

Call for childcare reform ^[1]

Author: Rodrigues, Alycia

Source: The Manitoban

Format: Article

Publication Date: 23 Sep 2013

EXCERPTS:

A group of parents gathered at the Children's Museum on Wednesday, Sept. 18 to discuss issues facing the Manitoba childcare system. The resounding majority of parents present felt that Manitoba does not have enough suitable childcare spaces to meet their needs.

A postcard was handed out for audience members to mail to the government to press for change. The postcard stated, "While 75 per cent of mothers of three to six-year-olds are working, there are enough regulated spaces for only 20 per cent of children under six."

The government of Manitoba has a childcare search tool online. A search for available facilities in Winnipeg with vacancies for children aged 12 weeks to two years will result in few to no vacancies.

According to Manitoba's Online Child Care Registry statistics, 7,963 children will require care by Sept. 28.

Child Care Coalition of Manitoba (CCCM) head Susan Prentice emceed the event. Prentice, a sociology professor, also co-chairs the Child Care Working Group at the University of Manitoba, which attempts to draw public attention to the lack of Manitoba child care.

At the event, five parents, both students and professionals, shared their experiences in trying to find a suitable day care. They felt a proper day care system would alleviate their stress and allow them to remain contributing members of society. Additionally, they concluded that the difficulty of finding and retaining a quality day care placement is the largest issue facing parents seeking childcare in Manitoba.

Politician and doctor Jon Gerrard inquired about Manitoba's childcare system in comparison to other provinces. Prentice responded that at 50 per cent, Montreal has the highest rate of childcare availability.

Dr. Priscilla Kerr officially became a Canadian citizen in 2011, and is a mother of two boys aged three months and two years. Kerr is an acupuncturist at a medical clinic in Manitoba.

"When you are in a business, or a demanding career, they expect you to go back to work right away," said Kerr.

Kerr has no family in Winnipeg. She applied at 38 day cares, and in two years received one response. Desperate to get back to work, she flew her mother-in-law to Canada to help with the childcare duties.

Kerr was nervous about having a second child for fear of losing her spot at her medical clinic. She cited her responsibility to take care of her patients as an important incentive to head back to work.

Ryan Eyford, assistant professor of history at the University of Winnipeg, is the father of a 14-month-old child. His wife, a genomic epidemiologist, considered giving up her career to care for their child. They placed their names on waiting lists and made numerous phone calls and e-mails, all to no avail.

"Our situation was atypical. We did find a spot around the end of maternity, which was pure luck in my opinion," remarked Eyford. "Academic spots are even more rare than day care spots."

Cost was another issue facing the parents. Childcare is more expensive than university tuition, and Prentice cited that 11 per cent of current university students have children.

Hortense Rabet is the mother of five children, a counsellor, and the executive director at l'Entre-temps, a non-profit organization providing essential services to women and children who are victims of domestic abuse.

Rabet was paying upwards of \$1,000 for two children. She noted that parents experience a burden when large portions of their paycheques are needed to cover the cost of day care. She pointed out that parents must continue to pay in order to keep their spots during the summer months, even if they do not require the services of child care during that time.

University of Brandon student Krystal Kayne has a son with Asperger syndrome. She had difficulty finding a day care that catered to her son since many day cares do not take in children with disabilities.

U of M nursing student Theresa Hubbard has five children. Hubbard, who is Aboriginal, shared the difficulties of Aboriginal students, nursing students, and issues with the U of M's day care centres. The Campus Day Care Centre Inc. has 40 spots, while the PlayCare Centre has just 16 spots.

"Day care centres cater to the nine-to-five workers. I'm in school to train as a nurse. Next year, practicum starts at 7:00 a.m., but day cares

open at 7:45 a.m.," stated Hubbard. "We need more day cares, and we need more flexible hours."

-reprinted from the Manitoban

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