



POLICY GUIDE

Early Childhood Care and Education

Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women
P.O. Box 2000
Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island C1A 7N8
902-368-4510 (telephone) 902-368-4516 (facsimile)
peiacs@isn.net (e-mail)
www.gov.pe.ca/acs (website)

At Issue ...

When a woman becomes a mother, she typically assumes the role as her child's primary caregiver. She is also likely to have additional work and/or study responsibilities. That is especially true here on Prince Edward Island where Statistics Canada reports that 83% of all mothers of young children participate in the paid workforce - about 20% more than the Canadian average.

When a mother is carrying out her other duties, someone else needs to look after her child. And, even if a woman works at home most of the time, she cannot provide all the care that her children require all the time nor can she meet all her children's developmental needs on her own.

Although many fathers may have increased their contributions to children's early care and learning, it is still true that, upon becoming a parent, they do not experience comparable demands on their time, energy, and resources. Because of this inequity, all women need to be supported as they provide care, stimulate children's learning, and contribute to society in their own right. The inequity deepens when we move beyond thinking about women's role as unpaid

caregivers and we consider the women who care for and educate other people's young children as their paid profession. Our Island community does not reward their work with respect or financial remuneration.

Here, where children are more likely to receive unregulated care from women in their own homes, this service is provided on an ad-hoc basis, likely for low wages and certainly without job security or benefits. And, in the regulated sector, trained early childhood educators find it difficult to pursue their chosen careers as they are unable to command adequate wages or acceptable working conditions in the market-driven system.

On both fronts - as consumers and providers of early childhood care and education services - women are faced with barriers to their equality and to their full and active participation in society.

What could help change this situation and move women towards a more equitable state? We desperately need a national early childhood care and education system. As the federal government begins to work towards that goal, the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women is working to inform and advocate on this issue at the provincial level.

Our Analysis ...

Invisible What is the current status of early childhood care and education services?

E. Elaine Ferguson from Nova Scotia's advocacy organization, Child Care Connections, puts it this way: "*Child care practitioners, their work, and its effects on society are invisible to most people. The majority of society does not see child care. Generally, its existence is not acknowledged as a crucial public service.*"

Ms. Ferguson explains, "*The nature of child care work, that is, caring and nurturing, affects its visibility. Skills, knowledge, and abilities that make this work effective are traditionally considered private skills that come naturally to women.*"

That description fits PEI. Here, women have quietly worked together for the past thirty years to develop formal and informal child care and education systems that have never received great public interest or support. These women have persisted in their work without fanfare, recognition, rewards, or political voices.

They have paid an enormous cost in terms of time, energy, and lost income as they have worked to care for children and keep our society and our economy functioning. They and their work must be acknowledged. They must become visible.

In March 2003, the Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services (except for Quebec) took a step towards making child care and education a more public issue when they signed the *Multilateral Framework and Early Learning and Child Care*.

This framework is meant to improve access to regulated early learning and child care programs and services across the country. This first step towards a national, universal child care and education program named five principles vital to meeting the overall goal. The signatories have affirmed that child care and education services need to be 1) available and accessible, 2) affordable, 3) quality, 4) inclusive, and 5) supportive of parental choice.

What do those principles mean here on PEI?

Available and Accessible "*Flexible and responsive early learning and child care options should be broadly available to promote early childhood development and to support parents to participate in employment or training.*"

At present, regulated child care is available all across the province in 135 licensed programs that offer any or all of these services: day care for pre-school children, school-age care, a nursery school program for three and four-year olds, and/or a half-day kindergarten program for five-year olds.

The majority of PEI children, though, are cared for in non-licensed settings, either at home or in the home of a relative or neighbour. This is a private arrangement negotiated between the provider and the parent.

Non-licensed care may meet the needs of the child and parents, but it operates without program support from the Department of Health and Social Services that is designed to help licensed programs continually improve their ability to nurture and stimulate children's development in a quality environment. It may be quality care but that is unknown.

Our Analysis ... (continued)

Some child care advocates advise that, to make child care completely available and accessible, government needs to work towards providing a licensed space for every child. From this perspective, PEI has some work to do.

Additional spaces are needed all across PEI, and the need is very urgent in rural areas. In 1990, the study, "*A Report on Rural Child Care Needs in PEI - Rural Child Care in Other Provinces - Feasibility Studies on Two Types of Rural Child Care*" outlined the need for flexibility in rural child care. Not much has changed since then.

In season, rural workers still need to work overtime and irregular hours and, out of season, they still require only occasional care. All across the province, non-traditional workers such as shift workers and part-time workers require similar levels of flexibility. As well, mothers of very young children are looking for good infant care.

