

Universal care better for everyone [CA] ^[1]

Editorial

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EXCERPTS

When we see media reports about child care shortages, those reports usually focus on the parents, and their struggles to find spaces for the children.

The drama is about finding care for little Johnny, so Mom and Dad can go to work to feed and keep a roof over their family's heads.

But there is another aspect of child care that usually gets left out of the equation, one that we should all be interested in - the benefits of quality child care.

Believe it or not, quality child care can have positive benefits for society. It can boost success rates of children, especially those from low-income families.

It can even reduce crime. Studies have proven it.

Don't just take my word for it - check some of the research available.

Lawrence Sherman, a leading U.S. crime prevention expert, found that quality early childhood education is one of the most effective programs to reduce crime.

Many studies have already shown high-quality child care cuts juvenile delinquency among disadvantaged children, by increasing their chances of finishing high school and getting a job.

The truth is, good early childhood care benefits all children, regardless of family background. It provides the opportunity to identify children with special needs early, to intervene at a time when it can be most effective.

Trained child care workers can detect problems like oppositional disorders among preschool children, then connect the children and their parents with the help they need, before it develops into a social disorder later in life.

Some U.S. studies have found arrest rates higher among adults who hadn't had the benefit of child care as, compared to those who did.

Startling statistics, indeed.

And you'd think these kinds of statistics would be of interest to Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives, well known for their tough stance on crime.

It seems they are missing the boat on an effective, and arguably inexpensive crime deterrent.

Yes, child care does have a cost, although it's less than what it costs to put a child through school.

And consider for a minute the long-term costs of not providing it - police, to catch habitual, career criminals who criminologists say are responsible for the great bulk of crimes in any city.

Then add up the other criminal justice system costs - the court workers, lawyers, judges, probation officers, mental health workers and hospital costs, not to mention the high cost of locking these people up in prisons, when they are caught.

Now imagine a system that would help divert a lot of these people early in life, before they get into trouble. Think about the lives that could be saved, all the anguish spared.

What Canada needs is a universal child care system.

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