

Topic #3 - The Child Care Picture of Tomorrow

This topic area includes an overview of:

- Appreciating the promises of a publicly funded, affordable, inclusive, high quality child care system
- Articulating our common vision and agenda
- Learning lessons from successful models at home and abroad.

1. Appreciating the promises of a publicly funded, affordable, inclusive, high quality child care system

International research highlights the economic, social and health benefits of a quality comprehensive child care system for children, families and communities. A quality child care system:

- ✓ promotes the healthy development of all children
- ✓ supports families and complements parenting responsibilities
- ✓ contributes to the capacity of women to achieve equality
- ✓ supports families to balance work and family commitments

What does the research tell us about the early years?

We know that what happens in the early years lays out the foundation and has a profound affect on life long learning and adult well-being. Early life experiences, particularly in the first three years of life, have a significant influence on a child's school success.

In **The Early Years Study: Reversing the Real Brain Drain** (1999) by Dr. F. Mustard and Hon. M. McCain, we learn that "the early years from conception to age six have the most important influence of any time in the life cycle on brain development and subsequent learning, behaviour and health".

Population health studies highlight the importance of positive early childhood experiences in determining healthy outcomes for all areas of children's development.

Research informs us that a child's well-being and development suffer when she/he has poor quality care, and even an advantaged family background can't protect children in poor quality care. (Partners in Quality, Canadian Child Care Federation, 1999)

In **The Brain and Child Development**, Dr. Paul Steinhauer wrote that readiness to learn is "a measure of cognitive, emotional and social abilities" as children enter kindergarten. He explains that if we can combine better supports during pregnancy, particularly for high risk families, good parent resource programs, and quality pre school experiences and early childhood care and education, children are ready to learn in the sense of having what he refers to as "the best start". (1999, *Interaction*, Canadian Child Care Federation)

2. Articulating our common vision and agenda

Our vision of a quality child care system is built upon:

- ✓ our collective knowledge of today's realities for children, families, and communities;
- ✓ research and evidence which is available to inform policy development for governments; and
- ✓ our commitment to key principles which provide the foundation for building a publicly funded high quality child care system.

A snapshot of a few key facts:

- For every \$1 spent in high quality child care for all children, there is a \$2 benefit to children, families and society.
(The Benefits and Costs of Good Child Care: The Economic Rationale for public Investment in Young Children, University of Toronto, G. Cleveland and M. Krashinsky, 1998)
- Almost 400,000 children are born each year, and 86% of their mothers end up back in the workplace in a year.
(February 25, 2000 – the Globe and Mail “A mother’s dilemma: children or job”)
- In 2001, 3,308,700 children from birth to 12 years of age in Canada had mothers who were employed in the labour force.
(Childcare Resource and Research Unit [CRRU], 2003)
- In 2001, more than 70% of Canada’s children aged 3-5, had mothers who were in the labour force.
(CRRU, 2003)
- In 2001, there were approximately 5,000,000 children from birth to twelve years living in Canada; only 600,000 regulated child care spaces; and thus regulated child care spaces for around 12.1% of the children.
(CRRU, 2003)
- The Vanier Institute of the Family estimates that women in the labour force contribute approximately \$25.5 billion a year in federal and provincial taxes.
(Speech by Dr. Robert Glossup, Vanier Institute of the Family)
- Between 1991 and 1998, the proportion of workers with dependents who reported excess tension due to family/work conflicts increased from 38% to 44%.
(The Progress of Canada’s Children: Into the Millennium, Canadian Council on Social Development, 1999)

A 2002 survey of Canadians conducted by Millward, Brown and Goldfarb for the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada and the Canadian Child Care Federation reported that:

- 90% of Canadians agree that government could do more to ensure that all Canadians have access to quality child care
- 86% agree that “There can be a publicly funded child care system that makes quality child care available to all Canadian children”
- 96% believe that the quality of Canadian child care can be improved by “regulating all child care services to meet quality standards”
- 93% say that child care is important to “allowing women to participate in the workforce”
- 90% of Canadians agree with the statement “Canada should have a nationally coordinated child care plan”
- 90% agree that “quality child care is essential to the prosperity of Canada”.

What are we advocating for?

The Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (CCAAC) advocates for a range of universal child care programs and services that are at the centre of a comprehensive family policy. Programs and services that are:

- ✓ universal *
- ✓ accessible and inclusive
- ✓ publicly funded
- ✓ affordable and high quality
- ✓ responsive to community needs
- ✓ regulated/licensed
- ✓ not for profit
- ✓ accountable to families, communities and governments.

** for definitions of key words and phrases, see the Parent Voices Resource Kit part 1, **Understanding the ABC's of child care terminology.***

The CCAAC supports:

- ✓ the right of all children to access a child care system supported by public funds collected through the tax system;
- ✓ a child care system which includes a comprehensive range of child care services for children 12 and under, including full- and part-time care; group, family, school age, pre school (nursery school), and in home care; rural care; remote area care; care for children with special needs; care that is culturally sensitive, respectful and responsive to diversity and different family needs;
- ✓ access to adequate training and education of a competent child care workforce with equitable wages and working conditions that reflect the importance and value of child care work;
- ✓ child care that complements other policies and services for all families; and
- ✓ improved parental rights and benefits.

3. Learning lessons from successful models at home and abroad

From examining what is happening within Canada and abroad, we have learned that where the political will exists, governments actively demonstrate a public commitment to young children and families by:

- designing and legislating family friendly policies;
- implementing a child care plan and intergovernmental agreements which ensure long term support and continuous progress;
- allocating funds in government budgets to build and maintain support for a publicly funded child care system;
- monitoring the progress and delivery of quality child care services.

