

# The daycare dilemma: Parents want better-paid workers but lower fees [CA-MB]<sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Philp, Margaret

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## EXCERPTS

Cindy Holland knows exactly where the first installment of Ottawa's new child care investment should go.

The mother of two children enrolled at the St Germain Day Care Centre in Winnipeg she wants the Manitoba government to pour its share of the \$700-million announced in yesterday's federal budget into increasing the notoriously low wages and spotty training requirements of child care workers.

She adores the workers at the centre that six-year-old Erica and four-year-old Mitchell have attended for a year. But she notices a difference between those who have studied early-childhood education and the workers with no formal training who have been hired for little more than minimum wage. And she knows the quality of her children's care is linked to the workers' pay and qualifications.

Ms. Holland will hardly be the only parent with a child care prescription for a provincial government as they dip into the new trust fund for their first installment of the \$5-billion pledged over the next five years -- Ottawa's tentative first step toward a national system of early learning and care.

Tantalized by the promise of a national child care program, many parents and child care advocates were deflated yesterday by Ottawa's plan, which, they insist, invests too little money and allows provinces free rein to spend the money as they wish.

For parents like Ms. Holland, the work now begins again: pressuring provinces like Manitoba to spend the money where it will make a difference, however small.

As daycare goes, Manitoba is one of Canada's more progressive provinces, with a cap on fees and a government child care plan that includes improving worker training.

Still, as in other provinces, there is a shortage of licensed spaces, enough for only about 15 per cent of the province's children. And only the poorest families living far below the poverty line are eligible for child care subsidies.

"Manitoba is likely to use the funds quite well," said Susan Prentice, a sociologist and child care policy researcher at the University of Manitoba.

But, she added, "there's a real risk that provincial discretion will mean some provinces won't even spend the money on regulated child care."

For Steven and Tricia Livingston, whose family income falls below \$50,000, but not nearly low enough to qualify for subsidies for their two children, they are living from one paycheck to another just to cover their \$40-a-day child care fees.

Twice they have applied for subsidies for five-year-old Tyler and two-year-old Jillian, and were turned down. To save a few dollars a week, the couple asked Mr. Livingston's parents to care for Tyler after school.

While Ms. Livingstone does not expect the province to foot her entire child care bill, she would like the government to overhaul the subsidy system to allow struggling working families like hers a small break in their fees, rather than risk forcing them to use cheaper, unlicensed babysitters.

She credits her son's smooth transition to kindergarten this year to the work of a good child care centre that taught him how to socialize with other children and sit quietly during story time.

"You still want quality child care," she said. "You could find somebody cheaper to look after your kids, but is that a reflection of what you want? There are a lot of good quality homes out there, but if you go with something that's unlicensed, then you really have to put your trust in the person you're with."

"It's so beneficial to young children to have exposure to early childhood education, whether in a daycare program or preschool program. I've seen the benefits for my son."

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

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