



ELECTION

CHILD CARE IS AN [^] ISSUE PROVINCIAL ELECTION: MAY 12, 2009

The REAL BC Child Care Story

Endorsed by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, the BC Association of Child Care Employers, the Early Childhood Educators of BC, and the School-Age Child Care Association.

The BC 2009 Provincial Election is underway. During elections, governments often claim to have done a great job on child care. That's why, this time, we think it's important to tell the REAL BC Child Care Story.

Government says it is spending more money on child care than ever before.

The REAL story is that...

All increases in BC child care budgets since 2001 come from federal funds. BC invests LESS provincial funds than in 2001. And BC still only spends about 0.2%¹ of GDP on kindergarten and child care programs for young children. Developed countries spend, on average, 0.7%² on this age group. BC would have to increase its total child care budget from \$300 million to \$1 billion to match this.

Government says it is 'funding' 6,000 more child care spaces than in 2001.

The REAL story is that...

The amount of funds licensed group child care programs receive through the Child Care Operating Fund (CCOF) has gone down. The increase in the number of spaces receiving CCOF reflects the extension of this small grant to licensed family child care—not a bigger role for government in funding child care.

Government says it takes families' child care challenges seriously.

The REAL story is that...

BC child care is in crisis. There are not enough quality spaces, parent fees are too high, and caregiver wages are too low.

**Listen to the REAL story families and child care providers have to tell
about whether or not BC child care is working.**

1. The CHILd Forum. November 19, 2007. Key Findings from the Child Care Policy Study of the CHILd Project: Public Policy and Public Funding Make a Difference.

2. UNICEF, 2008. Innocenti Research Centre Report Card 8, pg. 38

COALITION OF CHILD CARE ADVOCATES OF BC

www.cccabc.bc.ca

Working together for a community based, non-profit child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible, publicly funded and accountable.

April 2009

Authorized by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, 604-515-5439. Registration # EAS-2009-0024.

TOO FEW SPACES

The chronic shortage of quality child care spaces is real.

From families at the University of British Columbia who may be able to afford child care but still can't find it...

My story is like many others. I had worked and lived at UBC for years and just assumed that when I started a family, UBC daycare would be there for me. Then I got pregnant. It was such a joyful time – until I realized because of the daycare situation I had only two choices...move away or stay home for a career-killing 5 years...I did move away and found a great daycare situation and a good job in a university in New Brunswick...

“I realized because of the daycare situation I had only two choices... move away or stay home for a career-killing 5 years”

To a single parent in the North ...

Childcare here has been scarce and, unfortunately, at times scary. I was grateful my children were both school age by the time we moved north, but I still had to rely on after school care. Quality care was a rare and expensive find.

To a rural community that lost child care due to misguided policies ...

(We used to have one daycare.) We were hampered for years with low numbers and very few full time kids enrolled but we managed to keep our doors open - barely. We kept our fees low as many parents living in our small, rural, isolated community had low-paying jobs. We had minimal staff and couldn't afford a lot of resources.

Unfortunately one small change that the Liberal government made at the time (2002) put the final nail in our coffin—it changed the salary rate for qualifying for the provincial subsidy and we lost two full time children attending as result of the parents losing their subsidy. We have not had a daycare (here) since that time...Small changes can have a big impact!

**The REAL story is that...
BC families do not have access to quality care
in their communities.**

The reason is not a mystery. There continues to be a chronic shortage of licensed child care spaces in BC.

From 2001-2006, with little or no capital grants for expansion and cuts to operating funds and subsidies, many communities **lost** licensed child care spaces. Government did not report on these closures.

Then, in 2007, BC offered some capital grants that may have reversed the downward trend but have not offset the losses of the previous 5 years.

The experience in the East Kootenays tells the real story...

Licensed child care in the East Kootenay shows a very slight improvement from the downward trend reported in September 2006. The East Kootenay region has gained 42 licensed child care spaces during the 2 year period 2006 to 2008.

This small gain does not off-set the five year period trend of loss of child care spaces (2003 to 2008). During that time the East Kootenay region has lost 257 licensed child care spaces. This is a loss of 17.81% in 5 years (from 1,443 spaces to 1,186 spaces). (Brown, 2009)

So, when Government says it has provided over \$12 million in direct capital grants to create 3,000 new spaces, remember the REAL story is chronic shortages, lost spaces and long wait lists.

REFERENCES

- Richards, T. et al, “Working for a Living Wage”, 2008. CCPA-SFU Economic Security Project
Brown, G. “East Kootenay Child Care Report”, 2009. Various East Kootenay ECD Groups and Children First.
Early Childhood Educators of BC, “Survey Outcomes: Early Learning and Care & Strong Start Centre Research”, 2009.