Sadly, we have also learned that in Canada where progress and significant steps forward have been initiated by some provincial/territorial governments, the fragility is such that a newly elected provincial/territorial government can eliminate and/or rewrite legislation, decrease child care funding, and take child care in a backwards direction. All of which negatively impacts on children, families and child care service providers.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines **family friendly policies** as “those employment oriented social policies that:

- facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life by fostering adequacy of family resources and child development,
- favour the parental choice about work and care, and
- promote gender equality in employment opportunities.”

In some European countries, governments have implemented public policy through legislation that reflects “family friendly policies”, and have assumed the leadership in and responsibility for publicly funding child care programs and services.

John Godfrey, an Ontario Member of Parliament, acknowledges that Canada has fallen behind many countries in the provision of child care and preschool. He stated, “even the United States is moving aggressively ahead of Canada in providing child care for young children.”

(www.johngodfrey.on.ca/pages/newfs.htm)

How does Canada compare?

- in Canada, only 5% of three-year-olds participate in preschool
- in Germany, Czechoslovakia and the United Kingdom, approximately 50% of the children participate in preschool
- in France, Belgium, Italy, Iceland and New Zealand, nearly 100% of the children participate in preschool.

The OECD publication **Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care** provides a comparative analysis of major policy developments and issues in 12 countries – Australia, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. This report, first presented at an international conference in Sweden, highlights “innovative approaches” and “proposes policy options that can be adapted to different national contexts.”

According to the OECD:

“Governments increasingly recognize that public investment is necessary to support a quality system of early childhood education and care. Most countries in the OECD review seek to give young children the opportunity to experience at least two years of free early childhood education and care before beginning primary school.”

- ✓ In several countries, access to early childhood education and care services begins earlier and is a legal right: from the age of 1 year in Denmark, Finland and Sweden, from the age of 2½ years in Belgium and from age 3 in Italy.
- ✓ All children in France above the age of three years attend full time school; children under the age of three may attend state funded nurseries; and government offers three year parental leave.
- ✓ In Sweden, all children over 12 months are entitled to access publicly funded nursery. “Sweden is the benchmark for state child care in Europe. They have a system which combines flexible parental leave with affordable child care.” Approximately 3% of all children aged 12 months to six years are looked after by relatives or childminders, while 76% are cared for in state nurseries. The fees are around \$250 per month or no more than 3% of a parent's income. Parents are entitled to 16 months paid maternity leave and to work shorter hours to be with their children.
- ✓ In Germany, children over the age of three go to publicly funded kindergarten. Child care fees are dependent upon the family income and the number of children in a family. Fees average about 3% of a family's income. Lower fees exist for low income families (e.g., a single mother who is a low income earner pays about \$50 per month for child care).
- ✓ In Norway, parental leave is offered for one year, at almost 100% of earnings. This policy promotes gender equity and reconciles family responsibilities and working life.

For more detailed information about the OECD reports, see the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) web site: www.oecd.org.

Some of the lessons learned from the OECD reports

“The early years are increasingly viewed as the first step in lifelong learning and a key component of a successful educational, social, and family policy agenda. Countries have adopted diverse strategies to policy development in this field – strategies that are deeply embedded in particular country contexts, values, and beliefs. In particular, early childhood policy and provision are strongly linked to cultural and social beliefs about young children, the roles of families and government, and the purposes of early childhood education and care within and across countries.”

In the report **eight key elements** are identified as being “likely to promote equitable access to quality early childhood education and care”. These are:

- *“A systemic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation calls for a clear vision for children, from birth to eight, underlying Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) policy, and coordinated policy frameworks at centralized and decentralized levels. Strong links across services, professionals and parents promote coherence for children.”*
- *“A strong and equal partnership with the education system supports a life long learning approach from birth, encourages smooth transitions for children, and recognizes ECEC as an important part of the education process.”*
- *“A universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support: It is important to ensure equitable access, such that all children have equal opportunities to attend quality ECEC, regardless of family income, parental employment status, special educational needs or ethnic/language background.”*
- *“Substantial public investment in services and the infrastructure: While ECEC may be funded by a combination of sources, there is a need for substantial government investment to support a sustainable system of quality, accessible services.”*
- *“A participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance: Defining, ensuring, and monitoring quality should be a participatory and democratic process that engages staff, parents and children. There is a need for regulatory standards.”*
- *“Appropriate training and working conditions for staff in all forms of provision: Quality ECEC depends on strong staff training and fair working conditions across the sector to ensure that a career in ECEC is satisfying, respected and financially viable.”*

- *“Systematic attention to monitoring and data collection requires coherent procedures to collect and analyze data on the status of young children, ECEC provision, and the early childhood workforce.”*
- *“A stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation: As part of a continuous improvement process, there needs to be sustained investment to support research on key policy goals.”*

[www1.oecd.org/els/pdfs/EDSECECDOCA022.pdf]

According to the OECD, *“Countries that have adopted some or all of these elements of successful policy share a strong public commitment to young children and their families.”*

For more information - See the Childcare Resource and Research Unit web site for related readings/articles/speeches: www.childcarecanada.org/policy/polstudies/int/OECDstrong.html

It's time we caught up. Canada should be a leader!

The research informs us that high quality care is one of the first important steps in life long learning, and access to high quality care can improve the outcomes for all children. Experiences in the earliest years help to shape the kind of adult a young person will become.

We know that:

- most Canadians support the vision of a pan-Canadian publicly funded child care plan that will provide access to affordable quality child care, and
- many other developed countries have made publicly funded child care a priority for their young children.

“Canadians are ready to move forward with a national child care strategy. It's time government caught up with the people.”

(“Canada won't work without child care”, C. Coffey, a children's advocate and senior executive of the Royal Bank and B. Hargrove, president of the Canadian Autoworkers Union; February 15, 2003)