

Parents and businesses push for \$10-a-day child care in B.C. ^[1]

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Source: Vancouver Sun

Format: Article

Publication Date: 8 Jun 2015

EXCERPTS:

VANCOUVER -- It is easy to see why parents such as Anna Geeroms, who pays \$2,500 a month for a nanny three days a week, are enthusiastic supporters of a subsidized child care plan, but support is also coming from B.C.'s business community.

The Surrey Board of Trade laid out the business case for \$10-a-day child care in B.C. in a 2012 position paper, noting that parents with young children make up a significant share of the city's workforce.

"Work-life conflict among employees with preschool-aged children costs the B.C. business community in excess of \$600 million annually, and the Canadian business community more than \$4 billion," the position paper said, citing research by the University of B.C.'s Paul Kershaw.

"The stress from work-life conflict among adults with young kids costs the Canadian health care system \$2.5 billion annually, and the child welfare system another \$1.2 billion per year. In addition to these direct costs to business, the 'squeeze' experienced by families today also contributes to rising costs of crime, poverty, education and health care.

"Over the long term, research shows that Canada's inaction in support of the generation raising young kids is compromising the quality of our future labour force and our competitiveness."

Geeroms, an IT professional, said her struggle to find child care for her twins made her return to work much more difficult.

She realized when her babies were about nine months old that finding two daycare spaces at a price the family could afford would be next to impossible.

"The going rates are ... \$1,200 to \$1,400 per child for early child care," she says. "With two, that becomes fairly enormous."

So the family began their search for a nanny. Geeroms perused hundreds of online ads and posted a profile with an online nanny agency. She had a string of disappointing interviews with a number of women who all wanted to work under the table.

She eventually found a nanny she liked. In a patchwork arrangement that is increasingly the norm for child care in Metro Vancouver, Geeroms stayed home one day a week, grandparents took another day and they hired the nanny for three.

After paying the mortgage and the nanny, the family was left with about \$200 a week, says Geeroms, whose partner is a millwright. That arrangement lasted only a year, ending when the nanny went back to school. She found another nanny, but it costs the family \$1,250 per month per child - \$2,500 total - for three days a week.

"At this point, if one of us lost our job we would lose our house because child care takes up so much of our income," she says.

"I feel like our government, Canada, invested so much money in my education ... My work was desperate to get me back. And yet, when it was time to go back, it was so hard to figure this thing out. That just doesn't make sense.

"You have to work to pay so you can't be home with your child."

Geeroms says she supports a provincial campaign to introduce publicly subsidized \$10-a-day child care, not only because it would ease the financial strain for families like hers, but also because it would improve wages and training for workers in the industry.

It is almost impossible for her family to offer their nanny the wages they do, she says, but it's also difficult for the caregiver and her child to live on those wages. The fact that the caregiver is Filipina adds a racial dimension that Geeroms says makes her uncomfortable.

"It feels like there's different classes and I'd rather not participate in that. I'd rather that we have universal child care where the people have pensions and they have medicare and they have sick days."

It would cost the province \$88 million a year to introduce \$10-a-day child care for children under three, where it is most needed, says advocate Sharon Gregson. It would cost \$1.5 billion per year to expand the program to all children under six. But because more parents are able to enter the workforce, the cost to government is offset by more people paying income tax and sales tax when they spend that additional income, she adds.

"You don't expect to have to put your eight-year-old on a waiting list for Grade 2 and hope that in a couple of years you'll get a space. You expect there's a space for your Grade 2 child when they need it and child care needs to be the same way," Gregson says. "There should be

no magic reason why suddenly at age five we accept some public responsibility."

Children and Family Development Minister Stephanie Cadieux refused an interview on the subject, saying in an email that the government cannot afford \$1.5 billion a year to implement the \$10-a-day plan. The B.C. government last year introduced an early childhood strategy that will see families of children under six with a net income of \$100,000 a year or less receive \$55 per month per child starting next year.

It doesn't make sense that the public is willing to foot the bill for K-12 education and subsidize university, but not early childhood learning, which research has proven is crucial to development, Geeroms says.

"We're just completely ignoring that and leaving that up to chance."

For Geeroms, who pays \$2,500 a month for part-time child care, an additional \$110 a month, while welcome, is a drop in the bucket.

"It makes me feel like they're saying I should stay in the home and my husband should work and I should take care of the kids. And that's just deeply wrong."

For Kamloops father of three Jon Treichel, who cut back his hours when the cost of child care started to exceed his income, the government's message rings hollow.

"When we hear the sort of discussions politicians in B.C. have regarding daycare costs we wonder what planet those people are living on," he says. "We make reasonable money and live in a very modest house but when gasoline is \$1.40/litre and virtually every cost imaginable is constantly going up I wonder exactly how we are ever supposed to get out of debt, let alone establish any sort of retirement income.

"If it wasn't for my in-laws, we would be in very difficult circumstances."

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