

NDP sells child care plan in Chatham-Kent ^[1]

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A national approach to childcare was the focus of a town hall meeting organized and held by the Chatham-Kent Leamington NDP in Chatham recently.

"It's an important issue to southwestern Ontario because we've seen programs struggling to keep their doors open," said Carolyn Ferns, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. "And parents are paying unaffordable child care fees. For many families, childcare is a second mortgage."

Ferns said the universal child care benefit is at best, moderate income support for families, but if your child care fees are over \$1,000 a month per child, that benefit barely scratches the need's surface.

"Across the country parents are all struggling with the same issues - lack of affordability, lack of spaces and lack of flexibility," she said. "When you know those are common problems, you know they need common solutions."

During the Rethink Child Campaign, parents met in kitchen-table conversations to discuss the challenges with finding adequate child care that meets their needs each parent expressed their ability to find child care as luck, said Ferns.

"The main message coming out of that was, it shouldn't be a matter of luck," she said. "We need to be able to provide childcare spaces for all the parents that need them without them having to pay through the nose."

Ferns said the full-day kindergarten program was helpful to parents with four and five-year-old children but didn't help parents with younger children access affordable care.

The Quebec approach to affordable and accessible daycare may not be perfect, but the province made huge strides when it made the decision to do something about the issue, she said.

"The economic benefits of childcare in its simplest form is that when you provide childcare, both parents can work, a third person is employed and all three pay taxes," Ferns said. "If you're providing high quality spaces that are nurturing and educational environments for children, it's a win all around."

Ferns said the Harper Conservative government has been absent from the child care table for the last nine years.

"For every dollar we invest," said Irene Mathysen, NDP MP for London-Fanshawe. "The government get \$1.50 to \$2.78 through tax increases and decreased social spending in terms of social assistance, housing supplements, the whole gamut. That's the TD Bank saying that."

Mathysen said her party's plan to invest \$5 billion over four years into a sustainable, regulated childcare system for each province where parents will pay up to \$15 a day.

"We would work with the province or territory to make sure they can deliver something that is affordable and respects the needs of the diverse family," Mathysen said. "Not everybody works 9 to 5, so we need a flexible system that embraces the reality that there is shift work and kids get sick."

She said the recently announced income splitting is going to cost Canadians \$3 billion a year and help just 15% of the population.

"You're investing \$5 billion in all the families as opposed to the 15% who benefit from this," Mathysen said. "It's a lot of bang for the buck."

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