

We need national day care [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Transcript of Radio Broadcast:

Introduction:

Many eyes will be focussed on Ottawa next month when the federal budget comes down.

Among them will be people who've waited many years for a national child care program. Sharon Gregson works for the SFU Child Care Society in Burnaby, British Columbia. On Commentary she says parents and their kids have waited long enough.

Sharon Gregson:

Last December saw the highest number ever of working women in Canada. I'm one of them.

I'm also a woman with young children at home. That's why I'm hoping for a federal budget that will invest in building a national child care system.

In my job I see the demand for child care services up close and personal. I work for a child care society with spaces for 240 children from 3 months to 12 years of age. Yet, these services are nowhere near enough to meet the demand because more than 64% of women with children under the age of 6 are working.

Every single day I turn away families who are desperate for care. I turn away families willing to pay almost anything for a child care space. I also have to turn away families who simply cannot afford the fees. I see desperate families, angry, anxious and in tears because they need child care to work or study.

I've heard all the old myths about child daycare. They're myths because they're simply not true.

The first one is that the government should give families tax breaks so women can stay home and look after their kids.

The truth is that a tax break will never replace income earned from a job. Our economic system depends on women working and paying taxes. Women want a career and a family. Without an income we're vulnerable, especially the many single-parent families in Canada. A national child care plan does not undermine initiatives that support families, rather, it would complement the important responsibilities of parenting.

The second myth is children are institutionalized in daycare centres - somehow it's just not good for them. Well, come and meet my children. See how quality child care provides nurturing, loving, engaging, stimulating, educational play and care. Research proves that children who have good early childhood experiences have better outcomes throughout their lives: better health, school readiness, fewer teenage pregnancies and fewer school drop-outs.

Related to the second myth is that grandmothers, aunts and neighbours are the best choice for daycare. But that ignores the fact that Canadians are mobile - many children do not live close to their extended families. And the women who might look after them - neighbours, grandmothers and aunts - are mostly working. The experience with \$5-a-day child care in Quebec shows that when parents can afford quality early childhood education they choose it.

We must stop abandoning our child care services to a market driven system and instead, look to the child care successes in Denmark and France.

Canada must have a national child care strategy because it's the right thing to do for Canadians. I know parents want it and our children deserve it.

For Commentary, I'm Sharon Gregson in Vancouver.

-Reprinted from CBC Radio One.

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