

Affordable daycare would ease child poverty ^[1]

Editorial

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EXCERPTS

That Cape Breton has one of the highest child poverty rates in Canada, with almost a third of children living in poverty, is a disturbing measure of how Nova Scotia is doing.

Two new reports say we are failing to protect children, among society's most vulnerable members, from developing lifelong cognitive, educational and health problems as a result of deprivation in their formative years.

Monday's front page story is based on reports from Campaign 2000, a national initiative to reduce child poverty, and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Nova Scotia. The CCPA report says that while child poverty is down more than four per cent from 2000, it is still four per cent higher than it was in 1989, when the House of Commons unanimously supported a motion from then NDP leader Ed Broadbent to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000.

We can, of course, shrug our shoulders, repeat that the poor will always be with us - and do nothing.

Or we can acknowledge that the means of alleviating child poverty - or at least the worst of it - is within our collective grasp.

Lack of affordable, quality child care is a major contributor to child poverty.

According to the CCPA study, lone parent families, usually led by women, account for half the children living in poverty in Nova Scotia, with only enough regulated child care spots for a quarter of children who need them.

Expanding child care, a federal NDP platform plank that was promised by the Liberal Paul Martin government that fell in 2006, would address that problem.

Mom Doris Gear of Florence, near Sydney Mines, wants to get off income assistance but cannot afford child care so she can take a six-week course to upgrade qualifications as a continuing care worker. Her boyfriend works nights and can't watch the children.

Ottawa's recent initiatives for families do little for the Doris Gears of the province. A \$60 increase to the Universal Child Benefit for young children, for example, is far too low to cover child care costs of \$750 a month. New income-splitting provisions help wealthier couples but do nothing for low-income earners or single parents.

We have argued in the past for a pilot program to test the benefits of a guaranteed annual income that would replace other income supplement programs, keep families out of poverty and allow parents to work to supplement incomes. A community in Cape Breton, hit hard by the closing of traditional industries in the last 20 years, would be a great place to start. Failing that, removing incentives to work from social assistance programs would also help.

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affordability ^[5]

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