

Nannies deserve better ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Nannies. We've all seen them. Not nanas or papas, but nannies. Most often they are women. Usually Filipino women.

We see them in the mornings, usually with a stroller and a blonde child in tow. We see them chatting in a foreign tongue, in the Tim Hortons, waiting to pick their kids up from school. We see them in the playgrounds watching carefully as their children are running and playing innocently, unaware of the hardships of adulthood and life.

These nannies are officially known as live-in caregivers. They have come to Canada to work for Canadian families who can afford to hire full-time caregivers for their children. Both parents can then return to work full-time at their own jobs, while the nanny takes care of their little ones.

I've heard many Toronto parents declare it is less expensive to hire a live-in caregiver than it is to send their kids to a daycare. One parent should stay home, you say? Well, try to find a reasonably priced home in Toronto-one with affordable mortgage payments for a single-income household. A daunting task.

The need for live-in caregivers displays how our society has become a victim of its purported success. We're a culture that needs more. We can never stop working because then we cease to be productive. We work ourselves into the graves. We don't know when enough is enough. We don't know how to make our success sustainable or manageable. The economy must always grow. At what cost? We don't know.

That's what they tell us at least.

Child care in Canada is in a crisis situation. Instead of our government putting together a child care strategy that includes daycare programs that are affordable and accessible to all Canadians, it has created tax incentives that amount to only a fraction of the actual cost of child care, and these are only available to those who can afford to pay for child care in the first place. It's a very conservative idea that takes money out of the budget, creates no new child care spaces, and just doesn't work.

How have some mitigated this crisis? Through live-in caregivers. People who have left their home countries and their families for the opportunity to live in Canada and make a better life for themselves and the ones they love. This dream is often shattered once they get here to work.

Employers of live-in caregivers need to ensure they provide the very basics under provincial labour laws. In Ontario, that's a 48-hour work week at \$10.25 an hour. About \$25,000 per year. The hiring family can then deduct room and board from this pay-up to \$4,400 per year-leaving the caregiver \$21,000 for full-time work caring for a family's children. You can bet that work hours often exceed a regular working day. It's pretty hard to say no when you live with your employer.

The live-in caregiver is left earning poverty-level wages, hardly able to save up for a better life in Canada for their own families.

Worst of all, this wage is hardly enough to return home to visit their own families in the Philippines, families whom Citizenship and Immigration Canada generally does not allow to come to Canada with them. To bring one's family to Canada for permanent immigration is even more difficult. In short, the caregiver must first work for one single employer for two years in Canada as a Temporary Worker (with no permanence). Once they have worked in Canada for two years, they can then apply for a work permit that allows them to work for any employer, and also at this time, they may apply to become a permanent resident of Canada. This process currently takes 39 months. If the caregiver has a spouse or child back home, this process will take longer.

The result is that it takes caregivers from four to seven years to be reunited with their families. I have heard of many hardships and much anguish over this sacrifice. Many families break apart. Mothers watch their children grow up over Skype or are limited to speaking with them on the telephone. Many never see each other again. Parents and grandparents pass away, children graduate, people marry, and the live-in caregiver in Canada is there for none of these life moments.

They are left with no money to return home to visit, and no memories of their own families' growing up, while they are caring for our Canadian children, ten thousand kilometers away from their own.

It is shocking that in Canada we allow such tragic circumstances to occur. We are abusing the hopes and dreams of the caregivers, and we are abusing their labour. We allow people to be separated from their families for too long. We make people wait too long to settle in

Canada. We allow them to be paid poverty level wages.

We need to let our governments know how we feel about these abuses. We need to let them know that a national child care program is just as essential as health care. We also need to stand up for the caregivers who have given up so much to come to Canada. We need to demand that they not be paid such low wages. Perhaps we should demand that employers pay for one flight to their home country once per year. Whatever it is, these people are human beings with families and dreams. They deserve better.

-reprinted from the Bluffs Advocate

Region: Ontario ^[2]

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