

HIGH QUALITY CHILD CARE: A PRE-CONDITION TO EQUALITY OF EMPLOYMENT*

Judith Martin

Si nous voulons voir l'égalité dans l'emploi pour les femmes devenir une réalité pour les mères, un système de garderies de haute qualité, et accessible économiquement, est une condition requise. Cependant, presque rien n'a été fait par les secteurs public et privé pour offrir un tel système d'appui complet pour la famille canadienne d'aujourd'hui – dont 48% se trouveraient en dessous du niveau de la pauvreté, si un des parents quittait son emploi.

Judith Martin, ancienne présidente du Canadian Daycare Advocacy Association (CDCAA), examine les limites des garderies comme service sous-subsventionné, et dont les coûts sont défrayés par l'usager. Elle démontre le besoin pour des mesures alternatives et pour des politiques d'appui aux parents pour faciliter l'adaptation du lieu de travail aux responsabilités parentales. Elle décrit les propositions faites par le CDCAA pour un contrôle fédéral (à la place du contrôle provincial actuel) des garderies et pour la subvention d'un nouveau système de garderies.

In 1982, 53% of mothers with one child aged 3 to 5 were in the paid labour force. In 1983, 53% of families with pre-school children were headed by two wage-earners. These mothers must be able to rely on accessible, affordable, high quality child care if they are to participate fully in the paid labour force.

Canadians need help. They need policies and programs that make it easier to combine the roles of "worker" and "parent." Today's economy (not to defend this economy!) demands two family incomes: Statistics Canada estimates that 48% of two-income families would fall below the poverty line if either parent quit work. Despite this, almost nothing has been done to provide support systems for the modern Canadian family. In all of Canada, only some 150,000 licenced daycare spaces exist. Still less has been done in terms of other parent support policy, such as the provision of days off to care for sick children.

Daycare, a matter of provincial jurisdiction in Canada, can be briefly characterized as a selectively subsidized user-fee service. Each province and territory (except the NWT) has enabling legislation in respect to standards, monitoring, start-up, and sponsorship. Each jurisdiction also has some form of subsidy program which, in accordance with an income or means test, assists selected parents to pay their children's user-fees.

THE USER-FEE APPROACH

Daycare has developed as a selectively subsidized user-fee service in Canada. This approach finds its roots in antiquated thinking which perceived child care as a welfare service for destitute working women.

Today in all Canada the four common problems that plague daycare are: *underfunding*, which makes it difficult for programs to provide care that is of consistently high quality; the *lack of availability* of licenced spaces; the *high cost* of daycare to parents; and daycare's present dependence on *low staff salaries*.

Each of these problems is linked to our use of a selectively subsidized user-fee approach to this vital human service. When a user-fee approach is used, it is market forces that determine the quality of care, rather than the needs and preferences of parents and children. With the market's constant pressure to keep costs down, daycare programs must save where they can. Some survive because of the low rents of church basements; others limit costs by paying minimum wages, or by cutting food or program supplies.

Good daycare is expensive! A stable, high quality, universally accessible program cannot be produced within the limitations of the selectively subsidized user-fee system.

In 1983-84, Ottawa budgeted as much for daycare (\$185 million) as did all the provinces combined (\$190 million). Because Ottawa chooses to spend all its daycare dollars as income assistance for select individual purchasers of daycare, it

is clear that federal spending plays a significant role in entrenching the provinces' user-fee approach to daycare.

Federal spending on daycare occurs through three programs: The Canada Assistance Plan, the Child-Care Tax Deduction, and the Dependent Care Allowance (Canada Employment and Immigration Commission).

The Canada Assistance Plan Act: Paragraph (2)(b) of the Canada Assistance Plan provides for Ottawa to reimburse (with conditions) up to 50% of the province's daycare subsidies for low income Canadians, as well as 50% of any grants the province makes to centres on behalf of low income Canadians. In 1983-84 this program cost Canada \$75 million.

The Child Care Income Tax Deduction: Section 63 of The Income Tax Act allows for employed parents who can produce receipts for child care expenses to deduct from their taxable income up to \$2000 per child or two-thirds of actual earned income, up to a maximum of \$8000 per family. Tax experts estimate that this program will have resulted in a 1983-84 public expenditure of \$100 million. It is not necessary to use licenced care in order to claim this deduction.

CEIC Dependent Care Allowance: Income assistance to low-income purchasers of child care who are participants in CEIC training programs will result in an estimated 1983-84 expenditure of \$10 million. It is not necessary to use licenced care in order to receive this assistance.

