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PREFACE

This report documents the history of the federal programs that funded Canada's early learning and child care research, public education and community capacity – but it is, quite directly, the story of my career and vocation. As an undergraduate at the University of Toronto in the early 1980s, I was lucky enough to be hired to work with powerhouse child care advocacy group Action Day Care. Fresh from the 1982 national conference that launched the Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association (now Child Care Now) and the Canadian Child Care Federation, Action Day Care's staff and volunteers joined in the year-round work on International Women's Day, the beginnings of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, pay equity and more, becoming part of a Canada-wide broad social movement promoting gender and generational justice as key to a Canadian child care agenda.

Throughout the 1980s, 1990s and first half of the 2000s, federal programs like the Child Care Initiatives Fund, Child Care Visions and the Women's Program of Status of Women Canada supported activism, research and policy development and growing professional practice in child care. As the OECD Strong team reviewing Canada noted in 2004, "early childhood policy development in Canada is ably supported by a vibrant research community and stakeholder constituency", providing much of the core infrastructure for Canadian ECEC.

Canada has long depended on the voluntary sector network of advocates, practitioners, and academics to sustain ELCC research and capacity building but at one time, these activities were financially supported. Since the end in 2007 of what was— in retrospect— the heyday of federal support, Canadian child care researchers, policy experts, professional and sector groups have been left largely bereft of funds, as this review demonstrates.

These strategic federal supports and their output were invaluable to me as a graduate student and a new academic. Now as a senior academic I find it painfully apparent that Canada is long overdue for significant, long-term, sustained investment in ELCC research and community capacity building.

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Federal funding supporting Canadian early learning and child care advocacy, research and capacity building 1988 – 2007

This paper outlines the federal funding programs that sustained advocacy, applied research, data collection and analysis, knowledge production, knowledge transfer and community capacity building in early learning and child care (ELCC) in the period 1988 – 2007. It discusses the background and context for these funds, their purposes and uses, available information on effectiveness, and alternative opportunities for funding. Looking forward, it discusses why renewed federal funding for applied research, data, capacity building and advocacy is essential if the current federal government’s commitments to building a child care system and to collaboration, consultation with stakeholders, transparency, and evidence-based policy-making are to be met.

In the 1988 – 2007 period, two federal departments were actively involved in enabling the Canadian child care community to engage in these activities: Status of Women Canada (now Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) and the social development ministry, Human Resources Development Canada¹ (HRDC) (now Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)).

Women’s Program (SWC) funding to equality seeking child care groups

The first element in this analysis is the federal funding available for child care advocacy from Status of Women Canada’s Women’s Program

1 Since the 1990s, Canada’s federal social development department has been called Health and Welfare Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Social Development and Employment and Social Development Canada.

from the 1980s through 2007. These funds, which included core funding until the early 2000s, supported child care organizational activity that was primarily focused on advocacy and policy development, as well as applied research. Child care organizations including the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada² (CCAAC) and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC) were funded as equality seeking groups as part of the Government of Canada’s commitment to “ensure that politicians and policy makers are informed of key issues affecting women” (National Association of Women and the Law, 2006).

The Women’s Program funding permitted child care advocacy groups to play a key role in the women’s movement, working with other feminist groups in partnership to ensure that child care was on political agendas.

When the Women’s Program was severely curtailed and reoriented after the 2006 election, the child care groups it funded lost their funding and were among those women’s movement organizations that either closed their doors or were substantially downsized, subsisting on limited funds for almost a decade. Some, such as the CCAAC, continued to carry on some of its activities in a limited way, which for some years did not include an office or staffing. However, today it remains Canada’s key national ELCC advocacy organization.

The Women’s Program³ funds were a separate funding stream from HRSDC’s grants and contribution program, which were primarily focused on applied research, data, resources and policy development. The equality seeking child care groups played a key role – which they continue to play today with much reduced capacity— in advocacy, community capacity building, knowledge transfers and policy development.

2 Now called Child Care Now.

3 Since the 2015 federal election, child care and national projects are again eligible for funding under the Women’s Program and advocacy goals are acceptable.

ELCC funding programs under HRSDC

Beginning in 1988, three federal funding programs in HRSDC consecutively supported child care policy development, resource development, applied research, building community capacity, and innovation across Canada. These successive programs were different from one another in some ways but generally were more similar than different. That is:

- a) each was the sole source of funds that supported groups to carry out designated kinds of activities;
- b) they enabled the voluntary/non-profit and academic child care community to develop and maintain some infrastructure for Canada's child care provision; and,
- c) each was evaluated through a federal process.

