

The daycare disconnect ^[1]

Letters to the Editor

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Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 12 Feb 2011

EXCERPTS

As a single mother, childcare advocate and academic in the field of Early Childhood Studies I am not only insulted, but embarrassed that Canada's Human Resources Minister, Diane Finley, would suggest that Canadian parents want a national child care system so the government can raise our children. In fact, it is quite the opposite.

A national child care program, what should be known as an Early Childhood Education and Care system, would only help parents to be better parents in a world that demands full-time work by parents. Formal, regulated care is simply not an option for too many Canadians given the long waiting lists, inaccessible costs, and lack of quality spaces in general. Was it not less than a two weeks ago that a 14-month old baby died in unregulated childcare in Mississauga? That seems to be quickly forgotten. Parents want the best for their children and that means not only a safe place to go while parents are at work, but a place where they can learn, grow and enjoy themselves.

I suggest Ms Finley make a heart-felt apology to all the Canadian parents out there who work hard to support their families and make the best arrangements they can in a country with little to no infrastructure supporting Early Childhood Education and Care. And quickly. Canadian parents have waited long enough.

- Brooke Richardson, Toronto

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As a grandparent of twin girls I was glad to see the Star giving attention to the chaotic child care situation, which leaves working parents scrambling on a day-to-day basis. I am visiting from B.C., where the chaos has different elements, but is no less dysfunctional.

The girls are in school full time now, but for four years, with both parents working, I, and the other set of grandparents became the fallback child care system. We had half-day pre-school for the twins three days a week, but how can either parent leave work to pick them up halfway through the day? Full-time child care in our area costs more than \$1200 per child per month... if you get your child on the two-year waiting list.

The girls' mom was trained as an early childhood educator. She is aware of the benefits of good quality child care; but was faced with the choice of working for low wages in an centre where she could not afford to send her own children, or working for higher pay in another field and at least getting them part-time care. So, that's where the rest of the family became the default child care system.

We do deserve better; our kids deserve better. It's time for a truly universal child care program across the country. Thanks for keeping this important issue in the forefront.

- Billie Carroll, Roberts Creek, B.C.

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I am always amazed that the debate about child care degenerates into accusations against parents with the "if you have 'em. you pay for 'em" sentiment. I am also amazed that after more than 40 years of this debate we still have governments, like Harper's, who ignore the very real needs of children and families by feeding into this vitriol.

The need for affordable child care is not going to go away. We are not, as a nation able to return to the past when young families lived within networks of extended family.

Where children grew-up to work in the local factory or to take over the family farm or business. Many young parents of today must leave families behind to follow work into the big cities. Many find themselves alone to care for their children and to work to put a roof over their head and food in their mouths. This is the reality of many families today and yet the same tired arguments about the "nanny state", and the "if you can't afford 'em, don't have 'em" are used to deny this very real need.

I remind readers that these were the very same arguments that were used when governments were considering the funding public education. Governments of the day rightly understood the need and the benefit of investing in education. Think where we would be today if the naysayers would have had their way. We would be a backward undeveloped nation instead of the wealthy, industrious nation we are today. The leadership of yesterday's governments paid off. It's time for governments of today to show leadership -- not pander to the vitriol that marks the discussion about how to support families and children in today's economy. Our education system is a shining example of

the benefits of investing in "other people's children". When governments invest in children we all benefit.

- Shellie Bird, Ottawa

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The child care news in the past couple days has really got me thinking, what is going on in Canada? How ignorant and blind are the people running this country? Child care is not about other people raising our children and Diane Finley knows that darn well. Still she chooses to denigrate the issue and neglect her responsibility to the thousands of Canadian citizens who suffer every day because of the lack of child care in this country.

Finley's comments are not surprising, however, as child care is not on the Conservative government's agenda because it is an issue that effects the most vulnerable of our population; children, women and the poor.

I for one am not going to sit back and let the leaders of my country try and fool Canadians into believing that child care is about handing our children over to the state. Child care is about equity, community and a better quality of life for hundreds of thousands of people in this country. That is precisely why child care has been and remains an issue that will not go away, it is just too important.

I only hope Michael Ignatieff actually has the courage and intelligence to follow through if he does get elected. In the meantime, let Diane Finley be a warning, there are some very ignorant and selfish people with a lot of power in this country. Child care is the solution for so many difficulties facing Canadians, why is that so hard for some people to see?

- Shani Halfon, Toronto

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If there was ever a doubt in anyone's mind as to the need for political leadership for Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) in Canada, it should have been solidified after our Human Resources Minister Diane Finley rose in Parliament and said these infamous words: "Mr. Speaker, it's the Liberals who wanted to ensure that parents are forced to have other people raise their children."

These words solidified the understood, but not always articulated beliefs of our current federal government, that ELCC infringes on the sanctity of the family and that early childhood practitioners across the country are raising Canada's children.

This is offensive and untrue in so many ways and flies in the face of reality and in the science of early childhood knowledge. It is offensive as it insults the working families in Canada where Statistics Canada has told us that 69 per cent of mothers with children under two are in the workforce along with 84 per cent of mothers with children between 6 and 15 years old. It is offensive because we know that 3 million Canadian children each and every day are in some form of care. It is offensive because there are only regulated and licensed spaces for about 18 per cent of those three million. It is offensive because those working families contribute to Canada's economy through taxation and spending.

It is wrong in that the science of early childhood learning speaks volumes about the need for quality and stable relationships at home as well as quality and stimulating experiences outside of the home where young brains have the chance to grow and develop to their full potential -- even if a family makes the choice to have one parent stay at home.

To be clear, this is not about an effort to take children from their parents and to raise them, as Minister Finley so insultingly suggests. It is about supporting children and families to the best of our collective abilities and to help nurture young minds to their potential -- along with the support and help of parents and families.

- Don Giesbrecht, President, Canadian Child Care Federation, Ottawa

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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