



TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILD CARE

Summary of the current situation and proposals for action

by the

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THE CASE FOR QUALITY CHILD CARE

As a society, we take responsibility for the well being of children. That is why education from kindergarten through Grade 12 is provided free. That is also why taxpayers support child protection services for children who are abused or neglected.

But what about the care of children while their parents are working or studying? Most children in New Brunswick are in some kind of care since about three-quarters of parents with young children are currently in the paid labour force. Because some cannot find child care to fit their schedules or their budget, some parents stay home or work or study part time. In New Brunswick, there are government-regulated child care spaces for about 11% of children aged under 12. As a result, most children are being cared for in settings that are not inspected or held to minimum standards.

A large body of research shows that the first six years of life are crucial to the future educational, career and social success of individuals. A child's brain development in the years from 0 to 6 sets the foundation for life-long learning, behaviour and health. So if children are spending a lot of their time away from their parents, in child care then we must ensure that child care offers developmentally appropriate stimulation in a safe and nurturing environment. It is a wise investment in the future.

Studies have demonstrated that children who received good quality child care had larger vocabularies when they began school as well as superior language skills, higher levels of cognitive functioning and a greater ability to get along with other children¹. The benefits of high quality child care for economically disadvantaged children appear to be particularly important². Early childhood educators can identify learning disabilities, behavioural and social problems and encourage healthy lifestyle choices. In short, children who get a good start in life will be healthier, happier and more productive citizens. Indeed, many parents send their pre-school age children to child care centers only to ensure they benefit from the stimulation and socialization.

Child care should be viewed as an essential service. It is not strictly a women's issue, although women still shoulder most of the child care responsibilities. Child care is a family issue, a societal issue and an economic issue.

¹ See, for example, Gillian Doherty, *Zero to Six: The Base for School Readiness* (Human Resources Development Canada, Applied Research Branch, Strategic Policy, May 1997); Hon. M. McCain and J.F. Mustard, *Reversing the Real Brain Drain: Early Years Study* (Toronto, Children's Secretariat, 1999).

² D. Kohen, C. Hertzman, and J.D. Willms, "The Importance of Quality Child Care," in J.D. Willms, ed., *Vulnerable Children: Findings from Canada's National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002).

A recent public opinion poll found that 90% of Canadians agreed or strongly agreed that “Canada should have a nationally co-ordinated childcare plan” and 86% were in favour of “a publicly funded childcare system that makes quality child care available to all Canadian children³.”

A recent study of kindergarten children in the Hampton/Sussex area of New Brunswick found that despite good overall development, their language and cognitive development as well as their emotional health and maturity were below national levels. The report also found that relatively few children in this community are cared for in formal daycare settings (1% versus national average of 8%) and suggested that “increasing high quality daycare offerings, and making them affordable to low-income families, may be the best strategy for improving language skills and their emotional health and maturity⁴.”

Quality child care services can also boost the health and well-being of parents. Knowing their children are in a safe and stimulating environment will reduce stress levels among parents and make it more possible for them to take advantage of employment, training or educational opportunities. For lone-parent or low-income families, the availability of affordable child care may mean the difference between dependence and financial autonomy.

“The marketplace doesn’t work well for childcare⁵”, as child care expert Martha Friendly says. But investment in early childhood education and support for adult employment and training lead to major payoffs down the road. Through savings on social programs, increased productivity and higher tax revenues, we all gain. It is estimated that for each \$1 spent on quality child care, there is a \$2 future return to society⁶.

The governor of the Bank of Canada, economist David Dodge, is a strong defender of investment in early childhood development. He says that in a world of limited resources, the economic challenge is to identify where we are likely to get the most productive use of new resources for human capital development: by investing in early childhood development, schooling, post-secondary education, or workforce training and retraining? The biggest payback, he concludes, is through early childhood development. Youngsters would enter the school system at age 6 ready to learn and succeed. This would make the school system itself more effective and efficient and

³ Millward Brown Goldfarb survey, conducted between November 27, 2002 and December 12, 2002.

