



MUNICIPAL CHILD CARE: LIGHTHOUSES FOR CWELCC?

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The argument in brief

- Municipal provision of child care can play an important role in achieving expansion of affordable, quality child care across Canada.
- Though unlikely to become dominant, municipal child care centres can function as a kind of navigational 'lighthouse' for the sector as a whole and a learning opportunity for the provinces.
- Toronto Early Learning and Child Care Services (TELCCS) as example.
- Not only in Toronto: there are important 'beacons' in much smaller centres.
- Provinces can facilitate this (e.g. BC) but also work to impede (recent Ontario initiatives).

Current municipal involvement in child care provision

- None in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Quebec and Manitoba. Newfoundland in fact currently prohibits this, but policy may change.
- PEI has 2, New Brunswick 3, Saskatchewan 3, Alberta 4, BC 63 and Ontario 109. Even in the latter account for a very small percentage of the total.
- Municipally run child care been decreasing. Alberta once had municipal 'lighthouse' centres in Calgary, Edmonton, Medicine Hat and Red Deer. All gone in 1990s.
- In 1998 municipal centres accounted for 18% of child care centres in Ontario. Now down to 2% following closures in cities like Windsor, Peel, Waterloo.

Pioneer Lighthouse: Toronto Early Learning and Child Care

- Accounts for only 3% of all spaces, but 10% of infant spaces.
- Concentrated in low income and vulnerable communities
- Emergency capacity (e.g. COVID) and system stability as able to step in when commercial or non-profit centres close (Weston, Kingston Rd, Mount Dennis)
- High quality jobs with fair wages and good benefits, benchmark for rest of sector
- Highly qualified staff benefit from more professional development hours than rest of the sector, including training in mental health, 2SLGBTQ+, anti-racism
- Pilot new initiatives before scaling up to implementation across the sector
- Support administration, human resources, operations, quality concerns and training in the wider community-based child care sector.

An interesting example: Kipling ELCC

- The Centre shares location with Kipling Acres Long-Term Care to facilitate intergenerational programming. Results in collaborative activities such as children deliver mail to residents and residents visiting the centre.
- Centre recognised as outstanding design model for early learning and child care space with low window benches, a welcoming entrance area with book-lending library.
- Outdoor space redesigned into an intergenerational garden area
- Often visited by others interested in its physical space and unique programming.

Not only in Toronto: Rainy River, Ontario

- District Social Services Admin Board responsible for 15,000 square km but population of only 20,000.
- Faced with challenge of introduction of full-day kindergarten for 4 and 5 year olds, chose single public governance for its 9 child care centres.
- Facilities costs and other admin savings allow the DSSAB to approach compensation rates of ECEs working in full day kindergarten. As employees also part of pension and benefit plans.
- ECEs of school-age children deployed throughout the system, avoiding split shifts.
- District working to remove barriers for parents with non-standard schedules (many in district have 12 hour days with 4 days on, 4 days off).

Russell Township, Ontario

- District located south-east of Ottawa with a population density 98.6 square km.
- Municipality took over operation of 1 closed and 1 struggling for profit centre and expanded them to add 456 new spaces
- Improved compensation including eligibility for pensions and benefits
- Helping on graduate educators with the cost of schooling toward Registered ECE designation. Working with local college to design in-service training

Drayton Valley, Alberta population 7000

- Developed a plan to establish a publicly delivered child care facility to attract families of oil sands workers
- Staff are paid union rates and are employees of the town. Most meet Alberta maximum qualification requirements.
- Shares operating policies, procedures and related documentation with other centres.
- When a new centre is being developed in the region, the centre manager is often asked to provide support and mentorship.

What role can provinces play: The Good: British Columbia

- Province introduced two new provincial funds in cooperation with the Union of BC Municipalities:
- *Child Care Community Planning* program administers grants enabling communities to develop child care space creation plans. Develops local capacity while improving provincial knowledge.
- *Community Child Care Space Creation* program provides local governments up to \$1 million to create new licensed child care spaces for children aged 0-5. Under the latter, priority for programs directly operated by the local government or public sector organisation for underserved populations and non-standard hours child care

The Bad: Current Ontario policies

- The only province to mandate a role for municipalities, but Ontario currently moving backward.
- Current gov't passed regulations eliminating municipal discretion about which centres should be preferred to provide subsidised services. Previously 16 had decided to only sign with non-profit providers.
- All municipal child care programs now required to undergo audits to determine whether the services could be offered by a 3rd party provider instead.
- Service System Managers are required to ensure “opportunities for community-based delivery participation are exhausted before direct child care delivery by the Consolidated Municipal Service Managers/District Soc Services Admin Bds.

Conclusions

- Although they are not signatories to the federal-provincial CWELCC agreements, municipalities can play an important role in expanding affordable, quality child care across Canada.
- They can create high quality, innovative centres offering equitable wages and good working conditions and thus function as ‘lighthouses’
- Provincial governments can impede this – or they can follow BC’s good example and support not only municipal planning but also child care provision.

Sources consulted

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