

It's not cheap to raise children: Fraser Institute report tries to let governments off the hook ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Back in the days of yore, couples had children because they were an asset to the family: an automatic labour force for the farm or whatever business the parents were in. The more kids the better and no need to figure out the cost.

Nowadays, it's more expensive to bring up offspring in this world and it seems that's standing in the way of lots of people making choices to do so. This isn't news. We hear regular updates on how low the birthrate is in North America for a variety of reasons, including how cost-prohibitive kids are.

The Fraser Institute (FI) wants to calm that fear and let prospective parents know there's merely a pittance needed to raise your future little one. They reported recently that contrary to the "prevailing estimates of the cost of a child in Canada ... of \$10,000 to \$15,000 per annum," the reality of raising a child in "lower income and newer immigrant households" is only \$3,000 to \$4,500.

The FI expresses concern that the higher estimates are being manufactured in order to send a message to lower-income families that they probably shouldn't bother having kids since they can't afford it anyway. I don't buy that.

Their more important reason for releasing these figures is revealed when they state, "Such estimates ... can also inform policies related to child benefits and possible parental child support obligations."

Governments looking to trim their budgets could welcome this news. If it's not as expensive as we thought, no need to increase the child benefit. No need to worry about increasing Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support payments to folks with kids. No extra supports needed for newcomer families. Just follow the FI budget for child rearing.

It's a budget that claims to follow the Nutritious Food Basket Reports from Public Health, which is a good thing but doesn't consider the cost of child care for parents who might like to work and it certainly doesn't allow for post-secondary education savings.

But they do offer handy tips on how you could save a little extra with "strategies such as home gardens, sewing and knitting clothing, couponing and taking advantage of sales, own repair and maintenance work in the home, etc."

They forgot to mention buying dented tuna cans, the other popular savings strategy put forward by Ontario's last Conservative government led by Tim Hudak's mentor, Mike Harris.

I don't have kids and it's not because I heard they were expensive. However, the lack of having them has not kept me in the dark about what is needed to ensure families have the best resources to raise a child.

To exclude childcare from this budget is ridiculous. There are very few families that have the luxury to have one parent stay at home with the kid(s) while the other one goes off to bring home the tofu bacon strips. The struggle is even harder for lone-parent families.

Not only is childcare expensive, with estimates ranging from \$400 to \$1,000 per month per child, it's very difficult to find with waitlists for registered childcare facilities lasting months and even years.

Another issue - the operating hours of childcare centres don't always align with the work hours parents are facing. This has led to an onslaught of unlicensed day care centres, many that provide less than adequate, and even life-threatening, care to their young charges.

It also means finding other creative, yet precarious, solutions. In recent consultations with Canadians about their experiences with the childcare system, one grandmother told her story of spending two hours a day on the telephone with her granddaughter who lives hundreds of kilometres away. She helps her with her homework and makes sure she is safe until the mother gets home from work since the day care closes two hours before her workday ends.

For whatever reason the Fraser Institute neglected childcare in its budget, it's no time for governments to neglect it in theirs. It's all part of making Canada the best place to raise a child.

-reprinted from the Spec

Region: Canada ^[2]

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