

Child care workers need more support [CA-PE] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

It's no surprise that the leaders of the three political parties tried to respond positively to the issue of low pay for early childhood educators when it was raised at the recent forum sponsored by the P.E.I. Federation of Labour. The party leaders know that child care is a 'motherhood' issue (so to speak) and they also know how desperate the current circumstances are for those who play a significant role in the development of the Island's most precious resource.

According to a study of the early childhood education sector conducted by the Atlantic Evaluation Group Inc. the average wage of the 400 or so ECEs in Prince Edward Island was \$8.25 an hour. By comparison, wage rates for similar occupations (teacher assistants, youth workers, etc.) with equal -- or, in some cases, fewer -- educational requirements range from \$11.57 an hour up to \$19.93 an hour.

To make matters worse, 25 per cent of ECEs are the only income earners in their family and 29 per cent had to rely on employment insurance benefits during some portion of 2000. As well, over 20 per cent of ECEs are forced to hold down at least one other job in addition to their work in the province's child-care field.

Not surprisingly, most Islanders who work in this field do so for only short periods of time.

Most of the owners/operators are concerned about the situation, too. They're facing serious problems in hiring and retaining qualified staff. So what's the answer? Should parents be expected to pay higher fees? Not really, given that many of them find it almost impossible to make ends meet now.

But then, why should individual parents be asked to shoulder this burden, anyway? Do they pay for the regular school system out of their own pockets? So why should early childhood education be an different?

The question that the three political parties have to answer is whether they are willing to accept their full responsibilities in this area should they form the government after Sept. 29. Are they willing to provide proper funding to the early childhood education sector in P.E.I.? And are they, as the main source of funding, willing to create a fair and equitable standard covering wages, benefits and working conditions for early childhood educators?

- reprinted from The Guardian (Charlottetown)

Region: Prince Edward Island ^[2]

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