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# **The Value of Child Care Work: Investing in Self-Sufficiency**

**Brief submitted to  
the Department of Family and Community Services as part  
of the Early Learning and Child Care Public Consultation  
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## **The Value of Child Care Work: Investing in Self-Sufficiency**

First of all, we commend the government for granting us this opportunity to voice our opinions regarding the state of child care in New Brunswick.

According to the final report recently released by the Self-Sufficiency Task Force, access to early child care is fundamental to social and economic progress. However, in order to reap the desired benefits, *quality* child care services must be on hand. Moreover, this same report also states that wages and salaries count in order to attract workers. Accordingly, this brief aims to demonstrate that pay equity legislation is not only one of the best ways of ensuring quality child care services, but also of attracting and retaining female workers.

Conventional views regarding gender roles are still widespread, which inevitably leads to occupational segregation. Consequently, women in the labour force tend to cluster in traditionally female fields. For that reason, jobs in child care facilities are generally held by women, since caring for children is a traditional household duty. Accordingly, over 96% of Canadian child care workers are women<sup>1</sup>.

Work done by women is generally undervalued. Likewise, the role of child care educators is often trivialized, regarded as little more than “keeping an eye on children”. However, child care is much more than babysitting.

Child care educators must prepare children for the world by giving them the tools they need to become responsible, conscientious citizens, capable of building and maintaining positive relationships with others. They must possess the ability to stimulate young minds. They, along with parents, are responsible for ensuring children’s development and safety. Therefore, they require a good understanding of child development as well as the ability to relate to children’s parents.

Nevertheless, as their work is often held in low esteem, child care educators are still underpaid. While salaries in this field are remarkably low worldwide, Canadian workers are poorly paid even by international standards<sup>2</sup>. In fact, they generally earn about half the national salary average<sup>3</sup>. On top of that, New Brunswick child care educators are among the worst paid in the country, despite recent improvements<sup>4</sup>. Currently, untrained staff earn slightly more than 8\$ an hour, while

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<sup>1</sup> Child Care Human Resources Sector Council. (2007). *Career Promotions and Recruitment Strategy Project – Executive Summary*. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Friendly, Martha. *Pay equity for child care: Why, what, how. What we learned in Ontario*. Presentation given in Fredericton, April 12<sup>th</sup> 2007 on behalf of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

<sup>3</sup> Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on how child care staff wages compare to other provinces see Table 1 in *Child Care Wages and a Quality Child Care System* as published in 2005 by the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council at

staff with a one-year college certificate earn a little over 12\$. In either case, workers have access to very few benefits.

Implementing a quality child care system largely depends on having trained staff. However, wages in this sector being as low as they are, convincing people to take the necessary training is incredibly difficult, as is attracting and retaining good workers. Indeed, studies have shown that low salaries are the main cause of high turnover rates in this field, which in turn generates poor quality care<sup>5</sup>.

Inadequate wages may also force employees to seek additional employment, giving them less down-time during which they can rest. More than 80% of Canadian child care workers who take on another job say “that they do so to earn more money<sup>6</sup>.” Undoubtedly, this burden affects job performance.

Research has shown that staff wages are indeed an important factor in predicting quality levels. Thus, higher salaries are a necessary component in achieving higher quality child care<sup>7</sup>. Not only will children and parents benefit from improved services, but society as a whole also. In reality, it is not merely a women’s issue, nor is it solely a family matter. It is a collective concern, in that children represent society’s next wave of self-sufficient members. Still, the burden of caring for our youth is borne almost exclusively by parents. Proper access to affordable child care services would certainly make it easier for them to work outside the home, increasing overall productivity in the workforce. The impact this would have on the economy should not be underestimated. In essence, for the greater good of the province, our government must step up and take responsibility in this matter.

We strongly believe that pay equity legislation - along with appropriate government funding - is part of the solution if we want quality child care that is affordable and accessible. The current government has promised it will perform job evaluations in the child care sector. We welcome this initiative, since it will highlight the true value of the work done by child care educators. In Québec, the pay equity program led to educators receiving an average salary adjustment of 6.5%. Due to wages being so low in New Brunswick, the average increase may be higher here.

After the evaluations are done the government must be committed to paying the necessary adjustments and ensuring proper wages in the long term. Job evaluations will likely bring to light the need for increased staff training, which the government must provide in order to match pay standards determined by the process. The government must also commit itself to ensuring pay equity in both existing and new child care centers.

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[http://www.ccsc-cssge.ca/english/pdf/research/2005/wages\\_e.pdf](http://www.ccsc-cssge.ca/english/pdf/research/2005/wages_e.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Friendly, M., Doherty G., & Beach, J. (2006), *Quality by design: What Do We Know about Quality in Early Learning and Child Care, and What Do We Think? A Literature Review*, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

While the government initiative is a step in the right direction, implementing pay equity legislation would be the best way to guarantee that child care educators, and others with jobs traditionally or predominantly held by women, receive equal pay for work for equal value. It would provide a clear, predefined process that would be the same for everyone, as well as the means to verify that programs are being put in place. Employers, who would therefore be compelled to comply with the law, would also be obligated to inform employees of the pay equity process and its results. Therefore, since pay equity is already recognized as a fundamental right, a law would provide measures designed to guarantee it.

That's why we call upon our provincial government to adopt such legislation. Now is the time!

### **Recommendations**

**The government must invest in long-term planning and funding, focusing on worker's wages & training, in order to ensure a high quality child care system in New Brunswick in addition to promoting the self-sufficiency agenda.**

**Therefore, we recommend:**

- 1. Adopting pay equity legislation**
  - a) Ensuring enough government funding to cover the pay equity adjustments for child care workers now and in the long term in both new and existing child care facilities**
  - b) Ensuring that proper training is available now and in the long term in both new and existing child care facilities**
- 2. Developing a long term plan for a quality child care system that is accessible and affordable**