



Building Our Profession Together – Child Care Forum Summary

Dick Stewart, former Commissioner of Social Services, Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton and Manager of Peoples Services City of Ottawa opened the Building Our Profession Together Forum with a strong message about the benefits that come when the child care community is active and engaged in their profession and in lobbying governments.

He reminisced about the gains made through the 1980's when the Regional Municipality of Ottawa Carleton and the child care community worked together to win wage parity and other important gains for the City's early learning and child care services. He encouraged participants to in continue this work.

Through an hour presentation noted researcher Jane Beach, presented a very powerful picture of the state of early learning and child care (ELCC) in Canada and how we compare to other countries in terms of funding, policy and delivery of early learning child care.

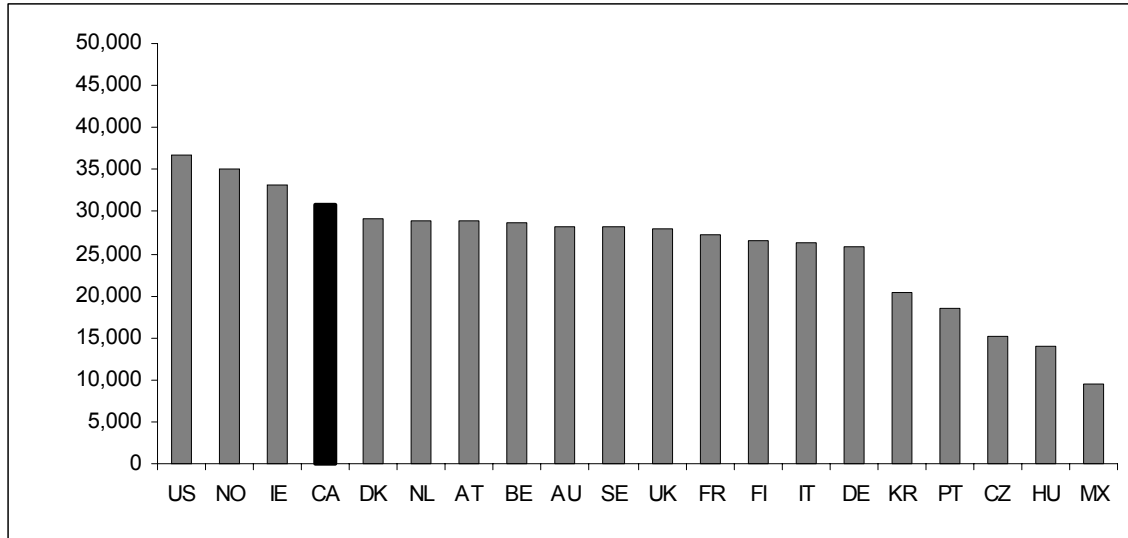
She provided an outline of the issues facing the child care workforce due to inadequate funding and weak policies and the impact of this on the quality in early learning programs. She ended on what will be needed to advance early learning and child care and to truly improve quality in child care programs.

Before heading off to the afternoon workshops, forum participants learned that...

Across Canada only 17% of children 0-12 can access regulated early learning and child care. In Ontario this drops to 12% of the children.

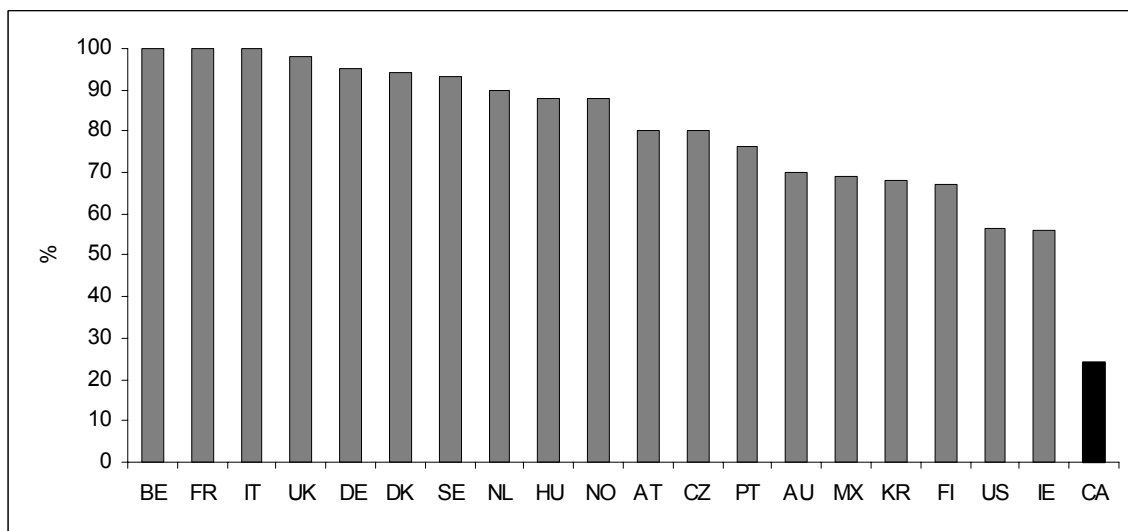
Canada ranks fourth in the top wealthiest nations, yet it is dead last in terms of spending and access to ELCC for children between the ages of 3-6 years.

