

# ChildCare



Social Planning Council  
of Cambridge and North Dumfries

Social Issues Advisory Committee  
of Cambridge

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Access to sufficient affordable quality child care is important to the health of a community. Child care is a critical component of healthy child development and it is directly linked to the adult population's ability to fully participate in the workforce. Childcare was identified as an important social issue in Cambridge through several public meetings hosted by the Social Planning Council in 2001.

The Social Issues Advisory (SIA) Committee of Cambridge provides a medium for discussion of social issues, unmet needs, and community capacities. The SIA develops recommendations to pass on to local decision makers from the information coming forward.

The Social Issues Advisory Committee felt compelled to include a discussion on childcare in its work as sufficient quality childcare has many social and economic benefits. The SIA hosted a community forum on childcare on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2002. Included in this report is a summary of the discussion that took place from each of the three working groups formed at the forum. Each group discussed these three questions: "What supports or resources are available?"<sup>1</sup>; "What are the issues/what do we need?"; and, "What action needs to take place?"

The SIA Core Facilitating Group took the discussion summaries and highlighted some recurring themes. Forum participants were then invited back to a subsequent meeting to provide input into recommendations.

The themes generated from the forum discussion were used to create the framework for this paper. They include:

- **Accessibility**
- **Government support**
- **Staff recognition, reimbursement, training and support**

The Social Planning Council endorses this report and is committed to further discussion to pursue action on its recommendations. The SIA Committee and the Social Planning Council believe that other organizations identified in the report will do the same.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Campaign 2000, a national coalition, was formed in 1991 as a response to the Governments resolution to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000. In response to the Federal Early Childhood Development Initiative, Campaign 2000 has released its vision of important next steps for services in Ontario. While the coalition sees ECDI as an important first step in providing supports for families and communities they are calling on the government to consult with communities to develop a "comprehensive system of Early Childhood Development services in Ontario" available to all families by 2004.

Examining the current state of Early Childhood Development services in Ontario, Campaign 2000 found:

- "For every \$1 spent on child care there is a \$2 economic benefit. Social benefits include increased workforce participation, higher tax revenues and lower social spending.
- There is substantial evidence that the quality of early childhood experiences has long term effects on an individual's performance in the education system, their behaviour in adult life, and their risks for chronic disease in adult life.
- More than one-third (37%) of lone mothers in Canada earn less than \$10 per hour
- Systems of early child care providing both development and care have been implemented in Quebec and in most European nations. In these areas, comprehensive family policies are an accepted part of the social fabric.
- Currently there are regulated child care spaces for only 8.8% of children under 12 in Ontario."<sup>2</sup>

Early years are critical years of development and we must invest in our future Canadians.

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## What supports are available?

### The Region:

- Child care Service Plan
- Childcare Connections and Kidslink
- Cambridge has preschools – 31% (35 centres) of Waterloo Regions licensed child care centres
- regulated home childcare program is accessible and within two block walk to schools
- no waiting list for childcare subsidies
- great/excellent Region to work and live in
- supportive Regional government – engaged with Early Childhood Educators (ECE)
- Healthy Babies Healthy Children program
- 11 funded Family Resource Centres in the Region with 4 in Cambridge
- a lot of research has been completed about child development and family needs

### Community

- a lot of resources for special needs and child development (Rotary, Camb Assoc for the Mentally Handicapped, Infant Devt Program, Sunbeam, etc.)
- strong neighborhood associations
- community centres – babysitting
- transportation - both an asset and an ongoing issue, (it is now possible to cross 401)
- universities (eg. Wilfrid Laurier University offers capacity building courses to the public)
- OP2000 is working to end poverty in the Region
- the schools and quality school staff

### Child care sectors – regulated and unregulated

- human resources within childcare centres – trained professionals
- fair amount of choice for parents (different kinds of licensed care and alternative care options)
- informal supports – unregulated care ie. youth
- awareness of what parents want and need
- Network for the Non-profit childcare sector supervisors who meet once a month - it serves as a resource, support, training, and networking opportunity for non-profit centres

### Other

- Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario (AECEO)
- strong childcare organizations
- Conestoga College Early Childhood Education program

## Theme - Accessibility

The forum participants identified accessibility as an umbrella theme. They found there are many issues that make child care inaccessible to many people in need of viable child care options. Below are the comments made by forum participants.

