



Caring At Work Campaign 2004
A Community-Based Development Project
of Child Care Connection Nova Scotia



Child Care Connection Nova Scotia
100-1200 Tower Road
Halifax, NS
B3H 4K6
1-800-565-8199
902 423-8199 (HRM)
cccns@istar.ca
<http://pages.istar.ca/~cccns/index.html>

Canadians want their country to be one where all children thrive in an atmosphere of love, care and understanding, valued as individuals in childhood and given opportunities to reach their full potential as adults.¹

A Comprehensive System of High Quality Child Care for Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia lacks a comprehensive system of high quality child care

The child care delivery system in Nova Scotia is in crisis. Programs have been closing and others are hanging on by a thread. Media attention to this issue and the government's subsequent response has focused primarily on the lack of funding to non-profit centres, and the fact that child care subsidies for lower-income families have not kept pace with the real cost of purchasing licensed child care.

In a formal media release, and in subsequent interviews, the Non-Profit Director's Association identified the cause as lack of government funding, pointing out that subsidies for child care have not kept pace with the real cost of child care. Child care subsidies are designed to make child care affordable to lower-income families, but subsidies only cover up to \$15.45 per day of parent fees. Cost of care is more than that, so centres have to charge more than the \$17.70 (\$15.45 plus \$2.25 parent portion of fee). This has resulted in higher costs for those parents—on average, approximately \$4.00 per day per child. According to the Province's own research, families that qualify for fully subsidized child care can only afford to pay \$2.25 per day per child. Also at issue is the fact that there have been no adjustments to the income criteria for subsidy eligibility since 1990, which means that fewer families than ever before actually qualify for subsidized care. The result is that subsidized spaces in licensed child care centres often go unfilled, leaving centres unable to recover their operating costs.

While these are serious problems for the child care system they are not the only factors involved in Nova Scotia's current child care crisis. The truth is that Nova Scotia lacks a comprehensive system for the provision of accessible, affordable, regulated high quality child care, and by failing to take action on this issue, significant burdens are imposed on employers, parents, children, and taxpayers as a whole. The lack of a comprehensive high quality child care system also places significant burdens on the child care sector in their efforts to provide a level of care to children that is beyond custodial (where children are safe) to where outcomes for children are enhanced and their ability to contribute to our future social and economic well being is optimized.

The needs of parents, employers, children, and taxpayers and the needs of the child care sector are not in competition. It is essential that initiatives address both the issue of child care for society and the issues of the child care sector. A balance must be struck between these two sets of needs when developing plans to most effectively utilize child care dollars. This balance is essential for a plan to be effective in supporting and sustaining a comprehensive system that supports society in its child care needs and the child care sector in what they need to provide high quality child care.

¹ Federal-Provincial-Territorial Council of Ministers on Social Policy Renewal. A National Children's Agenda. May 1999.

Why a Comprehensive System of High Quality Child Care is needed in Nova Scotia

Employers are affected by the lack of a comprehensive child care system in Nova Scotia

Employers pay a steep price when public officials don't take responsibility for child care. Accessible, affordable, regulated child care is an essential service. The lack of it forces many parents out of the labour market entirely. With them, go vital skills and talents. This reduces the pool of qualified workers available to Nova Scotia's industries and businesses, and places an unnecessary burden on the province's social safety net.

Lack of access to affordable, regulated child care also forces many parents to rely on older relatives or other unregulated care providers for their children. The precariousness of these arrangements is a frequent source of stress and worry for parents. Surveys by the Conference Board of Canada in 1999 found that workers who are stressed are significantly less committed to their work. They have higher absenteeism, use more benefits, are more likely to turn down promotions and are more likely to leave their employers². When the instability associated with unregulated child care arrangements manifests as lateness or absence, it frequently becomes a source of conflict between working parents and their employers and co-workers. The Conference Board of Canada surveys also found that parents with pre-school children were three times more likely to miss work than other employees³. In a 2001 national discussion paper, it was found that 48% of working mothers with preschool children reported experiencing chronically high levels of stress and depression⁴. The lack of accessible and affordable quality child care is also detrimental to workers' health.

Parents are affected by the lack of a comprehensive child care system

Even parents who can afford to pay for high quality, regulated child care have trouble getting it. According to a report from the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services, in 2003 there were 65,000 children under the age of six in Nova Scotia, 70% of whom (about 45,300 children) had mothers in the paid work force⁵. The number of regulated child care spaces in the entire province, including full-day and part-day programs, is 12,194 which would accommodate 27% of children of working mothers.

