

Governments ignoring crisis: Dolan [CA-BC] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Cowichan Valley childcare advocate Mary Dolan is frustrated with the lack of attention being given by provincial and federal leaders to the country's childcare crisis.

A long-time champion of affordable and adequate care options for children, Dolan recently wrote letters to both Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Premier Gordon Campbell highlighting UNICEF's December 2008 Innocenti Report Card -- a study on child care in economically advanced countries.

The report proposed a set of internationally applicable benchmarks for early childhood care and education - the minimum standards for protecting the rights of children in their most vulnerable and formative years.

"They are not huge," said Dolan. "They are simple things."

But of the 10 benchmarks, Canada meets just one. The country shares the distinction of being in last place with Ireland, 25th overall out of a group of 25. The only benchmark Canada has met is the one connected to the percentage of staff with relevant qualifications in the field of early childhood education and care.

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Canada's failure to meet the benchmarks doesn't sit well with Dolan. "Why is Canada tying for dead last (with Ireland) in the services for child care and early learning?" she asked the Prime Minister in a letter.

"Why are the needs of vulnerable young children whose parents look to 'out of home care' being ignored by your government?" Other benchmarks include having parental leave of one year at 50 per cent of salary, creating a national plan with a priority for the disadvantaged and having one per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product spent on childhood services.

"Is even one quarter of one per cent going to assist in the child care and education of our greatest resource, our young children?" Dolan asked to Harper in her missive.

"It is both compassionate and prudent fiscally to pay immediate attention to this shocking report which states that today's rising generation is the first in which a majority are spending a large part of early childhood in some form of out of home care."

The \$100 credit given to families just isn't enough to allow for real choice, she said. While the findings disturb Dolan, what is equally puzzling is the Canadian government's reluctance to do anything about it. Dolan had yet to hear back from either the federal or provincial government, to which she also sent a letter. "To date I have not heard anything. I was hoping to get a response to my letter," said Dolan of her letter to Harper.

Her letter to Campbell has fallen on deaf ears, as she's been told it's up to those in Ottawa. "We can't wait on the federal government," said Dolan. "The B.C. government needs to put pressure on the federal government to address the benchmarks."

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Dolan is not willing to give up the fight and will continue to use data like the UNICEF report to support her claims. "When I look at this report I see a field of seedlings full of promise and nobody seems to be responsible for the watering or the caring or the nurturing," said Dolan. "

Who is going to take care of the nurturing and make sure they bud and blossom and become what the community needs them to be for the next generation and that's what the UNICEF report is concerned with."

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