These federal government funds stopped supporting ELCC activities in approximately 2007, following the 2006 federal election.

Three evaluations conducted by the federal government between 2002 and 2009 assessed these ELCC programs and concluded that they did not duplicate other funding sources and were well used by the child care community. The evaluation reports noted that the federally funded groups were providing much of the infrastructure for Canadian child care services.

Following the termination of HRSDC funding for child care related activities in 2007, much of the community infrastructure that sustained the Canadian child care community for 25 years shrank or disappeared, leaving a limited capacity for developing networks, partnerships, knowledge, policy and resource development and program support in the ELCC community. The three HRSDC funding programs are described in some detail below.

1988 - 1995 Child Care Initiatives Fund

The Child Care Initiatives Fund (CCIF) was established to “monitor, promote and encourage quality child care in Canada by funding innovative research and development projects” (HRDC, 1995: i) as a component of the National Strategy on Child Care put forward by the Mulroney government. Only a few elements of this National Strategy were implemented, as the federal legislation that was its centrepiece died on the order paper when the 1988 federal election was called, and was not revived afterwards. However, CCIF, with an initial budget of \$98 million over seven years (subsequently somewhat reduced) was put in place and continued until its scheduled end in 1995.

An evaluation of the CCIF program conducted by the federal government noted that

No other program—federal, provincial or municipal—duplicates the activities of CCIF, so it is easy to conclude that if the federal government ceases CCIF activities, no other program could fill the gap. Most informants were adamant that a federal withdrawal would be “devastating”, as the infrastructure built could crumble. (HRDC, 1995: ii)

The government evaluation describes the initiatives funded, the successes and weaknesses and project outcomes in considerable detail. Key recommendations were that the “federal government should build on the experience amassed by CCIF” and that a new program should be “more proactive and focused on research” (HRDC, 1995: 111). In 1995, when CCIF was scheduled to end, Child Care Visions – based on the evaluation’s conclusions and recommendations was introduced.

1995- 2002 Child Care Visions

Child Care Visions (CCV) was created April 1, 1995⁴ as a “national child care research and development contributions program” by then-social development minister Lloyd Axworthy. In some contrast to CCIF, CCV projects were required to be “national in scope”, with the primary objective described as “to support research and evaluation projects that will study the adequacy, outcomes and cost-effectiveness of current best child care practices and service delivery models” (Government of Canada, no date).

The CCV program, like CCIF, was an HRSDC program. It had a Minister-appointed Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) that included child care researchers, service providers, experts from NGOs, universities, provincial government and the Indigenous community. The TAC worked collaboratively with federal officials to develop criteria for funding, priority topics and periodic Calls for Proposals. Many CCV-funded research and development reports (such as *You Bet I Care!*, the sole national analysis of child care process quality ever conducted in Canada), service and quality related tools (such as the School-Age Child Care Rating Scale (SACERS), research on inclusion and rural child care, successive editions of ECEC in Canada and many other works can still be found on the internet and in libraries.

HRSDC commissioned a Gap Analysis of the CCV program that solicited key informant responses to a set of questions “to help guide HRDC as it focuses on the development and direction of future programs to support research in early childhood learning and care” (Ekos Research, 2002).

The available Gap Analysis materials, which are limited, indicate that it focused on gaps in knowledge and services; that “most respondents

4 CCV had a smaller budget than CCIF.

believed CCV [to be] a unique program with little overlap”; and that CCV’s national focus was supported by most respondents. The respondents said that a key outcome of CCV had been a substantial contribution to knowledge/practice in the child care field while the evaluation’s literature review showed that CCV project results have become part of the field’s literature (Ekos Research, 2002). One focus of this analysis was about the nature of the “successor” program to CCV.

2002 - 2007 Social Development Partnerships Program

The Social Development Partnerships Program (SDPP) had been created in 1998 as a national research and development program. In 2002, CCV was integrated into the Social Development Partnerships Program, as were National Welfare Grants, which had funded several child care organizations such as the Canadian Child Care Federation and Specialink, The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion.

