec)
- there were regulated child care spaces for only 600,000 of the total number of 4,891,300 children aged 0-12.

The Childcare Resource and Research Unit's report Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2001 (Friendly, Beach and Turiano) available at <http://www.childcarecanada.org/ECECC2001/index.html> (Table 30)

Research reports document that all children do not have equitable access to licensed care. In addition to an inadequate number of licensed spaces to meet the numbers of children in most regions, there are other barriers affecting accessibility. Some examples:

- families with lower and moderate socio-economic means cannot afford the fees and cannot access quality child care
- families needing care for their children with additional support needs face accessibility barriers. For example, lack of funding to ensure adequate supports to include their children, lack of accessible facilities, lack of support services to meet particular needs
- families who live in rural and remote areas live long distances from services
- families needing flexible hours/seasonal care (e.g., shift and weekend workers who require non-traditional hours of care; part-time care etc.) often have no access to regulated child care in their community.

ADVOCACY

When we talk about advocacy we are referring to the actions we take when we 'speak up' about child care issues and put forward solutions. We are referring to both individual and collective activities. We are involved in advocacy when we participate in a range of activities, actions and campaigns that champion quality child care.

Advocacy is about:

- ✓ the issues
- ✓ being involved and working for political change
- ✓ seeking support for and promoting a cause
- ✓ influencing public opinion and government decisions.

Types of Advocacy:

- ✓ **self advocacy – individual advocacy:** when you are speaking up for yourself and/or taking action with or on behalf of an individual to ensure that your opinion or the opinion of the person you represent is heard, rights are respected and that individuals have a say in decisions about things that affect themselves.

e.g., a parent who has a child with special needs, writes letters, meets with politicians or community service providers to bring attention to their child and her/his needs and to try to access support/educational service for their child.

- ✓ **systemic advocacy – public policy advocacy:** when you are working to influence and affect changes in government policy that will positively affect the lives of many people.

e.g., a parent participates in campaigns with thousands of other parents and child care advocates urging the federal government to develop a pan-Canadian strategy and designate sufficient multi year public funding to build a child care system for all of Canada's children.

Parent advocacy is about:

- understanding the issues
- promoting the benefits of quality child care for children, families and communities
- speaking up and taking action on behalf of children
- being a champion for government policy and funding that promotes a child care system that entitles all children access to affordable, licensed, quality child care.

AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE

When we talk about an affordable child care system, we are talking about a child care system that ensures all families, regardless of their income, can access quality, licensed child care programs and services that meets their needs and preferences.

Paying for child care in Canada is mostly an individual family responsibility. Each family must pay the child care fees. Child care is not publicly funded through the tax system like education, health, highways, transportation and other services. *Child care fees are costly, often the second biggest item in a family budget (after housing).*

(The Progress of Canada's Children 1998: Focus on Youth, Canadian Council on Social Development)

In communities today, a family's ability to pay for child care – affordability – is one of the key factors that determines what kind of child care they use. Given the high cost of child care, economically advantaged children have a better chance of accessing quality child care than children of lower/moderate income families.

What do Monthly Fees cost? Fees vary from region to region, according to the children's ages and the type of child care program (note: in many regions this information is not collected for family child care.) Some examples from 2001:

- In **Manitoba** the fees are set by government and it cost \$560 per month for an infant child care centre, \$376 for a toddler, and \$341 for a 3-5 year old.
- In **BC** the fees are set by each provider and there is a diverse range of fees for each type of care and in various regions. On average, it costs a BC family \$705 per month for an infant, \$662 for a toddler, and \$494 for a 3-5 year old in a centre based program. The average **daily fee** in family child care for an infant was \$29, for a toddler \$28, for a 3 to 5 year old \$26.74 and for a kindergarten child \$24.37.
- In **New Brunswick**, infant care averaged \$482 per month, toddler care \$418, \$418 for a 3-5 year old, and \$227 per month for school aged care.
- In **PEI** in 2001, \$520 for infant care in a centre, \$432 for toddler care, \$412 for a 3-5 year old.
- In the **Yukon Territories** the median monthly full time fee for infants was \$630, \$550 for toddlers, \$250 for a school aged child. The average daily fee in family child care is similar to that of centre based care.

