

# Affordable child care programs are central to women's equality <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

The New Brunswick Federation of Labour wishes all New Brunswick women a happy International Women's Week, March 2 to 9. Every year, women come together to celebrate their accomplishments during the week and to refocus their energies on the struggles for equality that remain ahead.

In light of International Women's Week, the New Brunswick Federation of Labour wants to highlight three areas where work is needed to ensure women's equality: pay equity, child care and the unacceptably high rates of violence against aboriginal women and girls.

New Brunswick women are entitled to earn a fair wage for the work that they do. Certain fields of work that are historically and/or predominantly female are underpaid because the work is under-valued. The positions of secretary, child care educator and home support worker come to mind. To rectify this discrimination a law requiring all employers to complete a pay equity evaluation is needed.

To date the provincial government has adopted pay equity legislation in the public sector but the majority of workers are employed in the private sector where there is no law to protect them. The government of New Brunswick also conducted pay equity evaluations in three sectors: child care, home support and transition house workers. There are a number of flaws with the evaluation process used. Fixing these flaws is essential to make sure that the pay equity adjustments rectify the wage discrimination that exists in these sectors and, eventually, that the methodology can be used for other groups who offer government-mandated services.

Access to reliable and affordable child care programs is central to women's equality. The 1984 Royal Commission on Equality in Employment, headed by the current Supreme Court Justice Rosalie Abella, said that: "child care is the ramp that provides equal access to the workforce for mothers."

Unfortunately, outside of Quebec, accessing quality and affordable child care programs is a matter of luck. This is because our governments are not doing what the available research is telling them is needed to build a child care program that parents can depend on. The research shows that dedicated government funding with clear benchmarks is required to grow quality and affordable child care programs. This is the basis for the Quebec system and it is the basis for the successful child care programs around the world.

Unfortunately the Harper Conservatives in Ottawa moved us further away from a national child care program when they cancelled the negotiated agreements signed with all ten provincial governments in February 2006. They replaced the negotiated child care program with the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB). The UCCB has nothing to do with child care. Under this program, families with children under the age of six receive a \$100 monthly cheque independently on how wealthy their family is. Recently, the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada released a media statement that said:

"Each year since 2006, the UCCB has cost taxpayers (including cash-strapped young families who can't access child care) \$2.5 billion annually. Yet there is no information about what this \$15 billion public expenditure has accomplished for Canadian families. The UCCB has not created a single child care space nor decreased fees. At a time of fiscal restraint, this lack of public accountability or concern about value-for-public-dollars is - at best - irresponsible."

Male violence against women persists in New Brunswick and across Canada. One simply has to read the news to see that violence against women is alive and well in our communities. In 2009, Harris Decima conducted an Attitudinal Survey on Violence Against Women on behalf of the Government of New Brunswick. It found that 53 per cent of New Brunswickers believe that it is not a crime to slap your wife on the face after an argument. 27 per cent of New Brunswickers surveyed said that it is not a crime to rape your wife.

One particular segment of the Canadian population faces a particularly high rate of violence: Aboriginal Women. While as a group, Aboriginal women make up three per cent of the female population in Canada, they make up 10 per cent of all murdered women. The New Brunswick Federation of Labour, like the Native Women's Association of Canada, calls on the Government of Canada to conduct a National Public Inquiry and to develop a National Framework of Action to address the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

Although a lot of work remains to achieve gender equality, women are actively working towards these objectives. In closing, on behalf of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour, we wanted to take this opportunity to say thank you to the women who work to make a difference in their communities and in their union. The labour movement has a long and proud history of working towards women's equality. In fact, International Women's Day, March 8, first emerged from the activities of labour movements at the turn of the twentieth century in North America and across Europe.

We leave you with a quote from Louise McKinney, a member of the Famous 5, who wisely said: "The purpose of a women's life is just the same as the purpose of a man's life - that she may make the best possible contribution to the generation in which she is living."

-reprinted from the Miramichi Leader

**Region:** New Brunswick <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** gender <sup>[3]</sup>

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