

Education, early childhood care priorities for women: Advisory council releases latest policy package [CA-PE] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The P.E.I. Advisory Council on the Status of Women is calling on the province to support early childhood care and education.

Members of the council released their latest policy package Wednesday at a media conference at the Kare-a-Lot Child Care Centre here.

The policy sets out a series of goals and ways for government to reach them in early childhood care and education.

Patricia MacAulay, researcher/policy analyst for the council, said early childhood care and education is a women's equality issue.

"When a woman becomes a mother she typically assumes the role as her child's primary caregiver," she said. "But she's also likely to have additional work and/or study responsibilities and that's especially true here on P.E.I."

MacAulay said Statistics Canada reports 83 per cent of mothers of young children are in the paid workforce in P.E.I., 20 per cent more than the national average.

MacAulay said their census results show women do two-thirds of the unpaid work in Canada and that a great deal of that work is caregiving.

She said on P.E.I., children are more likely to receive unregulated care from women in their own homes. This service is provided on an ad hoc basis and for low wages and certainly without job security or benefits.

She said in the regulated sector, trained early childhood educators find it difficult to pursue their careers because of inadequate wages or acceptable work conditions.

"So on both fronts, as the consumers and as the providers of early childhood care and educational services, the lack of support is a barrier to women's equality and to their full and active participation in society," MacAulay said.

"The policy guide that we've put together is intended to inform Island women on the issues at hand and enable them to advocate on their own behalf so that they can be supported in providing care for their children."

Eighty-per cent of the costs for early childhood care and education on P.E.I. is provided through parent fees. The province makes up the remaining 20 per cent. MacAulay said the national average is close to a 50-50 split between parent fees and government funding.

Laura Cannon, owner/operator of Kare-a-Lot Child Care Centre and president of the P.E.I. Early Childhood Development Association, said the service should be accessible to provide children with a continuing caring environment regardless of family income, specialized needs, parents employment status or geographical location.

"Early childhood care and education need to be regarded as a public service, much like health care and education with core funding coming from government instead of parents," she said.

The council wants the early childhood care and education sector visible. To do this, the Early Childhood Development Association needs to be provided with the resources required to provide leadership and support to the sector and to work collaboratively with government. A public information program is also required on the value of early childhood care and education.

Availability and accessibility of these services must be improved. The council is calling for financial and training incentives for more licensed child-care spaces, including home day-care providers, as well as support to licensed centres that provide flexible care options and transportation to kindergarten programs.

The council sees a need for a review of affordability and an increase to parent subsidies and wants the province to continue to work with the federal government for a universal national program.

-Reprinted from The Guardian (Charlottetown)

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