

An Early Childhood Learning and Care Blueprint for Nova Scotia

by Sue Wolstenholme

During 2004-05, YWCA Canada partnered with YWCAs in Halifax NS, Cambridge ON, Saskatoon SK and Vancouver BC, in a national research project which aimed to develop community-based plans for a comprehensive early childhood learning and care (ECLC) system that would provide quality, universally accessible, affordable and developmental learning and care anywhere in Canada. The project worked with community task forces to produce "blueprints" for an ECLC system that incorporated many similar elements such as those developed through the YWCA Halifax Community Task Force:

- Program delivery through the HUB model of non-profit community-board governed organizations.
- Funding to all existing ECLC centres, with program expansion in the non-profit/public sectors only.
- Development of a long term funding plan with the following goals:
 - universal availability of ECLC programs.
 - substantial public funding of each licensed space with a low maximum fee for parents.
- Development of a human resource Strategy for Nova Scotia through a task force representative of all stakeholder groups, and incorporating public input, with the aim of achieving livable wages for ECLC staff, comparable to other similar occupations.

What would a plan for ECLC in Nova Scotia look like?

The ECLC plan would recognize the positive paybacks on investments in early childhood learning and care. Funding early learning and care programs for all children is the most important investment that societies can make. It would recognize that available, affordable child care is, as the ramp to women's equality. And, it would recognize ECLC as an essential public service.

The ECLC plan would identify and address the real needs of both families, and the current providers. It would ensure that early childhood educators are paid a living wage commensurate with their two years of post-secondary education. And, it would create a province-wide system of ECLC based on non-profit / public delivery.

What are the real needs of Nova Scotia families?

The Nova Scotia government was tasked to prepare an Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) plan for Nova Scotia as a requirement of their 2005 federal/provincial agreement with the government of Canada.

With the canceling of this federal/provincial agreement after the 2006 federal election, the Nova Scotia government received a one-time payment of \$39 million

from the federal government to be spent on Early Learning and Child Care programs.

On May 8, 2006, the government released a document which outlined ELCC spending priority areas, promising to spend an additional \$130 million over the next ten years above their current annual spending, creating a total of 1,000 new licensed spaces, and 550 newly subsidized spaces. This would represent an 8% increase in spaces by 2016, or less than 1% per year. There was, however, no indication of a long-term vision to address the real needs of Nova Scotia families for ECLC and family support programs.

Currently, there are 12,759 licensed child care spaces for children ages 0-12, of which 9,477 are full day spaces. This would provide spaces for 14.8% of children whose mothers are in the paid work force, or for 9.6% of all children (presuming that many mothers not in the work force choose to use part time programs for their children)

The current population of children ages 0-12 in N.S. is 132,600 with 55,500 under the age of 6. Nova Scotia experienced a 33% decline in the birth rate between 1991 and 2004, the highest decline in Canada over the same time frame. With a substantial increase in the supply of high quality, affordable child care, we could speculate whether this decline would continue, stop, or be reversed.

Parent's child care fees in Nova Scotia can range from the fully subsidized rate of \$2.25 per day to well over \$30.00 per day for a preschooler, and considerably higher for an infant or toddler. Many families' earnings will not support the full cost of child care. Even most families who receive the full provincial subsidy are paying upwards of \$100 per month. It is clear that Nova Scotia's plan will not meet the ECLC needs of Nova Scotia families.

In 2006 the (OECD) released a major study of ECLC programs in 20 countries including Canada. They used ECLC funding as a percentage of GDP as the appropriate measurement of a country's commitment to ELCC. Canada is at the bottom of the list spending .25% of GDP in ECLC services as compared to Denmark at 2%, and Sweden and Norway at over 1.5%. The OECD's recommendation is that governments spend at least 1% of GDP on ECLC program.

The YWCA Blueprint for ECLC in Nova Scotia

In May of 2005, YWCA Halifax proposed a 20 year plan to develop an ECLC system in Nova Scotia based on the principles identified by their community task force and

incorporating specific spending targets and time lines.

The plan incorporates the following principles:

Universal availability: Establishment of spending target of 1% of GDP

Accountable: Funding available to all existing ECLC Centres – non-profit, public and commercial.

Program expansion in the non-profit/public sectors only.

Affordable and publicly funded: Low maximum fee for all parents, implying that *all* spaces are funded. Role of government is to invest in the development of young children

Accessible and inclusive programs: Program delivery through the HUB model of non-profit, community-board-governed organizations providing ELCC and parent support and resource programs. Neighbourhood based centres that reduce the need to travel long distances. Inclusion of all children through funding for extra support needs.

