

Today's parents struggle to raise a family ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Canada has become a country where the generation now raising children is finding it far harder than those before them.

Lynell Anderson, senior researcher, Human Early Learning Partnership UBC, in her presentation Business and Community Leaders: Does Canada Work for Families?, said many Canadians are not aware of how changes in society have changed families.

"The generation raising young children today has less time at home because they need to work longer hours to earn what is essentially the same income as the previous generation. The cost of housing has increased and more mothers are working outside the home, and families are finding it difficult to find and afford quality childcare," Anderson told the meeting sponsored by the North Okanagan Early Childhood Development Coalition.

"If we can address these issues early, we can anticipate significant growth in the economy and well being of our society."

She admitted that it is hard to engage people in the urgency of addressing a vision with benefits that will be seen years into the future.

"We also have to see the immediate value of public policy changes for families with young children," she said.

The Human Early Learning Partnership has proposed what it calls A New Deal for Families with Young Children, which suggests that parents need support with more choices about how they will take personal responsibility for home and family.

The New Deal is centred on three core policy changes. These are: New Mom and New Dad benefits for the first 18 months of a child's life, with time and financial benefits available to everyone, including those who are self employed, not employed or otherwise not currently eligible for parental leave. This would include access to a healthy child check-in and parenting support program.

When parents return to work, there would be \$10 per day childcare so that parents can afford enough employment time to manage the rising cost of housing and stalled household incomes. Caregivers would be well trained and well paid.

These policies would be supported by flex-time for employees and employers with adaptations to overtime, employment insurance, and Canada Public Pension premiums regulations.

New incentives would decrease the work week and changes to the National Child Benefit Supplement would ensure that any reduction in employment hours would not reduce income in low-earning families.

"Governments have reduced seniors' poverty but despite commitments to work against children's poverty, not as much has been done," said Anderson.

"The UNICEF 2008 report places Canada at the bottom of the 25 wealthiest countries in family policies. We have to work together to support each other and the changing realities for young families. Our future is going to be compromised economically and socially if we don't get involved to retain a healthy, well-trained work force."

Anderson said the New Deal for Families builds on what already exists and is economically sustainable as money spent there would mean less spent on health care and child welfare.

It is expected that there would be reductions in crime, and gender equality and pay equity would be promoted.

"I hope people will carry on this dialogue and make others aware of the need to change how we support families," said Anderson.

-reprinted from the Vernon Morning Star

Region: British Columbia ^[2]

Tags: work/life balance ^[3]

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