How wealthy is Canada? GDP per capita (in U.S. \$)



Data source: OECD. (2006). *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care. Country Profiles*

Rate of access to ELCC programs for 3-6 year olds



Data source: OECD. (2006). *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care. Country Profiles*.

Workforce

Forum participants learned that...

While statistics are hard to gather for the early learning and child care workforce currently estimates there are 125,000 early childhood educators in the workforce.

The childcare workforce has the highest level of workers with a post secondary diploma or degree when compared with other occupations.

The annual income of an early childhood educator falls well below other occupations whether they hold a diploma or degree. An ECE with a diploma earns on average \$21,000 dollars compared to \$38,000 for other occupations. If they hold a degree ECE's earn \$29,000 compared to \$59,000 in other occupations.

Many working in the field feel that their ECE training and education did not adequately prepare them for their work with children with special needs, parents, colleagues and other social services and educational professionals.

More ECE graduates are going onto further study or to work in the education sector or other related children services because of the low wages, value and recognition given to those working in early learning and child care.

The lack of recognition, low wages, poor working conditions (physical environments) low job satisfaction and increased opportunities in related sectors make recruitment and retention of a skilled, stable and professional workforce difficult – setting into motion a vicious cycle that drives ECE's out of the field, reduces quality and job satisfaction, increases staff turnover creates challenges in recruitment, which in turn lowers quality...

The You Bet I Care and the OECD studies both concluded that quality in ELCC in Canada was lower than most other industrialized countries.

Forum participants learned that...

Quality child care can only be achieved in a high quality ELCC system and requires good public policy and good public funding.

What does quality ELCC programs look like or feel like from the perspective of the child, staff and parents?



Children thrive in early learning and care environments that are supportive and nurturing and guided by a clear mission statement and situated in a learning framework. And where they feel valued, respected and supported in their learning and socializing.

Child care professionals need support, respect and recognition for the important work they undertake with young children. They require post secondary training and on-going professional development opportunities. They require decent wages and good working conditions that encourage good morale and low staff turnover. They need leadership at all levels (programs, supervisory, educational, policy and political)



Photographs taken at Langara Child Development Centre in Vancouver, and Copperhouse, in Bolton, Ontario.'

This can best be achieved through strong public management at a systems level through regulations that define minimum standards, monitoring and mechanisms that ensure ongoing quality improvements. Through policy

Karin Jordan (parent): Getting a behind the scenes look at the Dalhousie budget really drove home for me personally that the high standards we as parents want and appreciate are being delivered on a shoestring – and one that is frayed.

Deirdre Speers (employer): It is always a struggle to find the money for both the staff and the upkeep of the centre. It is a juggling act.

Brenda Frey (staff): If there are job opportunities in related sectors why wouldn't we move on especially if it gives us value, recognition, better wages and working conditions?

With all that was learned in the morning plenary and knowing that Ontario's per child care space funding has declined by \$200 dollars between 2001 and 2004 participants went into their afternoon workshops to talk about how we can work together to break the cycle and bring about the necessary changes to expand and improve ELCC.

The 3 Pillars for Quality Child Care Workshop

Through panel presentations, question and answer, small group discussion and report-backs workshop participants explored how advocacy, an ECE college and unionization can work together to build a national public and non-profit child care system in Canada and Ontario.

Guest panellists; Elizabeth Ablett, Executive Director of Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, Donna Marie Kennedy, Ontario Elementary Catholic Teachers Association first Chair Ontario Teachers College and Morna Ballantyne, CUPE National each spoke briefly about the different and unique roles advocacy, a professional college and unionization play in the advancement of a national child care program and improving quality.

