

# Canada lags on child issues [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Today is not exactly a Hallmark holiday. Perhaps you've never even heard of National Child Day. But there are a lot of grown-ups around who would like to see it get at least a fraction of the attention paid to those commercial extravaganzas held in the name of mom and dad every spring.

Among them is Lorna King, president of an organization called Women for PACE Canada, a non-profit organization that has been working to support early childhood education in Jamaica.

National Child Day was originally set by the United Nations and formally adopted 13 years ago in Canada after we signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

To King, a day in honour of children is the ideal time for reflection on how we can better meet the needs of the next generation and identify the gaps.

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While PACE &mdash; Project for Advancement of Childhood Education &mdash; set out 20 years ago to raise funds for poor schools in Jamaica that teach the youngest children, today it seems Canada may be the country that's lagging behind when it comes to recognizing the importance of the early years.

"In Jamaica, at least there is a system where 97 per cent of children are attending schools from ages 3 to 6," says King. "Now we, as advocates of early childhood education, would like to see that in Canada."

There are about 2,000 schools delivering subsidized early childhood education in Jamaica, she adds, and the current government is working to implement standards for things including teacher training, facilities and nutrition.

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Here in Canada, we have a lot more material things, but no systematic approach that provides children across the board with reliable high-quality early childhood education and care.

So many kids from families with few resources are being left behind. This matters because we have plenty of research to show that early learning affects the brain's ability to learn later on. And that positive educational experiences early in life are key to future success in school.

We've had the studies.... We've also had the harsh realities pointed out by a number of international organizations, including the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

All for naught.

Now, thanks to the Harper government, a national child-care strategy has fallen off the agenda. Parents get \$1,200 a year for each child under age 6 &mdash; which hardly puts a dent in the costs of high-quality child care for working parents. Is this supposed to convince us that kids are a priority?

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The UN's aim [is] to promote children's rights &mdash; the right to protection, education and care, play and rest, health and to have their voices heard. But to recognize children's rights, adults have to shoulder responsibility. And not just for their own kids but for all children.

When you look at it that way, the question of early childhood education and child care seems like a no-brainer. The bigger question is who will be responsible enough to take action?

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

**Region:** Latin America and the Caribbean <sup>[2]</sup>

Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** children's rights <sup>[4]</sup>  
federal programs <sup>[5]</sup>  
international organizations <sup>[6]</sup>

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