

More than affordability: N.L. childcare report suggests improvements that consider factors beyond the cost ^[1]

Jimmy Pratt Foundation report makes recommendations to improve the industry for early childhood educators, parents and their children

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

An early childhood educator (ECE) who helped raise young children in this province for more than three decades said she will leave the profession with what she had going into it: not much.

She was among the more than 250 people and more than 40 organizations consulted as part of the Jimmy Pratt Foundation's most recent report, "Let's Get it Right: Early Childhood Education for the Next Generation," released Tuesday, April 26.

The non-profit organization's executive director, Neria Aylward, said the consultations included "some really difficult conversations" with early childhood educators.

"These are people that have stayed in it because they're passionate, and they care about the work that they do, but the incentives are just not there," said Aylward.

"It's really difficult. Passion can only get you so far."

Unlike teachers, early childhood educators don't get a pension, paid time off for professional learning opportunities, or a competitive payscale they can climb as they gain experience and further education.

She said the difficulty in finding, recruiting, keeping and competitively paying early childhood educators was a concern that came up consistently in the consultations.

Improving those conditions was one of several recommendations in the report.

"Getting (early childhood education) right is not just going to be making childcare cheaper, it's looking at things more holistically, and allowing the community in, and asking people who are in the sector, asking parents from a broad range of backgrounds, what's working and what isn't," said Aylward.

"This is a provincial government program, and we want to see leadership from the provincial government, but we also want to see that leadership to be quite collaborative."

The provincial government aims to lower the cost of registered childcare to \$10 per day by 2023.

Education, guaranteed

As the province moves to make early childhood education more financially accessible, Aylward said there are currently two broad groups of people whose needs are not being met.

First, there are people working traditional 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. jobs for which most childcare schedules are currently designed. These people can often afford to pay much more than \$10 per day, but they simply can't find a space for their child due to the current high demand and few options.

She's hopeful that problem will be alleviated within a few years as full-time pre-kindergarten becomes available for all four-year-olds by 2026, and more early childhood educators get trained.

"But there's another group of folks who aren't served by the current childcare offerings, or really the ones coming up ... and those are the people for whom 9 to 5 childcare isn't going to work, period."

Aylward said people who work shift work or rotational work, or at minimum wage jobs with fluctuating, unpredictable schedules, have an especially hard time securing childcare.

"It can get a little bit tangly, right? How do you make sure everybody can get to work? ... But when we're thinking about it as education, we figure it out. We figure out K-12 education in rural and remote communities in this province, and there's certainly much to be desired, but

the same thing should be guaranteed for little kids as well.”

Some specific suggestions in the report include:

- the government should expand not-for-profit and public early childhood education;
- the province should build a system of early childhood education — not just "childcare"; and
- early childhood educators should get benefits, professional development opportunities, standardized pay and strong workplace protections.

Region: Newfoundland ^[3]

Tags: high-quality childcare ^[4]

early childhood education and care workforce ^[5]

child care expansion ^[6]

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