A summative evaluation of SDPP was conducted in 2005 – 2007 (Evaluation Directorate Strategic Policy and Research Branch, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2009). It assessed the rationale and relevance, results, cost-effectiveness and some aspects of the design and delivery of the program including ELCC and other such as social inclusion and disability issues.

The evaluation report described the program and its goals:

The SDPP is a nationally delivered program that plays a role in furthering broad social goals by making strategic investments in not-for-profit organizations to support the generation and dissemination of knowledge, foster partnerships to achieve shared goals, and help to build capacity in the social not-for-profit sector in Canada.

The 2009 evaluation report described the child care projects funded under SDPP as “largely of high quality and usefulness”, noting that they had addressed “important, relevant social issues related to social inclusion, early childhood learning and care, and disabilities”. It also observed that “there are concerns that recent decisions to reduce or eliminate funding in these areas are having a weakening effect, particularly given the lack of alternative funding sources” (Evaluation Directorate Strategic Policy and Research Branch, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2009: 29).

By 2006 or 2007, it had become clear that activities concerned with ELCC were no longer funded (or fundable) under SDPP. Thus:

- ***Specialink***: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion, one of the first projects funded by CCIF, had grown to be a cross-Canada organization building capacity vis-a-vis issues of inclusion in child care. With funding from successive federal governments, Specialink did substantial work on inclusion of children with disabilities in child care. However, in the period between 2006 and 2008, the group submitted several proposals that were not funded, leaving Specialink with no funds (Specialink, Annual Report 2009);
- ***The Canadian Child Care Federation (CCCF)***, representing the child care workforce – funded through a National Welfare Grant and other HRDC funds since the mid 1980s—lost all its funding and closed its office but carried on its work in a much-reduced form. CCCF was, and remains Canada’s main ECEC organization, working with provincial affiliates across Canada to further the ECEC field;
- ***The Childcare Resource and Research Unit (CRRU)***—federally funded since the mid-1980s to provide “information resources” and

to develop national ELCC data and reporting utilizing provincial/territorial administrative data—lost all its funds and with them its standing at University of Toronto, becoming a small independent non-profit that has carried on some of its work including collecting the national data. The 2006 version of *Early childhood education and care in Canada* was the last to be funded by a federal contribution agreement until 2016.⁵

By 2008, the child care community came to understand that the federal funding that had supported its activities and work had ended.

The Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC)

Another key element relevant to child care policy, service provision and to research/data was the substantial work on the child care workforce that was federally supported and carried out in partnership with the provinces/territories and the child care community between 1998 and 2012. In the mid-1990s, HRDC had financed and organized a comprehensive sector study on the child care workforce. Its report, *Our child care workforce: From recognition to remuneration* was published in 1998, focusing on the “human resource and training issues faced by caregivers in the different child care settings and demonstrated that child care as a sector has far-reaching social and economic impacts in Canada” (Beach, Cleveland and Bertrand, 1998).

A main outcome of the national child care workforce sector study was the establishment of the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC) in 2003, funded by HRDC as the “the only Pan-Canadian organization dedicated to moving forward on human resources issues in Canada’s ELCC sector. The CCHRSC brought together national partners

5 CRRU successfully competed for standard MERX contracts for the 2008 and 2010 versions of ECEC in Canada. After 2010, when not even contract funds were available, smaller 2012 and 2014 versions were developed by CRRU with limited funds from foundations, unions and online crowdfunding.

and sector representatives to help develop a knowledgeable, skilled, and respected workforce valued for its contribution to ECEC” (CCHRSC, no date).

The CCHRSC carried out substantial research and analysis on the child care workforce between 2003 and 2013 when the federal government ended funding to national sector councils. Most of these, including the CCHRSC, which had no other source of funds— closed.

The members of the community board of the CCHRSC took “steps to ensure that access to CCHRSC resources, reports, analysis and data will continue to be available to the sector and others after operations cease in mid-2013”. Several child care groups established a Trust to share legal responsibility for the Sector Council’s intellectual property, maintain its website and provide continued access to its documents and materials. This arrangement continues today.

Federal funding supported the infrastructure for child care

As noted, Status of Women Canada’s funding of child care activities and the three consecutive HRSDC/HRDC funding programs had somewhat different objectives and operational approaches. Overall, however, these supported what constituted much of the infrastructure for child care in Canada for more than 25 years. That is, although all provinces/territories have child care service structures that include legislation, regulation, post-secondary training and funding arrangements, outside the Women’s Program, CCIF, CCV and SSDP, there has been only limited and uneven support for advocacy, data or research development, or community capacity-building by professional, community or advocacy organizations, development of program materials, exploration of innovative approaches or convening conferences and workshops.

