

Early Childhood Community Reels over Government Cuts!!

Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC) is reeling with the Ministry of Children and Family Development's recent announcement of cuts to child care operating funds, capital funds, and child care subsidies, as well as elimination of funds for Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (effective September 2007).

ECEBC members, the licensed practitioners working in early learning and child care facilities throughout the province, were struggling to cope with the lack of resources even before this announcement. ECEBC president, Toni Hoyland says "The child care communities are dealing with a system in ongoing crisis with not enough child care spaces, long waiting lists for parents and not enough trained staff to increase spaces and accommodate the need."

Hoyland reports that Early Childhood Educators have worked for very low wages trying to keep child care fees affordable for parents, while at the same time attempting to advocate for additional government support. "A mass exodus of child care staff from the field and programs closing their doors will impede the ability of parents (i.e. taxpayers) to remain in the workforce." Hoyland says.

The government is well aware of the importance of the early years as documented in a recent government publication: "The years between birth and age six are a critical time in a child's life. The nurturing that occurs in early childhood influences health, well-being and learning skills for a lifetime." (Summary of Community Consultations, MCFD and Ministry of Education)

The child care community asks government: "Why are you pretending that you care, when everything you do shows that you don't care?"

In her funding cut announcement, Minister of State for Childcare, Linda Reid, says, "The government's goal is to create a quality, flexible child care system that works for BC families, supports our most vulnerable children and that is sustainable over the long term". We remind Minister of State Reid that *all* children in the early years are "*most vulnerable*" as this is the most critical time for brain development. Ensuring quality experiences is vital for all children! "Maintaining a system at all with these brutal cuts is incomprehensible", says Hoyland, "a flexible, quality system requires tangible support and a clear commitment and vision for early learning and child care in BC. The upcoming funding cuts will undermine the child care profession and erode the already tenuous 'core of care' for children outside the home."

Minister of State Reid tells us that the current funding cuts are in response to the end of the federal child care funds at the end of March 2007. “What did this government do to advocate for maintaining this funding?” asks Hoyland. “Where is the provincial commitment to funding child care programs? Where is the rationale for making such sweeping cuts, when the foundation of child care services will be seriously destabilized?”

“We were in crisis before but this government action forced on an early learning and child care system already in crisis will have devastating effects. A depleted child care workforce can no longer absorb the financial hits by government”, says Hoyland. This government must not rely on the federal government’s \$100 a month ‘child care plan’. The true costs of child care will make early learning and child care services out of reach to more and more families.

A system of quality, affordable, accessible early learning and child care helps to keep our families and communities healthy and economically viable. ECEBC believes government needs to look again at their priorities and target some of the surplus budget to creating positive outcomes for the youngest citizens of the province! Investing in child care will have far reaching social and economic benefits well into the future.

With the imposed fragmentation and splintering of child care in BC, who will be left to reach out, to take the child’s hand, and to safeguard her/his health and well-being outside the home?

ECEBC urges government to make a commitment to child care visible... Step forward and show that you really do care!

Toni Hoyland
President
And Board of ECEBC