What we learned...

Advocacy is an important tool for building public awareness and bringing our message about the need for early learning and child care to politicians and decision-makers. For advocacy to be effective it must involve a broad lobby of parents, early childhood educators, citizens and advocates undertaking common campaigns together. Yet, one of the many challenges for advocacy is doing just that. Fear of advocacy and not feeling informed about funding and policy issues make it very daunting for the majority to become involved.

When asked to give one reason why frontline staff should be involved in advocacy participants were quick to share their views...

How can we expect others to do it when we aren't? We work directly in the programs with the children and have more knowledge about what is needed. We have a responsibility to give voice to the needs of children and families. We can be leaders for the children and parents and our own profession. If we act now we can impact not only our own future, but future generations.

College of ECE's primary duty will be to serve and protect public interest. It will do this through its objectives to; regulate the practice and govern its members; establish qualifications and professional standards; receive, investigate and rule on complaints against members and promote the high standards and conduct of its members.

It is important for frontline staff to be more informed and involved at this early stage in the development of their professional college. For example the college will establish specific Objectives or Purposes and it will be important for those working in the field to have in-put on what these Objectives should be.

The environments, materials, equipment, training and support ECE's receive to do their work have a huge impact on our ability to carry-out our work. Once the college is established ECE's will be held to a higher standard even if the conditions in which we work remain the same. The object or purpose of the college will not be concerned with these matters as its primary duty is to serve and protect the public interest.

When asked how a college of early childhood educators could benefit child care workers and their field respondents quickly became engaged in small group discussions...

It is important to get involved! The credential we earn at college is what makes us professional. We don't have a well funded system like teachers in the education system. The college is a way to maintain quality of work and validate our profession. It will raise the bar. Many were not clear about the college and wanted more information. Thought it would protect the interest of ECE's.

Unions are legally recognized and enduring institutions that have played a pivotal role in putting the concerns of working people forward to employer and to governments for centuries. Union involvement in advocacy has been crucial for moving child care onto the public and political stage and for improving daily

working conditions, wages and benefits in unionized child care centres. Unions provide an effective vehicle for taking collective action and putting forward a common voice/vision.

Unions practically support the daily concerns of child care staff. Providing legitimate structures for putting daily workplace concerns forward to employers, helping to solve workplace problems and for improving wages, benefits and working conditions. The expertise and resources they can bring into the workplace benefit staff, parents and directors and quality child care in practical every day kind of ways.

When asked do you think a union could benefit child care workers and their field participants again became quickly engaged in small group discussions...

Unions can build a united front and collective action. Unions do raise the bar in working conditions. They provide security and a means for resolving workplace issues and representing the interest of staff to employers and government. They create fair and equal treatment and standards in the workplace. They help on a daily basis by giving staff a greater say in the decisions that affect their work life. The union can support professional development and help with on-going education to gain or maintain a diploma. Many did not really know about unions or their benefits to workers or the field.

Occupational Standards

Mary Goss-Prowse and Jamie Kass of the Childcare Human Resources Sector Council presented this workshop and provided participants an opportunity to talk about the importance of Occupational Standards for Administrators. Child care administrators play a leadership role in the delivery of high quality child care.

What we learned...

Occupational Standards describe what a person does in a particular occupation and the knowledge they need to perform the job. The standards that were presented by workshop leaders were developed through extensive, workshops and consultations with individuals working in the field from all across Canada.

The need for occupational standards for administrators in child care settings arose from earlier work of the Canadian Child Care Federation on standards for

child care practitioners/early childhood educators. It was identified that a similar tool for administrators should be developed to enhance leadership and management practices.

Using a power point presentation and small group discussions participants examined their own administrative jobs by breaking them down into tasks and steps so that they could determine the skills and knowledge needed to perform the job. These set of standards can be used by employer for developing job descriptions, recruitment and hiring criteria and identify professional development needs.

The participants left the workshop with a better understanding of the occupational standards for child care administrators and of the in-depth process required to develop a set of occupational standards that ensure that licensing regulations are met and high quality child care is being delivered.



CODE BLUE Update

Morna Ballantyne wrapped up the forum with an update on the Code Blue for Child Care Campaign. Participants were encouraged to send a message to the government through the on-line picture petition and to visit the www.buildchildcare.ca website regularly to stay informed.

CUPE and its Local 2204 thanked the participants and presenters for their involvement in the day and for making the **Building Our Profession Forum** a great success.