Child care subsidy? With the exception of Quebec, (which funds a developing child care system, not individual children), all regions provide a child care subsidy for low income families. Subsidy amounts and eligibility rules vary and often the subsidy does not cover the full monthly fee of a regulated child care space. *Income levels and rules for accessing child care subsidy differ widely depending upon where you live. In some provinces, fee subsidies are administered at the local level e.g., by the Municipality, while in others it is managed by a provincial department of government.*

COMPREHENSIVE RANGE OF CHILD CARE SERVICES

When we talk about a comprehensive range of child care services for children from birth to 12 years, we are talking about different types of licensed child care services that are planned and responsive to meet the varying and changing needs of families.

This includes child care programs and services that are high quality, flexible, responsive, and inclusive – welcoming to all children and families.

A **comprehensive** range of programs offers quality child care that is planned, coordinated and has the capacity to meet varied family needs. It includes:

- ✓ care in urban, rural and remote communities that is responsive to community needs
- ✓ a continuum of part-full-time child care that is culturally sensitive and able to meet the educational, developmental and social needs of all children
- ✓ a continuum of part-full-time child care that is able to meet the flexible needs of all families whether the parents are at work, studying or at home.

A **comprehensive** range of child care services within a regional child care system would typically include the following types of regulated care:

- ✓ licensed child care centres for children from infants to 12 year olds
- ✓ licensed family day care/family day homes where care is provided in the caregiver's home
- ✓ licensed nursery schools or pre school programs
- ✓ child care in a child's own home in certain situations e.g., illness, overnight care, short term care
- ✓ recreation/educational child care programs for kindergarten and school aged children
- ✓ parenting resources and programs.

From region to region, the programs within the child care system will feature similarities, but also regional variations in response to unique community needs – **it is not a one-size fits all approach.**

HIGH QUALITY CHILD CARE

When we talk about high quality child care, we are referring to care that is in the best interests of children and their families, is licensed and offers care provided by trained staff. It is child care that is developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive and respectful of diversity. Research confirms that high quality child care leaves a long term positive impact on children's health and learning.

What Do We Know?

Educators and researchers have assessed quality and have concluded that several indicators impact on quality:

- ✓ the number of adults as compared to the number of children – staff to child ratios affect the capacity of staff to frequently and positively interact with the children, children to interact with each other, and adults to interact with adults.
- ✓ consistent staffing and smaller groups – staff consistency allows each child chances to sustain lasting relationships with caregivers and smaller group sizes enhance opportunities for personal interactions child to child, child to adult.
- ✓ wages, working conditions and benefits for employees impact on job satisfaction – when staff are well paid and valued, the quality of their job performance is enhanced and quality of care is enhanced.
- ✓ training of caregivers – education and training impacts on the ability of staff to positively interact with the children, plan and support programming and provide care that respects diversity and values all children.
- ✓ health and safety requirements – strong legislated standards, monitoring and enforcement impact on the well-being of children and promote safe care.
- ✓ physical environment – the indoor/outdoor environments affect the capacity to accommodate the needs of all children and to stimulate play and learning.
- ✓ administration of child care programs – competent administration enhances service delivery. It positively impacts on levels of mutual respect, trust and cooperation between everyone involved. Stable and adequate funding, sound financial management and capacity for planning enhance the quality of care.
- ✓ auspice – sponsorship of child care impacts on quality – (e.g., non-profit organizations, public institutions OR individual owners/partnerships/companies known as private/commercial child care). Research indicates significant differences between the motivation of those providing non-profit child care and those operating a business and for profit. When provided as a business, child care typically demonstrates a lower quality rating.

INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE

When we talk about inclusive child care, we are describing a philosophical commitment and actions reflected in policies and procedures to welcome the participation of all children. This means adequate resources and expertise to ensure that activities and curriculum, materials, equipment, and indoor and outdoor spaces are designed to meet each child's capabilities and needs.

