

Making childcare accessible: Parents working in the trades face unique barriers ^[1]

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Source: BC Building Trades

Format: Article

Publication Date: 13 May 2022

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

A PIPEFITTER, AN ELECTRICIAN AND A BOILERMAKER are called out to work on different job sites in and around the Lower Mainland.

The pipefitter is working four 10-hour shifts, the electrician is called for a night shift, and the boilermaker took a two-week shutdown call. All three skilled tradespeople have children ranging in age from three to 12 years old. All three need childcare but are faced with long waitlists, limited service provider areas, or lack of flexibility.

While the above scenarios are fictional, they represent a reality for many in the construction sector.

"Canada's Building Trades Unions (CBTU) were pleased to see the federal government make good on their campaign promise to roll out affordable childcare across Canada," said CBTU executive director Sean Strickland. "Now we just need to make sure it's accessible for building trades families as well."

In Budget 2021, the federal Liberal government unveiled its Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan, committing \$30 billion over the next five years and \$8.3 billion ongoing. The government also committed to working with provinces and territories to build a Canada-wide, community-based system of quality childcare.

To ensure the development of an accessible childcare program that supports Canada's skilled trades workforce, CBTU conducted focus groups in the fall with parents who work in the unionized construction sector and their spouses. The focus groups were aimed at gathering information on their experiences and realities of working in the construction industry and managing childcare. The results of the focus groups and CBTU's recommendations can be found at buildingtrades.ca.

Barriers that families experienced during their careers when trying to access childcare included:

- Limited daycare provider hours that don't correspond with the shifts they work
- Long waitlists to access childcare
- Long-term commitments to one childcare facility that don't correspond with the cyclical nature of construction
- Lack of qualified childcare professionals/drop-in childcare options

Due to barriers in accessing childcare, many tradespeople — and disproportionately tradeswomen — are unable to work or have considered leaving the construction industry altogether.

"We need more programs/supports to help women when they're getting into the trade to remove those barriers and support them when they return to second, third year in the trade. Any single parent—not just women," commented a B.C.-based training director during the CBTU-led focus groups.

In a recent study out of the U.S., the Institute for Women's Policy Research surveyed 2,635 tradeswomen on retention and advancement in the construction industry. Some key findings included:

- 63 per cent identified as parents;
- Over 20 per cent had children age five or younger;
- 100 per cent of respondents with young children identified childcare as their main issue; and
- 44 per cent of respondents said they were seriously considering leaving the trades; where 40 per cent ranked difficulty finding childcare as their main reason.

Ensuring parents in the skilled trades have access to childcare supports will create a stronger workforce and enable it to continue to grow, and attract more diversity to the industry.

"When I did have to bring them (their kids) to daycare, I had to wake them up so early. When I brought them home, they had had a 14-hour day themselves. So when we got home, they were exhausted and miserable," said a commercial transport mechanic from B.C. during the focus group. "Not only is it challenging for us as parents, it's so challenging for our kids. In trades, I've typically started at 6 a.m., so my

partner has to deliver the kids. At one time, we had to be a single-income family because it was too hard to navigate (childcare and work).”

In a historic partnership agreement between B.C. and Ottawa announced last July, the federal government will invest \$3.2 billion over the next five years to help create additional spaces and affordable childcare opportunities in B.C.

“Now is the time for all building trades leaders to ensure the new childcare program is designed to meet the needs of our members—who don’t work a traditional nine-to-five job,” stated Strickland.

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

Tags: non-standard hours child care ^[4]

accessibility ^[5]

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Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/05/making-childcare-accessible-parents-working-trades-face-unique> [2]

<https://bcbuildingtrades.org/making-childcare-accessible-parents-working-in-the-trades-face-unique-barriers/> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7860> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9248> [5]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/accessibility> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9023>