Cost can also be a barrier. Around the province, the cost of child care averages \$20.00 to \$28.00 per day, per child, for full-time care. The average income of a Nova Scotia family is \$46,523.00⁶. This means the average Nova Scotia family with one child in full-time care must spend between 11% and 15% of its total household income on child care. All parents are feeling the crunch, but lower-income families are hardest hit by the rising costs of care.

In the 1970's, subsidies were introduced to make regulated child care more affordable for lower-income families. Maximum subsidized parent fees have remained at \$15.45 per day for many years, without consideration given to the steadily rising costs parents face. The very people the subsidization of child care spaces was meant to assist--lower-income families--can no longer afford to pay for quality child care while they work. Additionally, it has been nearly 15 years since the income criteria for child care subsidies has been reviewed, leaving fewer families eligible for subsidies than ever before. The combined effect of these policies is that so few parents can afford to pay for regulated child care that spaces go unfilled. As centres close, all parents are left with the increasingly serious challenge of finding regulated care for their children.

² MacBride-King, J., Bachmann, K. Is Work-Life Balance Still an Issue for Canadians and their Employers? You Bet It Is! The Conference Board of Canada. Ottawa, 1999.

³ MacBride-King, J., Bachmann, K. Is Work-Life Balance Still an Issue for Canadians and their Employers? You Bet It Is! The Conference Board of Canada. Ottawa, 1999.

⁴ Duxbury, L., Higgins, C. Work-life balance in the New Millennium: Where Are We? Where Do We Need to Go? CPRN Discussion Paper No. W/12. Ottawa, 2001

⁵ Nova Scotia's Early Childhood Development Initiative: Annual Report April 2003. Nova Scotia Community Services. Halifax, 2003.

⁶ Statistics Canada 2000.

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Child Care Operators are affected by the lack of a comprehensive child care system

The provincial government's failure to take responsibility for maintaining a comprehensive system of child care leaves both the boards of directors of non-profit centres and the owners of private child care centres in an ethical dilemma. The hostile operating environment that government inaction imposes upon them means that private and non profit operators constantly have to choose between fair wages for staff, affordable fees⁷ for parents and their commitment to providing high quality early learning experiences for children.

Recruitment and retention of qualified staff is also problematic. It is difficult to soothe staff fears about job security, when the truth is that the future is very uncertain. Early childhood educators have already lost their jobs in the recent closures of centres, but those working in other child care centres are also concerned about job security. This environment of insecurity and unease creates other complications for child care operators, including calling into question their ability to provide the quality of care necessary to offer children the best start in life.

When such a large portion of child care centre resources must be spent simply trying to stay afloat amid rising costs, outdated subsidies and anxious staff, many licensed operators feel a moral responsibility to close. When they are no longer able to provide the quality of care laid out in their mission, it is reasonable for operators to simply choose not to take chances with children's well-being. This downward spiral means further job losses for early childhood educators and further reductions in parental choice.

Children are affected by the lack of a comprehensive child care system

Children are the group most affected by Nova Scotia's lack of a comprehensive child care system. Advancements in neuroscience re-enforce what many parents have known all along: what happens in the few first months and years of a child's life has a profound effect on that child's future. Negative experiences in the early years have prolonged effects that can be difficult to overcome later⁸. Studies show that high quality child care reduces school drop-out rates and the incidence of school failure; reduces the need to admit children into special education programs; lowers juvenile delinquency rates; and increases the detection and treatment of health problems⁹. There is reason to believe that investments in regulated, high quality child care more than pay for themselves by the time a child reaches adulthood and there is absolutely no question that quality child care helps children become healthy, well-adjusted adults. Doesn't every child born in our province deserve the advantages of a healthy start in life?

It's important to remember as well the critical role that access to affordable, high quality child care plays in facilitating parents' labour force participation and ability to provide their children with a stable home environment. Simply put, when more parents work, fewer families live in poverty. As a province, are we willing to accept that 48% of working mothers with preschool children will feel high levels of stress and depression? This is a particularly grim statistic, given that maternal depression predicts worst outcomes for children¹⁰. The lack of an affordable, available, quality child care system is most certainly a factor. Supporting children means supporting their parents by making affordable, quality child care available to all.

⁷ The average cost of child care is between \$20 to \$28 per day, per child, for full-time care. Many parents cannot afford this, even with the help of subsidies. However, if centres do not charge this amount, they lose money and will eventually close. (A realistic cost of care is around \$45 per child per day when equitable wages, modest support staff, and operating costs are factored in.)

