

Canada has child-care problems — but we can solve them ^[1]

We lag behind 18 others in a recent global ranking. What can we learn from the Nordic countries in the top four spots?

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EXCERPTS

Over the past two months, I have been exploring the problems of child care in B.C. and Canada, and the impact that these problems have on parents, children and early childhood educators. Child care is an underrepresented topic in media. As a former daycare teacher and a current Tyee intern, this underrepresentation is something I've sought to rectify.

The goal has been to share information about these problems. As my internship draws to a close, though, I would like to explore some potential solutions.

In April 2021, the federal budget pledged \$30 billion towards creating a national child-care system. This is an important moment for Canada — a historical one even — as it begins to prioritize a broken industry.

And small steps are being taken here in B.C. On Tuesday, the provincial government introduced two new bills related to child care. The first would commit it to publicly reporting on its progress towards a more affordable, accessible system, particularly around supporting Indigenous-led child care, and allow the minister responsible for child care to set limits on daycare fees.

The second aims to increase supports for early childhood educators and ECE assistants by making the certification process for early childhood educators in B.C. easier for those trained out of province. It would also create a registry of educational training institutions to improve the quality of care and consistency within education, and an easier hiring process.

But both B.C. and Canada have a long way to go to fulfill their commitments for a truly affordable system.

A recent ranking released by Childcare Canada evaluated OECD countries using the organization's "Raising a Family Index," looking at things like safety, happiness, health and cost. Nordic countries took the top spots, while Canada sat at number 19.

So: what can Canada learn from Nordic countries' treatment of children and child care?

1. Iceland considers daycares and preschools (or as they call them "playschools") part of the educational system. Every child under six is given the opportunity to attend playschool, though it isn't required. Iceland sees child care as an important part of the education of children.

In B.C., daycares and preschools currently fall under the umbrella of the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and are not considered a part of the educational system. In a recent interview with The Tyee, B.C.'s Minister of State for Child Care, Katrina Chen, said that the province plans to move child care to the Ministry of Education by 2023.

2. In Norway, municipalities must offer a child-care spot for all children under six. Norway's children have the "statutory right" to a child-care placement after their first birthday. Though, similarly to Iceland, attendance is not required.

In Canada, 60 per cent of children are enrolled in some form of child care from infancy to age five. But Statistics Canada reports that 36 per cent of parents in Canada struggle to find child care, and the \$10aDay campaign asserts that there are licensed child-care spots available for only 18 per cent of children in B.C.

In Vancouver, the current shortfall of licensed child-care spaces has been estimated at 16,274.

3. Sweden has curriculum guidelines for every early childhood education and preschool centre, creating consistency within the daycare industry. The curriculum outlines goals and philosophies but allows individual child-care providers to decide how they'll implement the curriculum to reach those goals.

Canada does not offer any form of regulation or curriculum to create consistency between daycare centres. The closest example of "consistency" in child care in B.C. is basic safety regulations.

4. In Finland's daycare system, teachers write up a detailed early childhood education and care plan for every child, detailing the child's strengths and individual needs. These personalized care plans are taken into account when teachers prepare the overall education plan,

and the plans are reviewed and revised regularly.

In B.C., care plans are only created for children who require “extra care” due to disabilities or health issues.

So yes, Canada has a long way to go. But we can move in the right direction, one step at a time.

Region: Canada ^[3]

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