

# Child care is good for children, for mothers, for everyone <sup>[1]</sup>

Opinion

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## EXCERPTS

On the surface child care seems like a simple issue. Surely it's just about having somewhere safe for kids to be looked after by women other than their mothers while their often low-income mums work? Simple, right?

The truth is that child care has broader and deeper implications and reaches into our families, our communities and our economy far more than most realize.

Let's start with children. It's not just about being safe. In the 21st century, given what we know about the importance of the early years on brain development, life-long health and success, we want children to be in environments that are designed for learning through play, no matter what the employment status of their mothers. We want early childhood educators who know about the social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of children and provide stimulating learning environments and high-quality care.

Because when a parent uses child care it's not a replacement for or abdication of their parenting. Rather, it's an extension of and complement to their parenting.

That's why a dingy basement with some plastic toys is not the quality early years experience we want for any of our kids. It will not help them thrive or be excited by life-long learning in the school system when they start kindergarten.

Next let's look at the impact quality child care has on communities. No surprise to me that the City of Cranbrook wrote in their support for the \$10aDay Child Care Plan:

"The lack of child care in the Cranbrook area means that people are turning away local jobs and not moving here, or they are having to leave the area, which is an economic barrier for business and services in our community."

This is why, in part, 41 local governments (large and small) in B.C. support the \$10aDay plan and why, for instance, Vancouver city council sets itself a target each term to expand the number of licensed spaces in the city and provide grants to ensure sustainability. Healthy communities include families with young children and those families need access to quality affordable child care.

Last, and important given this election, let's look at the economy. We're hearing a lot from politicians about infrastructure investments. But most don't seem to understand that child care, too, is absolutely part of sustainable infrastructure. Infrastructure is not just about typical "guy" jobs of building roads, bridges and laying pipe. It is also about building child care centres and educating the women and men who'll work in them. When we have more quality affordable child care spaces, more mums and dads will be able to join and re-join the work force. Some will be able to move off welfare or from part-time to full-time work. They will contribute taxes to governments and spend money in their local communities. Our economy will grow.

Many economists recognize the significant multiplier effect from child care investment and the positive impact affordable child care has had on Quebec's economy. Just ask the chief economist from the TD Bank of Canada as he articulates the long-term benefits to our economy of having a healthy, well-educated work force, which starts with access to early childhood education.

So we know quality child care is good for kids, now and for their future. It's good for healthy communities, it's a part of sustainable infrastructure, and it's good for the economy as it creates jobs and new revenue for governments. But there is one more significant benefit from child care: women's equality.

The bottom line is that in Canada, though we often take feminism (women's equal rights) for granted, we have not achieved it yet. We grapple with equal pay, domestic violence, missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, glass ceilings and more. I believe that we will not achieve equality for women until we have a system of quality affordable child care available to all mothers.

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