

'We can't afford child care as it stands' ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Brittany Hickey has turned her entire work life upside down to avoid needing to bear the high cost of child care for her two toddlers.

Hickey, of Riverview, works in veterinary medicine and ended her maternity leave last month. She said she is now working nights and weekends to keep full-time hours. She stays home during the day, while her husband works and vice versa.

"We couldn't survive on one income alone, especially with increased cost of living due to COVID-19," she said, adding that she is also still paying student loans.

"With the cost of child care for two toddlers, my take-home pay would entirely go to child care costs," she said. "It's hard, but we can't afford child care as it stands right now," adding that the family did not qualify for a provincial subsidy.

The federal budget released Monday pours \$30 billion into child care and early learning, with the goal of giving all Canadians access to child care that costs an average of \$10 a day by 2025. It also aims to reduce child care costs by 50 per cent by 2022.

Hickey said if the goal is reached, her family would benefit as her youngest child is only 18 months. "Even as after-school care, it would be an improvement," she said, noting it would also mean she and her husband wouldn't have to work opposite schedules.

Jonathan Lewis moved to Moncton during the pandemic with his spouse and their son, who will be two in September.

The family found finding a space for their child, both in Toronto and then Moncton, daunting. They now pay \$39 a day for child care in Moncton, but he works in the arts and is facing job insecurity, he said.

"\$10 a day child care would certainly take some of the stress away," he said.

Joanne Perron, executive director of the N.B. Coalition for Pay Equity, called the federal announcement "a victory for feminist economic policy".

She said too many women have to decide if it's financially worth it to return to the workforce, and if they can do it full-time. "child care is a pillar of good economic and social policy infrastructure," she said.

Perron said promises have been made for years, but called Monday's budget a real commitment that comes with significant investment.

Also included in the budget, was an emphasis on non-profit care.

Rachelle Pascoe-Deslauriers, who teaches commerce and women's and gender studies at Mount Allison University, praised this move.

"Where the market is a driver for care, we see that quality of care is poor," she said.

Removing child care from the market is a good move, she said.

Pascoe-Deslauriers also praised recognition that much of the child care sector work is being done by women, often racialized women, and that solving the child care problem in Canada needs to address working conditions and wages for workers.

The big challenge is implementation, she said.

Christine Griffin, associate director of Regroupement féministe du Nouveau-Brunswick, said the organization is aware of a lack of child care spaces in rural areas of New Brunswick. Ensuring this issue is addressed, along with ensuring child care is offered in both official languages is important, she said.

At a news conference last week, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said they would not comment yet on if there were provinces who were less willing partners.

Regroupement féministe du Nouveau-Brunswick is urging "the New Brunswick government to work in collaboration with the federal government to ensure that all New Brunswick families can benefit from accessible child care," said Griffin.

Flavio Nienow, communications officer for the province's department of Education and Early Childhood Development said the provincial government continues to dive into the details of the federal budget. However, he said, the province understands the importance of accessible and affordable child care and has already taken many steps to improve the system for workers and families.

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