

Will we create rural child care options? ^[1]

A Woman's View

Author: Petitpas-Taylor, Ginette

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EXCERPTS

Child care supports families, provides quality learning experiences for children and provides benefits to the community. That was the theme of this column last week. This week, it's show and tell.

Some employers and unions in New Brunswick are taking a leadership role in supporting child care services in their communities.

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The Centre de jour l'Éveil at l'Université de Moncton provides non-profit child care services run by a parent board. The university provides space for the child care service and provides a subsidy for parents who are full-time students. Priority is given to students, followed by university staff and alumni.

Fredericton also has examples of employer and union sponsored child care programs.

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Postal workers are one group of New Brunswickers who have non standard work hours, so the Union of Postal Communication Employees and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers have been working with the Preschool Centre in Fredericton to find innovative ways to meet the child care needs of shift workers. Working with the Preschool Centre, which has a long-standing child care centre on the South side of Fredericton, the unions' child care fund covered the start-up costs for the North-side facilities, within a block of a Canada Post call centre. Priority is given to children of members of the sponsoring unions but the majority of the 132 spaces are available to the community.

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Other parts of Canada have several examples of innovative services developed to meet the needs of parents who work non-traditional hours but also of rural areas.

A rural community in Manitoba with a population of about 90 people has a licensed non-profit child care program that many New Brunswick communities would envy.

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In rural Ontario, the South East Grey Community Outreach has organized licensed child care facilities and various other parent supports in many of the small rural communities that make up south east Grey County. SEGCO has also worked at increasing government awareness of rural needs.

When municipal subsidies were only available for parents using child care regularly and on a full day or half day basis and rural families needed care on a seasonal and intermittent basis, SEGCO negotiated more responsive policies. The changes that were made resulted in flexible access for rural parents.

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When the Advisory Council on the Status of Women organized sessions on rural child care in two rural regions of New Brunswick a few weeks ago, we noted several representatives of Local Service Districts and of community organizations attended, mixed in among the representatives of child care, women's groups and other usual suspects. Their enthusiasm was also noted.

Will the provincial plan to improve access to quality child care tap into this enthusiasm. We hope so.

At the sessions we organized, some participants had difficulty moving beyond what they know occurs at a community level to a vision of what they would like to see in their communities. Many said provincial policy was not developed in consultation with community.

Participants spoke of the need to repeat participatory processes such as the recent sessions and to help communities mobilize around actions.

Will New Brunswick create rural child care options that make sense for our rural communities?

The partners are certainly asking for it.

- reprinted from the New Brunswick Times & Transcript

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