

Woman's work? Early childhood educator worries sexism plays a role in low wages for care providers in B.C. ^[1]

Early childhood educators lobbying for higher pay as part of province's universal child-care plan

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EXCERPTS

Early childhood educators in B.C. are disappointed the province's push for universal child care isn't coming with a pay increase for those doing the work — and at least one worries sexism plays a role.

In February, the federal government announced a \$153-million investment in child care and education training in the province, following the province's December announcement of \$33 million to increase the number of daycare spots. Both announcements are part of the B.C. NDP's goal of establishing universal child care.

But Heidi Reeves, who has been working as an early childhood educator since the 1990s, is disappointed none of the announcements so far has come with a plan to increase the wages of people like her, who are doing the work of looking after children across the province.

"I've never been paid more than \$15 an hour," Reeves said.

"Although parents have been paying too much for child care, the fees have always been subsidized by the low wages of early childhood educators."

Reeves worries one reason for this is sexism — because child-care providers tend to be women, they aren't paid as much as those in male-dominated industries.

For comparison, she looked at the wages of people working in trades that require similar levels of training. She was shocked at what she found.

A quick online job search found postings in construction and other trades that require a year or less of training pay between \$20 and \$35 an hour.

"Even the lowest paid [trades] job I could find, at \$18 an hour, was still more than I have ever been paid ... with 20 years experience," she said.

"People say, 'Well that's not a fair comparison, because the guys, they have this difficult job.' [But] we have a difficult job. Our job is incredibly difficult."

Reeves said she is considering a career change if she can't find a way to make more money, something the industry group Early Childhood Educators of B.C. says is happening with greater frequency.

The group is lobbying behind what it calls the "\$25 an Hour Strategy," which calls for the average early childhood educator in the province to receive \$25 an hour, plus 20 per cent in benefits.

According to executive director Emily Mliczko, the pay and benefits for early childhood educators has remained largely stagnant over the past decade, even as minimum wage and the cost of living has increased.

"The services we provide are vital to the health and well being of families," she said in a campaign letter. "Our child-care system is in jeopardy if we do nothing to keep trained and qualified early childhood educators in the field."

Mliczko said people like Reeves are seeing better-paying jobs elsewhere and abandoning the field, making it difficult for existing daycares to care for the children they already have.

The organization wants more public funding for those working in the child-care field, along with subsidies for parents who place their children in care.

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