

Why we need affordable child care for all - now ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Shanesha Taylor's story is a hard one for many parents to swallow. The Arizona mom left her six-month-old and two-year-old sons in a locked car while she went for a job interview this past March. Passersby called 911 and Taylor was arrested. The kids were fine, but are now living with a relative pending their mother's trial (as is her daughter, who was at school at the time).

No one is arguing that what she did was right, but Taylor's situation says as much about the state of child care as it does about her. According to a recent New York Times story, her family was homeless and barely scraping by, and this job was their ticket out of poverty. It was a good position with an insurance company and Taylor was flat broke, though she was doggedly trying to improve her family's life. She had spent the night before in a Walmart parking lot asking for money and collecting cans to pay for gas for the 35-mile trip to the interview. She had lined up child care, she said in the Times article, but the sitter wouldn't answer the door when she arrived to drop her boys off. So, she made a choice. She drove to the interview and left the kids in their car seats with the fan blowing and the engine off while she went inside.

It's clear Taylor's decision was horrific and wrong, but to me, it was a momentary lapse in judgment based on extreme circumstances. Can you imagine the panic she must have experienced when the babysitter fell through? All hope for her family's future was slipping away. Thank goodness those babies were OK.

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Barbara Gault, vice-president and executive director of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, is quoted in the Times article as saying: "Child care is often listed as the No. 1 challenge that gets in the way of women's work participation."

It's hard for women to Lean In à la Sheryl Sandberg when this is the reality. And it's not just an issue in the United States. According to a just-released report by Toronto's Childcare Resource and Research Unit, Canada is in a baby boom at the same time as more Canadian mothers are entering the workforce, and government funding for regulated daycare has not kept up with the demand.

Read more: The Canadian child-care crisis

We had a national daycare program snatched out of our hands when the federal Liberals lost the 2006 election. If we want all women (not just those who can afford the cost of daycare) to be able to work if they choose to, then we need a comprehensive plan to support parents, and that includes local subsidies that meet the needs of the community as well as a federal program. Until then, we leave many families vulnerable to impossible choices like Taylor's.

- reprinted from Today's Parent

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