

Funding cuts throw city's childcare programs into deeper crisis [CA-BC]^[1]

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Source: Vancouver Westender

Format: Article

Publication Date: 26 Apr 2007

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Recent domestic and international reports have revealed not only that Canada is home to one of the world's lowest birthrates, but that B.C. has the very lowest birthrate in Canada, with just 1.4 children per mother. Therefore, many would think that encouraging a baby boom should be top priority.

Instead, tales of lengthy waiting lists and funding cuts for childcare are enough to put off any prospective parent. Vancouver's 9,200 licensed childcare spaces are stretched to the breaking point, with an estimated 62,000 children under the age of 12 battling for access. It is now not unusual for parents to wait years for their child to reach the top of the list, says Sandra Menzer, executive director of the Vancouver Society of Children's Centres. VSOCC's 25 licensed childcare programs currently have a waiting list of 2,000 names.

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Menzer says she is puzzled by recent cuts, which include almost 30 per cent (or \$200,000) shaved off of her operating grant by the provincial government. The cut is effective from July until March 2008, and could mean increased fees for parents who are already faced with bills ranging from \$600 to \$1,300 per month for a child under three. Although the federal government provides \$1,200 a year (taxable) for each child under six through the Universal Child Care Benefit, that still leaves a large balance for parents to pay.

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The benefits of quality care in fostering a child's social development are inarguable, agrees University of British Columbia Professor Paul Kershaw. The professor at the UBC's Human Early Learning Partnership says childcare is also crucial in promoting equality for women and improving the economy. "We have a hot economy right now, and childcare services are a key way to allow people added time in the labour force," he says. "They also allow women to access the paid workforce and help in evening up the distribution of care in the home."

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Families, childcare providers and politicians gathered at Heritage Hall, on Main Street, on April 12 to discuss the way forward after almost \$1.3 million was slashed from the budget of a well-established resource centre. Staff at the Westcoast Childcare Resource Centre, which is B.C.'s only centre dedicated to early childhood education and care, thought they were immune from cash chops after 15 years of government funding. But the cuts come into effect at the end of this month, marking the final nail in the coffin for many of its services, including a specialized library, workshops, and multilingual support to parents and childcare providers.

"I want to give voice to the shock, shame and outrage over the way our government is failing families and their children, as well as those who provide child care," Gyda Chud said at the Heritage Hall meeting. Chud has championed the needs of preschool children for three decades and co-founded the Westcoast Childcare Resource Centre. She says programs run by Westcoast at 10 neighbourhood houses will be forced to close when the funds run out on April 30.

Linda Reid, B.C.'s Minister of State for Childcare, is also unhappy with the situation, but says it came down to a reduction in the expected funding from federal government. "This is fiercely troubling for children because it means that long-term plans are compromised," she says. "We are not reneging on the provincial commitment, but federal government has withdrawn its dollar."

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- reprinted from the Vancouver Westender

Region: Canada^[2]

British Columbia^[3]

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crisis-ca-bc

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/07/04/funding-cuts-throw-citys-childcare-programs-deeper-crisis-ca-bc> [2]

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