Licensed centres have not been able to meet these costly demands, therefore mothers have turned to private providers who can. It is possible, though, that all other things being equal, mothers might choose licensed care. In the rural study, for example, the majority of mothers said it was important to them to have their children cared for in a licensed facility, even though a minority had actually enrolled their children in such a facility. It is important to remember that licensed care does not necessarily have to take place in large group settings. Home care settings can also be part of licensing programs.

All in all, the current scenario is not helping Island women attain long-term economic

security. In the rural study, seasonal workers reported that they had to pay all or most of their earnings to the child care provider, benefiting only from Employment Insurance payments during the off-season. And, some reported that they were not able to receive the receipt required to claim income tax deductions. That is an economic loss to the mother and it means that the provider is ineligible for benefits, not contributing to the Canada Pension Plan, and not contributing to governments' tax revenues.

The kindergarten program has just become more available and accessible. Until September 2000, child care centres had offered private kindergarten programs to paying parents. Now, the program is offered free of charge to all five-year olds at community-based child care centres and 97% of the Island's five-year olds participate, up from the previous enrollment of 85%.

The provincial government pays a monthly fee to the centre, based on its enrollment, to cover program and staffing costs. This is different than any other system in Canada. Elsewhere, the kindergarten program is part of the regular education system. On PEI, children receive their care and their education at the same site for the entire day, Early childhood educators teach the program, and parents are responsible for transporting their children to the program.

Transportation may still limit access due to cost and distance. Some kindergarten students travel on the school bus, but that can present concerns due to the child's age and the distance travelled. Financial support for and innovative approaches to transportation could eliminate this final access issue.

Here on Prince Edward Island ...

Here is a brief history of regulated early childhood care and education on PEI:

1960s	Women begin joining the paid workforce in greater numbers.
1970s and 1980s	Government and early childhood sector develop policy and regulatory frameworks.
1990s	System in place but with shrinking public investment.
2000	Children's issues become part of government agendas. PEI signs <i>National Children's Agenda</i> and <i>Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI)</i> . Launches <i>Healthy Child Development Strategy</i> . Universal kindergarten program begins.
2003	Signs the <i>Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care</i> . PEI will receive \$100,000 the first year with increments over the next four years in order to improve access to regulated child care.

There is no reliable information about unregulated child care on PEI, but in 2002 the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA), a group that advocates for the regulated sector, presented this information:

- There were 135 licensed programs in the province.
- There were about 4000 child care and early childhood education spaces.
- The centres employed 400 staff, almost exclusively women.

The ECDA also reports that the sector generates about \$22 million annually. Here is the latest revenue breakdown:

- Parents pay \$16 million or a little over 75% of all revenue.
- The provincial government contributes the remainder of the revenue through a subsidy program (\$2.2 million) that assists parents who cannot afford the whole fee, special needs grants (\$530,000) to assist children who require special supports, operating grants to certain centres (\$300,000), and a universal kindergarten program (\$2.5 million).

The ECDA also reports that owners and operators (mostly women) cannot afford to offer decent wages and working conditions to early childhood educators (mostly women). A quarter of early childhood educators are the sole income earners in their households and half of them have children.

- 38% make less than \$8/hour.
- 55% have no paid sick leave.
- 77% do not get paid for overtime.
- 89% have no health or dental insurance.
- 94% have no RRSP or pension plan.

Almost 40% of all women interviewed said that, if they could choose again, they would pursue another, better paying career.

Across Canada ...

History of Broken Promises

Every federal government for the past thirty years has promised a national child care program and has failed to deliver. In 1991, Canada signed the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children*. According to Article 18 of the *Convention*, the government committed itself to “take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.” Over a decade later, the Canadian Child Care Advocacy Association writes, “Only one in ten children have access to a regulated child space in Canada. And, there is no comprehensive child care policy or system to speak of. This means that access to child care in Canada varies, depending upon where you live and how much money you have.”

Early Childhood Development Initiative

In September 2000, all First Ministers in provinces except Quebec signed the *ECDI*. This was a five-year \$2.2 billion funding agreement designed to allow provinces to introduce, improve, and/or expand early childhood development programs and services.

The initiative did not specify that the funds needed to be put directly into child care services. The ECDA reports that this is how PEI spent its allocation of about \$1.2 million in 2001-2002:

- early childhood, development, learning, and care (\$500,000 or 37.6%)
- parenting and family supports (\$720,000)
- community supports (\$110,000)

The other three Atlantic provinces have allocated between 43% and 66% of *ECDI* dollars to the early childhood education and care sector.

Why Didn't Quebec Sign?

Quebec didn't sign the *ECDI* because it already offers something better. In 1997, Quebec introduced subsidized child care at \$5 / day for all families with young children, regardless of income. While the program has had growing pains, the consensus in Quebec appears to be that the government has taken the right action.