As the three evaluations noted, the range of outputs of the federally-funded organizations and projects was huge over the 25 years of federal funding. Projects included: economic and policy analyses, surveys, applied research, data, pedagogical materials, quality assessment tools, conferences, workshops, professional development opportunities, knowledge production and transfer, and many more.

The 2009 SDPP evaluation report noted:

...program officials, funding recipients and external respondents cited the decision in recent years to no longer fund research-oriented projects (and research through grant funding), as well as the elimination of funding for conferences by the Children and Families component, as representing a serious gap in knowledge development within the SNP sector. Respondents argued that by no longer offering to fund these items, the federal government no longer provided support for social policy dialogue in Canada, which put at risk the sector's ability to remain current and to develop new and innovative approaches to address social issues (Evaluation Directorate Strategic Policy and Research Branch, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2009: 24).

Post-2007, some funds from national unions, several private foundations, community fundraising and fee-for-service allowed limited ELCC-related activities and some organizations to continue. While some academic research on ELCC has been funded through Canada's lead academic social research funding body, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), these funds do not fund advocacy, applied research, basic data, capacity building, professional development nor do academic SSHRC-funded grants constitute a research agenda.

Going forward

The OECD's 2004 Country Report on Canada—part of a 20 country cross-national Thematic Review— noted:

Early childhood policy development in Canada is ably supported by a vibrant research community and stakeholder constituency. It seemed to the review team that the consultation of such groups should be given an obligatory and legal status in development planning... In many instances, expert groups can move policy making from the political field toward a more research driven focus, and maintain objectivity and continuity in policy (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2004: 156).

Following the 2015 election, the new federal government signalled a new approach that affirmed the value of an ELCC community with the capacity to participate. The Liberal government has stated that it values data and evidence, while there has been commitment to collaboration and consultation with stakeholders (see, for example, Ministers' Mandate Letters, 2015). This, together with commitment to and development by the Government of Canada of the 2017 Multinational Framework on Early Learning and Child Care and the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework, suggests the importance of ensuring that the child care community has the capacity to participate.

Since this paper was originally drafted in 2018, another federal election and an international pandemic have significantly shifted Canadian perceptions of the role early learning and child care plays in a 21st century economy. The pandemic revealed how essential, yet how vulnerable Canadian child care is as it is currently provided. How essential reliable child care is— not only to support women's equality and children's

healthy development— but for a functioning economy was recognized during the COVID-19 pandemic by new and unexpected players (Ballantyne, Friendly & Anderson, 2020).

In this environment, as multiple and diverse voices pressed for urgent action on early learning and child care, the October 23 2020 federal Throne Speech situated child care for all squarely as key in a “stronger, more resilient Canada” as necessary in economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic:

We have long understood that Canada cannot succeed if half of the population is held back. Canadians need more accessible, affordable, inclusive, and high quality childcare... Recognizing the urgency of this challenge, the Government will make a significant, long-term, sustained investment to create a Canada-wide early learning and childcare system.

Examination of the past, together with consideration of the present and future of ELCC in Canada suggests that taking note of the OECD’s observation in its review of Canada in 2004—that “expert groups can move policy making from the political field toward a more research driven focus, and maintain objectivity and continuity in policy could be most beneficial for governments and stakeholders alike”. From this perspective, a plan for sustained financial support for child care organizations’ capacity and for applied research, innovation, policy development, and knowledge in ELCC move forward nationally and provincially/territorially should be considered to be essential.

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The Childcare Resource and Research Unit (CRRU), a non-profit, non-partisan policy research institute, has a mandate to work towards an equitable, high quality, publicly funded, inclusive ECEC system for all Canadians. CRRU began in the early 1980s as a project at the University of Toronto's Centre for Urban and Community Studies and was initially funded by the Ontario government. In 1985, CRRU was funded by the Government of Canada under the Child Care Initiatives Fund. Over the next two decades, CRRU developed policy research expertise, expanded research capacity and resource provision. This came to include a resource and research library, publications and collections, *Early childhood education and care in Canada*, a bi-annual synthesis of available data on Canadian ECEC programs, and an extensive website used to make resources widely available and meet CRRU's goals and objectives.