

Campaigning for affordable child-care spaces in B.C. ^[1]

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Excerpted from podcast description

Sharon Gregson works with the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C. and is the provincial spokesperson for British Columbia's \$10aDay daycare campaign. Scott Neigh interviews her about the importance of high-quality, affordable, accessible, public child care, and about both the gains the campaign in BC has made so far and what it has left to win.

The crucial role that child care plays has been sharply illustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Men and women initially lost their jobs in roughly equal numbers, but women are returning to work at much slower rates and women's labour force participation is lower than it has been since the 1980s. Some of this has to do with gendered differences in employment in different industries, and how fast those industries are rehiring people. But it also has to do with the pandemic-related increase in the amount of unpaid care work that needs to be done and the fact that women in Canada end up doing almost twice as much unpaid care work as men. Notwithstanding the fact that the refusal by many men to do their share must be addressed, this also points to how crucial a high-quality, affordable, accessible public child-care system is.

The inadequacy of governmental approaches to child care in most of the country is, of course, not a new problem. The Royal Commission on the Status of Women recommended creating a national public child-care system in 1970, and feminists have been pushing for such a system in the decades since. Changes in the Canadian economy and Canadian families, and growing evidence of the importance of child care for gender equity, economic growth and child development have made things even more urgent. Political parties have made relevant promises over the years but almost none have been kept. The details are complicated and varied, but most provinces have seen cuts, privatization and deregulation, which have been accompanied by long wait lists and skyrocketing fees. The only jurisdiction in the country to deliver affordable, universal child care has been Quebec, starting in 1996.

The coalition in British Columbia got its start in 1982 and has been fighting for a comprehensive, accessible, affordable, non-profit child-care system ever since. In 2010, the coalition and the Early Childhood Educators of B.C. got together to create an evidence-based community plan for what a high quality, affordable public child care system could look like, which they further refined based on consultation with other groups. The following year, they launched the campaign to push the provincial government to adopt the resulting \$10aDay Plan.

As the name suggests, affordability for parents is a central plank of the plan -- no more than \$10 per day for full-time child care. It also seeks better pay for the people who work in child care. And it calls for extensive new capital funding to create the physical infrastructure for new child-care spaces. Specifically, it calls for this money to be rolled out through local public sector bodies like municipalities, schools, and hospitals. When asked about the emphasis on building a public system, Gregson pointed to "50 years of market failure" in attempting to meet needs through the private sector, given the prevalence of excessive fees, low wages and insufficient spaces.

The campaign started from the strength of the coalition's long track record and its solid partnerships with other movement and community organizations. Through a mix of lobbying, media work, events and online tools, in a few years no public discussion of child care in B.C. could take place without including mention of the plan. It amassed endorsements not only from the allies you would expect but from chambers of commerce, dozens of municipal governments and school districts, credit unions, Indigenous organizations, medical officers of health, and many more.

This shaped the child-care conversation during the 2017 election in B.C., and the resulting NDP-Green coalition promised to make sweeping changes. The \$10aDay campaign has been encouraged by many of the changes made by the new government, while at the same time recognizing important differences between the government's plan and the one developed by the community. For instance, the government is putting public money into building privately held infrastructure, and according to Gregson is not doing enough to make affordable spaces broadly available and accessible. The campaign is currently active in pressuring the province in numerous ways -- newspaper ads, email campaigns, social media, hardcopy letter campaigns, and at times even stroller brigade demonstrations in cities across the province.

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

Tags: advocacy ^[4]

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