

Episode 13: The promise of \$10 child care ^[1]

What happens when child care becomes a right, like health care in Canada, and what can we learn from countries who have done this before us?

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AVAILABILITY

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Excerpted from transcript:

ANGELA: Health care is the purview of the provincial governments in Canada, which means that all kinds of things, like how we handle a pandemic, are up to each province and territory.

MIHIRA: This is also true for how child care is handled in this country, which is why it's a small miracle that the federal Liberals have put together 12 separate deals with provinces and territories to offer \$10-a-day daycare to Canadians.

ANGELA: Except for Quebec, which already had child care available for less than \$10 a day, they got their own deal last summer. This matches up nicely with our May cover story by Sadiya Ansari, and why she will be one of the panelists in our next Article Club on THURSDAY, April 21st, along with Anjum Sultana and Karen Muir.

MIHIRA: THAT WILL BE Live on Facebook, we're hoping you'll join us for the conversation Canada is having about child care. But until then, let's take a listen to your interview with Sadiya Ansari (SAA-dee-ya UN-sari):

ANGELA: \$10 child care might finally be a possibility for Canadian parents outside of Quebec, but you wrote this story at least partially because of what you experienced as a Canadian living overseas – can you tell us about that?

SADIYA ANSARI: So I think what the story is about is that Germany made childcare a legal right for parents. And that has totally transformed the availability of childcare and the expectation of childcare being there for you. If you are a parent with a child over one. So I've been living in Berlin since July, 2020. Uh, and I started to notice everyone had a lot of babies. Like I just started to notice a bunch of babies everywhere. And I know it sounds silly, but in Toronto where I'm from, I just found like so many people were putting off having children or moving, cuz they just couldn't even afford it. They couldn't afford childcare on top of, you know, their housing and whatever else was going on. So, I kind of started just asking people who had kids and they ended up telling me that in Berlin it's actually state-run childcare is, or sorry, their state funded childcare is essentially is free for parents. And then I started reading more and more about it and every state is a little bit different, but in 2008 there was a law that was passed that essentially made it a legal right for parents, with kids over the age of one. So that him into effect in 2013. So, that doesn't mean childcare is free here for everybody. It just means you have a right to a space and the federal government is working with all the different states to try to bring down the cost.

Germany is much more similar to Canada, like it's very similar in that the federal government is not responsible for childcare, but wants to make these changes. Um, and that the kind of at the state municipal level, that's where the responsibility lies. So that was interesting, but also that they were just kind of changing this and really re-hauling their system in the last 20 years. It's not like they've just been doing this since the sixties and seventies, like, um, some Scandinavian countries. Yeah. So that's what kind of made Germany an interesting comparator to Canada.

ANGELA: As a parent, you'd think I'd be super excited about this move by our various governments, and I am, but it's about 10 years too late for me to directly benefit from any cost-savings on childcare; my kid is 20. What would you say to people who might say this benefits only a small part of our society?

SADIYA ANSARI:: I do think that is an interesting question, because there's also the question of how does it help people who don't have children or who don't plan to have children, which to be honest, I'm in this category and some people have asked me, why are you even writing this story? But I think it's about quality of life for not just parents, but also people who aren't parents. Like if you were in a workplace, you know, parents are just dealing with so much, especially during the pandemic, but even before the pandemic, like you're rushing to, you know, for pickup you're, you're just constantly, your entire life is kind of around your child's life and also childcare being so expensive. It means maybe you can't afford that extra hour to take you to five o'clock. Maybe you have to leave work at four, even though it would be much more useful for you to stay that hour or what have you.

So, I think that it actually ends up helping everybody. And it's just this idea. It's an idea like that I think is not just unique to childcare, but a lot of different kinds of care. Like we look at caring for the elderly too. I think it falls into this kind of category, which is that, you know, what do we want to be responsible for as society? Like, do we want to make parents responsible for their children and say like you had a kid and

that's not my problem. Or do we want to say like, actually we want to take care of not only parents, but we want to take care of kids too, because when kids are in childcare, um, for the most part, they're getting also a bit of an education depending on the kind of care that they're going into, it's better for their socialization. Um, and basically their educational outcomes are usually better also. So, so it's kind of like you're kind of winning as a society if you're taking care of kids and parents and, and on another level, I think it's also the UN looks at the wellbeing of families. They don't just look at like, you know, this idea of like, oh, we'll have more women in the workforce, which I haven't even talked about yet because I mean, I think that's important, but I think this idea of putting this like number on our GDP is not entirely appropriate to say, like, we can add this many billion to our GDP. Like we're talking about human beings and, and families and all the people around me, my family, my friends, just seeing them so stressed out about this one thing that should not be a barrier to them living their lives, you know? I think that's kind of, what's interesting and important for me in the story.

ANGELA: As you started to say, childcare responsibilities often disproportionately effect women and we're going to talk about this all at our Article Club with Anjum and Karen on the 21st, but how would you ask that question specifically as it pertains to women?