When we talk about social inclusion, we are talking about equality of life chances and actions to ensure opportunities in our communities for everyone to be active participants in all 'walks of life'.

Inclusive child care means equitable access to child care that meets the needs of all children regardless of:

- ✓ their ability/disability
- ✓ home language and culture
- ✓ family income and parental circumstance.

Successful and effective inclusion requires:

- a range of programs and services that are designed and adapted to meet varying abilities
- appropriately trained staff and ongoing opportunities for specialized training to enhance the capacity of staff to plan and carry out appropriate activities and provide safe care for all of the children
- adaptable facilities, play materials and special equipment suitable to each child's abilities.

Social inclusion

Social inclusion refers to the right of all to participate and to be involved alongside others in our communities in all aspects of our daily lives.

Social inclusion depends upon:

- ✓ valuing and recognizing diversity, different skills and capacities, and similarities/commonalities
- ✓ enabling children and adults to develop to their maximum potential
- ✓ supporting women's equality
- ✓ accessing adequate resources to participate in community life.

NOT FOR PROFIT CHILD CARE

When we talk about not for profit child care, we are describing the way child care is sponsored as a service - auspice. As a not for profit service, child care is provided in the public interest and without personal gain or profit. As a not for profit service there are legislated accountabilities for governance – and the way it is managed – to:

- communities
- families and
- members.

A not for profit organization/public institution is expected to be openly accountable for any money it receives from: government, other funders, and fees for service and to be accountable for all spending. All assets belong to the organization, not to any individuals.

In most provinces/territories, the sponsors of child care programs are either:

- a voluntary group, a not for profit organization **OR**
- a commercial business or for profit operation (owned by an individual or partnership or corporation that allows the owners to make a profit for themselves).

A non-profit organization providing child care as a service to the community is typically managed by a:

- ✓ legally incorporated organization and non-profit society (e.g., YWCA, YMCA, ABC Child Care Society) which may or may not meet the criteria established by the federal government for federal charitable tax status, or by a
- ✓ municipal government, or by a
- ✓ publicly funded institution such as a hospital, college, university, and/or by a
- ✓ Band Council/Tribal Nation.

Guidelines for non-profit organizations and the rules and expectations of how they function are established through provincial/territorial legislation. The majority of ‘true’ non-profit child care is managed by a community based, legally constituted ‘governing’ body (an elected board of directors) that is required to abide by relevant provincial and federal laws, and ensure the financial sustainability of the services.

PUBLICLY FUNDED CHILD CARE

When we talk about publicly funded child care, we mean child care that is funded through the tax system and supported by legislation.

When services are publicly funded, government is responsible for collecting taxes and spending the taxes, public funds, on services. This is how it works for transportation, roads, health, education, social services and other vital services. When it comes to education, each province/territory collects taxes, allocates an annual budget for public school spending and the education of children and youth from Kindergarten/grade 1 to grade 12 is an entitlement for children.

In 1997, Quebec committed to make significant progress in developing its publicly funded child care system in all regions – a comprehensive range of regulated child care services, funded through tax dollars.

However, in the rest of Canada, the federal/provincial/territorial governments have not had a consistent long-term plan and policies for building a publicly funded child care system. While federal/provincial/territorial governments currently provide some dollars to support regulated/licensed child care, there is no established policy and sustained funding across the country for child care. And by no means is child care an entitlement for Canada's children. While the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care (signed by the federal/provincial/territorial governments on March 13, 2003) may be a first small step, to date there is no framework and funding that will meet the conditions as outlined in the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA), that all provincial/ territorial and federal governments must

“ensure access for all Canadians, wherever they live or move in Canada, to essential social programs and services of reasonably comparable quality” and “ensure adequate, affordable, stable and sustaining funding for social programs”.

A fully developed publicly funded not for profit child care system will:

- ✓ treat child care as a public good, rather than a commodity, a marketable service.
- ✓ ensure that accessing licensed child care is not a matter of luck.
- ✓ collect taxpayers' dollars to be used for the operational costs of a comprehensive range of child care programs.
- ✓ facilitate the planning and delivery of the child care programs that are coordinated, community-based and regionally responsive.