National Liberal Caucus Social Policy Committee Recommendations

In 2002, this committee recommended a total of \$10.9 billion in spending over four years to be allocated specifically for supporting the expansion and operations of regulated child care for children under six.

Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care

Instead, the federal government allocated only \$900 million over five years for child care and education programs, with an additional \$35 million for specific Aboriginal programs. This happened despite the fact that a poll conducted by the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada and the Canadian Child Care Federation showed that 90% of Canadians agree with the statement: “I believe government could do more to ensure that all Canadians have access to quality child care.”

Our Analysis ... (continued)

Affordable “Early learning and child care services should be affordable.”

A 1999 University of Toronto study, *Canadian Early Childhood Care and Education in the 1990s*, reports that PEI parents pay the lowest child care fees in the country, but they are paying a much higher percentage of the total cost of providing services - about 30% more than the national average. With lower than average incomes, PEI parents are struggling to pay owners/operators what they require to meet their financial commitments. Paying fees can be particularly difficult for single mothers who, according to the research institute, GPI Atlantic, spend about three times more of their income on paid child care than mothers with partners.

The Province of PEI works to address this concern through a fee subsidy program that is widely used. The ECDA reports that almost all programs have at least one child who is subsidized and over half of all programs have at least half of their children subsidized. Although the income level required for eligibility increased throughout the 1990s, the University of Toronto study reports that, as of 1998, it was the second lowest in the country and that PEI was subsidizing fewer children than it did in the early 1990s.

Increasing fee subsidies would go a long way towards improving women’s status in society while removing barriers to employment and training and creating increased economic security. And, it would have benefits for governments through increased economic activity and decreased social spending.

Quality “Early learning and child care should be of high quality to support optimal child development.”

Giving quality care means helping children meet their developmental outcomes. Such important work requires a solid infrastructure consisting of qualified early childhood educators and safe and healthy learning environments.

Qualified early childhood educators complete at least two years of post-secondary training and, to maintain their certification, they are required to continue their training throughout their career. In return, they receive a median wage of \$8 per hour.

With such a low return, more and more women are choosing to leave the field. When there are shortages, centres must hire workers with no training in early childhood education and these women receive a median wage of \$7 per hour.

Where there is public investment, there are wage increases. For example, early childhood educators who teach kindergarten have a median wage of \$10 per hour while those who teach special needs children have a median wage of \$9 per hour.

But, no matter what their teaching assignment may be, few early childhood educators receive such basic benefits as paid overtime or paid sick leave, let alone health insurance or pension contributions. A career in early childhood care and education usually means a lifetime of financial sacrifice for the women involved.

Our Analysis ... (continued)

At present, certain centres receive operating grants to help pay salaries and maintain facilities. This system of grants must be reviewed and expanded so that all early childhood educators get paid fairly and that all centres maintain health and safety. The ECDA also recommends that the *Child Care Facilities Act and Regulations* be updated and that the Department of Health and Social Services increase its staff to support the work required to maintain quality and provide continuing education.

Inclusive “Early learning and child care should be inclusive of, and responsive to, the needs of children with differing abilities; Aboriginal children; and children in various cultural and linguistic circumstances.”

The most effective means of having an inclusive child care and education system is to make it a universal one - accessible to everyone, regardless of income, location, disability, or cultural background. Within a universal program, government can provide special assistance to ensure that particular needs are met.

Right now, PEI’s early childhood centres are having difficulty including everyone. While they have a high population of special needs children and do receive funding for special programming, they report that it is more and more difficult to recruit and retain the qualified staff required to meet those needs. There may also be unmet needs for Aboriginal children and the children of newcomers. The sector needs the support of basic operating grants combined with special funding to meet children’s particular needs.

Parental Choice “Early learning and child care services should provide the flexibility to respond to the varying needs and preferences of parents and children.”

PEI has a variety of families - two-parent families, lone-parent families, families with same-sex parents. Mothers, the primary caregivers, have a variety of work experiences - full-time paid work, part-time paid work, contract work, seasonal work, and work in the home.

In order to support these diverse family scenarios, a continuum of care is required in Island communities. This continuum could include group programs, day programs, drop-in programs, home child care programs, short-term child care, information, family resource, integration of children with special needs, consulting services, referrals, parent education, and provider education.

While Canada works towards catching up with the rest of the industrialized world by developing policies to support child care and to provide adequate parental benefits, PEI communities could use support in developing a comprehensive child care system that will respect the rights of the child and the rights of the parent and the providers. Such a system would result in increased equality for women and social and economic benefits for all Islanders.

The PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women is an arms-length government agency that works for equality and supports women’s full and active participation in social, legal, cultural, economic, and political spheres of life.

Our Recommendations ...

To make the early childhood care and education sector visible:

- Provide the Early Childhood Development Association with the resources required to provide leadership and support to the sector and to work collaboratively with government.
- In collaboration with the Early Childhood Development Association, initiate a public information and awareness program on the value of early childhood care and education.

