

Province has 'momentum' in early childhood development [CA-NB] ^[1]

Author: McCann, Matt

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EXCERPTS

The future of children in New Brunswick and across Canada is in the caring hands of a group of scientists and politicians gathering at Mount Allison University this week.

The conference, called Putting Science Into Action, will bring together experts from across the world with Canadian researchers and politicians to connect the science of early childhood development with what governments can do.

"Countries around the world are really moving more quickly than Canada to put in place a universal program," said Marilyn Trenholme Counsell, the local chairwoman of the conference. "It's very difficult without strong government leadership and strong government support. In some respects, that has been lacking across Canada."

The conference, which runs from today to Friday, will feature seminars on public policy and neuroscience, bridging the divide between education and care, an integrated early childhood and parenting plan, instituting an early childhood development program in Canada, and best practices for parents.

Featured speakers will include former Prime Minister Paul Martin, Toronto-based medical expert Dr. Fraser Mustard and Dr. Robin Williams, the medical officer of health for the Niagara Region and conference co-chairperson.

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Conference co-chairperson Margaret McCain said there's a greater need in Atlantic Canada when it comes to the early nurturing of our kids.

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Canada spends only 0.2 per cent of its GDP on early childhood programs, compared to about two per cent in other developed countries. The OECD has called for a national strategy in Canada, "but we haven't had that yet," Trenholme Counsell said.

Still, despite the lack of a comprehensive national strategy, both Trenholme Counsell and McCain applaud the steps taken so far by the New Brunswick government.

There's momentum here in New Brunswick and Premier Graham has taken on early childhood development as an issue that he thinks is important, McCain said.

"For that reason, we decided it would be a good thing to have this conference in Atlantic Canada," she said.

The government has announced it will open four early childhood development centres across the province as part of a pilot program.

Staff at each centre will deliver programming to both parents and children, which will include - among other services - full- and part-time child care, drop in programs, play groups, immunization clinics and healthy-lifestyle programs.

Social Development will provide \$100,000 annually for each centre for the duration of the program.

McCain hopes the conference will lead to similar action across the country.

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- reprinted from the Telegraph-Journal

Region: New Brunswick ^[2]

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/09/05/province-has-momentum-early-childhood-development-ca-nb> [2]

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