REGULATED, LICENSED CHILD CARE

When we talk about a regulated/licensed child care system, we are referring to child care that must meet minimum standards that are spelled out in regulation. The standards are expected to be based on research and best practices in working with children. While regulation and licensing are established and monitored provincially/territorially, these standards are not consistent from one province/territory to another.

In each region, Regulation determines who is responsible for: developing and monitoring the rules; ensuring that minimum standards are met; establishing procedures and expectations for compliance and for enforcement.

Some examples: in **Manitoba**, “Manitoba Child Day Care” oversees the operation of licensed child care in the province; in **Ontario** it’s the “Day Nurseries Act” and the “Ontario Regulation”; in **BC** it’s the “Community Care Facilities Licensing Act and Regulation”; in **PEI** it’s the “Child Care Facilities Board and Act”; in **Alberta** it’s the “Social Care Facilities Licensing Act and the Day Care Regulation” and in **New Brunswick** it’s the “New Brunswick Child Day Care Facilities Operator Standards”.

As it is now, there is no consistent framework for child care regulation and licensing across the country and the minimum standards vary for the types of licensed programs, the licensing process and responsibilities and:

- ✓ group size
- ✓ staffing requirements – staff/child ratios (the number of children per staff)
- ✓ staff training/qualifications
- ✓ health and safety requirements
- ✓ program expectations and standards
- ✓ facility requirements (indoors and outdoors).

Without an adequate number of affordable licensed child care spaces, most families have no choice but to use child care arrangements that are not licensed or monitored for basic safety, health and other standards. For the majority of families, that is the only care they can currently find and afford in their community.

UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE

When we talk about universal child care, we are talking about child care that is accessible and available as an entitlement for all families. When universal child care exists, families can choose to access a comprehensive range of child care programs according to their needs and preferences – regardless of their employment status, their income, the region or community where they live, and/or the abilities of their children.

A fully funded and developed universal child care system ensures access to quality child care for each family that wants or needs to use it – it is not targeted to selected groups (e.g., those that can afford the fees, parents who are employed and need the care while they are working, families who are poor and targeted for access to child care as an early years program). Accessing child care **would not** be “a matter of luck.”

In other countries where the governments fund the operational costs of a universal child care system, parents either pay:

- ✓ an affordable fee based on their income or
- ✓ no user fee at all.

In a universal child care system, costs to provide the comprehensive range of quality child care programs are sustained through government funding collected from the public via the tax systems, just like other publicly funded services such as health, transportation, education etc.

PLEASE NOTE:

One of our priorities was to build on existing work. Appreciation is extended to the following resources/authors, organizations and individuals, all of which were an excellent resource in writing the definitions:

Child Care Policy in Canada: Putting the Pieces Together (Martha Friendly, 1994)

Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2001 (Friendly, Beach and Turiano) available at <http://www.childcarecanada.org/ECECC2001/index.html> (Childcare Resource and Research Unit)

The web sites:

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC www.cccabc.bc.ca

Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care www.childcareontario.org

Voices for Children www.voicesforchildren.ca – Fact Sheets (no longer available online)

A special note of appreciation: Thank you to the Parent Voices Representatives to the Network who gave valuable volunteer time to review Resource Kit drafts and provide suggestions/edits – Jody Dallaire, Sheri Hincks, and Sharon Gregson.

3. Advocacy and sharing of personal stories

We often learn through our own first hand experiences. Many adults become interested in child care issues when:

- they try to sort out their own needs for child care
- they try to help solve the child care needs of a close friend, family member or colleague
- they see as an employer/fellow employee how the lack of affordable, high quality child care impacts on and unfairly reduces early years opportunities for young children; how lack of child care is a barrier for adults to employment in the labour force; and how without child care, too many adults lack opportunities for social inclusion.