To make early childhood care and education services available and accessible:

- Provide financial and training incentives for more licensed child care spaces, including home care spaces.
- Provide financial support to licensed programs that provide flexible care options.
- Provide financial support so that kindergarten programs can provide transportation.

To make early childhood care and education services affordable:

- Review and increase parent subsidies.
- Continue to work with the federal government towards the goal of a universal national program.

To improve the quality of early childhood care and education services:

- Review and increase operating grants to programs for wage enhancement and to maintain health and safety standards.
- Provide the Early Childhood Development Association with the resources required to offer continuing education opportunities.
- Update the *Child Care Facilities Act and Regulations*.
- Increase provincial government staffing to support quality initiatives.

To make early childhood care and education services more inclusive:

- In addition to basic operating grants, provide early childhood care and education centres with financial support for programs in rural areas, to provide programming for special needs children, and to offer culturally supportive programs.
- Offer support to Aboriginal communities in developing and delivering licensed care.

To provide for parent choice in early childhood care and education services:

- Support communities in developing a continuum of care that supports children's rights, parents' rights, and the rights of early childhood educators.

Backgrounder

Early Childhood Care and Education

Why is the Advisory Council on the Status of Women concerned about child care as an equality issue? Aren't both parents equally responsible for their children?

That is true. But, historically, gender has determined how parents fulfill that responsibility. Women have been the caregivers and men have been the providers.

Now, even though our reality has changed so that society sees women as providers, too, we are still less likely to expect men to be caregivers.

Therefore, when a woman becomes a parent, she takes on a set of responsibilities that are quite different than those of her partner.



How does that play out in real life? Here is an illustration from an Island household:

When the baby turns one next month, Cathy will return to her job as an administrative assistant in a busy office. It was tough to make ends meet on her reduced income during maternity and parental leave, but Cathy felt strongly about being with the baby through the first year of development.

Cathy chose to breastfeed and got support in that choice from her pre-natal program and through a parent education and support group at the family resource centre. Cathy also used the centre's resources to learn about her child's developmental needs and worked to stimulate the baby's learning and growth.

During that year, she also did household work, including cleaning, cooking, maintenance, and budgeting. Her partner is a carpenter who works long, irregular hours. He enjoyed having Cathy at home for that year, especially having meals ready and having the house clean. He spent time with her and the baby whenever he wasn't at work and learned from Cathy how to change and feed the baby.

Backgrounder

Early Childhood Care and Education

Although she would like to spend one more year at home with her child, Cathy knows that she cannot afford to do so and that she would likely lose her job if she asked for another leave of absence. For the past few months, she has been searching high and low for a reliable caregiver. She would prefer a licensed setting with an established reputation, good facilities, and qualified workers, but cannot find such a service within a half hour drive from her home that has space for children under age two.

She was getting desperate when, through word of mouth, she learned about a woman in the neighbouring community who takes children into her own home Monday to Friday from 8:30 - 5:00 sharp. Cathy worries about being able to fit her work into those hours. Sometimes, she needs to do overtime without any notice and, because of her partner's irregular work hours, she will have to find a neighbour or friend to provide back-up if she cannot pick up the baby at 5:00.

Fortunately, she feels comfortable with the caregiver. She has visited the home and has talked to other parents and has received positive reports on the care provided. There are financial worries, though. Her partner pays their mortgage and for his truck. She is responsible for her car, utilities, groceries, and child care. She has done the math and has learned that she will just barely be able to meet those expenses after she pays for child care. As well, she has learned that the caregiver does not provide receipts and, therefore, Cathy will be unable to claim those expenses on her tax return.

She wants to be a mother and a worker, though, and even the little bit of money left after paying for child care makes a difference in how she feels about herself and her contribution to the household and to the world.

Cathy and Bob are parents to the same child, but their outlook on parenting and their related responsibilities are worlds apart. Things are slowly changing, but it is still true that women are the primary caregivers. At the same time, they are income earners. That is true - with or without a partner. For the sake of fairness, women need support in both roles and it is a public responsibility to provide support through a continuum of early childhood care and education services.

Fact Sheets

Early Childhood Care and Education

The numbers presented in this table illustrate these facts about delivering child care on PEI:

- Although PEI parents generally pay lower fees than other Canadians, they contribute a greater proportion of the total revenue than parents in other jurisdictions.
- The percentage of revenue generated by public funds is much lower in PEI compared to the national average.
- Almost every child care centre has parents who have low incomes. That is true in PEI and across Canada.
- Island child care centres find it difficult to hire substitutes, but the situation is even more dire elsewhere in Canada.
- The vacancy rate indicates that demand for licensed child care is about the same in PEI compared to the national average.

