

Moving child care forward at the University of Manitoba: Background, analysis, & recommendations ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full report in PDF ^[2]

University of Manitoba child care initiative ^[3]

See also: Child care in Canadian Universities ^[4]

Executive Summary:

The University of Manitoba began its venture into child care with the opening of the Campus Day Care Centre in 1974. A second facility, the University of Manitoba Play Care Centre became available in 1983, and in 2012 a few more spaces were allotted to children of faculty and students through an agreement with Makoonsag Intergenerational Children's Centre. The University of Manitoba is to be commended for these achievements.

Cognizant of the fact that more services are needed even while aware that moving ahead on child care is never simple, the U of M Childcare Working Group commenced a series of consultations to examine the university's child care needs and level of service. The research activities resulted in two important contributions to date: the Childcare Working Group's Briefing Paper (August, 2013) and Friendly and Macdonald's Child Care in Canadian Universities, Background research and analysis for a child care feasibility study for the University of Manitoba (2014).

This research paper adds to the previous work by offering historical and comparative analyses that help frame a set of recommendations and initiatives designed to enhance child care services at the University of Manitoba.

The brief historical narrative on child care in Manitoba reveals that the current strength of the province's child care program lies in its predominate community-based non-profit structure. The model relies on government oversight, using public dollars to help finance the construction and operation of child care centres offering quality programing with qualified staff and with a fee schedule that keeps child care reasonably affordable for a broad spectrum of Manitoba society.

The review of how child care services is currently offered both on campus at the University of Manitoba and off campus by other services providers uses the critical lenses of affordability, accessibility, and quality to assess the impacts of services on those needing child care, whether faculty, staff, but especially students. This review draws on a comparison of child care services at other Canadian universities, showing how the University of Manitoba fares in comparison.

The suite of recommendations offers a range of opportunities to advance the child care agenda at the University of Manitoba. All ten of the recommendations are important and should not be read as a hierarchical list; the 10th recommendation is as important as the first. In general the suite points to the need for capacity building and sustaining engagement by the many involved in this issue, while also acknowledging the wide variety of stakeholders' interests and agendas around child care.

Recommendations for Action:

1. Relocate Play Care Centre: A relocation plan for Play Care Centre must be developed and implemented as soon as possible.

2. Child Care Centre Development: Develop new child care centres at both the Fort Garry campus and Bannatyne campus as satellites of Campus Day Care Centre Inc., with the executive director and board of directors full partners in the planning.

Maintain the current model of child care service delivery, including:

- the existing landlord / centre relationship with long term lease agreements,
- not-for-profit service delivery, and
- the funded programs and subsidized fee structure that combined together have served the University so well for over 30 years.

3. A Child Care Services Lead at U of M to serve both the Fort Garry and Bannatyne campuses:

Create a Child Care Services Office with a staff position designated as The University of Manitoba Child Care Services Lead. This Office

and staff position should have a clear mandate to actively facilitate the development of child care services at the University of Manitoba, as well as undertaking a government relations and community outreach campaign to advocate for university child care.

4. Family Resource Program for U of M students and staff: Develop a Family Resource Program as part of the Child Care Services Office, and allocate the resources necessary to ensure a comprehensive range of supports are available to families with complex family care needs. This service could be provided a) directly by the U of M or b) through a partnership with an off-campus agency. Links to a network of family child care homes should be an integral component of this family resource program.

5. Government relations and outreach activities: Initiate a strong government relations and outreach campaign that involves all levels of the University of Manitoba, with a goal of securing Manitoba government approval for additional funded, subsidized child care spaces as well as capital funding approval for projects developed in partnership with the University of Manitoba.

6. Explore a pilot for new ways of financing child care capital builds with Province of Manitoba:

Ensure that advocacy with the Province of Manitoba include consultations regarding a pilot initiative to recognize that other public institutions besides elementary schools, especially universities and hospitals, are also optimal sites for Early Learning and Child Care centres, and should be considered for up to 100% capital funding.

7. Internal U of M Child Care Implementation Team: Establish an internal cross-department Child Care Implementation Team (with a makeup similar to the initial needs working group) to support and advise the Child Care Services Lead.

8. Explore multi-partner options to develop child care spaces for Bannatyne campus, such as partnering on developing child care spaces at Ellen Douglas School.

9. Consider flexible part-time child care services for each campus: Explore the need for a flexible parttime, short-hour-care option and wrap around school age care on each campus especially through discussions with the Active Living Centre and the Aboriginal Student Centre.

10. Include child care services in all planning processes as a required and important component of a quality university environment to ensure that it cannot be lost to financial pressures or simply to changes in corporate memory.

Child care needs to be solidly entrenched in the University of Manitoba culture and expectations.

Exploring these options to enhance child care services requires attention be given to affordability, accessibility, and quality.

Accommodating these competing contingencies when developing child care programming is a challenge, but striking a balance among each is fundamental if the interests and needs of the family and children are to come first. Understanding the interplay of these factors in the various actions that can be undertaken to enhance child care services is as critical as recognizing the meaningful benefits that faculty, staff, students, and children, and the entire University of Manitoba community gain:

- An enriching learning environment for children provided by professional staff,
- A responsive and positive academic and work environment for faculty and staff,
- A program to facilitate student success and alumni support by delivering services geared to students needs,
- Brand name recognition by becoming a front-runner in the delivery of exemplary quality child care in Manitoba.

Seizing this initiative does come with risks and challenges, but moving ahead also promises real successes, which can be as assured now as when child care began in Manitoba.

Related link: Campus child care inaccessible, unaffordable, says report [5]

Region: Manitoba [6]

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