

Mothers speak on childcare funding models ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

If we were to plan a society where both parents worked, do you suppose we would think of our current ways of taking care of children while parents are busy? Our parents get by with a mix of classified ads, grandmothers, neighbours, unlicensed care and, if they are lucky and have disposable income, quality licensed care.

No wonder we most stop at one child.

Compared to the organization and investment that goes into schools, the organization and investment that goes into early child care is haphazard.

That is not particular to New Brunswick and in fact in the last few years, New Brunswick has taken impressive steps towards getting our child care sector in order.

The average wages of trained workers in child care centres have increased to \$14.72 per hour from about \$7 per hour in 2001.

There are now regulated child care spaces for 19 per cent of New Brunswick children aged 12 and under, which may not sound like much but it was seven per cent in 1996. New Brunswick's average is the same as the Canadian average - and the national average is buoyed by the good performance of Québec in child care availability and affordability.

It is also exciting that the government is testing integrated early childhood development centres in several communities in New Brunswick.

School-based early child development and parenting services become a hub for programs for young families.

A curriculum has been developed and all childcare workers working with preschoolers in licensed centres are being trained to use it.

But without new funding from the federal level, New Brunswick can hardly make the other significant changes we need to build a network of accessible, affordable quality child care in rural and urban areas.

The national system of child care promised for decades was a victim of the 2006 federal election.

The Harper government's preference for handing out \$100 per month to parents to purchase child care or giving subsidies to employers to create child care services has not solved the problems of availability, quality or affordability.

Do mothers who are in the thick of "the hunt" for child care have an opinion how services should be funded? Last month, the New Brunswick Child Care Coalition released the findings of its "Mothers Voices Project." Come to find out, mothers have plenty of ideas on funding models.

The project sought out first-hand opinions on the issue of childcare from about 80 mothers throughout the province.

Workshops took place in seven communities, with a diversity of voices - new mothers, immigrant mothers, lone mothers, anglophone and francophone mothers, and mothers in rural and urban areas.

Mothers were asked to discuss their views on the organization of childcare, asked to envision childcare that would work for them, focusing particularly on the funding aspect.

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Mothers' Voices project found that New Brunswick mothers are a mixed group; but some common themes emerged. Mostly, it was clear that the current funding model is inadequate and that a more collective funding model is favoured.

Mothers' were concerned about cost, of course, but also about quality, waiting lists, availability of spaces, support for children with additional needs and lack of flexibility (part-time and full-time care, seasonal and shift work, and hours of operation).

In some communities, there was a particularly high level of concern about staff turnover, lack of infant care and childcare costs

outweighing local average incomes.

Some Canadians are opposed to publicly-funded childcare.

But given the other systems we have in place - education, for example, and the especially great importance of children's early years, it is surprising that we allowed childcare services to develop so haphazardly - up to now.

For those who remain unconvinced, the Mothers' Voices report quotes recent research, Understanding and Addressing Workforce Shortages in Early Childhood Education and Care, which shows that for every dollar invested in childcare programs, economic output is increased by \$2.30 - in the short term. Long term, that dollar investment yields \$2.54 return - a fantastic return by any measure of stimulus.

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-reprinted from the Times and Transcript

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