

Women in Toronto politics on child care and the federal election ^[1]

Lyndsay Macdonald on child care & #elxn42

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Source: Women in Toronto Politics

Format: Article

Publication Date: 13 Oct 2015

AVAILABILITY

Read online ^[2]

The Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada advocates for a national child care system, supported and funded by both the provincial/territorial and federal governments. Earlier this year, with the support of many Canadian organizations, they started the **Vote Child Care 2015 campaign** ^[3] to call on the next federal government to make high-quality, affordable childcare a priority, and accessible to all. Following up on last week's post on #elxn42 and child care, we spoke to Lyndsay Macdonald, National Coordinator for the CCAAC, about what our next federal leader needs to do to implement an effective child care system.

Q: What was your role in beginning the Vote Child Care 2015 campaign?

A: Planning for the VCC 2015 campaign began last November during the **Child Care 2020 conference** ^[4] in Winnipeg where over 600 delegates gathered to discuss the current state of early childhood education and child care (ECEC) in Canada. A focus of that conference was a move from research to action, in which we brainstormed what we wanted in a national campaign and how the various "players" would collaborate and contribute to an election campaign for child care. My primary duties were to organize a steering committee to work closely on the campaign, to form a larger reference group with the broader ECEC sector and to hire a campaign organizer to help us pull it off. The VCC campaign works with just about anyone who wants to get involved and our local organizers across Canada have reached out to school board trustees, city councillors and other stakeholders/community leaders to join us in our call for a national child care program.

Q: What is the biggest problem with Canada's child care system? And how does this impact Canadians of all backgrounds, beliefs and socio-economic levels?

A: Carolyn Ferns and Jane Beach **discuss** ^[5] how "a deeply entrenched neoliberal approach to social policy at the federal level and in many provinces has left child care twisting in the wind. And we have seen the total absence of the federal government from child care." Perhaps the first step to correcting this major issue is for the federal and provincial/territorial governments to recognize ECEC as a public good and to fund it and plan for it accordingly – this requires a serious commitment from all levels of government in Canada. In 2004/05 the federal government introduced plans to develop a national child care program. The federal government and provincial and territorial governments worked to sign bilateral agreements which included substantial public funding, policy commitments and common principles such as quality, universally inclusive, accessible and child care programs that are developmentally focused (known as the QUAD principles). In 2006, Harper announced that the government would abandon those agreements and that it would instead introduce the Universal Child Care Benefit of \$100 dollars a month per child 0-6 years of age (recently expanded to \$160/month for children 0-6 and \$60/month for children 7-17). I personally believe that it comes down to political will and also how Canadians value care work and the essential role that it plays in our society. The current patchwork of early childhood education and child care services impacts all Canadians – whether or not we have children of our own. Of course the lack of affordable quality child care impacts some groups more, parents of children with disabilities or special needs can face immense hardships in trying to find suitable child care to meet their child's needs. Indigenous communities have limited access to early childhood education and family resource programs that support the cultural teachings and practices of the community with programs that foster the physical, social, intellectual and spiritual development of children.

Q: What do the federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal levels of government need to do, cooperatively, to implement ECEC by 2020?

A: If we look at the provinces and territories across Canada we can observe that many have taken significant steps towards improving the ECEC sector. To us in the child care movement we believe that this is the most opportune time to have the federal government come to the table ready to work with provincial and territorial governments to support a comprehensive national program. The federal government needs to make a commitment to Canada's children and families to build a national child care program anchored by a comprehensive policy framework, long-term sustained funding, benchmarks, and evaluation. This needs to happen in cooperation with provincial/territorial levels of government who then need to work out comprehensive provincial policy to support local levels of government to grow and sustain child care systems. It requires careful policy planning that pulls in experts in the field including researchers, academics, parents and early childhood educators who have real on the ground experience of the essential elements that make quality child care programs work. What we have seen is that 3 of the 4 major political parties have released child care platforms this election, each one with promises to support Canadian families with better child care. We are optimistic and we believe that the VCC2015 campaign has been successful in keeping child care on the political agenda and on the minds of voters.

Region: Canada ^[6]

Tags: federal election ^[7]

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