

Amplify: Daycare workers are heroes. After a year, I finally met those who care for my daughter ^[1]

Author: Stasiuk, Melissa

Source: Globe and Mail

Format: Article

Publication Date: 25 Mar 2022

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXERPTS

After you've spent nearly every waking moment together, it's a strange feeling to hand over your child to a masked stranger, who takes her into a building that you're not allowed to enter.

My daughter's daycare has largely been a mystery to me since she started attending in April, 2021. I had never laid eyes on the room where she spends roughly 40 hours a week. I had never seen the children whose names she started listing off when I asked her "how was school today?" And I had never met in-person the women who now feed my daughter more meals and sing more songs with her than I do.

But these inconveniences the pandemic has caused me and other parents are nothing compared to what daycare workers have faced.

While I worked from home, my daughter's teachers showed up to the daycare every day, hoping the face mask and shield (and eventually vaccine) were enough to protect them from the 10-15 unmasked, unvaccinated children in their charge. On top of changing diapers, feeding meals and planning stimulating activities, daycare staff now had the added responsibilities of constantly sanitizing surfaces and toys and policing children for the first sign of a runny nose.

As if their own fears were not enough, they also faced anxious parents. The uncertainty and length of the pandemic had me questioning whether the centre's COVID-19 policies were being followed closely enough, only to later wonder whether they made any sense in the first place.

It's not surprising then that the profession is seeing its workers leave in droves. As my colleague Dave McGinn wrote recently, daycare staff – many of whom earn little more than minimum wage – report feeling overwhelmed, exhausted and underpaid.

According to Statistics Canada, there was a 21-per-cent drop in employment among child-care workers across the country from February, 2020, to February, 2021. Some of this reduction was likely owing to involuntary layoffs during daycare shutdowns, but after centres reopened, many of these frustrated and fed-up employees didn't come back.

Advocates say the workplace conditions are primarily a result of gender bias: More than 95 per cent of child-care workers in Canada are women, and there is an expectation they will do this work for low pay.

It's a looming crisis policy-makers can't afford to ignore. Not only is daycare essential to keeping mothers in the work force, but a lack of daycare staff doesn't bode well for the federal government's plan to bring \$10-a-day child care to families across the country.

Affordable daycare – and more of it – is sorely needed, with median monthly fees ranging from \$1,050 in Edmonton to \$1,866 in Toronto, and with many parents languishing for months or even years on waiting lists to secure a licensed child care spot.

You can create all the new daycare spots you want, but if there aren't enough people who want to work there, what then?

Two weeks ago, the giant missing puzzle piece of my daughter's life fell into place. With COVID-19 restrictions easing, I was finally allowed to go inside the daycare.

I followed my daughter through the door and down the hall, past "Nugget," the school hamster, whose surprisingly large cage I had previously only glanced at through the window.

"Boots here," she said, pointing to the mat outside the door marked Classroom #5.

We went inside and the other kids eagerly looked up: "Hi Sloane!" a few called out. I had always wondered whether she was the first to arrive each morning. Now I know.

I walked around the room, past the mini leather sofa and bookshelves, the colourful bristol board listing each child's birthday and adorned with family photos. "Baby Shark!" Sloane yelled as she brought me toward the speaker.

I looked at her two teachers who work tirelessly every day to ensure these amazing, demanding, little humans are safe and happy and said:

“Thank you.”

Then Sloane did something she’s never done before. She cried as I started to leave.

But I didn’t need to worry. Miss Sally had already wrapped her in a warm hug, calming her down in no time.

I’m in awe of and so grateful for all that the daycare staff do for the families in their care while under so much stress. It’s time our institutions give them their dues.

What else we’re thinking about:

Kids have missed out on so much due to pandemic disruptions so I was heartened to read my colleague Caroline Alphonso’s recent story about how schools are using play to help students recover from learning loss. The story features teachers at a school in Gatineau, Que., whose classroom curriculum includes acting out scenes of a story and playing with Lego. The idea is to extend play-based learning beyond kindergarten and into later grades to help students use their imaginations. “It does help them find their creativity and it allows them to explore,” teacher Fiona Medley told Alphonso. It sounds a lot more engaging than sitting at a desk all day. I hope Sloane is lucky enough to have such thoughtful and innovative educators.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: child care workforce ^[4]

wages and working conditions ^[5]

care economy ^[6]

Source URL (modified on 28 Mar 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/03/amplify-daycare-workers-are-heroes-after-year-i-finally-met-those>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/03/amplify-daycare-workers-are-heroes-after-year-i-finally-met-those> [2]

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-daycare-worker-heroes-covid/> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-care-workforce> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9175> [6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/care-economy>