

Canada's child care champion Martha Friendly honoured ^[1]

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If you have been lucky enough to get your children into a licensed, high quality daycare, you can thank Martha Friendly.

The Toronto-based founder of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit has been toiling in Canada's daycare trenches on behalf of parents, children and the community for almost 40 years.

And on Friday, Trent University is giving her an honorary doctorate, the first time anyone in the child care field has received such an award for research and activism.

The university notes that without Friendly's research there would be no national statistics or analysis of the state of licensed care in Canada.

"What's more, her advocacy has helped shaped the views of both parents and policy makers across the country," the university adds in background material for the award.

The Childcare Resource and Research, which Friendly founded in 1982, is the only child care policy think-tank in the country and is respected both nationally and internationally for its research and advocacy work.

"Martha is the person who established child care as a serious area of academic inquiry in Canada," said Carolyn Ferns of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. "I think it's well past time that she be recognized for that huge contribution to our field."

Laurel Rothman, past co-ordinator of Campaign 2000, a national coalition fighting child poverty, praised Friendly for her "persistence, honesty and integrity about a tough issue."

"And she continues to contribute to Canadians' understanding of what high quality early childhood education and care is and what it means to children, families and society."

Friendly said she was "floored" when Trent University President Leo Groake called earlier this year to tell her about the award.

"I am personally honoured," she said. "But I also think it shows how child care is really coming of age in this country."

University of Toronto Economics Professor Michael Krashinsky, whose 1998 research found that every public dollar spent on child care saves \$2 in future spending, says Friendly is Canada's "go-to" person on the issue.

"If you are researcher in the field, whenever you need to know something, you call Martha first," he said. "I am delighted they are recognizing her contributions."

Friendly, an American who moved to Toronto in 1971, says her daycare journey began when her own young children were part of a co-op daycare at York University.

Now the grandmother of 2-year-old twin boys, Friendly says she can't believe the country is still struggling to deal with the issue.

"It's so ironic that after working on this for all these years, that it is still an issue for our grandchildren."

Child care by the numbers

73 — Percentage of mothers with young children working outside the home

22.5 — Percentage of children under age 6 who have access to licensed child care

\$16.50 — Median hourly wage of child care workers

\$1,676 — Average monthly cost for licensed daycare for a child under 2 in Toronto

17,000 — Number of children on Toronto's child care subsidy wait list

Key dates in Canada's daycare history

1970 — Royal Commission on the Status of Women recommends a national daycare act.

1984 — Pierre Trudeau's Liberal government launches a national task force on child care.

1988 — Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservative government passes the National Child Care Act, which dies in the Senate when the federal election is called later that year. Mulroney wins the election but does not reintroduce the legislation.

1997 — Parti Quebecois government in Quebec introduces \$5-a-day child care.

2004 — Paul Martin's Liberal government launches a \$5 billion national daycare program based on the "QUAD" principles of quality, universal, accessible and developmentally enriching.

2006 — Stephen Harper's Conservative government kills the national child care program and replaces it with a \$100 monthly child-care benefit for every child under age 6.

2010 — Ontario introduces Canada's first universal full-day junior and senior kindergarten program to be rolled out over five years.

2014 — NDP Leader Tom Mulcair promises to introduce a national child-care program with fees no higher than \$15-a-day, if elected in October 2015.

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