⁴ The community study was conducted in 2001-2002, using information provided by teachers, parents and children as well as comparative data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. See the report prepared by J. Douglas Willms with assistance from Shawn Dalton and Norman Daoust, *Understanding the Early Years: Early Childhood Development in Hampton/Sussex, New Brunswick*, (Human Resources Development Canada, Applied Research Branch, Strategic Policy, April 2003).

⁵ Martha Friendly, “Subsidized child care delivers future payoffs”, *National Post*, March 31, 2003.

⁶ Gordon Cleveland and Michael Krashinsky, *The Benefits and Costs of Good Child Care*, 1998.

allow young people to obtain higher levels of achievement in fewer years of schooling- thus also enabling them to enter the world of work at a reasonably young age. This becomes important in our aging society with a proportionately smaller labour force. But institutional arrangements are lacking, says Dodge. Provinces do not have a human capital development focus for early years - they should shift early years responsibilities from social welfare to education ministries, with increased resources. He urges that government institution be given the mandate to organize early childhood development with a clear performance criterion to raise readiness-to-learn scores for 6-year-olds.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

New Brunswick presently has no provincial development plan for child care services. The province's Early Childhood Development Agenda launched in 2001 includes various measures to improve child care services, along with prenatal services, nutrition programs and aid to child witnesses of family violence. The Agenda was New Brunswick's response to the September 2000 First Ministers announcement on funding allocated to the provinces with the aim of helping young children "fulfill their potential to be healthy, safe and secure, ready to learn, socially engaged and responsible."

The N.B. Department of Family and Community Services has taken on a limited monitoring and financing role in the child care sector. It provides licensing and inspection services for regulated child care facilities (day care centres and community day homes) while health and safety standards are set by Department of Health and Wellness. Limited grants are provided to regulated child care facilities, but no government funding is available to open new child care centres (see funding formula below). The government also subsidizes child care fees for eligible low-income families. Families with net incomes of \$15,000 or less are currently eligible for full subsidies. Partial subsidies are available for families with maximum net incomes of \$23,100 (1 child, 2 years and older) or \$24,180 (1 child, under 2 years).

**N.B. annual grants formula for existing licensed child care spaces,
2003-2004**

Number of approved spaces x hours per week of operation x number of weeks per year, weighted according to program type.

Under this formula, higher levels of funding are provided for infant spaces, followed by community day home spaces, preschool spaces and school-age spaces.

In March 2003, the New Brunswick government signed the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care with the federal government and the other provinces. Under this agreement, New Brunswick will receive \$22 million in federal funding for child care over the next 5 years. However, federal funding alone will not be sufficient to substantially improve the quality of child care services in the province.

Accessibility and flexibility remain key issues. In New Brunswick, as in most of Canada, regulated child care is in short supply. The situation of particular groups and areas is even more desperate, such as rural areas, on First Nation reserves, for children under the age of 2 and for parents who work shifts or extended seasonal hours. Spaces for infants and care for children with special needs are particularly difficult to find. There is also such a shortage of after-school care that there is the danger of underage latchkey children (children who are at home alone after school until a parent arrives from work). A 1997 survey of rural and farm households by New Brunswick Partners in Agriculture showed that half of all farming families were forced to take their children out on farm equipment, because no child care was available.

Affordability - The cost of existing child care facilities or unapproved caregivers is beyond the reach of many parents. The median monthly fee paid in 1998 by New Brunswick parents for full-time centre-based child care was \$360 for toddlers and pre-schoolers and \$380 for infants.⁷ In 2003, those figures are likely closer to \$400 for toddlers and preschoolers and \$400-\$500 for infants. For low-wage workers, the cost of child care may be a reason to stay out of the workforce. New Brunswick government subsidies to low-income families do help with the cost of child care for some families, but only 23% of children in regulated spaces receive a government subsidy in this province in 2001, versus 36% in Canada⁸.

Despite the high demand for child care services, many centres have difficulty keeping afloat. Many close because the operation was not viable, even when they were full. New Brunswick spends just one-third of the national average on regulated child care spaces: \$1,066 versus \$3,185 for Canada as whole⁹. The bulk of the revenue for regulated child care facilities in New Brunswick comes from parent fees.

