

The perfect gift for Mother's Day: Universal child care ^[1]

Posted on 11 May 2018

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It takes a village to raise a child, yet in 2018 very few of us live in villages in Ontario. As a result, child care is an essential service for families with young children. There is no question that Ontario needs a universal, affordable, and high quality child care system. As a soon-to-be working mom, child care is central to my ability to participate fully in the workforce, build my career and achieve my personal goals – pretty lofty stuff.

For me, and for many of the new parents I have met over the past year, access is a momentous barrier to child care, particularly for children under 18 months of age. I live in Toronto and I am a few weeks away from returning to work. The most stressful component of planning my return to work has been securing child care. Even though I signed up at several daycare centres when I was four months pregnant, I have yet to secure a spot almost 16 months later. I could not even fill out half of the paperwork when I signed up because I did not know my baby's sex, name, date of birth, personality, or nap schedule. None of these centres have a spot available for my son next month. This is one of many reasons why we need to call for action on child care this election.

A universal, affordable, high quality child care system supports closing the gender wage gap for mothers in the workforce.

Affordability is another significant challenge for many families. Although child care fees range across the province and fluctuate based on the type of child care facility, they are prohibitively high. Toronto has the highest child care fees in the country: median monthly fees for infants are \$1,758 a month and \$1,354 for toddlers. This is more than college or university tuition. In a two parent family, a common scenario is that one parent is usually working just to pay for child care. But just think of what that means for single parent families, which are disproportionately women-led. Think about what happens to their children and whether they are able to find reliable, safe care for them.

All parents want the best possible care for their children and many pay very high fees to secure such peace of mind. For many parents, child care is fundamentally essential so that they can work and provide their families with basic necessities. Ask yourself, does the status quo on child care make good economic sense in a province where the cost of living and personal debt levels are at a historic high?

A universal, affordable, high quality child care system supports closing the gender wage gap for mothers in the workforce. We know this because the top recommendation of Ontario's Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee was just that – immediate investment in child care. We must also support the economic empowerment of the mostly women early childhood educators and child care workers who are the backbone of the system. They deserve decent work and professional pay.

Child care is indelibly tied to parenthood, gender equity, and the well-being of the next generation – this is something we should all care about. This election, make sure you ask the candidates in your riding what concrete steps they will take to create a universal, affordable, high quality child care system in Ontario. Now is the time for action.

NOTES

This blog was originally included in a communication from YWCA Toronto's #WomenVoteON campaign. Dorothy MacLeod (@dorothybinkley) is a member of YWCA Toronto's Advocacy Advisory Committee.

Source URL (modified on 7 Apr 2020): <https://childcarecanada.org/blog/perfect-gift-mothers-day-universal-child-care>

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