

Kids first is proper strategy ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

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On Monday, Community Services Minister Denise Peterson-Rafuse announced a \$5-million investment in the child-care system. The money will include subsidies for 400 low-income child-care spaces and elimination of a family fee that will put about \$1 per day back into the pockets of low-income families with children in care.

A portion of the money will also be used for grants to help pay and provide benefits for workers. The grants will be available provincewide and will target both the non-profit and for-profit child-care sectors.

The investment will boost the number of available subsidized spaces to 1,100 in the provincial system. It's not nearly enough, but still an improvement.

"It makes a huge difference because the subsidy will allow (families) to put their child or children into a daycare facility, and sometimes that subsidy is a difference between them being able to do that or not and it also is the difference between a mother or father going to work or not," Peterson-Rafuse told reporters during the announcement in Dartmouth.

This gets to the heart of the matter. The subsidy is obviously means-tested. It is not intended to help middle-class families for whom child care is an unavoidable expense. But it will help low-income families by encouraging employment and job training over welfare. This is the most certain way to move families from the cycle of poverty toward independence and more successful options for their children.

It was meaningful that Peterson-Rafuse chose the Mawio'mi Child Care Centre at Nova Scotia Community College's campus in Dartmouth. Its' a place where people go who are looking to improve their chances of success in the workforce, a place where people who have bright plans for a better future pursue their dreams.

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On an international scale, Canada has not done well on child care. The Harper Conservatives killed a plan for a national child-care program for low-income families by the Martin Liberals, replacing it with a universal \$100-per-child monthly subsidy for families with preschoolers. Meanwhile, as The Canadian Press reported last September, federal child-care funding dropped from \$950 million in 2006-07 to \$600 million two years ago.

And a Senate report last spring cited two international surveys

comparing spending on child-care services and availability of those services among developed countries. A 2006 report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development put Canada last among 14 countries, while in a 2008 report from UNICEF, Canada tied for last among 25 countries.

The Senate report also cited a national survey from 2006 that showed while over 70 per cent of mothers of children between the ages of three and five were in the workplace, there were regulated daycare spots available for only 20 per cent of Canadian children age five and under.

When there is growing concern about labour force shortages and the need for skilled employees, daycare subsidies make both social and economic sense. The NDP is correct to step in to help fill the gap caused by dropping federal funding levels. It won't be enough to help every family in need, but it's a move in the right direction.

-reprinted from the Chronicle Herald

Region: Nova Scotia ^[2]

Tags: funding ^[3]
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