Each of these programs supports the user-fee approach to daycare. They put dollars in the pockets of select daycare consumers. CAP assists the poor to compete in the daycare marketplace. This is a form of welfare which rules out many in need of daycare – such as middle-income families, and mothers who, despite higher "family" incomes, have to pay for their children's care out of their personal poverty-level take-home pay.

While CAP assists the poor in the daycare marketplace, the child care tax deduction favours high-income purchasers of child care. According to tax

experts, 50% of the 1983-84 \$100 million price tag of this program will end up in the pockets of families with annual incomes of more than \$45,000. The problem with using a tax deduction mechanism to finance daycare goes far beyond the obvious gross unfairness of where this money now goes. Many who should claim this deduction cannot – because many babysitters refuse to give receipts as they intend not to claim their babysitting wages as income. In 1981, only 5.7% of female tax-filers made use of the child care expenses deduction.

Since the Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association (CDCAA) has publicized the gross unfairness of the child care tax deduction, there have been rumblings about the advantages of financing daycare via a child care tax credit. Although a tax credit – an amount one would subtract from taxes owed – would provide more assistance to lower-income parents, it is merely a more palatable method of continuing to shore up Canada's user-fee approach to daycare. The basic problems with the tax approach to financing daycare persist if either the deduction or credit scheme approach is used, simply because funding by any type of individual transfer program shores up the user-fee approach to daycare.

DAYCARE CANNOT STAND ALONE

Daycare advocates know that an enlightened and flexible response to the crisis of today's family involves a lot more than daycare. In fact, many parents have come to believe that new daycare policy must be supplemented with comprehensive parent support policies. By parent support policies, I mean policies that would assist the workplace to adapt to the parenting responsibilities of many workers. Parents need the right to stay home when children are sick, the right to breast-feed at work, the right to substantial paid parental leaves, the right to "flex-time" options which accommodate the work of parenting, and the right to shorten the workday when children are young, as parents in Sweden are now able to do.

NEED FOR FEDERAL LEADERSHIP

The federal government is now taking some leadership in examining the daycare issue. But it is important that Canadians appearing before the upcoming Parliamentary Task Force do not let the federal government use the argument that daycare is a provincial matter in order to avoid spending more money on this vital service.

Although the CDCAA supports

provincial control of daycare, we have put forth three main arguments in our case for federal leadership. They are:

- *Responsibility for leadership:* Given the determining role current federal spending on daycare plays in defining and entrenching the provinces' user-fee approach to daycare, it clearly behooves the senior government to take initiatives to assist the provinces to go beyond the user-fee system.
- *Constitutional basis for leadership:* Canada has many well-established precedents involving the expansion of the federal "spending" role in order to develop services which fall within the "regulatory" sphere of the provinces – for example, post-secondary education and health care.
- *Regional disparities:* Federalism is intended to provide Canadians with some measure of "equality of services" and "portability of services." The following Table describes disparities across Canada in respect to availability of licenced daycare. Such disparities also exist in the size of user-fee (after subsidy) and quality of service available. Quite clearly, current federal policy does not provide for equality of daycare services across the country.

Number of licensed day care spaces per 1,000 children under age of six, and labour force participation rate for women with at least one child 3-5 years of age for ten provinces, 1982.

	NFLD.	N.B.	N.S.	P.E.I.	QUE.	ONT.	MAN.	SASK.	ALTA.	B.C.
number of licensed day care spaces per 1,000 children under age 6 (1982)	9	36	54	40	43	66	84	31	78	69
labour force participation rate of women with at least one child 3-5 years (Statistics Canada – 1982)	43.9%	42.3%	49.3% (0-5 years)	51%	44.4%	59.8%	63.5%	54.8%	59.1%	55%

CDCAA PROPOSAL: FUNDING FOR A NEW DAYCARE SYSTEM

In order to provide for the development of a system of affordable, universally accessible high quality child care, the CDCAA proposes that new federal daycare policies based on the following goals be developed:

- *Equality and universality:* All children, regardless of the income level of their parents, must have equal access to high quality services, programs, and benefits.

- *High quality service:* Because the quality of nurturing during the early years of a child's life is a key factor in determining the overall quality and character of one's life, it is crucial that daycare be of high quality, in that it should conform to the standards and expectations of child development research.
- *Availability of service:* All Canadian parents ought to have the option of using a range of high quality licenced child care services. Any proposals for new daycare policy

ought to provide for a mechanism ensuring the development of new daycare spaces in Canada.

- *Building a financial and institutional infra-structure across the country:* We need a federal vision that foresees a Canada dotted with a great variety of child care centres and child care support services. This means that we must commit ourselves to funding daycare, not on the basis of transfer of dollars to individuals, but rather on the basis of policies that will develop a range of flexible

institutions to meet the child care needs of Canadians.

