

What's your game plan? [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Dear Ken:

As daunting as they must have been, the 1970-71 Stanley Cup playoffs will pale by comparison to the challenge facing you in fulfilling the government's promise for affordable daycare. Canadians expect their government to convert on this promise. Providing affordable daycare requires setting priorities.

Fortunately, there's a growing body of evidence to help direct government policy -- some of it Canadian.

One of the research's most important lessons is that the provision of quality daycare can alleviate some of the worst consequences of poverty for children, increase the likelihood of educational success, and improve their life chances. Ercilia Palacio-Quintin, a professor (now retired) in the Department of Psychology at the Université du Québec à Trois Rivières, compiled what is known about the impact of daycare on child development. The findings have implications for all children, but are crucial for those from less-advantaged backgrounds.

According to Dr. Palacio-Quintin, a child's intellectual development, knowledge, and language are positively influenced by attending daycare, particularly from facilities where staff have had teacher preparation and have developed positive relationships with the children. The longer the child attends, the greater are the benefits. And they endure: Children who have attended daycare perform better when they arrive at elementary school, and this continues in language and mathematics as they progress through the grades. Daycare particularly helps children whose cognitive and language abilities aren't stimulated at home.

As well, children attending daycare centres "are better able to assess the intent behind actions and to distinguish between moral and social transgressions," says Dr. Palacio-Quintin. Children attending daycare are more social, more affectionate, more co-operative, demonstrate more pro-social and less negative behaviour than children who do not attend.

Many of daycare's benefits extend to abused children, writes Dr. Palacio-Quintin. Those who attend daycare have "more appropriate contact with teachers, express their affection to children and adults more often, seek emotional support from adults more often, and use positive means to attract attention" compared with other abused children.

University of Toronto economist Michael Krashinsky and his colleague Gordon Cleveland found a 2:1 payoff for public expenditures for child care. "We measured two dollars of benefits for every dollar the government spent to enhance child care." According to Prof. Krashinsky, half the benefit of the investment in daycare was realized in mothers' increased labour-force participation. The remainder came from higher-quality, early educational experiences that the children had, whether their parents worked or not.

The latest edition of the American Educational Research Journal contains the report of an investigation using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study conducted in the United States. The study confirms that children who had the advantage of a centre-based or school-based preschool program in the year before entering elementary school performed better on reading and mathematics assessments. The effects, which persist through kindergarten and Grade 1, are largest for disadvantaged groups, lending weight to policies directed toward disadvantaged children.

Daycare increases school success and graduation rates. Children who have difficulty in school or leave before graduation are more likely to require costly remediation, to have unwanted pregnancies or to be involved in the criminal justice system. When these factors are taken into account, the social and economic returns on investment in daycare are significant. This suggests that, at the outset, you should focus day-care policy on the children in Canada's most disadvantaged families.

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

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