

Opinion: Lack of a national child care programs comes up every election cycle ^[1]

'Women still carry most child rearing responsibilities'

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EXCERPTS

We all lead busy lives. Too busy. Aside from work, there's lunches to pack, errands, and maybe a class or two. There's barely enough time to watch that Netflix show everyone's binging, never mind make friends with the neighbours. Unless you get lucky. For a while, we were very lucky indeed. Our former next door neighbours couldn't have been lovelier. We picked up each other's mail, we'd check in if someone was away for work, or we'd get together for a glass of wine, and a bit of neighbourhood gossip.

If the weather was nice you'd find us on each other's front stoops, playing with their kids, chit chatting away. Remember, I said "former" neighbours. Earlier this year, they moved back overseas. What was one major factor for the big change? Childcare.

For Toronto, just one child under the age of 18 months can mean \$20,000 in childcare costs a year. This in a city where the average salary is about \$60,000 (and that's before taxes). My neighbours couldn't justify or financially absorb the costs and waiting lists, so they made it work by leaving. Not everyone has this luxury, so what happens when you don't? The lack of a national childcare program comes up every election cycle, and while so far it hasn't become a hot button issue, it's worth looking at what parties are promising.

The Liberals have promised to create up to 250,000 more before- and after-school spaces for kids under 10, and a 10 per cent reduction in fees across Canada at a cost of \$535 million. They also announced a secretariat to work with provinces to look at a national program. The NDP calls the plan "patchwork" – they instead call for a \$1-billion investment in 2020 in "inclusive" childcare, that also recognizes the need to pay child care workers a fair wage.

The Conservatives haven't announced anything specific at the time of writing, but the name of the game seems to be tax credits. They recently announced one for parental leave which experts estimate will cost \$600 million in its first year.

The Greens are – unsurprisingly – making the connection between climate and child care. They're also calling for a \$1-billion investment, and are prioritizing childcare locations near public transit and in existing work locations.

Why should we care?

Well, a recent French study of 1,400 children showed those who attend high quality care demonstrate better cognitive, language and pre-academic skills.

What constitutes "high quality?" To start, expert care givers, healthy food and a safe environment. In short, what every child needs and deserves.

Quality childcare can also mean increased access to the workforce for at least one parent – whether it be a move to full time employment, or an opportunity that provides a better salary and benefits.

Women still carry most child rearing responsibilities, and the pay gap is closely connected to a lack of affordable, high quality childcare. My neighbours had their "village" to help raise their children, it just wasn't in Canada.

This October, ask yourself if it's time to step up and raise our own village right here at home.

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: federal election ^[4]

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