

Career or motherhood? Women in B.C.'s film industry say lack of child care forces them to choose ^[1]

Workers say child-care services need to adapt to the demands of shift work

Author: Ballard, Joel

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EXCERPTS

Brenda Huggins has been working in the film industry for a decade, but becoming a mother and pursuing her career has proven a challenge, mainly because she says there is inadequate child care in the industry — and the province as a whole — to support people working irregular hours.

A regular workday for Huggins can start as early as 3 a.m. and a 16-hour shift is the norm working with craft services and as a first aid attendant.

"If I didn't have my sister [who often watches her son], I probably wouldn't be able to work, to be honest. Daycare hours do not align with the same hours," said Huggins.

There are no 24-hour child-care facilities in B.C. — unlike Ontario and Quebec. Most daycares operate on a traditional workday schedule that isn't suitable for the families of shift worker in industries like film and TV, emergency response, health-care and hotel services.

Huggins recently lost out on a job because the employer wanted her to commit to full-time work, but without adequate child-care services, it wasn't an option.

"I need to work, I need to pay my bills, I need to put food on the table, but I have my son that I want to raise, that I have to raise. He's my only son and I'm his only parent, so it's difficult," she said.

Huggins feels she's being forced to choose between working the job she loves and being a mother.

"We are told 'work in the film industry, especially women and families,' and all the sudden here we are and there's nothing for us."

It's a struggle Heather McQuillan understands well.

She too works in the film industry and is a mother of two children. She says people in the industry with kids often make do, usually by juggling a combination of nannies, daycare and helpful family members.

Sometimes, she admits, it's too much, and many parents, predominantly women, are forced to leave an industry that offers them little support.

"I want to be able to have a voice in my career, I want to have a voice in media and to have that taken away because of a logistics issue is very frustrating," said McQuillan, who both works in set decoration and as the executive director of Reel Families for Change Canada.

Work patterns in B.C. have shifted, but McQuillan says child-care infrastructure has failed to keep pace.

"We don't work 9-5 across the board anymore. We really need to look at how people are working and make sure that our child-care services match the workforce in the area," she said.

Employer-driven child care

In Vancouver, city staff are looking into the feasibility of non-traditional child care hours following a motion by Coun. Melissa De Genova. A staff report is expected by the fall of 2021.

The women also want to see the industry embrace child care integrated into workplaces. McQuillan says there are film lots in California that offer on-site daycare.

The challenge shift workers face when looking for child care is something Minister of State for Child Care Katrina Chen has been trying to address since 2018.

"We are building a new system in B.C.," said Chen, acknowledging that child-care options are limited.

Recently her ministry helped usher in a new \$10-a-day child-care plan that will create 30,000 new spaces in B.C. over the next five years. As well, the province intends to open a 24-hour child-care facility pilot project in Kitimat on B.C.'s North Coast by the summer of 2022.

"We will continue to invest in child care that addresses diverse needs," said Chen.

One way her ministry plans to do that is by partnering with industries to produce employer-driven child-care services. There are currently two employer-driven pilots in B.C. where the employers receive funding to offer child care for \$10-a-day or less.

"If you're interested in creating employer-driven child care that works for your worker's hours, our government is happy to partner," she said.

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

Tags: non-standard hours ^[4]
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