Quality, developmental programs: Livable wages and good working conditions for staff. Good staff/child ratios. Well designed and maintained facilities

Targets and Timelines Recommendations

Spaces:

Currently, there are 2750 full day subsidies available in Nova Scotia. 2426 of these are allocated to specific non-profit centres, and 324 are “portable”, which may be used in either for-profit or non-profit centres, and will follow the child. The portable subsidy approach is difficult for parents to navigate, and requires the alignment of both a vacancy in the parent’s choice of centre, and arrival at the top of the portable subsidy waiting list.

The starting point for funded spaces would be to convert all existing licensed spaces to be assigned subsidies. That is, all currently existing spaces in N. S. would be “subsidizable” in the short term, and would be fully funded in the long term. Communities which have few assigned subsidies and where there are significant low-income families would be supported first. New spaces, as they are created, would be funded (subsidized) spaces.

Costs for achieving the proposed space targets over 20 years: Projections are based on fixed cost per space over the period so therefore the cost would increase based on increases in the per day funding. As well they are based on the population base (i.e., number of children in the age cohort) remaining at the current level over the period and this could continued to decline. Both of these possibilities would increase the costs.

- By 2011 six thousand new spaces would be added to the existing 12,759 spaces. All of these spaces would

be funded at 80 percent of \$28 per day for a total cost of approximately 114 million per year.

- By 2016, additional 12,000 spaces (funded at 80 percent) are added for an additional cost of approximately \$70 million, total overall being approximately \$184 million per year.
- By 2021, an additional 26,000 spaces (funded at 80 percent) are added for an additional cost of approximately \$151.4 million with an overall total of \$335.4 million per year.
- By 2026, an additional 22,300 spaces (funded at 80 percent) are added for an additional cost of approximately \$162.3 million with an overall total of \$497.8 million per year.

Recommendation:

- *By 2026, full day funded spaces be created for 50% of children ages 0-12 (66,300 full time equivalent spaces). Added to the existing 11,118 spaces, this would provide spaces for 58% of children in this age group.*

Qualified Early Childhood Educators

Currently, in Nova Scotia, early childhood educators are considered to be qualified if they have completed and ECE program or taken two evening courses (consisting of 60 hrs each) in child development topics, and by current legislation, this qualification is required of only 2/3 of staff in any centre. Even this minimal rule can be bent if the employee is currently enrolled in a course.

Recommendation

- *By 2015, development of a schedule that would see all ECE's fully qualified (2-year post secondary diploma).*

Early Childhood Educators Wages

Early Childhood Educators in Nova Scotia do not receive a living wage, in spite of the responsibility and importance of their work to society. Our current child care programs are, in fact, subsidized by the staff through their low wages. Staff turnover rates are at or above 50% in many centres. Qualified educators cannot afford to continue working in child care. The ECLC plan includes provisions for addressing this imbalance by substantially improving the wages and working conditions in the system.

Recommendation

- *By 2011, a substantial increase to the wages of ECE's, to bring the entry-level salary for a qualified educator up to \$36,000.*

Parent Fees

Parent fees for licensed ECE programs are unaffordable for the majority of parents. Only 2700 subsidized spaces are available in the province. Otherwise, daily fees can be anywhere from \$22.00 to over \$30.00 per day, with higher rates for children under 18 months.

Recommendation

- By **2016**, a system similar to the Quebec plan, with a low maximum daily fee for all parents (\$7.00 per day in Quebec), to be phased in. Centres would receive direct funding from the provincial government to cover the remainder of their cost.

Subsidy Levels

The current subsidy system establishes income guidelines for subsidy eligibility. The subsidy “cut-off” point has not been adjusted for a number of years. Many parents whose incomes fall slightly above the cut-off point cannot afford licensed child care.

Recommendation

- By **2007**, the income guidelines for subsidy be adjusted by 2007 by raising the cut-off point by \$5,000 to \$29,900, and by 2008 to \$34,900. (Cost estimates for this recommendation have not been done.)

A not-for-profit / public system

Currently, child care services in N. S. are delivered through either non-profit or for-profit auspice in a “market-driven” model, operating competitively for those families who can afford to use their services. The plan provides a new paradigm for delivery of high quality, universally accessible, affordable and developmental ECLC programs. It acknowledges the role of ECLC programs as essential public investments in the early childhood years and envisions an ECLC system that implies permanency and continuity of services delivered through not-for-profit or public auspice.

Recommendations

- A system based on delivery through a network of HUB model community-based umbrella organizations which would incorporate early learning and child care programs for all ages and with flexible hours, along with parent support and resource programs and regulated home based care.
- Funding would include all existing licensed centres of either auspice, with the proviso that growth takes place only in the non-profit sector. New commercial centres established after the funding program began would not be funded.