⁸ Nova Scotia's Early Childhood Development Initiative: Annual Report April 2003. Nova Scotia Community Services. Halifax, 2003.

⁹ Canadian Child Care Federation (1999) Partners in Quality; Cleveland and Krashinski (1998) The Benefits and Costs of Good Child Care; Doherty (1998) Zero to Six: The Basis for School Readiness. Human Resource Development Canada; Connor and Brink (1999) Understanding the Early Years: Community Impacts on Child Development. Human Resource Development Canada; and Kyle (1999) Why is Quality Important? Canadian Child Care Federation.

¹⁰ Coffey, C., McCain, M. N., (2002). Commission on Early Learning and Child Care for the City of Toronto: Final Report May 2002.

*A
comprehensive
system of high
quality child
care is essential*

It is important to recognize that helping children grow into healthy, well-adjusted adults is a responsibility shared by all citizens of Nova Scotia. Our acceptance of this responsibility is part of what makes us Canadian. It is how we acknowledge that care and compassion aren't optional—they are the lifeblood of our society.

A comprehensive system of available, affordable, high quality child care is essential to Nova Scotia's social and economic well being. It would improve our quality of life now, and would lead to fewer demands on the health, social welfare and criminal justice systems in the future¹¹. To expand the knowledge-based economy, we must give parents the opportunity to concentrate on their work and take advantage of continuing education. Nova Scotia can only benefit from investing in the development of healthy, positive citizens, who have the potential for innovation, creativity, communication and contribution¹². As citizens we cannot settle for less. We must insist that the government of Nova Scotia, support and make a priority, the development of the comprehensive child care system we so desperately need.

The Federal-Provincial-Territorial Council of Ministers for Social Policy Renewal said it best:

Canadians want their country to be one where all children thrive in an atmosphere of love, care and understanding, valued as individuals in childhood and given opportunities to reach their full potential as adults.¹³

So do Nova Scotians.

The Needs of the Child Care Sector:

*Child Care
Connection
Nova Scotia
Sector
Consultation*

In Spring of 2004, Child Care Connection Nova Scotia held consultations across Nova Scotia to identify the issues of the child care sector. A sample of programs were contacted via telephone interviews; meetings were held in Halifax, Sydney, Truro and Yarmouth and surveys were distributed to all regulated child care programs in the province. Participants analyzed the current situation by identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that currently faced the sector, envisioned what the people, practice and place would look like in an ideal sector and identified what needed to happen to have the current reality become the vision. From the consultations it became evident that the Nova Scotia Child Care Sector wants a comprehensive system that supports high quality child care. The implementation of this system is a partnership between government and the child care sector.

*The Needs of
the Child Care
Sector*

The needs of the child care sector that emerged from the cross province forums were issues around building this comprehensive system. They included:

- *Developing a Strong Professional Infrastructure.*
- *Retention and recruitment-* without enough qualified staff programs are unable to provide high quality care to children. This is supported by findings in the *You Bet I Care* study (Doherty, 2000). In a study of retention and recruitment (Ferguson and Miller, 2000)¹⁴ in NS the following systemic causes, causes which reflect factors affecting many issues for the sector, were identified:
 - *The Workplace-* low compensation due to financial fragility of child care programs; work expectations with increased special needs programming, multitasking, turnover, and more part time children; and few opportunities for advancement, low visibility and low status;
 - *Standards & Recognition-* government and other professions give little authority to practitioners; Lack of a professional infrastructure due to lack of a voice to advocate for the

¹¹ Coffey, C., McCain, M. N., (2002). Commission on Early Learning and Child Care for the City of Toronto: Final Report May 2002.

¹² Coffey, C., McCain, M. N., (2002). Commission on Early Learning and Child Care for the City of Toronto: Final Report May 2002.

¹³ Federal-Provincial-Territorial Council of Ministers on Social Policy Renewal. A National Children's Agenda. May 1999.