There seems to be a common pathway for many parents involved in child care advocacy. As parents/grandparents they become aware of child care issues through personal experiences and get their “feet wet” in becoming familiar with key child care issues – lack of accessible, regulated/licensed/affordable child care → which results in becoming more aware of common challenges, community needs and child care issues → which often leads to expressing/sharing concerns with others and → seeking others who share concerns and want to promote similar solutions → to speaking up and becoming involved to try to influence political will → which sparks involvement in local advocacy efforts → passion and community involvement to address regional child care solutions → interest and involvement in federal advocacy.

How does telling our personal stories contribute to child care advocacy?

Our personal stories:

- ✓ give us voice and empower us to contribute what we know best
- ✓ let us raise issues that are anchored in real-life situations
- ✓ demonstrate how government decisions affect us – our stories put “human faces” – of our children, family members, employers, neighbours, friends, and community members – to public policy
- ✓ allow people to learn first hand from each other
- ✓ inform others who might not pay much attention to statistical data but who feel connected at a personal level and relate to a story about someone’s life experiences (and throughout time we have learned we often need to say the same things in a number of different times/ways before we are heard)
- ✓ connect us by “communities of interest” – link us with others who share similar experiences, beliefs and a commitment to helping to bring about change.

4. Connecting personal stories to collective stories

Personal stories are a vital part of public education – vital to bringing diverse perspectives to child care advocacy – to influencing and promoting change. Through telling, listening and discussing personal stories about child care, we have a chance to express values, beliefs and opinions and describe the kind of society we want to live in. And through our stories, we share facts about the child care issues, help others to understand the key issues, and talk about the benefits of child care as a complement to our family responsibilities of raising children.

Becoming involved:

Turning our concerns to action may connect us to others and encourage us to become involved in child care advocacy. With a range of opportunities to become involved, people can find a place – a place where you/others fit in and can contribute where you feel most comfortable. For example:

- joining in community based advocacy activities with others
- learning more about the issues and solutions
- sustaining active participation in an advocacy organization and/or
- networking, collectively working with others, and over time becoming an active team player, leader, organizer and facilitator.

5. Adding Your Parent Voices

Parent advocates through their work and efforts to influence “political will” can give “voices” to children. Parents can be the “best advocates” and “voices” for children – together parents can speak about their own experiences – and feature what access/lack of access to quality affordable child care can mean for children, families and for their communities.

Adding your voices - Advocating for change!

- ✓ **Speaking out** – present a few basic facts and speak with passion about your own children and family – engage people in discussions about child care. Learn about how government works and who is responsible for what – municipally, provincially/territorially and federally. Keep informed.
- ✓ **Expressing your views** – use letters, phone calls and e-mails. We know that all politicians count up the number of phone calls, e-mails, and letters received and that people read letters to the editor of newspapers.
- ✓ **Participating in consultation** – if opportunities are presented for consultation – write/present a short brief, submit your thoughts online or take advantage of as many opportunities to provide your thoughts and ideas.
- ✓ **Joining with others who share your concerns** – individuals/organizations (e.g., professionals, parents/organizations advocating for children and families). Dialogue to seek consensus on issues and speak out together.
- ✓ **Advocating for the next significant steps** – if progress towards the end goal (e.g., a publicly funded child care system) is a long way off, speak up about important **next steps** while spelling out the “pot of gold at the end of the rainbow”.
- ✓ **Participating in elections at all levels of government** – attend public candidates’ meetings. Call, e-mail and/or fax the candidates to find out what they know about the child care issues. Tell them what you want. Sometimes they need **US** to educate **THEM!** Become a candidate yourself.
- ✓ **Congratulating politicians who are child care advocates** – when the politicians support what you are advocating for, congratulate them. If there is new money to be provided or any positive steps, acknowledge them, but keep pushing towards the final goal. When they stop speaking up, give them a wake up call and a nudge!
- ✓ **Criticizing the opposing voices** – when politicians and community members speak out against the issues you are advocating for, let them know what you believe. Share information and tell the community what the advocates are promoting.
- ✓ **Keeping your eyes on the prize and being aware of progress or setbacks** – when governments make decisions that reflect our goals, we need to monitor and maintain our advocacy efforts and ensure proper legislation, adequate funding and accountability between governments and communities.

Margaret Mead once said “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”