

The Yukon has to find a way to pay for day care^[1]

Child care workers are leaving their jobs because the wages are terrible. Who can blame them?

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EXCERPTS

It's a good thing we parents love our little bundles of joy as much as we do, because if we can't sort out our daycare situation, working moms (and dads) in this territory are going to be spending a lot more time with their children. That might not be great news for your career, your sanity, or our economy, but it sure looks to be the way we're heading.

Child care services Yukon-wide are feeling the pinch. As reported just last week in the News, a daycare in Whitehorse suddenly closed down and parents were left scrambling. In November, the only daycare in Watson Lake shut its doors because they simply couldn't keep staff who, understandably, left for better-paying jobs. The Boys & Girls Club suspended their after school care program (Weekday Warriors) for this year due to a lack of government funding. Is this the start of a disturbing trend?

Here's the problem: Even if we had enough daycare spaces for every kid in the Yukon under the age of five, we couldn't staff them because wages for these jobs are so low. A quick search on YuWin gives you easily a dozen job postings for child care providers in the range of \$12 to \$25 per hour. The low end of this range is not even considered a living wage, which is \$18.26 per hour according to the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition. And worst of all, most of these jobs lack any kind of benefits.

How did we get ourselves in this pickle? The most obvious answer is that the Yukon government hasn't given child care operators a raise in 10 years. Between 2005 and 2015, the average income of Canadians grew nearly 13 per cent according to figures from Statistics Canada.

Women continue to earn less than men (it's mostly women who work in daycares). The Yukon government funds licensed child care facilities through a direct operating grant, but hasn't increased funding for wages under the grant since 2008. And all this time costs like rent, utilities and food keep rising for our child care providers.

This is making the pinch on daycare operators tighter and tighter. More money is needed from our territorial government to directly fund a wage increase for our child care providers. Ottawa gives us the Canada Child Benefit, which helps with the cost of raising children, but doesn't increase wages for child care providers. And raising daycare fees to pay for higher wages just isn't an option. In Canada, parents already spend almost one-quarter of their income on child care, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

What happens when daycare is either too expensive or simply not available or both? Women don't get to work for pay, that's what. When the chips are down, one parent or the other will need to forgo a paycheck and stay home with children. And in most cases that duty falls to mom.

Experts tell us that making more affordable child care spaces available will grow our economy because more moms will enter the job market. Early Childhood Educators of B.C. commissioned a report on the economic impact of a \$10 a day child care plan for British Columbia in 2017. Not surprisingly, it found that affordable child care boosted gross domestic product because it increased mothers' labour supply. Businesses benefitted from reduced staff turnover, absences, and increased productivity. In fact, a report from the Conference Board of Canada in 2017 found that every \$1 invested in child care creates \$6 in economic benefits.

It's pretty hard to raise a family these days on only one salary. I work full-time and have three kids of my own, so daycare is my lifeline to earning an income and having the mental space to find personal fulfillment beyond mothering. Unfortunately not every working mom in the Yukon can say the same.

So we need to attract and retain early childhood educators by offering competitive wages. It's good for working women, it's good for their kids, and for our economy.

I value the staff at my son's daycare. I feel so lucky to have quality child care, lovingly provided by educators with great knowledge and skill. They are the professionals I turn to when I need parenting advice because, if I'm being honest, I still haven't found the instruction manual on how to raise these little people.

Taking good care of young kids all day might be the hardest job there is, and often a thankless task. Let's show child care workers what they're worth to us. If we can address this issue, we can boost our economy, and improve economic and social outcomes for all Yukon children.

-reprinted from Yukon News

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