

Parent pushing province for affordable child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Patricia Sharratt has always dreamed about starting a family with her loving husband and one day having two beautiful children.

Growing up, Sharratt always cherished how close she was to her sister, who was two years younger than her, and wanted her children to be as close as she was with her sister.

But Sharratt's dream of having two children is slowly slipping away as the cost of child care continues to soar in Victoria.

Sharratt will be paying \$1,250 a month to put her 17-month-old son, Bruce, in daycare — a search that began before he was born.

After she found out she was pregnant, Sharratt was already on the hunt for daycare, sending applications and making phone calls to put her son into child care in facilities in Victoria or Esquimalt, after her one-year maternity leave was over.

By the time Bruce had turned one year old, the young family still hadn't found a suitable daycare. They also toyed with the idea of using stay-at-home moms, nannies, au pairs or unlicensed daycares, but none were a good fit, forcing Sharratt to delay her return to work.

"It was a constant nagging on my mind," Sharratt said, adding many daycares only let a family know if a space is available one month prior. "It was like a chicken and egg thing. I can't go back to work if I don't have a space, but I won't find out if I have a space until it's too late."

Eventually, the young family found a daycare that opened recently and is a 10-minute walk from their home in the Gorge neighbourhood. While she's secured a spot for Bruce, Sharratt is afraid the financial burden of child care will prevent her from having another child.

"It's a major factor. Even spacing, do you wait until one kid goes to school to have a second one?" she said. "Two kids in daycare would be a lot, it's a strain for sure."

Now, Sharratt is joining the growing chorus of residents calling on the provincial government to implement the \$10aDay Child Care Plan — one many have been calling for, for several years.

As part of the campaign, which grew out of a partnership between the Early Childhood Educators of B.C. and the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C., child care would cost \$10 a day for full-time care, \$7 a day for part-time care and no parent fee for families with annual incomes under \$40,000.

A 2015 Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) study said B.C. businesses were losing as much as \$600 million per year because parents were forced to abandon paid work due to a lack of affordable child care.

But implementing a \$10-a-day child care program could come with a price tag of \$1.5 billion in additional public funding to cover operating costs, noted the report.

It's a plan some politicians are in favour of. In October, NDP leader John Horgan promised to implement \$10-a-day child care if the party wins the provincial election in May. In the past Premier Christy Clark has said her government has no plans to introduce a \$10-a-day program, but instead remains focused on creating child care spaces in the province.

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