

# Parents need real choices on child care <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Just as it has in previous years, the Conservative government saw fit to "celebrate" the anniversary of its universal child-care benefit this week. That's what the government calls the \$100-a-month cheques it hands out to families with children under 6, instead of funding the national child-care program this country really needs.

Working parents can be forgiven for wondering just what there is to celebrate. Sure, a bit extra in a family's monthly budget is always nice but it doesn't provide safe, affordable child care.

Regulated daycare shortages across the country are so severe that families pay to put their names on multiple waiting lists long before their children are even born. For low-income families, the situation is even worse. Not only do they need to find a daycare space in their neighbourhood, they need to be lucky enough to get to the top of the waiting list for a subsidy so they can afford it.

In Toronto alone some 20,000 families are waiting for a subsidy. That list could grow if city hall's current cost-cutting efforts lead to the elimination of some of Toronto's subsidized spaces.

Outside the cities, the situation is little better. More than 8,000 kids in rural and northern Ontario are in danger of losing their child care with hundreds of licensed centres on the verge of closing.

No wonder Canada tied for last among developed countries for providing affordable, quality daycare in a United Nations study.

Rather than deal with this crisis, which causes financial havoc for families and keeps women out of the workforce, the Harper government prefers to proudly blow out the candles on yet another year - we're at five now - of handing out \$2.6 billion in taxpayers' money without producing any new daycare spaces or enabling parents to afford existing ones. That's cause for shame, not celebration.

However useful these monthly cheques may be to some families to pay for a recreation class or babysitting for a few nights out, they do not give parents the choice to pay for quality child care, assuming they can even find it, while they work. Nor do they make it affordable for a working parent to stay at home.

They certainly don't let parents "balance work and family life," as Human Resources Minister Diane Finley likes to claim. For that to happen, we need national support for affordable, quality child care.

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

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