

# Families welcome \$200 monthly child care fees in 'life-changing' pilot project <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

**VANCOUVER**—One by one, families throughout B.C. have been quietly receiving the news that their child care fees will be drastically reduced to roughly \$200 a month, a pilot initiative child care advocates are calling “life-changing.”

“I’ve had families, parents contact me who are in tears. They are so happy about the difference it’s going to make for their families,” said Sharon Gregson, spokesperson for the \$10aDay child care campaign.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development told StarMetro in a statement on Tuesday that it is currently “finalizing contracts and expect there to be around 50” universal child care prototype sites around the province with lower fees.

In August, the B.C. government announced that families in the selected child care centres will pay \$10 or less a day for full-time child care, equivalent to roughly \$200 a month — a drastic reduction from \$1,360, the median cost for child care in Vancouver, according to Statistics Canada in 2015.

It’s a relief for families living in one of the world’s most expensive cities and where wages remain relatively low compared to other Canadian cities at about \$80,000 per year in 2015.

“So for some families, this is going to keep them out of bankruptcy,” said Gregson who explained that the \$10aDay child care campaign started in 2011, spearheaded by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, a “voluntary organization” made up of citizens.

“For some families, this is going to mean their credit cards aren’t maxed out every month. For some families it’s going to mean they can buy nutritious food, they can have better housing. It’s that significant,” she added.

In total, 1,800 licensed child care spaces for infants and toddlers will be participating in the fee reduction initiative, according to the B.C. government that made improvements to child care access and fee reduction a major NDP party campaign promise prior to provincial elections in May 2017.

Amy Chu is a mother of two living in the Vancouver area with a combined child care cost of \$1,500 a month. Her children are not participating in the pilot project but she said a fee reduction would improve her mental health and stress level.

“It’s constantly paycheck to paycheck. ... I wouldn’t work any less but at least I wouldn’t have that pressure on us anymore.”

Chu’s husband also works full-time so because their combined income is over \$111,000 a year, they don’t qualify for the Affordable Child Care Benefit launched Sept. 1.

“It’s not like we’re living frivolously,” said Chu. “We’re trying to be as frugal as possible. Mainly, the child care costs are crippling. We can’t save for vacation.”

Chu added that her family is part of the middle-class in “expensive” Vancouver that are “suffering” because they don’t qualify for additional fee relief.

Gregson said advocates eventually expect to see all licensed child care costs no more than \$10 a day or \$200 a month.

“But we also need — not just a focus on affordability, we also need more licensed child care spaces. So we need the new mayors and council and school districts across the province to step up to make sure there are new licensed spaces in their community and take advantage of the new capital dollars available from the province,” she said.

She is confident that the selection process is diverse and will include low-income neighbourhoods and rural and remote communities.

An formal announcement including all of the organizations participating in the universal child care prototype project is expected in the coming weeks, the Ministry of Children and Family told StarMetro on Tuesday.

StarMetro reached out to several parents participating in the project who declined to comment because they were concerned they would potentially put their child care centres at risk of losing funding from the government.

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