

# Why I'm voting for child care <sup>[1]</sup>

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Full text:

I've dealt with some interesting challenges since becoming a mom. Food allergy diagnoses, wonky sleep patterns, stubborn resistance to potty training -- all these have tested my ability to troubleshoot. But perhaps the biggest and most crazy-making family issue has been child care. Specifically, the lack thereof.

When Wee G was born, I dutifully put him on the centralized waiting list for child care spaces in Ottawa. When I signed up, I was shocked at how few centres there were in my Ottawa neighbourhood -- and how few accepted children between 12 months and 2.5 years. My family relies on my income, so there was no question about going back to work after my 12 months' leave was up. And thus began the first of many frantic -- and fruitless -- searches for options. It only got worse after my second child arrived.

Like many of the several thousand families waiting for child care spaces in Ottawa, I never received a call. We've made do, but it has not been without tremendous effort, creativity and expense. For our first child, we helped establish a parent-run cooperative daycare with other first-time parents in our neighbourhood. It was a tremendous amount of work and a tremendous amount of time. And while it was a great experience and fantastic community of parents and kids, it worked for us only because we could afford to have one parent working in the day care every week.

When we had our second child we moved Wee G into a local Montessori, one of the only neighbourhood preschools offering full-day programs. It's costly, but we can walk there and our son loves it. When I went back to work after my daughter was born, we knew we wouldn't have time for the co-op with two kids to juggle, so we made the choice to put a hold on my partner's freelance career until AJ was old enough to start in the Montessori's toddler room.

I count myself lucky -- very lucky -- that my family can afford to make the choices that we have made. So many other families are not so lucky or so privileged.

I find it shocking that Canada does not have a universal child care system. What we have is ad-hoc and piecemeal, with massive gaps in the kinds of care available. What we need is federal leadership -- funding and a plan to work with provinces to establish a system that can really meet the needs of families. And by families, I mean all families -- people who need part-time care, emergency and respite care, care for kids with special needs as well as those who need full-time care.

There's a lot of stuff out there that seems aimed at dividing parents and families based on the choices that they make (or are forced to make). But I see child care as an issue that should unite, not divide us.

Good child care means parents that need to work can work -- this means more tax revenue, more spending in our local economy, and less stress for those families. Good child care creates jobs (again, good for the economy). Good child care means more kids have access to quality programs, not just those who can afford it or who luck into a space. Good child care offers real choices to all kinds of families -- the 70% of moms who are in the paid labour force as well as those single-income families who don't need full-time, all-day care.

On May 2, I'm voting for good child care. Want to join me?

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