¹⁴ Ferguson, E. Editor (2002) *Reflecting on Attracting and Keeping Qualified staff in Child Care*, Halifax: Child Care Connection Nova Scotia. Available at <http://pages.istar.ca/~cccns/index.html>

- sector, need to strengthen the professional association; and absence of a career structure;
- *Societal Attitudes*- devaluation of women's work; devaluing caring work; privatization of the family; and lack of respect for children;
- *Policy Factors*-need for an overall vision for child care; current policy demonstrates a labour market approach, targeted programs, and disparity in eligibility for grants; and regulations on training equivalency dilute training requirements;
- *Training & Education*- low enrolments due to high cost of tuition, status and compensation of practitioners and the screening at the high school level; and the complexity of the curriculum influenced by changes in training regulations and need for more specialized training.
- *Building relationships and working together within the sector*- as we develop our professional organizations, implement standards of practice, apply a code of ethics, and work successfully on various projects, the sector will become more accountable and responsible for high quality care;
- *Increased and sustained government support*- supported by the policy framework of the National Children's Agenda, the Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI), The Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) that invests in programs that increase positive outcomes for children 0-6. Research indicates returns of \$7 for every \$1 spent on High Quality Child Care (Schweinhart & Weikart -1997, Mustard and McCain- 1999). Such returns are not evident in other programs for young children; and
- *Increasing awareness of the value of child care* within and outside the sector.

What a Comprehensive Child Care System that supports High Quality Child Care Looks Like

The policy framework for developing a comprehensive high quality child care system in Nova Scotia

Canadian society has undergone a profound change in recent years, a change that has prompted public officials to pledge their commitment to increasing positive outcomes for children 0-6. As a result, a public policy framework that supports good outcomes for children now exists.

Under the umbrella of the National Children's Agenda¹⁵ and following the basic parameters for improving social programs described in the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA), Canada's First Ministers committed to the Early Childhood Development Initiative¹⁶ (ECDI, 2000), which pledged funding to strengthen early childhood development, learning and care. Building on this commitment, the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services agreed to make additional investments in the specific area of early learning and child care. This was based on the recognition that "quality early learning and child care programs play an important role in promoting the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of young children".¹⁷ The Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care ¹⁸(ELCC) provides the framework for increased funding specifically for "provincially/territorially regulated early learning and child care programs". (ELCC)

Regulation

Two types of regulation are important to ensuring the quality of the care provided: government regulation and sector self-regulation.

- Government regulation is necessary to ensure that children are safe from harm.
- Sector self-regulation supported by government is necessary to ensure that each child receives a level of care and early education that optimizes his or her developmental potential.

¹⁵ < http://socialunion.gc.ca/nca_e.html>

¹⁶ < <http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/common/wnew/document/ecdback.shtm>>

¹⁷ Multilateral Framework Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care. Signed March 13,2003.

¹⁸ http://socialunion.gc.ca/ecd-framework_e.htm

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*Ensuring a
Foundation for
Safe Care and
Quality*

Licensing regulations (legal requirements in order to be licensed to provide child care) help reduce or eliminate three broad areas of risk that threaten children’s health and well-being while they attend child care programs:

- *safety hazards* related to the physical plant and program activities (e.g. fires, building hazards, strangulation related to improper precautions, insufficient staffing and inadequate supervision);
- *health hazards* related to the spread of infectious diseases and environmental risks (e.g. food preparation, body waste handling, medication errors etc.); and
- *developmental impairment hazards* (e.g. failure to provide for growth and well being in the basic spheres of development, under-stimulation etc.).^{19, 20}

The area of “developmental impairment” is relatively new and is based on a growing body of evidence that children’s early year’s experiences have a lifelong impact. Research suggests that 75% of brain development occurs between the ages of birth and five.²¹ Given that so much of an individual’s fundamental social, intellectual and physical development takes place during this period, the quality of early childhood care and education services is especially critical and must be considered in the context of preventing developmental impairment.

*Enhancing the
Quality of Care*

A comprehensive system that supports quality child care defines the role of the licensing professional as involving more than just enforcement of basic safety and hygiene rules that protect children from harm. In a comprehensive system, the licensing professional works with each licensee to optimize the quality of care offered and developmental outcomes achieved in the program or facility. Rather than simply monitoring for compliance, the licensing professional’s role is to facilitate ongoing quality improvements for individual centres, by providing consultation, access to resources and other supports for child care practitioners. Under such a system, licensees are encouraged and supported by the licensing professional to exceed basic compliance standards, thereby creating a system that makes it possible for adequate centres to become good centres, and good centres to become excellent centres.

A comprehensive system that supports quality child care also encourages and supports sector-driven initiatives that facilitate excellence and professionalism among child care practitioners and within child care programs or centres. In such a system, the child care sector develops standards of practice, which are promoted and supported through endorsement and accreditation by professional associations and affiliate groups such as the Canadian Child Care Federation, as well as by post secondary early education and care programs.