HIGH PARENT FEES

The high cost of quality child care is real.

In BC, parent fees contribute about 70-80% of the cost of child care—a far greater percentage than in other countries.

In Vancouver and Victoria, child care fees can account for 20% of families' total expenses—the second highest expense after rent.

A Vancouver family with a 4-year-old in full-time child care and a 7-year-old in after-school care will pay \$982 per month or \$11,784 per year for child care. In Victoria, a family needing this same kind of child care pays \$946 per month or \$11,362 per year. And, if these families have an infant or toddler, the monthly fees for this child could top \$1,000 a month. (Richards et al, 2008)

“...after paying my child care fee, there's not much income left for our family”

High fees are not only found in urban areas. From 2001 to 2006, average annual child care fees for pre-school-aged children in BC went up by \$672. For school-aged care, the increase was more than \$800.

A social worker from the North tells the real story...

The folks I am most struck by are the parents who are working two or more jobs to make ends meet and having to tolerate substandard care situations for their children, because they either can't afford it or it simply isn't available to cover all the hours they have to work.

Or, as the young suburban mother says...

We sure struggled with the decision about me going back to work. I attended the centre that I would like to take my 1 year old daughter to and I know it is a quality place for her and the monthly fee is reasonable, however, after paying my child care fee, there's not much income left for our family.

The REAL story is that... quality child care is out of reach for most families.

The reason is not a mystery. Unlike public education for children from 5 years up, Government does not fund child care services directly.

Again, the East Kootenays tells the real story...

Effects of past provincial cut-backs (2007) in Provincial Child Care Operating Funds have further stressed group child care operators. These effects have been eating away at the financial viability of group child care centers in this region.

The Province of BC is paying Operating Fund Grants (per child attending) to licensed child care centers in almost the same amounts that parents in Quebec are paying as the parent portion of their child care fees.

In other words, the payment system for child care is reversed in Quebec so that the provincial government pays the larger cost of child care operations. The Quebec approach delivers child care as a social service. The BC approach offers child care as a non-profitable “business”. (Brown, 2009)

Government also provides capped subsidies to low-income families to help cover their child care fees, BUT these families still have to make up the difference between their subsidy and their child care fees.

So, when Government says it is providing child care subsidies for 50,000 children annually in families earning up to \$38,000, remember the REAL story is high and rising fees for the families of the 575,000 children under 12 in BC and family economic stress and hardship.

LOW CAREGIVER WAGES

Low wages for child care providers are real.

Qualified early childhood educators are leaving the field because they cannot support themselves and their families on their wages. Others aren't entering the field. As a result—there is a staffing crisis.

An early childhood educator in a small northern community tells the real story...

We ... struggle constantly with availability of subs, qualified staff and many hours of unpaid overtime. We are committed, passionate about our work and well educated with many courses above the required license to practice and yet the service we provide continues to lack respect from our government. We have no pension and no benefits. Needless to say—we are all women and we are aging. There are very few people entering this field because of the reasons stated above.

We cannot understand why the government is willing to pay a person running a Strong Start Centre (which is drop in only) a wage of \$20.00/hour and will not commit to paying the same wage to Early Childcare Educators working in other centres.

Or, from another experienced early childhood educator...

After 20 years working in ECE I have come to the realization that I am no longer able to stay in this field. I have to admit that this field that I love will not longer be able to financially support me. (ECEBC, 2009)

The real story is that... caregivers are still undervalued and underpaid.

Close to half of college-trained early childhood educators who responded to a recent survey indicated that they earn under \$16 per hour. And a recent Freedom of Information request shows that only 14 early childhood educators have benefited from government touted programs to retain and recruit staff.

The reason is no mystery. Outside of Quebec, no province has invested the funds required to build a system that recognizes and respects the important work of early childhood educators.

So, when Government says it has launched initiatives to address the ECE retention and recruitment crisis, remember the REAL story is lost wages, a shortage of qualified providers and an erosion of quality.

THE REAL SOLUTION

The good news is that there are real solutions to BC's child care crisis.

All it takes is electing MLAs who are committed to:

1. **Building a universal, high quality child care system that meets the developmental needs of children and the needs of working families.**
2. **Setting targets and timelines for creating more community spaces, lowering parent fees and raising caregivers wages.**
3. **Investing adequate and stable public funds in community based child care to achieve these goals.**

Don't let anyone tell you that it can't be done. Even in these difficult economic times, BC has the capacity to build the child care system we need. In fact, our continued economic strength depends on a substantial investment in child care. Investing in child care creates local jobs, generates local spending, makes it possible for communities to attract and keep young families and builds social cohesion.

**BC has the strength and capacity to get the job done.
Now, let's elect politicians who will get on with it.**