

Quality child care is simply good sense [CA] ^[1]

Author: Austin, Janet, Turner, Denise & Kershaw, Paul

Source: Vancouver Sun [p.A11]

Format: Article

Publication Date: 17 Jan 2006

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Child care is finally receiving the attention it deserves in this federal election as three national parties make significant promises.

This attention is sorely needed. A report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development criticized Canada for lagging behind many other countries because we have failed to implement a quality child care system that will foster a well-educated citizenry, one that ensures Canada is competitive in the global economy.

Research overwhelmingly shows that the quality of care that children receive in their early years affects them for life. High quality care positively influences health and learning, while poor quality care can do harm.

That's why study upon study confirms that quality child care is a smart economic investment. We know that the benefits will outweigh the costs by a margin of two to one, at a minimum.

The YWCA of Vancouver has provided quality child care for more than 23 years as part of our mission to build better futures for children, youth and women.

Our network of clients and supporters spans the continuum between stay-at-home and employed parents in all parts of the economy. Because of our experience, we understand that child care can be an invaluable support for mothers and fathers from all walks of life as they raise the next generation -- a support that must supplement, but will never replace, parental care.

The current debate on child care risks dividing families with young kids, pitting those who opt for full-time parental care against those who need or want child care programs. The YWCA of Vancouver believes that, as a society, we should support families in all of their roles -- as they parent, work, study, care for other family members and volunteer in their communities.

Canadians already enjoy a number of taxation policies, and other forms of government support, that subsidize parents who personally provide full-time care for their children.

This includes our system of maternity and parental leave, as well as tax measures like the spousal credit and the equivalent-to-spouse credit. What is missing from the mix are child care options that serve working parents.

Canada's family policy has not kept pace with the needs of families. Today, more than 70 per cent of women with children under five are in the labour force, and our society is economically dependent on their contribution.

It is unrealistic to think that a taxable allowance of \$1,200 annually will actually address our current child care crisis.

We don't question the need to invest public funds to build libraries, parks and schools. Why do we not see a quality child care system in the same light?

Critics of the move to create a child care system worry that this will mean all children placed in "one-size-fits-all" institutional care. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The YWCA is calling for a range of options. Options like neighbourhood-based licensed centres, preschools, and family home care -- available on a part-time, full-time or flexible hours basis, according to family needs.

The federal provincial child care agreements that have been signed in all 10 provinces are a good start.

The YWCA of Vancouver calls on all parties to honour and build on these agreements.

- reprinted from the Vancouver Sun

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