

Affordable child care can help curb food insecurity ^[1]

Author: Huffington Post

Source: The Huffington Post

Format: Article

Publication Date: 5 Jul 2016

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

For children across Ontario, school is officially out for the summer. For many children, it means two months of freedom to run through sprinklers, eat enough ice cream to get brain freeze, and make great memories at summer camp. However, for far too many low-income parents, two months of "no school" means having to scramble to find child care, which can add a huge logistical and financial burden to an already-stressful situation.

While some families are fortunate enough to have a stay-at-home caregiver, a parent with the flexibility to work from home, or friends and relatives who can babysit, many are not so lucky. In Ontario, only 32 per cent of dual-parent families have one parent stay at home, and in Canada, one in five families with small children are single-parent families.

In lieu of having family or friends to look after their children, many parents look to daycare or camp during the summer months -- but these options don't come cheap. Summer camp can run anywhere from \$1,200 to \$6,000 a month, and daycare can be just as much.

Summertime exacerbates an issue that is already a big problem for families throughout the rest of the year. Ontario has the most expensive daycare rates in the country, with the average monthly fee for infants in Ontario coming in at \$1,152 per month, or \$13,824 a year. In Toronto, the annual cost is closer to \$20,600.

While Ontario offers a child-care fee subsidy to ease this burden on low-income parents, the line is very long -- in Toronto alone, there are nearly 17,000 children on the waitlist. If your child has to start daycare but you're still on the waitlist, you simply have to pay the costs, with no reimbursements available.

The affordability and accessibility of child care can be linked to hunger and food insecurity. Our 2015 Hunger Report showed that families with children make up 41 per cent of households who visit food banks. Research from one of our members, the Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto, indicates that a quarter of parents report the cost of, and access to, child care are barriers to them entering the workforce. If the cost of sending your kids to daycare eats up most of your salary, it doesn't make sense to work.

Juggling the costs of rent, child care, and other bills only gets worse for young families during the summertime. A survey released earlier this month reveals that a third of low and middle-income Canadian parents struggle to provide meals to their kids over the summer. When school is out, parents who rely on school meals, breakfast clubs and snack programs to help fill the gap cannot access these resources.

This added pressure means many will turn to food banks for assistance. Yet the summer months happen to be when many food banks typically see a drop in donations, as hunger tends to not be a top-of-mind issue for donors during that time.

In May, the Ontario Association of Food Banks participated in the national Every Plate Full campaign to help raise money for food banks during this critical time. Thanks to the efforts of our supporters, we raised an amazing \$7,723.00. As every \$1 donated equals three meals, that means we can help food banks provide an additional 15,670 meals this summer. This will definitely be appreciated by families in need who will be turning to food banks this summer.

However, in the long-term, we must look at reducing the demand for food banks: not only in the summer, but all year round. Making child care affordable to all parents means more money can go towards food, and it becomes easier for them to go to work.

In March, the federal government introduced the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), a new, non-taxable program that replaces the former Universal Child Care Benefit and Canada Child Tax Benefit. The Minister for Families, Children and Social Development says the CCB will slash the child poverty rate in Ontario from 14.2 per cent to 8.8 per cent.

The Ontario government has also promised that the CCB will not result in clawbacks to social assistance. These are both great steps in the right direction towards ending child poverty -- but there is still so much more to be done.

Ottawa is currently in consultations with provincial governments on a National Early Learning and Childcare Framework. This is a huge opportunity to ensure that child care is accessible and affordable to all Canadians. As Ontario has the least affordable child care in the

country, it is important that the province steps up to make sure our voice is heard.

Let's make sure that any tummy aches kids remember this summer are from eating too much ice cream instead of not having enough to eat. To help a family in need today, please consider visiting us online at: www.oafb.ca/donate [3]

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