

The ten-dollars a day plan ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Beth Legacy-Cole and her husband Shawn Cole hope to be homeowners one day. But even though they both work full time, they won't be able to buy a house in the near future. The reason? As B.C. residents, they have to pay the bulk of the cost for childcare for their three-year-old daughter Delilah.

"The current system of childcare being funded by my husband and me impacts our finances and five-year-plan greatly," Legacy-Cole said. "Since turning one, our daughter has been in daycare and we have estimated that we have spent approximately \$1,300 per month on daycare during the first year and \$1,150 per month during the second year as we moved locations."

Unlike other community and social services, child care in British Columbia is primarily a user fee service and Ann Silberman, executive director of the Bowen Children's Centre, believes that this model does not work well.

"For most of my working life of almost 30 years, this has been a struggle," she said. "In order to get people working in child care to make a decent wage, the money has to come from the families. There is a direct relationship between fees and wages as we don't get much other financial support."

Silberman explained that the Bowen Children's Centre receives some government funding and grant money but parents' fees cover most of the cost.

"Elementary and secondary school teachers get paid fair wages and that is coming out of taxes but early childcare is funded by user fees," Silberman said. "I don't think this is sustainable." She adds that she has to constantly apply for grant money and look for other fundraising opportunities in an effort to make the fees more affordable. "On Bowen, our situation may be a little bit better than in most daycares. A facility with a 25-child maximum is usually filled with 25 children but on Bowen we accommodate 50 families because many of the parents work part-time." Silberman explains that if the parents had to work full time, she would need a facility with double the current capacity. And there is already a wait list for the toddler program.

"Young families are at their most vulnerable. They have babies and try to build an economic base," says Silberman, adding that, on the other hand, research shows that financial stability in families builds self esteem.

There are other examples, even in Canada, that make sense to Silberman. "If you are a mom with a baby in Quebec and have to go back into workforce, you can put your infant in care and most of it is paid by the government," she explained. "Quebec has a family policy in place that ensures the support of parents who need to work." Quebec's child care program, implemented 12 years ago, serves about half of the province's children under age five. Silberman points out numbers that say that Quebec's program helped 70,000 women with young children enter the workforce and that the ripple effect contributed an additional \$5.2 billion to the provincial economy and increased Quebec's GDP by 1.7 per cent.

Silberman is not alone in her desire to make a difference for BC families and child care workers and she has invited Sharon Gregson, executive director of the Collingwood Neighbourhood House, to speak on Wednesday, October 3, at BICS. Gregson is promoting the community plan for a public system of integrated care and learning, an initiative that envisions a \$10 a day child care option for families and wages of \$25 an hour for child care workers.

"The \$10 a day plan for a system of early care and learning will make a substantial difference for families," Gregson said. "When the plan is fully implemented, parents will know that, when they need to, they will be able to access a quality licensed child care space in a group or family setting for \$10 a day and that the early childhood educators who care for their children will be well educated and fairly compensated."

Gregson believes that we expect a high quality education system for older children and youth - a system where teachers are well educated and fairly paid and where families are not burdened by user fees and the same should apply to the early years. "Accessing a high quality child care space should not just be for wealthy or lucky parents," she said.

The implementation of the plan will allow parents, particularly mothers, to enter or re-enter the workforce, or return to school, knowing that their pay cheque is not just for daycare fees, says Gregson, adding that fees in Vancouver have now reached \$1915 per month per child. "More parents able to participate in the paid labour force means more people contributing taxes through their income and also spending in their local economy which is good for communities," Gregson said.

The \$10 a day plan is rapidly gaining support and the list of organizations, municipalities, school boards and individuals in favour of the initiative can be seen at <http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/plan/endorse-the-plan/organizational-support/> [2]. "This momentum across BC is building towards the May 2013 provincial election where there will be an expectation that candidates will need to commit to implementation of the \$10 a day plan in order to be elected," Gregson says. "Pressure is mounting to move ahead with this solution to the current child care crisis." Gregson also drew attention to a postcard campaign where supporters can sign and mail postcards to their politicians asking for the plan to be implemented. They are by request from info@cccabc.bc.ca [3]

Legacy-Cole believes a plan that would help young families would have a larger impact as well. "If administered properly, publicly funded childcare would have the potential of benefitting not just our family, but all of Canadian society," she said. "Lessening the financial burden on our dual income family would mean that we could streamline our ascent into becoming greater contributors to the Canadian economic engine as homeowners, investors and entrepreneurs."

But those are not the only benefits she sees. "More importantly, there is no greater opportunity to have a bigger impact on the lifelong emotional, cognitive and intellectual development of our society than in early education," Legacy-Cole said. "Universities enjoy incredible subsidies and have professors who are the best paid educators in the country while one could argue that the young people who benefit have generally already become the people that they are. Meanwhile, when children are the most impressionable, with the greatest opportunity to realize their true potential, we fail to provide them with broad access to well put-together thoroughly researched, subsidized developmental opportunities."

Legacy-Cole says that she has a number of friends in the city who have been forced to compromise with less than ideal childcare solutions because of the system's inefficiencies. "More standardization, oversight and funding would give more families the opportunity to help their children become the best people they can be," she says, but adds. "My only fear would be that with those subsidies, an inferior standard would be implemented. I would hate to imagine a world where a place like the Bowen Children's Centre, which has amazing staff and learning opportunities for children, would have to change their programming because of bureaucratic intervention."

Silberman hopes that people will come out and hear the presentation on Wednesday, October 3, at 6:30 p.m. in the library at the Bowen Island Community School.

-reprinted from the Bowen Island Undercurrent

Region: British Columbia [4]

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