Under funding and inadequate coordination in the child care sector are major roadblocks to achieving quality child care. Well-trained early childhood educators and continuity of care are

⁷ Martha Friendly, Jane Beach and Michelle Turiano, *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2001* (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, University of Toronto, December 2002). Available online at www.childcarecanada.org

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

essential to quality child care. Staff qualifications set by the provincial government are currently inadequate. No early childhood training or experience is required of staff in approved centres. A 16 year old with first-aid training is deemed qualified to work in approved child care centres, while caregivers must be at least 19 years old in approved private home settings. A new standard will come into effect by April 2006, requiring that the child care director or one in four staff have one year of community college training in child care or its equivalent. That standard is already being applied to any new child care center that applies to be approved, although it is unclear what would happen if once approved, the qualified staff or director with training leaves the center. The N.B. Department of Family and Community Services is presently developing distance education training modules that will be offered through the Community Colleges.

Low salaries also contribute to the training deficiencies and high turnover in the child care sector. It has been said that investing in training of child care workers when turnover is high is like putting water in a pot that has a hole. Staff in New Brunswick approved child care centres are among the lowest paid in Canada: many work for little more than minimum wage. Child care workers participating in the N.B. Training Needs Profile survey conducted by the Department of Family and Community Services in the Fall of 2001 reported hourly wages ranging between \$6.76 and \$7.00. There is little incentive to get specialized training or to remain in the sector. Less than 20% of New Brunswick child care workers in regulated centres have received their certification in early childhood education¹⁰. 61% of the 978 child care workers who participated in the Fall 2001 survey had no formal early childhood education training and only 3% were currently enrolled in such training. Fully half of the workers had been employed for 2.5 years or less by their current employer.

¹⁰ Parents for Quality Care (Moncton Division), Let's Vote Child Care 2003 Election Campaign, April 2003.

SOME INTERESTING INITIATIVES OUTSIDE NEW BRUNSWICK

Many European countries have made child care a public priority, as part of family, educational and employment policies. In countries like France, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, the government heavily subsidizes child care services and sets high standards of education and care.

The Quebec government has set a goal of universal child care and developed a comprehensive multiyear program with substantial public funding designed to achieve it. Promoting child development, equal opportunities and balancing of family and work responsibilities are among the aims of a program that is part of a broader family policy.

5\$ a day spaces in Quebec

- provincial program unique in Canada
- beginning in 1997, government-subsidized rate of \$5 per day for infant, pre-school and after school care was introduced gradually for all children to age 12 (lower or no fees for low-income families)
- spaces available in child care centres offering educational programming and supervision by trained staff or in private homes
- since 2000, some facilities offer extended hours and late night care for shift workers such as casino and hospital staff.

“EduCare” in Finland

- Finnish system is based on a holistic view of the child’s growth, development and learning;
- almost all pre-schoolers (below age 7) are taken care of under publicly subsidized programs;
- since 1996, all children under the age of 7 are guaranteed a place in municipal day care (in centres and in family day care), whether or not the child’s parents are at work
- families may also receive a private childcare allowance to cover part of the private day care expenses if that is their choice (since 1997).
- fees are kept low, based on family size and income level with no fees for low-income families
- client fees only cover about 15% of the total child care costs.
- all workers in child care centres are required to have at least secondary-level training in the field of social welfare and health care; 1 in 3 of the staff must have a university degree in Education or Social Sciences; some training is required for caregivers in family settings
- child care programming encourages children’s self-motivated play as a learning tool and co-operation with others; an individual educational plan is drawn up for every child and provision is made for special care and education needs.

In some regions, pilot projects have been introduced to address specific needs, such as those of seasonal workers and farming families.

Serving Seasonal Workers in British Columbia

- in B.C.'s Okanagan Valley, a pilot project from 1995 to 1999 provided child care services for transient and migrant fruit pickers earning minimum wage.
- services offered 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. five days per week during July and August, with 3 daily meals provided to the children.
- quality child care at an affordable cost for parents, adapted to the summer harvesting work schedules, was delivered by qualified and experienced staff
- involved high staffing and food costs.
- the project ended in 1999 when funding from the provincial and federal governments was discontinued.