- *Public accountability:* Public funds should be dispersed in a way that allows for us to measure and account for the kind of service tax dollars are used to provide.
- *Parent-user control:* The CDCAA believes that, within the confines of provincial regulations, individual daycare centres should be controlled by parent-users. By this we mean that centres should be governed by elected boards of directors or other governing bodies, of which at least 51% are parent-users. (This does not detract from the involvement of community organizations and non-user professionals.)
- *Involvement of caregivers in the running of daycare services:* Wherever appropriate and desired by caregivers and parents, worker involvement should be encouraged in the running of centres.
- *Daycare as a non-profit service:* The CDCAA believes Canada should evolve towards a system of non-profit daycare.
- *Decent returns for those involved in the delivery and provision of services:* Child

care policy must recognize the value and worth, in monetary terms, of child care workers and providers.

In order to implement these national goals, the CDCAA is proposing a Federal Child Care Financing Act which, over a period of 10 years, would phase in new federal and provincial funding mechanisms, so that by 1996 Canada would have in place a system of high quality, flexible child care services which would be available to all children. This proposed system would also be universally funded, so that the parent-user fee would be reduced to a minimal amount (10-15%), as is the case in countries such as Sweden.

Clearly, this proposal is both visionary and practical.

This fall is seeing the establishment of a Parliamentary Task Force on Child Care which is holding public hearings in each province and territory. Participation by all groups, especially women's groups, is essential. The failure of progressive groups to speak out at this time will most likely result in the further entrenchment of Canada's user-fee daycare system, which stands as one of the greatest barriers to equality for women. For more information on how to participate, contact:

The Canadian Day Care
Advocacy Association
323 Chapel Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7Z2
(613) 594-3196

FURTHER READING

Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association. *Beginning to Solve Canada's Day Care Crisis: Short-term and Long-term Proposals*. A brief submitted to the Commission of Inquiry on the Equality of Employment, November 1983.

Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association. *New Federal Policy - Fact Sheets on Child Care in Canada*. June 1985.

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Illustration by Jane Northey

Tales of Three Mothers

Mothers have been employed forever, and forever they have agonized over what happens to their children when they are not able to care for them.

In 1985, mothers continue to agonize. But there is a difference. Today more women are making connections – connections between the plight of their children and the backwardness of this society.

Brenda: With her first-born, a 5½-month-old boy in her arms, just dropped in to say that she, a very traditional woman, had been searching for care for her baby and was totally undone by feelings of hurt and betrayal.

Why betrayal? Well, she had really gotten into mothering – did all the good things: quit smoking while pregnant, didn't drink, exercised, ate well, breast-fed – did it all and loved her baby boy.

"But how," she asked, tears in her eyes, "How can I leave him with someone I don't know – someone I got through the classifieds? He can't talk – I don't know what his day will be like – I can't do it, but my leave is up."

(In Canada there are licensed day care spaces for about 10% of children under two years of age whose parents – or single parents – are in the paid labour force full-time or more than half-time.)

Gloria: A mother of a four-year-old in licensed care (with a child staff ratio of 9:1) recently boiled over when she thought about her child's needs in light of her daily experience as an employment counsellor.

"They talk about responsible government. That's a laugh! On one hand, I see my child in need of more attention, more adult contact; and on the other hand, I see thousands of people begging for a job – with no hope of getting a first job."

June: A Toronto nurse, who always thought good day care was simply a matter of having enough money, recently shared a conversation she overheard in the hospital. Apparently, a three-year-old had fallen while in the care of a woman who was struggling on her own with nine others.

This care was cheaper than a licensed centre, and the mother was overheard to say to her husband: "If you'd stop smoking, we could use the extra \$80 a month for the centre I want for him."

June said it chilled her. Why should the quality of an innocent child's care depend on whether his father smokes or not? She concluded: "We need the centres, high quality and all – not the money being given out to the parents."

NEVER HAD AN ANNIVERSARY

(for *Marvyne*)

You never had an anniversary
to celebrate the salt and sugar
of societies' legal ties,
no one craves the same diet forever;
soup 'n salad, oil & vinegar, sweet and sour,
so the menu changes

for you
relationships were always more
honestly negotiated
using feelings and attractions
not property and titles
to bind your days with formality

your heart ignoring
practicalities of proven recipes
letting you taste
a variety of experiments

yet sometimes the ingredients
burst into mouth-watering
passion fruit.

Bernice Lever
Richmond Hill, Ontario