Program Information	PEI	CANADA
% of funding from parent fees	80% of total cost	49.2% of total cost
Fees (median)	\$360/month	\$450/month
% of revenue from subsidies	10%	30.5%
% of revenue from special needs grants	2.5%	17.5%
% of revenue from operating grants	1.2%	9.5%
% of revenue from salary enhancement grants	1.2%	5.9%
% of centres with subsidized children	91%	93.5%
% of centres who have trouble getting substitutes	46%	85%
Vacancy rate	23.2%	20%

Sources:

"For Our Educators - A Study of the Early Childhood Sector Summary Report," Early Childhood Development Association of PEI, 2002.

"Canadian Early Childhood Care and Education in the 1990s," Child Care Resource and Research Unit, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, 1999.

"You Bet I Care," University of Guelph, 1998.

Fact Sheet

Early Childhood Care and Education

A recent study called the early childhood sector on PEI “fragile.” Here are some contributing factors:

- The percentage of certified educators is about 10% lower than the national average.
- Compared to educators across Canada, PEI’s workers have very few benefits.
- A slightly higher percentage of Island educators hold a second job.
- There are no unionized early child care educators on PEI.
- PEI’s staff turnover rate is about twice the national average.
- Island educators have actually lost purchasing power over the last few years.

Despite these circumstances, Island educators participate in professional development at higher rates than their colleagues elsewhere in Canada. However, if given a second chance, about 40% of all educators would choose a different profession.

Early Childhood Educator Information	PEI	Canada
% of staff who are certified	60%	70.8%
% of staff with paid sick days	45%	74%
% of staff with extended health care benefits	11%	58%
% of staff with disability insurance	7%	48%
% of staff with RRSP or pension contributions	6%	25%
% of staff with other paid work	21%	17.8%
# of centres with unionized staff	0%	13.4%
Turnover rate	42%	21.7%
Purchasing power	down 3.1%	*same or down
% of staff who participated in professional development	92.4%	76.2%
% of staff who would choose a different profession	35 - 40%	44.4%

* Purchasing power was up in BC and Saskatchewan, two provinces with wage enhancement programs.

Sources: “For Our Educators - A Study of the Early Childhood Sector Summary Report,” Early Childhood Development Association of PEI, 2002.
 “You Bet I Care,” University of Guelph, 1998.

Fact Sheet

Early Childhood Care and Education

There are certain pieces of information that indicate that the need to improve access to child care is particularly acute on PEI:

- Over 20% more mothers of pre-schoolers are part of the paid workforce in PEI.
- A higher proportion of those workers are involved in seasonal work that requires flexible approaches to child care.
- A higher percentage of Island children receive non-parental care than children in the rest of the country.
- Like the rest of the country, the most popular type of care is non-regulated care with non-relatives at home but a higher percentage of children on PEI receive care with non-relatives outside the home.

Demographic Information	PEI	CANADA
Labour force participation rate for mothers of pre-schoolers	83%	61%
% of population employed in agriculture	8%	3%
Number of children under six	11,000	2.4 million
% of children in non-parental care	63.6%	48.4%
% of children in informal, non-regulated arrangements with non-relatives at home	15.8%	15.8%
% of children in informal, non-regulated arrangements with non-relatives outside the home	7.1%	5.2%

Sources: "For Our Educators - A Study of the Early Childhood Sector Summary Report," Early Childhood Development Association of PEI, 2002.
"Caring About Quality," Child Care Connections, Doherty, Dr. Gillian, 2001.
"Understanding the Early Years - Early Childhood Development on PEI," Human Resources Development Canada, 2001.
"Understanding the Early Years - Results of the Community Mapping Study on Prince Edward Island," Human Resources Development Canada, 2001.
"Are We There Yet?," Transitions, Krashinsky, Dr. Michael, 2002.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Early Childhood Care and Education

Q Why is early childhood care and education an equality issue?

A One can argue for better access to early childhood care and education from a variety of perspectives.

Child advocates think about children's developmental needs and the rights of children to receive quality care in order to meet those needs. Economists argue for early childhood service as a vital piece of societal infrastructure that invites people to work and helps the economy grow.

A women's equality perspective acknowledges that women are the primary caregivers of children and emphasizes the need for quality, regulated service as a means to support women in that role and in their other roles as employees, students, managers, business owners - whatever an individual woman may choose.

As long as women are not as free as men to pursue work/study goals along with parenting, then they cannot be called "equal."

At the same time, children will not get the kind of service that will nurture them and stimulate their learning and the economy will not benefit from a fully engaged, productive workforce.

This is also an equality issue when we consider the plight of early childhood educators, mostly women, who care for children and help them learn - all within a shaky set of working conditions that cannot be tolerated much longer.

