

Labour views: Childcare in the NWT ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Back in April, the federal government announced \$30 billion over five years to help offset the cost of early learning and child care services in Canada. Of course, there's always a catch – provinces and territories would need to contribute their own funds before households would see a significant reduction in childcare costs.

The idea of a publicly funded childcare program in the NWT is not new, and we still have many questions. Some may wonder, how would we pay for this? What is the benefit to the communities we live in? What kind of impact would this have on our territory's work force? But most importantly why is this so important?

One thing that science has told us is that early childhood experiences have a lasting impact on a person's brain, brain function, behaviour and emotions. It is important for children to have access to quality and inclusive early childhood education everywhere in our territory. It is not acceptable to have communities where childcare is simply not available. Just like every child has the right to attend school and access health care, every child should also have the right to quality early education.

Like other programs, the federal government must collaborate with the provinces and territories to come up with a plan to address childcare in all parts of our country. Some provinces and territories have made attempts at addressing the right to childcare for all children, but without a universal approach from all levels of government, along with a commitment to deliver publicly fund childcare, we end up with a patchwork of broken systems; with never ending waitlists, unequal access based on geography, and disparity in the quality of services.

The right to quality childcare for our children will not only benefit children but also parents, employers, childcare workers, governments, and our economy as a whole. When a parent cannot afford to return to work because they cannot afford childcare, we all lose.

Employers lose a skilled worker who would bring their valuable labour to their field. Governments lose tax dollars with fewer residents earning steady income. Workers lose opportunities to advance within their workplace and find meaningful employment.

There is a big difference between choosing to stay at home to care for children, and being required to stay home. Every parent in our territory should be able to choose. Those who can't, often have to access other income support programs to be able to support their family. This creates a cycle of poverty that too many NWT families are faced with.

Instead of helping these families through income support programs, why can't our government help them by providing quality childcare for all children?

The need for quality and inclusivity of services is also very important when it comes to establishing a childcare program. In education, for example, the government sets ways to measure a child's progress. By having a public system, we are able to maintain a high standard and a sense of accountability in our schools and pre-schools. As early childhood education is critical in the development of healthy children, would we not want to make sure that the level of services provided reflects the importance of that period of our children's lives?

To ensure a healthy environment for our children, we must also create a healthy environment for childcare workers. Childcare workers are an important part of a child's early life, and play a key role in our children's development. If we want the best start for our children, we must also look after those providing that care and ensure they receive good wages, benefits, and a healthy work environment.

Our territorial government has had childcare as a priority for at least two assemblies. Yet, families continue to be faced with daily challenges related to early childhood education for their children. We must continue to tell our government how critical this is to the functioning of family units, to the health and development of our children, and the overall well-being and advancement of our society.

Our children are our future. Providing them with affordable, quality childcare is a stepping stone in ensuring their success. It is not a priority we can continue to set aside.

Region: Northwest Territories ^[3]

Tags: public investment ^[4]

funding ^[5]

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