

Stroller brigade rolling for affordable care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

If Selchie Middleton continues to stay at home with her son rather than go back to work, her family can't make ends meet. But if she goes back to work the cost of childcare will eat up any income she can contribute to the family finances.

"Do I really have to wait until my son is five and goes to school in the day to go back to work?" Middleton questions. "Do we as a family just have to slowly accrue debt for the next three years in order to have a healthy lifestyle with a roof over our heads?" Right now, the family is surviving on Middleton's husband's income, their veggie garden and rabbits that they raise to help with the food budget.

They have what Middleton describes as an "average" house with a mortgage of \$1,150 per month, an old truck, a 2004 car, no television and her son wears 90 per cent second-hand clothes.

"Our lifestyle is simple and frugal," she said. "The one extravagance we have in our budget is purchasing mostly organic groceries because we believe strongly in how much this benefits us and the world in general."

Her family's health is not something she thinks they should have to give up to meet expenses. So, with her son now two-and-a-half, Middleton would like to be able to go back to work to contribute to the family's bank account.

Before having a child she had "a healthy self-employment income", and she's been training part-time for the past year to become a certified riding coach so that her horse riding and training business could offer more to clients.

But the math just doesn't add up, she said.

"Now I am feeling quite hopeless about re-launching my business because where will it really get me?" Middleton asked. "If most of the money I make goes to childcare and my son is with someone else all day instead of me or dad, then the answer is: nowhere."

Middleton's story is not unique. "I know I am not alone," she said. "Whenever I speak to friends and family I find that many, many people are facing the same tough choices, everywhere you look families are stretched to the limit trying to balance work, finances and childcare."

There is a workable solution for everyone who's struggling Middleton said.

"This could all go away in a heartbeat if qualified, affordable childcare was universally accessible to the people. Ten dollars a day is a proven system," she said, referring to the subsidized childcare system already in place in Quebec.

"That puts money in everyone's pockets; more childcare jobs, more tax revenue from working parents, more disposable income back into the community. Less stressed happier families mean less of a burden on our healthcare system, children are witness to less struggle and strife at home, parents have enough money for three healthy meals a day - the ripples go on and on and on."

"The struggle is much harder than it used to be for young families," agreed longtime early childhood education advocate Mary Dolan.

"The cost of living has gone up, wages haven't gone up," she said.

To raise awareness around the campaign for a \$10 a day childcare system, a group of Cowichan Valley early childhood educators, along with concerned parents like Middleton, will be banding together into a Stroller Brigade in celebration of National Week of Action on Child Care on Saturday, May 16.

Anyone interested is invited to join the group, which will gather at 10 a.m. in front of the Duncan Post Office on Ingram Street for a stroll through the Saturday Farmer's Market and around downtown Duncan, ending at the Matraea Centre courtyard at 170 Craig St.

"I truly hope the people of B.C. get together and force the hand of elected governments to put this plan into place; this is truly a deal where everyone wins," Middleton concluded.

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

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