While governments have moved to adopt a children's agenda - championing children's rights to healthy development - they have not been as quick to champion the rights of the women who

support that development.

Early childhood educators working in both regulated and unregulated settings are the working poor, even though they do what is often called the most important job in society.

Q Why are early childhood educators so under-paid and under-valued?

A This situation likely grew out of a tradition that named child care as "women's work," something that came naturally to women, did not require significant skill or energy, and was not paid.

It is true that for most of history, women worked at home and cared for children and never got paid. When women started joining the paid workforce in greater numbers about thirty years ago, they added their paid responsibilities to their caregiving tradition without any significant shift in society's perceptions of the nature and value of caregiving.

As regulated child care systems developed, workers never gained much in terms of status because of the perception that any woman could do their work. After all, someone had once done it for free. How valuable could it be?

One also has to wonder whether there is still resistance to the idea of women taking equal roles in all spheres of society. Otherwise, wouldn't society support them as fully as possible in a basic and crucial need like child care? And, wouldn't society demand that women who meet the need for care receive fair compensation?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Early Childhood Care and Education

Q What's the difference between regulated and unregulated child care?

A Regulated care refers to child care programs that are licensed by the Province of PEI. As licensed programs, they are required to meet certain standards. For example, they have particular staff:child ratios and certain education requirements for staff. These regulations are enforced by the Child Care Facilities Board.

Regulated programs receive ongoing support from the Department of Health and Social Services in developing and maintaining the quality of their learning environments and learning approaches. As well, low income parents who access regulated programs may be eligible for fee subsidies to help with child care costs and certain regulated programs receive operating grants.

Unregulated caregivers offer a private service negotiated with the parent. These caregivers do not have access to ongoing program support, fee subsidy payments, or operating grants. Unregulated care is usually offered in a private home, often while a woman cares for her own children in the home.

Q Is unregulated care bad care? Unsafe for children? Wrong for caregivers?

A Not necessarily. The only thing that can accurately be said about unregulated care is that the public doesn't know whether it's good care or bad care. Many parents and children may be very satisfied with the service they receive.

Others may feel that it is the only option that they can afford and access, given the money they earn and where they live.

Some caregivers have reported that providing care in their own homes is the only way that they can afford to care for their own children. Some say that the income is very unstable.

Keeping care hidden makes it difficult to address access issues for parents and employment issues for caregivers.

Regulated care doesn't mean institutionalized care. Home child care programs can also be regulated and, thus, receive public support and become more visible.

Q Isn't caregiving a parental responsibility? Why should government be involved?

A Yes, parents have primary responsibility for their children but, increasingly, it is becoming obvious that children's optimal development depends on the entire community.

For example, in a study sponsored by Human Resources Development Canada called *Understanding the Early Years - Early Childhood Development on PEI*, results showed that PEI children were doing well and that the support within PEI communities played a big part in their development.

It is the combination of parents, community, and public investment that helps children grow and learn.

Looking at the issue from a purely economic

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Early Childhood Care and Education

perspective, it is true that governments make significant investments in the economy in many ways. For example, they maintain transportation systems, provide financial incentives to businesses, and invest in training and education. Providing quality child care services is just as much a public responsibility as any of those other activities.

Q **Aren't governments already doing work in this area? I keep hearing announcements about early childhood services and programs.**

A That's right. There has been some action lately, both provincially and federally.

Child care is a provincial responsibility and, over the past thirty years, a lot of work has been done to develop appropriate programs. Here on PEI, the provincial government and the early childhood sector developed policy and regulatory frameworks throughout the 1970s and 1980s and, by the 1990s, a system - underfunded and incomplete as it might be - was in place and ready for fine-tuning and expansion.

Unfortunately, at the same time, budget cutting began and there were no opportunities for new investment in the sector. For the past decade, women in the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors have worked to maintain quality service, despite that lack of investment.

Back in 1970, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women recommended that the federal government create a national child care program to be offered in all provinces and territories.

Since then, every federal government has

promised to implement such a program and, to date, every government failed to deliver on that promise.

In the late 1990s, children's issues became part of government agendas. In 2000, Prince Edward Island signed the *National Children's Agenda* and the *Early Childhood Development Initiative* and launched its own *Healthy Child Development Strategy* that included delivering a universal kindergarten program.

The *Early Childhood Development Initiative* was a disappointment to many child care advocates. Dollars allocated to the provinces through this agreement did not necessarily have to go to child care and education. And, in fact, here on PEI, 37.6% of those funds were directed towards that purpose compared to between 43% and 66% in other Atlantic provinces.

The most recent announcement was the signing of the *Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care*. This framework allocates \$935 million over five years for child care and education programs.

PEI will receive \$100,000 in the first year with increments over the next four years in order to improve access to regulated child care.