Prince Edward Island Rural Child Care Program

- pilot project in 1990 coordinated by the province's Agriculture Employment Services (A.E.S.) and funded by the P.E.I. Department of Health and Social Services.
- Four student workers on provincial payroll completed a Department of Health child care training seminar and were registered with the Charlottetown A.E.S. office.
- Farmers would contact the A.E.S. office to request childcare worker for specific dates, usually up to 5 days. Child care workers were sent out to the farms.
- 13 farm families participated in the two-month pilot project.
- the project was cancelled after 1 year due to budget cuts.

Encouraging Public-Private Partnerships in U.S. Rural Communities

- the Child Care Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funded a multiyear information and technical assistance initiative called the Child Care Partnership Project.
- this initiative has produced a series of technical assistance resources and material to support the development and strengthening of public-private partnerships to improve the quality and supply of child care in rural communities.
- with aid from this project, a variety of partnerships involving small employers, non-profit agencies (such as Head Start associations) and other stakeholders were created to offer innovative approaches to child care provision, training for staff and transportation, in communities from rural Huntsville, Arkansas to rural Wyoming.

See: <http://nccic.org/ccpartnerships>

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

Providing quality care for New Brunswick children requires action on many fronts. All citizens, whether or not they have young children, need to be aware of the importance of high quality early childhood education and care. Government commitment is essential. A quality sustainable child care system requires a coherent action plan and substantial public funding. Government-regulated and coordinated services must be based on early childhood development and care principles. They must also be affordable and responsive to the needs of all parents and children in the province. Flexibility and adaptability are key. Child care should accommodate residents of urban and rural areas, Anglophones, Francophones and Aboriginal peoples, shift and seasonal workers, full-time and part-time employees, infants, children with special needs and school-age children in after-school care.

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women recommends the following actions.

Issues	Recommendations for change
<p>Child care centre salaries are not much more than minimum wage. The result is a high turnover and difficulty in attracting or retaining staff with early childhood education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ launch a public awareness campaign on the value of services provided by child care workers, prepared by the ACSW in partnership with other stakeholders (Early Childhood Care and Education of NB, Parents for Quality Care, New Brunswick Partners in Agriculture, employer/union sponsored child care representatives, early childhood university professors and researchers, appropriate provincial government departments, union and business groups). √ establish an appropriate salary scale for child care workers. Adopt training standards. Provide adequate public funding to ensure child care workers' salaries reach the set salary scale in set timeframe.
<p>The level of educational and activity programs in child care centres and regulated home settings is limited by lack of resources and lack of trained staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ introduce a minimum curriculum for use in regulated child care facilities in the province. Create awareness and collaboration among school teachers and officials about child care role and programs. √ provide public funding for equipment and materials required to support the curriculum program in regulated child care centres and regulated home settings. √ set high competency levels for child care staff, requiring certification in early childhood education for at least 2 in 4 workers per approved child care facility.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ provide government grants to future and current child care workers for specialized training, as well as opportunities for ongoing professional development. √ ensure adequate staffing for mandated schedule of inspection and monitoring of regulated child care facilities.
Employers' and parents' needs for non-standard child care (due to shift work, weekend work, extended hours, part-time work, infant or special needs care) are not met.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ sponsor pilot projects to serve workers in sites such as hospitals and fish-processing plants. √ provide tax incentives, start-up and operating grants to encourage employers and unions to create workplace child care services. √ subsidize specialized training for child care workers who care for special needs children (ie autism).
Lack of child care services in rural areas of N.B.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ establish a central registry of government-trained and subsidized caregivers for farming regions of the province. √ consider the use of mobile child care facilities and resources for areas of high need during peak periods. √ provide financial aid and support for training and professional development for new and existing child care workers in small towns and villages of N.B. √ encourage the formation of community alliances bringing together service and volunteer organizations, businesses and other stakeholders with an interest in establishing child care facilities. √ provide tax incentives, start-up and operating grants to encourage employers and unions to create workplace child care services.
▫ Many parents cannot afford the current child care centre rates.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ expand eligibility requirements for government subsidies to low-income families at least so that parents who live at or below the poverty line benefit from full subsidies covering child care fees. √ increase government grants per regulated child care space and provide start-up and operating grants for approved child care facilities to cover a major portion of child care costs.