### BACKGROUNDER:

At the June 4, forum on child care, the Region of Waterloo Child Care Division provided an overview of the number of licensed child care spaces and the number of children living in the area.<sup>3</sup>

The child population, (0-12) in Waterloo Region is 79, 880 with 21,517 (27%) of these children residing in Cambridge. Of that population, the number of children aged 0-6 living in Waterloo Region is 42,050 with 11,414 (27%) of these children living in Cambridge.

In the Region there are 113 licensed child care centres with 33 (29%) of them in Cambridge. Also, there are 650 licensed homes that provide child care in the Region with 220 (34%) of them in Cambridge. Out of the 5,049 licensed spaces in Waterloo Region 1,364 (27%) are in Cambridge. In Cambridge there are 1,364 licensed spots for a population of 21,517 children aged 0-12.

Some of the current child care issues that the Region is facing include availability (supply and location), affordability (balancing cost and fees), quality (regulated and unregulated sector), support for parenting (Early Years Centres) and funding (Provincial constraints). The Region is in the process of reviewing and updating their Child Care Service Plan, which is looking at these issues.

### What are the issues?

- more flexibility in types of care (informal, culturally diverse and inclusive) are needed
- affordability – prohibitive cost for regulated care
- lack of networking coordination
- need more funding – which will aid in making child care affordable, recognizing staff, and ensuring high quality child care
- education/promotion/advocacy of the child care field
- lack of infant and toddler centre based spaces

- schools do not have licensed space to put childcare programs in
- the re-zoning of school areas means bus routes are being cancelled and parents need to find alternative transportation and therefore child care arrangements
- transportation
- child care centres are doing school surveys of child care needs and unfortunately, due to the low response rate, it is difficult to accurately understand the specific child care needs in the community
- Breakfast and Nutrition Clubs cannot find enough volunteers to run the programs - could develop partnerships with childcare providers.
- immigrants and newcomers may not be accessing programs – this may be because the centres or child care options are not meeting specific cultural needs.
- child care providers not representative of demographics
- English only care – language barriers
- waiting lists for specialized support services/ special needs kids
- hard to find licensed space
- hard to find care for children with complex needs – such as allergy-sensitive, medically fragile
- stigma attached to being on subsidies
- little after-hours care, weekend care, sick childcare options available
- re-invention and duplication of services
- communication between services (parents, schools government, licensed centres and unlicensed centres)

### What do we need?

- a system to deal with after-hours care, weekend care and sick childcare
- workplaces need to be flexible and accommodate childcare issues such as working from home
- enlist more businesses to have family friendly policies
- child care needs to increase its awareness around various ethno-cultural beliefs, religion, and language to match or compliment needs
- culturally based/sensitive child care
- to hire across cultures
- increase education around options, subsidies, and resources
- increase knowledge of subsidies available for parents
- subsidy – across board
- environmentally accommodating care – compromised immune etc.
- educating the community as a whole
- advocate for the importance of accessible child care

- building bridges and partnerships – affordability, accountability, and quality
- increase recognition and reimbursement within the child care sector
- a network
- accountability of informal care system

### **BACKGROUNDER:**

According to the National Work-life Conflict study, research found “the majority of employees in the Canadian workforce are members of dual-income families with dependent care responsibilities. As such, they require a diversity of work schedules. Unfortunately, the data indicates that the majority of Canadians in both the 1991 and 2001 samples work "regular" hours (i.e. little to no formal flexibility with respect to arrival and departure times, no work location flexibility).

The percentage of respondents using the most desired "family-friendly" flexible work arrangements (flextime and telework) has not changed over the decade and remains relatively low (approximately 20% work flextime and 1% telework). The data also indicate that access to flexible work arrangements is not evenly distributed throughout the workforce.