A lot of child care advocates are hailing this as a "good start," noting that it would take a much higher level of investment in order to develop a truly universal program.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Early Childhood Care and Education

Q What do you mean by “universal program?”

A For a program to be considered universal, all parents would have equal access to quality child care and education, regardless of income, geographic location, family type, or any other factor.

Other Western nations besides Canada offer such programs. Governments such as those in France, Germany, and Sweden view child care as a necessary part of societal infrastructure and allocate about 1% of their country’s Gross Domestic Product for that purpose.

The closest thing to universal programming here in Canada is offered in Quebec where, for \$5/day/child, parents can send their children to provincially subsidized community-based child care centres. That provincial government has chosen to forge ahead without a federal commitment.



Reports from Quebec indicate that things are far from perfect with the current system. In some respects, it is growing too rapidly, placing great demands on early childhood educators to provide service within this new structure.

Some parents would argue that it is not growing fast enough as it can be difficult to find spaces at provincially subsidized centres.

Lately, the newly elected provincial government has indicated that it may make some changes to this system.

Q You keep mentioning the word “quality.” What does quality mean in relation to child care and education?

A Caring for children means more than protecting their health and safety. It means being able to provide valuable learning experiences that promote children’s physical, emotional, spiritual, social, language, and intellectual development.

Research is showing that the most crucial years for learning are the pre-school years when the child’s brain is growing and developing. Those are the years when nurturing and appropriate stimulation will reap long-term benefits as children develop self-worth, self-confidence, and a host of new skills that will serve them for a lifetime.

Right now, a lot of Island child care programs are providing this type of environment. There is a culture of quality here on PEI.

A recently developed project that uses an internationally recognized evaluation and learning tool to help child care programs assess and improve what they offer shows that Island programs are doing well. But, the long term stability of this quality care may be at risk as owner/operators of programs find it increasingly difficult to meet the basic infrastructure costs, including staff, facilities, and continuing education.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Early Childhood Care and Education

Q How much money would it take to provide a national, universal, quality program?

A Two researchers, Dr. Gordon Cleveland and Dr. Michael Krashinsky, explored this question in a 1998 report, *The Benefits and Costs of Good Child Care*. They concluded that a national, universal, quality program would cost about \$5.3 billion annually, or less than 1% of Canada's annual Gross Domestic Product. And, they demonstrated that, for every dollar invested in high quality child care, there would be a \$2.00 benefit for a total benefit of \$10.54 billion.

Q How would providing child care result in economic gain?

A The researchers suggest there would be gains derived from child development benefits and parental employment benefits.

They present research showing that, regardless of socio-economic background, children who participate in early childhood education perform significantly better in school than those who do not participate.

High risk children who participate in pre-school programs are far more likely to complete high school, go on to post-secondary studies, and be gainfully employed and less likely to commit a crime or require public assistance than their counterparts who did not participate in such programs. An investment in the early years will pay off as the child develops and grows into a healthy, functioning adult.

Having access to quality, affordable care would mean increased workforce participation by single mothers and women from two-parent families. The researchers found that, if child care costs were fully subsidized, the rate of full-time employment for mothers would increase by about 20% nationally.

At the same time, public investment in high quality early childhood care and education would create 170,000 new jobs for Canadian child care workers in the regulated sector while eliminating 250,000 jobs in the unregulated sector. While the net effect on employment would be negative, the new jobs would be better ones with increased pay and benefits.

Both of these changes would mean that there would be lower social spending on children and families and higher tax revenue for the government.

Q Is this all about money? What about parent-child relationships?

A This is all about choices, not about money. The changes being suggested simply reflect the realities of today's society. Most mothers of young children also work outside the home and when the primary caregiver is not available, someone needs to look after the children.

Right now, it is mostly left to parents to figure out how to get care for their children. If we really valued the parent-child bond, we would not make it so difficult for them to get their basic needs met.

Relationships blossom when both parent and child feel secure and happy in their life choices and work/learning environments.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Early Childhood Care and Education

Q **What about women who choose to care for their own children? Are they being left out of the picture?**

A Whether caregivers are paid or unpaid, they need support in their role. A minority of women do choose to care for their own children in their own home and they have a variety of reasons for doing so. That is as legitimate a choice as any other that a woman might make. But, it is true that any woman who makes that choice will suffer an economic loss as she will not derive an income from the work she does with her own children.

That is why governments need to work towards innovations that will help women make that choice without such severe economic consequences. For example, could caregivers make CPP contributions for their retirement? Could they claim their own child care contribution on tax returns? What can be done to support parental choices?

And, let us not forget that no woman can provide care for her children all the time. Women working in the home can benefit from quality services like occasional care or emergency care along with parent support and information services. Child care is not an all-or-nothing scenario. It's required by all parents at least some of the time.

