

Between a rock and a marketplace ^[1]

Childcare and early childhood education are too important to be left to the profit-driven whims of the market. Only a publicly-funded and publicly-managed system will put children, families and workers first

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Excerpts

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Why is childcare such a lottery? And why can't anyone you know get a \$10-a-day childcare spot? In my work with the Jimmy Pratt Foundation, we see this as a policy failure to uphold a child's right to education. The solution is straightforward, and proven many times over in countries like Norway, Sweden, France and Iceland: governments need to build more childcare centres and hire more staff to fill them. We need to treat childcare as a public service that puts children, families, and workers first.

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Economically speaking, we can't afford not to act on childcare. The tax revenue generated by parents who return to work far outweighs the cost of operating childcare services. Governments also save money down the line on costs associated with healthcare and child protection. A universal childcare program that treats childcare as a public service has the potential to create good jobs in every community with young children. It's the easiest investment a government could make, with the surest returns.

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Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest proportion of for-profit childcare centers in the country, and still has the lowest enrollment of children two to four years old in early learning programs. All rural areas of the province are considered childcare deserts, and St. John's has childcare spaces for just 10 per cent of infants. Children with special needs are routinely kicked out of childcare programs, and their families have little recourse.

Ultimately, this is because high-quality childcare is bad business. Educating young children requires many qualified staff, which means that centers use most of their budget on wages. As a result, to make a profit, for-profit childcare centers are more likely to serve children who are "profitable" — able-bodied children without exceptionalities who live in urban areas. Meanwhile, preschoolers are the "moneymakers," needing fewer staff per child than infants. To cut costs, for-profit centers are more likely to employ less-qualified staff, and cut corners on staff benefits. Many Early Childhood Educators go to work sick because they don't have any other choice; they can't afford to lose a day's wages.

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There are certainly individual for-profit childcare operators who have provided high-quality programs in Newfoundland and Labrador, some for decades. Children, parents, and communities would be lost if these spaces were to disappear. But providing funding for existing for-profit spaces is not the same as creating more for-profit spaces.

So what's the alternative? A publicly-funded and publicly-managed system of early learning and childcare. Our provincial and federal governments must step up and spend what it takes to finish the job. They must put up the capital funding required to build beautiful, safe, and welcoming spaces for every child. Early Childhood Educators must be paid what they are worth, and have paid sick days, paid vacations, benefits and pensions (most do not). While the not-for-profit sector has an important role to play in delivering programs, governments have a responsibility to directly operate childcare where not-for-profit centers do not exist.

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Region: Canada ^[3]

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inclusion ^[5]

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Links

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