

The case for state-supported early childhood education and care [CA-PE] ^[1]

Opinion

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

A series of networks has been set up all across Canada to provide research support for the rich and diverse community initiatives falling under the general heading of 'the social economy'. The network established for the Atlantic provinces involves six clusters of researchers, one of which is being co-ordinated by the Institute of Island Studies at UPEI.

Network partners on P.E.I., who include community organizations and academics, are focusing on inclusion and empowerment in the social economy. Part of the network's mandate is to allocate seed money for research activities. In drafting criteria for such allocations, the network soon found itself facing the need to factor in child - care costs, to allow for the participation of parents with young children in network-affiliated projects.

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Key trends...that have stimulated demand for early childhood education and care include: higher labour force participation by women, including mothers with young children; increases in single-parent (mainly female) households; increased need to travel to work; and shifts away from resource-based, seasonal industries to service-based, all-year-round employment, often with unconventional hours.

In short, the need for affordable, accessible, high-quality child care has increased dramatically. Professional early education and child care helps to support women in their (persisting) dual roles as wage earners and care givers; plus gives their children the best possible start in their crucial, formative years...To give families access to this good start for their children, we need sufficient licensed centres with good facilities, well-planned activities and qualified staff.

The situation at present on P.E.I. is far from ideal. The numbers show that parents can't afford to stay at home. Eighty three per cent of women in P.E.I. with children under age five are in the labour force: 20 per cent more than the Canadian average. (It is no wonder that the voices of young women are often noticeably absent from community meetings called to deal with local issues). Women scramble for what care-giving services they can find, and can afford. These are often unregulated, which means there is no way to assess the training, skill, suitability, or safety of personnel or facilities.

...

The province has made some key investments in healthy child development; but a serious investment in quality, universally accessible, affordable child care that is focused on children's development is long overdue. We urge our policymakers to think hard before abandoning the federal-provincial agreement to provide financial support to the early childhood education and care programs in this province.

- Dr. Irene Novaczek of the Institute of Island Studies is co-ordinator of the Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network for Prince Edward Island. This is the first of a series of research-informed, collective public statements, to be issued to the media by the P.E.I. branch of the Social Economy and Sustainability research network on issues that are relevant to the social economy.

Reprinted from the Guardian.

Region: Prince Edward Island ^[2]

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