

# Who's minding the kids? [CA]<sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Ten-year-old Allyssa Jansen has been a day-care kid all her life. In private homes or big day-care centres, as an infant, toddler, and now before and after school, Allyssa is well-acquainted with the child care system.

And more and more children appear to be joining her ranks every year.

A new report from Statistics Canada shows the number of Canadian children under the age of five in child care -- defined as children who are regularly cared for at least part of the time by adults who aren't their parents -- has grown more than 25 per cent between 1995 and 2003.

These kids include those in big day-care centres, smaller day-care centres in private homes, those who are cared for by relatives such as grandparents or aunts and uncles either in the child's home or the relative's home, and those cared for by a non-relative in the child's own home.

In Manitoba in 1995, 42.5 per cent of children under five were in child care. By 2001, that had grown to 48.6 per cent.

Advocates for better child care say these numbers should send the federal and provincial governments a message that it's long past time for a national child care strategy.

Tina Jansen, Allyssa's mother, said she would welcome anything that would make finding affordable, quality child care easier.

"There's a lot of parents out there that need help," she said. "They can't get a space."

Federal Social Development Minister Ken Dryden is meeting with his provincial counterparts Friday in B.C., where they are expected to sign an agreement for a national child care program.

Susan Prentice, University of Manitoba sociology professor and member of the Manitoba Child Care Coalition, said the Statistics Canada numbers aren't surprising to her. She said as labour force statistics show more mothers are returning to work, the demand for child care grows. Recent statistics show seven out of 10 women with a pre-school aged child work outside the home.

"The numbers confirm what we've known for a long time," Prentice said.

The Statistics Canada report also showed the kind of child care that children are in is shifting from home-based day cares to big, licensed centres.

In 1995, half of Manitoba kids in child care were cared for by a non-relative in someone's private home, while 13.6 per cent were in large day-care centres. Others were cared for by relatives, or by nannies.

By 2001, the number in day-care centres almost doubled to 22.3 per cent, and the number in private homes dropped to 37.6 per cent.

Prentice said that's partly because larger centres are more stable, so parents aren't scrambling for a babysitter for their day-care worker's vacations or sick days.

Prentice said she'd like to know how many of the home-based day-care spots are licensed, noting in Manitoba only day cares with more than four children require a licence. But she said regulated care is generally safer and more geared toward early childhood education.

She said a national child care program should be focused on the non-profit sector, where she says statistics show fewer accidents, such as the recent Edmonton situation when an infant was left in a crib in a day care when the workers locked up and went home.

Prentice said she'd like to see a national child care act that sets out baseline principles for child care, including restrictions on expansion of for-profit day-care centres, and lays out provincial accountability.

Despite the rise in spaces, Prentice said Manitoba and Canada, are still "far from being able to meet the full need."

In the federal budget Feb. 23, the Liberals are expected to set up a \$5-billion trust fund to start the program, over the next five years.

Prentice said a full national child care program is estimated to cost \$10 billion a year.

Prentice said after years of promises by the federal government to enact a national child care program, Friday's meeting is promising. The success depends on the fine print.

- reprinted from the Winnipeg Free Press

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