Further examination of the data indicates that those employees who have the greatest need for flexible work arrangements do not have access to them. This would suggest that despite all the talk about "family friendly" and "employer of choice," the reality of separate worlds still appears to be the operating principle in many of Canada's largest employers.”<sup>4</sup>

### What action needs to take place?

- approach parents that run on the school council
- approach the Breakfast and Nutrition Clubs funders (employers could further support programs and funding could be re-assessed)
- cultural workshops and training for child care programs
- outreach to reach the diverse populations in ECE programs
- increase advocacy
- need to do better job of engaging parents in our centres
- involvement of business partnership (onsite childcare)
- decrease fragmentation and increase communication
- enlist more business partnerships
- set up a network between all programs

## Theme - Government Support

To ensure the social and economic vitality of Canada, it is important that we have a government that invests in our children so that they have the opportunity to grow and develop to their full potential. Below are the comments made by forum participants.

### BACKGROUND:

As UNICEF suggests, "the persistence of child poverty in rich countries undermines both equality of opportunity and commonality of values."<sup>5</sup>

In their recent report *Child Poverty in Rich Nations* UNICEF found that Canada ranks 17<sup>th</sup> out of 23 developed nations in terms of child poverty. This report ranked countries on child poverty based on how each country set their investment priorities. Countries that fared better on the report invested in unemployment and low wages through comprehensive family policies that include quality early childhood development services." Canada must address child poverty and in turn invest in the citizens of tomorrow.

### What are the issues?

- lack of funding
- process of eligibility for subsidy is provincially orchestrated and highly intrusive – a "turn off"
- no local control of disbursements of money
- child care is a missing component of the Early Years Initiative (federally funded initiative designed to address the needs of children 0-6 years)

### What do we need?

- consistent funding across system
- need a commitment to quality child care at all levels of government
- standards
- increase regulation of informal system
- redesign subsidy system
- income sensitive rules
- respectful subsidy application process
- government money

### What action needs to take place?

- Lobby government for new money for new centres and operators for start-up costs
- Leadership by the Region of Waterloo Region

## Theme - Staff recognition, reimbursement, training and support

People working in the child care sector have often noted the lack of staff recognition, reimbursement, training and support. We must recognize the commitment of these teachers to provide a stimulating learning environment and the high quality of care we expect for our children. Below are the comments made by forum participants.

### BACKGROUND:

A Canada-wide study *You Bet I Care!* found that the child care industry is at serious risk which has implications for child development, parent's ability to participate in the paid workforce and the economic productivity of Canada as a whole.

The study showed that child care centres are facing a shortage of skilled qualified teachers and many have financial insecurities. Continuity of a constant caregiver, research found, is important for the child's well being and development but Canada wide, one in five staff (22%) leave their centres every year. The most common reason cited for leaving is the low salary. Child care teachers earn an average wage of \$22,717 a year across Canada – just above the average wage earned by a parking lot attendants \$21,038.

Eighty-two percent of centre staff have at least one year of post-secondary specialized education, while 75% have a two-year college diploma or a university degree. The report found this situation is due to the absence of coordinated child care policies by all levels of government, insufficient funding, and the need for government and society to make a stronger commitment to child care.<sup>6</sup>

### What are the issues?

- trained professionals are leaving the profession resulting in a problem of consistency within child care centres. Staff remaining in the field are facing burnout and often can't take time off. All this results in increased cost.
- Early Childhood Educator diplomas are not transferable between provinces.

### What do we need?

- public education around child care options, subsidies, and resources
- increased knowledge of subsidies available for parents

- subsidies – across board
- consistent funding across the system
- government investment in the system
- increase regulation of informal system
- increased recognition

**What action needs to take place?**

- we need to examine how to get trained people into the workforce.
- legislative recognition of E.C.E.’s increase power in membership. Wider membership in AECEO professional association paid

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**Recommendations**

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The following recommendations were drafted after the forum by a number of the forum participants:

**To the City**

- That the City of Cambridge advocate to policy makers, at both the regional and provincial government levels, on behalf of families and children for sufficient and quality childcare.
- That the City of Cambridge, in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, encourage local businesses to promote family-friendly workplaces (e.g. providing childcare spaces onsite or flexible hours to staff).

**BACKGROUNDER:**

The City of Cambridge’s slogan “a fine place for business, a great place to call home” would be strengthened and attract more people to live and work in the community by highlighting that businesses in the city meet the needs of the families.

An example of a business with positive family-friendly work environment is Husky Injection Molding Systems in Bolton, ON. They have an on-site daycare, which offers full-day programs and before and after school care. This enables parents the opportunity to stay connected and close to their children at any point of their workday.