SADIYA ANSARI:: I think asking the question, like how does this affect women more than men, right? Especially for women who have partners, who are men. I mean, there's some women who obviously have partners who are women or non-binary, but I think that, you know, there is one single mom in our discussion. So I think that's like, she is, she'll be a really interesting person to talk to because she's just totally responsible. Karen Muir, she's a single mom, so she's totally responsible for like everything essentially. Um, and I think when we look at what the policy goal is for women it's to get more women working. It's oh, what were the other to get the, a birth rate up? Well, in Germany, in particular, they had really bad educational outcomes.

And so that was part of their goal too, to get those O E C D sort of comparative numbers up. And like in all of those cases, they, they they're like it's working essentially like more people are having babies, more women are working and, um, the educational outcomes across the board had improved. So yeah, I think that there's a variety of way it affects, I think you can ask them like, how does this affect your life or how does having the, the guarantee of childcare make your life better? Because for instance, for Karen, it's gonna be that she is able to work and not worry about where her kid is, because she doesn't really have a fall back. Right? And for her during COVID she did not have a fall back because she couldn't rely on a neighbor or something to take care of her kids.

It just wasn't, you know, it just, you, she, she had nothing. She had like her mother who lived an hour away and that was about it. And for Olivia, who's in Hamburg, I think it gave her a lot. It gave her the ability to sort of reexamine what she wanted to do in her career, but she also went through postpartum depression. And so she also like needed some time to recalibrate and needed some time to like go to therapy and just kind of like take a bit of time to herself. So, I think that, I think that gave her, or having childcare also gave her a variety of things beyond just like being able to jump back into the workforce.

ANGELA: Just to give people a bit of FOMO, what can you tell us about what else you want to talk about at our Article Club?

SADIYA ANSARI:: I guess what I'd wanna hear? Um, there's a lot that didn't make it into this story ... for Karen, she's in BC. So I think what's interesting is she mentioned the subsidies in BC are like very, very good, especially for single parents. And so, um, or I don't know if it's, because she's a single parent or because of an income threshold, because there's just one income. But she'll know she's an accountant. She knows like all of her numbers, like the back of her hand. She's amazing. Yeah. So, um, so yeah, she, the one thing that's interesting is like, how is this going to change her life? Because in some way, if she loses the subsidies, she said to me, she might be paying more. So, um, so it's not like it, it's not really a one size all fits solution for everybody. So I think in this case \$10, \$10 day daycare sounds really great, but for some people actually they're going to be worse off.

And I think to ask someone else what else they want to see in care? Right? Like, does she want this Karen for instance who's in Canada, want different options in care? Like I think Olivia, what the story kind of brought home was like she had, um, the option to try a bunch of different kinds of care to find the right care for her kid. And for most parents in Canada, I don't even think that's like an option. It's like, you're just trying to get your kid in a spot. And if it's not ideal, you're like, you kind of just feel bad about it, but you're like, let's, let's see what opens up. Do you know what I mean? And like what a, what a shitty feeling, to send your kid every day, somewhere where you're not like, "oh, I feel really good about this."

You know? So, I'm kind of interested to know from, from Karen, how she feels about that. Um, but also what, what else would make their lives easier? Like what would make your life easier, more flexible hours? Like for instance, in Germany, they're now investing in quality of care because there's a real difference across the country in terms of what kind of quality care you get. So one of the other things we're looking at is, is expanding hours and availability because of course there are people who work all sorts of hours and daycare can be like seven to two or seven to three or what have you. So, things like that, like I'm kind of curious about what else they, they want out of childcare in their like dream world. Yeah.

ANGELA: For sure! And that kind of brings me to my last question, which is what does this mean in the larger context of Canadian politics and Canadian culture?

SADIYA ANSARI:: This is a massive policy change, right? And I think that this is something that maybe we've been told we had no access to before or like this is like, you can't expect this kind of thing from your government. I think like there's lots of conversations like that around lots of different kinds of things. Like now, you know, we're having a conversation about dental care. And so we're just expected to accept the status quo. And I think with COVID and the measures is in the pandemic that has been really frustrating for people and I think people are calling for change. So I am kind of interested to see how the next like set of elections might go, you know, um, and what people might demand, because we can see that if a government wants to change something that they can. I'm also interested to know personally, I think, you know, what the German model has going for it, that the Canadian model doesn't like.

So the Canadian model has agreements with every single province and territory. The German model is like also, you know, of course it has these agreements with every, between the federal government and the states and municipalities, but it has this legal basis to say like you

have the right to a child care spot. So, you know, there was a court case in 2016 where three mothers took the city of Leipzig to court to say, like, we don't have a child spot and you know, they were awarded damages. And beyond that, I read that it became the burden of proof became on onto the municipality to prove that, that they tried to provide a spot, not on the parents. And that's super interesting, right. Because I think that really changes, one of the experts said this, actually, she said it changes the game. Her name was Agnes Blome she's studied this for many years and it does change the game for parents.

If you know that you can, you don't want to go to court. Like that's not actually fun and it might take years and you know, it might not help you, but knowing that like, it is actually a legal right for you, just like healthcare is, I think that for me was a real light bulb moment. And I'm interested to know even as someone who doesn't have kids, like, okay, can this kind of large scale policy last beyond 2025, 2026 fiscal year? Like, are the Liberals going to be in power? What happens when they're not in power? Like these are kind of questions that, that I have.

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