*Government’s
Role*

A comprehensive system that supports quality child care requires five things from governments. They are:

- the provision of clear regulations,
- periodic review of these regulations,
- support and training for licensing professionals,
- dedicated funding to licensees, child care associations and post secondary early education and care programs, and
- a willingness to work in partnership with stakeholders in regulated child care (licensing professionals; child care practitioners both as individuals and working together as a sector, and post secondary early childhood care and education programs) to facilitate positive human development outcomes.

19 Stevens, Carolyne.(1996). *Regulating Human Care and Service Programs: Study Guides for Citizens and Advocates Part I: Identifying Agendas*, NARA.

20 Morgan, Gwen, (1996). *Regulation and the Prevention of Harm*, Boston: Centre for Career Development and Education.

21 Childcare Resource and Research Unit. (1999) “Statistics Summary: Canadian Early Childhood Care and Education in the 1990s.” Toronto:CCRU.

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*A Partnership
between the
Child Care
Sector and
Government*

As a signatory to the National Children's Agenda, Social Union Framework Agreement, Early Childhood Development Agreement and Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care, the government of Nova Scotia has committed to improving early childhood outcomes. It has formally recognized the lead role it's regulated child care programs play in this regard. Nova Scotia's child care sector is committed to ensuring that the government of Nova Scotia is able to meet these stated commitments. But, the sector can't do it alone. The time has come for the government of Nova Scotia to demonstrate that it endorsed these agreements in good faith. It can do so by meeting directly with licensees, child care associations and post-secondary early learning and care programs to discuss best practices and create a plan for moving beyond mere regulation to the optimization of the vast human resource potential inherent in our children.

*First Steps
have been
taken by the
Nova Scotia
government*

High quality child care is one important way in which the Government of Nova Scotia can fulfill its commitments to children and families as expressed in the ECDA and ELCC. In support of the Early Childhood Development Agreement, the federal government allocated \$66 million over five years to Nova Scotia for investments in early childhood development programs and services for children from birth to six years of age. One key priority identified for funding action is "stabilizing and enhancing childcare"²². Since 2002, the Nova Scotia government has reported on several initiatives taken to address this priority, including the federally funded stabilization grant, made available to all staff in full-day centres in 2003; a training initiative; grants given to non-profit full and part-day centres; the creation of more subsidized spaces; support of inclusion for special needs; and grants to child development centres²³.

Under the Multilateral Framework Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) the federal government will be providing \$30.497 million, over five years, for the purpose of "promoting early childhood development and supporting parent participation in the paid workforce or training, by improving access to affordable, quality early learning and child care programs and services"²⁴. The provincial government received \$750,000 from the federal government in 2003-2004 and will be receiving \$4.41 million in 2004-2005. Of the 03-04 monies, approximately 57% has been allocated to including children with special needs in child care and 42% to part day recreation equipment & resources grants. Of the 04-05 \$4.41 million, \$900,000 has been allocated to increase parent fee subsidy for regulated child care.

The province of Nova Scotia has taken the first step by recognizing the role quality child care plays in supporting human development. Now is the time to build on that start. The stabilization grant will end in two years, and to date there are no plans for the future of the grant or for staff salaries. Subsidies have not increased in several years despite the rising cost of care. Many child care centres pay the Business Occupancy Tax and all pay the HST. Practical solutions to Nova Scotia's current child care crisis have to be developed in consultation with the child care sector.

*A Balanced
Approach is
Needed*

Nova Scotia will benefit from a comprehensive child care system that will meet the needs of parents for working and training while providing high quality programs for children that will maximize their potential and their contribution to Nova Scotia's social and economic future. The needs of parents and the needs of the child care sector are not in competition. It is essential that initiatives address both the issue of child care for society and the issues of the child care sector. A balance must be struck between these two sets of needs when developing plans to most effectively utilize child care dollars. This balance is fundamental for a plan to be effective in supporting and sustaining a comprehensive system that supports both parents in their child care needs and the child care sector in what they need to provide high quality child care.

²² Nova Scotia's Early Childhood Development Initiative: Annual Report April 2003. Nova Scotia Community Services. Halifax, 2003.

²³ Nova Scotia's Early Childhood Development Initiative: Annual Report April 2003. Nova Scotia Community Services. Halifax, 2003.

²⁴ Early Childhood Development Activities and Expenditures: Government of Canada Report 2002-2003. Government of Canada. Ottawa, 2003.