Supporting and promoting more business in Cambridge to develop similar family-friendly policies would make Cambridge an even more desirable place to live and work in.

- That the City take a leadership role in developing and implementing internal policies that promote a family-friendly workplace and support the importance of quality child care.
- That the City’s Planning Department include children’s services such as childcare in their urban planning and design.
- That the City of Cambridge continue to work from a Healthy Community model to address local determinants of health (such as “healthy child development”).

**To the Region**

- That the Region of Waterloo take on a leadership role and initiate a network to inform and coordinate childcare in the Region.
- That the Region advocate for increased funding to local child care services on behalf of the Cambridge population.
- That the Region explore the possibility of extending childcare centre fee subsidies to recreation programs.
- That the Region seek broad input from the community regarding their revised childcare plan.
- That the Region of Waterloo’s Planning, Housing and Community Services Department include children’s services such as childcare in urban planning.

**To the Early Years Planning Committee**

- That the Early Years Planning Committee consider the existing childcare services when developing Early Years Centres to respect successful programs in the Region.
- That the Early Years Centres develop links and supports to childcare and other community services.
- That the Early Years Centres reflect the uniqueness of the Cambridge context and the diversity of local neighbourhoods.

**To the United Way**

- That the United Way continue to work from a Healthy Community model which values childcare services and the link to a number of issues including employment and healthy child development.
- That United Way fund childcare services as childcare is foundational to the involvement of many participants in United Way-funded programs.

This issue paper was compiled by Kristine Allison, Wendy Adema, and Dan Vandebelt with input from the Cambridge Social Issues Advisory Committee and forum participants. It is published and copyrighted by the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. Quotations from this paper may be used provided that proper and complete citations are included.

This issue paper is a summary of the discussions that occurred at the June 4<sup>th</sup> 2002 public forum on poverty and basic needs in Cambridge.

The Social Issues Advisory (SIA) Committee of Cambridge tracks the pulse of our community. It provides a public forum for discussion of social service issues, unmet needs, community capacities, etc. Relevant information is then forwarded regularly to City Council and the United Way. Recommendations are formulated on a case-by-case basis, depending on the nature of the social issues that are brought up.

The SIA is a committee of the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries and is funded by the City of Cambridge and the United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

The SIA will continue to host a series of similar community forums on identified social issues.

The Social Planning Council has also published other research reports on topics such as:

- Poverty & Basic Needs Forum, & Volunteerism Forum Issue Papers
- Social Issues & Trends in Cambridge,
- Proposed Shelter & Housing Supports Best Practices,
- Disability Demographics,
- Poverty Demographics,
- Quality of Life in Waterloo Region,
- Human Services Sector Issues,
- Our Common Future visioning progress report,

For more information about this paper or about other related research, please contact:

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## Recommendations continued

### **To the Non-profit Network / Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario**

- That these networks promote cultural diversity and inclusiveness in local childcare services to reflect the population of Cambridge.
- That these networks advocate and lobby all levels of government about the importance of quality childcare.
- That these networks promote the field of childcare in Cambridge and Waterloo Region, as well as the status of Early Childhood Educators.
- That these networks request the City of Cambridge and the Region of Waterloo to formally recognize the November National Week of Action on Childcare.
- That these networks increasingly reach out to the for-profit and informal sectors.

### **To Conestoga College**

- That Conestoga College Early Childhood Education department establishes connections with the City of Cambridge to promote more presence of the college and E.C.E. training in Cambridge.

## Sources

- <sup>1</sup> The list of resources that are included in each theme area are not exhaustive but reflect discussion that took place at the public forum.
- <sup>2</sup> Campaign 2000, Ontario Campaign 2000 Consultation Paper April 9, 2001.
- <sup>3</sup> The Region of Waterloo Child Care Division presentation to the SIA child care forum on June 4, 2002
- <sup>4</sup> Health Canada. The 2001 National Work-life Conflict Study. Report One. 2002 <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/publicat/work/travail/index.html>
- <sup>5</sup> UNICEF *Child Poverty in Rich Nations* Issue No. 1 2000.
- <sup>6</sup> Today's Parent, Creativecare October 2000 pg 106 also see <http://www.husky.ca>