

Investing in child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Thousands of Manitoba families are caught every day between the need to go to work and the need for safe, good quality and affordable arrangement for their children.

Quality care is essential for children's development and for the full economic participation of many families. It's particularly important to enable opportunities for women.

That's why the Government of Canada last year signed an agreement to provide \$1.2 billion for provinces and territories to expand child care. As part of that funding, Canada and Manitoba agreed in February to create 1,400 new or newly funded childcare space in Manitoba, using \$47 million in federal support.

These child care spaces are desperately needed in Manitoba.

As of last August 31, more than 16,600 Manitoba children — including more than 1,000 who weren't yet born — were on the child care waiting list.

Here in Kildonan-St. Paul, two or three year waits are common. At Created 4 Me Early Learning Centre in East St. Paul, approximately 300 children are on the waiting list for 36 child care positions. Kinderworld on Gateway Road is licensed for 124 positions (from infants to age 12) and has 700 names on the waiting list. Both centres report waits of up to three years.

It's no surprise that in a survey conducted by Probe Research for the Manitoba Child Care Association, only 11 per cent of Manitobans said they thought it was easy to find care. More than 80 per cent said lack of space in childcare is a serious issue.

What do parents do when they can't find a child care placement?

Pat Wege, director of the Manitoba Child Care Association, said some turn to "grandma" for help, some "tag team" work shifts with their partners, and some find an unlicensed neighbourhood babysitter.

"Where do people go when they can't get in the licensed system? They go to Kijiji and look for babysitters," she said, noting that lack of child care is "a significant barrier to women's equality."

Families that need child care don't want to search Kijiji. Families need a commitment from all levels of government. Our commitment to providing 1,400 additional child care spaces for Manitoba is a step in the right direction. However, we know more investment is needed. Growing the middle class means helping families find safe and affordable child care, allowing parents the opportunity to work and creating new jobs in a high-demand sector. Let me know what you think: Maryann.mihychuk@parl.gc.ca ^[3]

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