

Double whammy: Why we're crowd funding for childcare data ^[1]

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taking care of child care data

Author: Martha Friendly ^[2]

It's probably not surprising that childcare data was one of the first casualties of the data crimes and misdemeanors that have swamped Canada's stock of valuable information used by social groups, business analysts and policy makers to understand critical issues.

Childcare was a particularly unpopular topic with the current Government of Canada even before their election in 2006. However, it's become obvious that evidence-based policy making generally – backed by data and research – is remarkably out of favour as well. Based on these two circumstances, one could say that Canada's childcare data has been hit by a "double whammy".

Thus, it was not entirely unexpected, though odious, that federal funding for research on childcare workforce, quality, supply and access issues and for collection of basic data on childcare provision and progress was terminated along with the post-2006 election cancellation of the barely begun national childcare program.

Since 1992, the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, which was funded by federal governments from 1984 to 2007, has regularly collected data on how many childcare spaces there are, and what kind; how much provinces/territories spend on childcare; how many children are subsidized, and how this works; how many five year olds are in kindergarten; and so on. CRRU's accessible reports summarizing and analyzing the data have provided a snapshot of all this about every two years for more than 20 years.

CRRU's national data reports, using consistent methods and carefully verified for accuracy, have also provided a way to track changes over time longitudinally by province and nationally. Did public childcare spending go up or down? Did it keep pace with inflation? Which jurisdictions offer capital funding? Did staff: child ratios or training requirements change? Which provinces provide full-day kindergarten? All this is laid out in plain language in the *ECEC in Canada* reports - and made available free online for everyone to use.

CRRU's reports synthesizing the available data have been able to answer some, at least, of the main questions about early childhood education and childcare in Canada. For 20 years, this has made up Canada's main basic data on childcare. The reports are used across Canada and internationally in policy making and analysis, research, advocacy and by the media. Some of their findings are especially widely used or have been popularized; for example, the commonly-quoted figure that Canada's childcare covers only 20% of children, the figures showing the rapid increase in for-profit child care and the recent headline in the Toronto Star 'Baby boom meets daycare bust in Canada' ^[3] come from this data.

Eight years into the Canadian data chill, the Childcare Resource and Research Unit is in the midst of a crowd funding campaign to cover the costs of collecting these data. With **Taking Care of Child Care Data** ^[4], we've joined the ranks of musicians, inventors and potato salad chefs to ask colleagues, users of the data, early childhood educators and social advocates to help us make sure that this longitudinal bi-annual national childcare data collection continues with its 10th edition, which we hope to publish in 2015.

The online crowd funding campaign has aroused a variety of comments and questions online, on Twitter, and in person – some supportive, a few disapproving, some merely bemused but most maddened or frustrated by the absence of government support for childcare and for data and evidence.

Supportive...

- "Could not have written my PhD dissertation without the data...sadly, because of government cuts, they must now crowd fund."
- "A cause more than worthy of my-and our-support."
- "It's really important for us as childcare advocates that we have credible, reliable, Canadian data to use when we talk to politicians."

- "I don't need to remind the people on this list just how important it is to know how many regulated spaces Canada has, how much the provinces are spending on those spaces with their different funding models, and how many women with young children are - or are not - in the workforce."
- "You don't have to bake cookies! Just support this effort to gather more research on childcare."

Disapproving...

- "Funding childcare data should be a government responsibility; it's very disappointing that you're giving up on this!"

Bemused...

- "Isn't CRRU receiving government funding for this anymore?"

Frustrated...

- "Please consider talking to your respective organizations about this fundraising appeal. I am depressed that I have to send it and that we have to do this, but there it is".
- "Shameful but now necessary to crowd fund for child care policy research"

We here at CRRU share elements of all these feelings. We know it isn't ideal to be asking people to make financial contributions to a project that we too staunchly believe should be publicly funded as part of a national childcare system. For many years, we have been one of the key advocates for good quality, publicly funded childcare data, have written several [reports](#) [5] about what should be included and about why good data and research should be part-and-parcel of the kind of high quality accessible childcare system we envision. We continue to take this position. Canada desperately needs a real child care system, and part of a childcare system is good data and a research agenda to support, assess and fine tune its development. We're not giving up on that.

But while crowd funding isn't a long-term solution for ensuring good quality public data, in the short-term we're relying on the power of collective action to ensure this work continues. We are heartened by the support we've received from the many individuals and groups who have posted, tweeted, circulated and donated to the Taking Care of Child Care Data campaign. For many years, the childcare movement has rallied, struggled, advocated and regrouped. We know the childcare community has the people power needed to fight back against the war on data.

So join the crowd [4].

Tags:

[funding](#) [6]

[statistics](#) [7]

[spaces](#) [8]

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Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/blog/double-whammy-why-we%E2%80%99re-crowd-funding-childcare-data> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/blog/author/martha-friendly> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/06/baby-boom-meets-daycare-bust-canada> [4] <https://www.giveeffect.com/campaigns/357-taking-care-of-child-care-data> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/publications/other-publications/03/06/state-data-early-childhood-education-and-care-canada-national-> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [7]

[6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [7] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/statistics> [8] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/spaces>