Q **What are some issues that are specific to PEI and need addressing?**

A There are some unique scenarios in PEI that make policy making and service delivery challenging. First, it should be noted that Island women have the highest labour force

participation rate in the country, about 20% higher than the national average. And, a lot of that work is seasonal, creating unique demands for flexible services in rural areas. At the same time, we have pockets of urban-based mother-led families with lower incomes and specific needs.

Our kindergarten program is different than in the rest of the country, offered in community settings, not in the public school system. And, overall, we still have greater access to extended family and community support systems than what may be available in many other parts of the country.

We have a solid base of caring for children here on PEI. What may be missing is a similar level of concern for those who provide the care - mostly women.

Q **What do women want, then?**

A Each individual woman could make a list of their own "wants," tailored to meet their own individual circumstances. But, overall, what women need is for all of society to share in the responsibilities associated with caring for, nurturing, and educating young children.

Right now, in terms of time, energy, and financial commitment, Island women are bearing the brunt of this huge commitment. The costs of providing quality care and education to the Island's young children are already being paid ... mostly by women themselves.

For the sake of fairness and equality and to achieve the best possible outcomes for everyone, this situation needs to change.

Toronto Star

March 1, 2003

**by Michele
Landsberg**

So picture this: Parliament convenes after a stunning federal election. A newly sworn-in cabinet (well, yeah, it's a Liberal cabinet ... I didn't say it was the New Messianic Era, did I?) meets for the first time. Prime Minister Jane Stewart looks around the cabinet room with satisfaction. Women are in the majority: it's an historic moment, thanks to a huge revolution in Canadian politics.

The women of the country finally woke up and stopped voting for men who don't give a damn about women, children or Canada's future. Joan Manley was the first to go down to defeat. Ah, what sweet revenge on the hockey-loving hotshot who threw around promises about a national program of universal child care, and clearly didn't mean a word of it.

It was after Manley assigned less than two-tenths of 1 per cent of next year's federal spending to the "national child care plan," and after everyone finally worked out the math, that women got fed up.

Remember how Manley boasted about his \$100 billion of tax cuts, within days of dissing child care? That did it. The women said: You're gone, John. If you can afford to throw away \$100 billion in federal revenue, why can't you afford to invest a tenth of that in a sensible plan to build Canada from the ground up, by making sure that all the children get a strong, safe, wholesome healthy, intelligent start in life?

After decades of voting for men who universally failed to keep their commitments to women and children, Canadian women got mad, got militant, and threw the buzzards out.

**Want
a revolution
in
child care?**

Tax cuts don't create growth; a well-educated, stable, optimistic, motivated population does. That's why Prime Minister Stewart's first cabinet meeting focused on drawing up a coherent national policy for early childhood education and care.

**Vote
for women.**

"Look, children in every country in Europe attend early education schools, full-time, from the age of about 2 ½, whether their mothers are out at work or not," she said to her cabinet colleagues. "It's part of the education system, a normal and valued aspect of a child's life."

Perspective

Early Childhood Care and Education

Because the mothers are freed up to work for a living if they need or want to, they can afford better housing, are more secure, enjoy better health - and don't have to put up with violent or abusive partners just in order to feed their children. With less poverty and violence at home, and a much enriched social and intellectual life at pre-school, the children blossom.

The cabinet, of course, being composed of practical women, knew that you can't wave a wand and presto, fashion a nation-wide system overnight. They would have to create a federal department to oversee things. There would be standards and regulations, and clear expectations, just like those in the European Union. No provinces would get to grab the money and run.

Not a cent of the \$10 billion slated for early childhood education and care would be used for public relations gimmicks and glossy brochures churned out by irresponsible provinces like Ontario.

A few of the western cabinet ministers balked at the idea of federal rules, but Prime Minister Stewart silenced them by reminding everyone of the founding of national medicare, and the way the provinces fell into line when they realized they wouldn't get the money unless they co-operated.

Aw, c'mon, I can imagine readers muttering to themselves. Does Landsberg really think that elected women are so different from men in their political behaviour? Yes, but before you start throwing around names like Margaret Thatcher and Indira Ghandi dear readers, consider this: Those women, who achieved prominence as surrogates of male power, were bound to act just like the men with whom they identified. They are no measure of anything. Men have dominated Canadian governments since the very beginning, and have never done the right thing for children. The odds are that they never will. (There are always honourable exceptions: Liberal MP John Godfrey and the NDP's Jack Layton have long been champions of child care.)

When women hold sway, the chances of achieving a child-nurturing civilization markedly improve.

Just as there has to be a "critical mass" of women in Parliament before there are enough women's washrooms, there will have to be real female power - that is, a majority of women will have to vote for their own interests - before early childhood care and education for all are an absolute given. The men won't do it until they hear the bell tolling their fate. Let the bells ring out.