

Affordable, accessible, quality care ^[1]

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Source: The Telegram

Format: Article

Publication Date: 26 Sep 2011

EXCERPTS:

For attendees of a public forum on child care in Newfoundland and Labrador, much of the debate centred around three words - accessibility, affordability and quality. On all three matters, questions were raised as to whether this province is measuring up.

During the question and answer portion of the forum hosted by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Sunday afternoon in St. John's, several employees and operators of private child care facilities shared their feelings about the shortcomings of working in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Early childhood educator Donalda Murley, who also owns and operates her own centre, said the provincial government's 10-year strategy, still under development, cannot adequately address the issues facing her profession.

"This 10-year strategy is too little, too late," she said in front of more than 50 people in attendance, including representatives from all three campaigning political parties for the Oct. 11 provincial election.

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Addressing a point made by several other speakers from the audience who took to the microphone, Murley said entry-level staff often tasked with assisting in child care are generally terrible. Their lack of skills can be linked to the small volume of training required to fill such positions, she said.

Fellow early childhood educator Joanne Morris said there are multiple studies dating back as far as the 1970s pointing to the importance of training in her line of work.

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A cap on fees for parents and a government push to make wages more competitive to retain skilled workers would greatly benefit the system, according to Mary Walsh, chairwoman of the Association of Early Childhood Educators Newfoundland and Labrador.

"We need people that stay," she said, pointing to significant turnover issues within her sector.

Public push

Ros Bennett, president of the Day Care Owners and Operators Association, said affordability, accessibility, and quality have been issues in need of addressing for several years. She expressed reservations on whether a public child care system would wholly improve matters.

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Highlighting the potential of a public child care system through the opening 15 minutes of the event was Martha Friendly, executive director of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit. She focused on what a public child care system could look like in Newfoundland and Labrador.

"I'm encouraged, because it seems that the politicians are all very supportive of the idea of early childhood education, so that's a really good start," she said.

She cited numbers from the Vector Poll prepared for CUPE on early learning and child care in the province released earlier this month that found one-third of parents and guardians had trouble finding someone to look after their children and 89 per cent of respondents supported the idea of a government early learning and child care system.

Friendly went on to highlight the gap between the number of regulated child care spaces available and the children in the province - 6,200 regulated spaces versus 38,000 children ages 12 and under.

"Good child care can build capacity in the population in a whole bunch of ways," she said, citing the need to bring women into the labour force, to revitalize communities and bring young people home, and to produce bright minds.

She said any public system needs to look at the long-term by implementing short-term measures that best serve it. It must be transformational and comprehensive, addressing a variety of unique needs. Friendly also stressed a need for flexibility in the system.

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-reprinted from the Telegram

Region: Newfoundland ^[2]

Tags: affordability ^[3]

accessibility ^[4]

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