

The union advantage in child care: How unionization can help recruitment and retention ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Paper in pdf ^[2]

Excerpts from paper:

Mention unions and child care in the same breath, and many people in the sector will say the two don't mix. Unions might have a place in industrial settings, the argument goes, but they are not appropriate vehicles for determining workplace relationships in a non-traditional social sector. Unionization could jeopardize the collegial relationships between workers, centre management and volunteer boards, and dilute the commitment of providers to their jobs. What's worse, if a union comes in, a centre might have to shut down because it won't be able to afford the increased costs of higher wages and benefits. Who needs or wants all that?

Nobody, of course, and certainly not the unions themselves, as this paper will show. We will make the case that far from being a negative force, unions exert a positive influence in child care workplaces and in the sector generally. Furthermore, when the benefits to child care workers and services are taken into account, unionization emerges as an important strategy for dealing with recruitment and retention, two of the biggest challenges facing the sector in Canada today.

Overall, unionized child care workplaces contribute to higher quality programs and attract more experienced and more trained early childhood educators. Unions support a model of professionalism and workplace relationships that is inclusive, democratic and collective. They support professional development, affordable education and regulation of the service and the occupation. They are longstanding advocates for women's equality, and a publicly funded child care system. All of these aspects are important in and of themselves. But they also speak to some of the broader, interrelated issues that have affected the sector's ability to attract and keep qualified early childhood educators.

Until recently, there was little information about the impact of unionization on the sector. However, a new study exploring the influence of unions on wages, benefits, working conditions and quality in child care centres provides some valuable insights into this issue. The study, *Unionization and Quality in Early Childhood Settings*, used raw data collected from two of the three You Bet I Care! (YBIC!) studies to do a statistical comparison between unionized and non-unionized child care centres. Much of the information used in this paper draws on the findings of this study, whose principal researcher was Dr. Gillian Doherty, one of the authors of the YBIC! series.

Related link: You Bet I Care! ^[3]

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