The HUB Model

The ECLC architecture envisioned by the HRM community task force is based on a HUB model – an umbrella network of delivery organizations and services that are community- board operated and primarily neighbourhood-based. ELCC programs are at their core, along with family support/learning programs and resources. HUB organizations would effectively provide ECLC programs to families living in all areas of the province – urban, suburban and rural. This architecture creates an infrastructure for an ECLC system that fulfills the principles outlined previously.

All currently existing ELCC centres (for-profit, non-profit and school based) and parent resource centres would be included as part of the funded system and would be equal stakeholders in its development and implementation. Accountability measures would be built in at all levels, centre, HUB and government. Commercial centres established after the funding program began would not be funded.

The core ELCC programs would be for all children ages 3 months to 5 years whose parents chose to use them. They would include full day, part day and drop-in programs. Operationally, the HUB umbrella organization would administer several ELCC centres, including family home based services and would provide extended hours when warranted. ELCC programs would be located in all neighbourhoods. They might be in facilities that are new and free-standing, or incorporated into larger buildings (e.g., apartment complexes), in public schools, higher education institutions or workplaces.

Programs would be inclusive of all children, including those with extra support needs. Parenting programs and resources would also be central to the mandate of the HUB, as well as programs and resources that meet various needs of families – e.g., health, skill development, pre and post-natal support, as well as leisure and social activities.

Why Support the Proposed ECLC System?

Cleveland and Krashinsky (1998) economists at the University of Toronto, in their study “*The Benefits and Costs of Good Child Care - The Economic Rationale for Public Investment in Young Children: a Policy Study*” calculated the total costs of a universal program in relation to benefits in terms of the child development and labour force participation. They found that the benefits were twice as much as the costs. They stated that societies flourish by “raising children, educating them so as to endow them with high levels of human capital and providing them with social infrastructure and with places to work and live”.

An impressive roll of experts and leaders from many disciplines has called for early childhood learning and care programs for all. They emphasize that child development, child health, brain development, social inclusion, economic growth, and women’s equality are all advanced through participation in high quality early childhood learning and care programs that build on and support parental care.

Economists and financiers, including James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics, David Dodge, Governor of the Bank of Canada, Charles Coffey, VP of RBC, and Arthur Rolnick, Senior VP at Federal Reserve Bank of

Minneapolis, have publicly supported the importance of early learning programs for all children as the most important investment that societies can make.

Just last April, the Brookings Institution of Washington, D.C. issued a policy paper on the effects on economic growth of investments in early education. Their analysis found that, by 2080, the return to the American economy of a universal ECLC program for 3 and 4 year-olds would be ten-fold, at \$2 trillion per year. They warned that countries failing to take advantage of such a solid investment opportunity could find dim prospects in store, and that businesses that operated similarly would likely fail to succeed.

And finally, Justice Rosalie Abella, Commissioner of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment (1984) stated that - "child care is the ramp to women's equality".

Faced with the facts of maternal employment today, and the evidence that ECLC programs support and enhance children's development, as well as economic growth, Nova Scotia must step up to the plate in investing in our future through significant funding for a province-wide Early Childhood Learning and Care system.

Sue Wolstenholme was the Halifax site project director of the YWCA ECLC Architecture Project. Sue is a long time advocate, researcher, practitioner and trainer for high quality child care in Nova Scotia and throughout Canada.

Connections Resource Library

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Clarification to Connections 10.3

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We have received communication from the Department of Community Services regarding a need for clarification regarding the “equivalency” requirements. After reading the newsletter, some operators and staff contacted Early Childhood Development Officers, inquiring as to whether there have been changes to the current requirements for “equivalency”.

In the Article, Sue Wolstenholme states:

"Currently in Nova Scotia, early childhood educators are considered to be qualified if they have completed an ECE program or taken two evening courses (consisting of 60 hours each) in child development topics, and by current legislation, this qualification is required of only 2/3 of staff in any centre. Even this minimal rule can be bent if the employee is currently enrolled in a course."

The requirements under Regulation 21A (5) with respect to equivalency state:

“A person will be considered to have the equivalent of early childhood education if he or she complies with the following requirements:

- (a) successful completion of Grade XII or the equivalent through the General Education Development program of the Department of Education;
- (b) a minimum of two years experiences in a licensed day care facility; and
- (c) successful completion of a full credit course of two semester in a post-secondary education program in at least one of the following areas, and successful completion of 25 hours in training programs, seminars or workshops in the other area not completed by way of post-secondary education;
 - (i) human growth and development with an emphasis on the young child;
 - (ii) curriculum development and implementation of programs for young children in day care facilities. “

Each criteria under Reg 21A(5) must be met for a person to be considered to have the equivalent of early childhood education.

Please attach this clarification to your copy of Connections vol 10.3