

Forum addresses need for national child-care program ^[1]

Author: Stokes Sullivan, Deana

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EXCERPTS

Considering Canadians are not given transportation vouchers and told to build their own streets, the manner in which child care in this country is funded doesn't make much sense, says Jody Dallaire, executive director of the New Brunswick Child Care Coalition.

Dallaire, who is also voluntary chairwoman of Child Care Advocacy of Canada, was a guest speaker Wednesday night at a St. John's Forum on Public Child Care, hosted by Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Newfoundland and Labrador as part of the union's national lobby for publicly funded child care.

Dallaire became a child-care advocate out of her own experiences as a mother trying to find high-quality, accessible, affordable child care. She said parents today face the exact situation she found herself in 10 years ago.

Child care in Canada isn't seen as a public service like schools, Dallaire said. Instead, it's considered something you purchase, like a television or other service.

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Martha Friendly, director of the Child Care Resource and Research Unit in Toronto, said there is very little public child care in Canada today, but CUPE's campaign is about moving it toward a public service.

From 2006 to 2008, Friendly said, growth in regulated child-care spaces slowed down, but the demand continued to rise. She said the coverage for children under six years of age is only up to about 20.3 per cent.

Also between 2006 and 2008, federal funding for child care dropped to about \$600 million from \$950 million.

Gail Brinston, a member of CUPE's national child-care working group and board member on the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador, said child care is not affordable for many parents and the system is not working and will never work.

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CUPE Newfoundland and Labrador president Wayne Lucas said the union represents some workers who care for animals who earn three to four times the salaries of some child-care workers.

"This is the beginning of a long-term lobby program," Lucas said.

- reprinted from the St. John's Telegram

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