

Working for Change: Canada's Child Care Workforce

Prepared for the
Child Care Human Resources Sector Council

Profiles and Case Studies



Jane Beach

Jane Bertrand

Donna Michal

Jocelyne Tougas

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Authors: Jane Beach, Jane Bertrand,

Bozica Costigliola, Donna Michal, Jocelyne Tougas

Copy Editor: Elaine Lowe

Translation: Jocelyne Tougas

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To obtain additional copies of this report, please contact:

info@ccsc-cssge.ca

1-866-411-6960

Child Care Human Resources Sector Council

323 Chapel Street, 3rd Floor

Ottawa (ON) K1N 7Z2

www.ccsc-cssge.ca

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***Profiles and Case Studies* has been prepared as part of the Labour Market Update study, conducted for the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council in 2003 and 2004. This report has three primary components:**

- Introduction to the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council and the Labour Market Update
- Profiles of 18 individuals working in the early childhood education sector
- Case studies of the roles taken by the cities of Toronto and Vancouver to support regulated child care, and a profile of a supervisor working in a child care program in each municipality.

We extend our appreciation to the individuals who shared their stories for the profiles contained in this report, and gave so generously of their time to do so. We would also like to thank the numerous municipal officials who provided detailed information for the case studies. Without their time and commitment this report would not have been possible.

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Background to the Labour Market Update

The release in 1998 of the child care sector study, *Our Child Care Workforce: From Recognition to Remuneration*, marked a turning point for a sector that up to that time had remained largely invisible. The government-sponsored study was the first of its kind to focus exclusively on the human resource and training issues faced by caregivers in the different settings that comprise the sector. The study demonstrated that child care is a sector with far-reaching social and economic impacts. It concluded with a set of recommendations designed to give the child care workforce the necessary supports to provide high quality services to children.

What has changed in the sector and in society since the publication of *Our Child Care Workforce*? What do these developments mean for the child care workforce of today and tomorrow? These are just two of the questions that the follow up to the sector study – the Labour Market Update (LMU) – sets out to explore.

There have, in fact, been considerable changes to child care regulation, funding and policy at all levels of government across Canada during this period. There are important differences in the way child care is organized and managed across the provinces and territories. Some jurisdictions, such as Quebec, have made significant gains. Others, such as British Columbia, have implemented major funding cuts.

As well, there is increased recognition that the first six years of life have a long lasting impact on children's development. Participation in quality child care can benefit all children and can compensate for social disadvantage.

Many other changes have also taken place during the last six years, such as demographic shifts, changes in the nature of work and work organization, and aging of the child care workforce. Overall, child care spending and the supply of regulated care have increased. Nonetheless, many of the same challenges the workforce faced in 1996 remain, such as low wages and minimal benefits, high turnover among trained staff, and shortage of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for young children.

A sector council for the workforce

After the sector study's release, there was a period of consultation on the recommendations in the report, culminating in the formation of the Child Care Human Resources Round Table. In the fall of 2003, the round table became the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC), a pan-Canadian organization that addresses child care workforce issues and is comprised of child care and labour organizations, and other sector representatives. The Sector Council is the sponsor of the LMU.

Funding for the LMU was secured in 2002 from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSD) – formerly Human Resources Development Canada. The 15-month study began in February 2003 and was undertaken by a five-member

research and consulting team under the direction of a steering committee of the sector council. The objectives of the study were to:

- Identify relevant environmental changes and policy developments in the five years since the child care sector study was begun.
- Assess what these changes mean for recruitment, retention and recognition.
- Provide a forward-looking analysis for the sector to use to develop a national human resource plan for child care.

The sector study identified a number of labour market issues that the LMU reexamines against the current social and economic backdrop. They remain at the heart of the sector's central human resource problems of recruitment, retention and recognition, and pose a real threat to the sector's future. The LMU focuses on the three main challenges related to the recognition of the child care workforce:

- *The work environment* – wages and benefits; health and safety issues; employment standards; and turnover rates.
- *Skills* – including educational requirements, and career and professional development opportunities.
- *The perceived low status* of the job of providing early childhood education and care.

Information and data gathering for the LMU included an environmental scan, literature review, and consultation with the field and relevant partners through a survey of early childhood education students in eight post-secondary institutions, focus groups and key informant interviews. The project also developed a series of case studies and profiles of staff, directors, caregivers and two municipalities (Vancouver and Toronto) that are innovators in child care planning, delivery and support. The profiles and case studies are the subject of this document.

Stories from the workforce

Profiles and Case Studies is a companion document to the main LMU report, prepared in order to capture the significant variations in the early childhood workforce across the country.

The major part of the document includes 18 profiles of members of the workforce presented as individual stories. The individuals were selected to reflect a range of positions, workforce characteristics, contexts, settings and geography. The profiles are intended to increase understanding of child care human resources issues across the country – the similarities and distinctions in different jurisdictions and settings – and to provide information to the members of the workforce about successful career strategies and opportunities. Data from the profiles will also be analyzed in the main LMU report to identify individual responses to retention, recruitment and recognition issues.

Municipal case studies and profiles

Profiles and Case Studies also includes two jurisdictional case studies, as well as a profile of a child care staff person in each municipality (Vancouver and Toronto). The two municipalities have long histories of addressing child care issues, conducting needs assessments, and supporting innovative approaches to service delivery and quality improvement. Their stories provide valuable information as to what can work to successfully address several key workforce issues.

A dedicated workforce

The profiles that follow show the considerable range of differences in working environments, working conditions and educational backgrounds of those in the ECEC sector. They vary according to the regulatory climate, policies and funding arrangements of their province/territory. The individuals profiled earn from an hourly wage of \$8.00 to a salary of more than \$65,000. Their educational backgrounds range from no formal training to graduate degrees. They work primarily in regulated child care settings, but also within the school system and in settings that are not regulated in some jurisdictions. They range in age from mid-20s to close to retirement. Some entered the profession right after high school while others had different careers before choosing child care. What each person has in common is a commitment to the well-being and development of young children, pride in their work and dedication to the sector in spite of its many challenges.

The goal of the LMU is to promote ways for the sector to have an impact on its critical human resource challenges – through strategies to recruit and retain qualified child care workers and providers, and to improve their status: career awareness strategies; curricula to train child care workers to meet the changing needs of families; and integrated government policy to serve the needs of children, their families and the workforce.

The mandate of the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council is to develop a confident, skilled and respected workforce, valued for its contribution to early childhood education and care. With an analysis that looks to the future, the LMU can provide a strong basis for the council and other parts of the sector to develop a plan to make much-needed inroads on the pressing workforce issues in child care.

A note about terminology

For the purposes of this report: Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is the umbrella term used to describe programs that:

- support the healthy development of all children
- provide additional supports to children with disabilities and to those living in conditions of risk
- enable parents to participate in the labour force, and in training and education.

The focus of the LMU is on full- and part-day centre- and family-based child care regulated under provincial/territorial child care legislation, but may include:

- Nursery/preschool programs in jurisdictions where they are not licensed
- Kindergarten and pre-kindergarten operated under the education system
- School-age programs operated by school boards
- Family resource programs with a component that includes child development activities.

Specific terms, such as child care centre, preschool/nursery school program, family child care home, Aboriginal Head Start program and pre-kindergarten program, are used for those particular programs. In the profiles, the terms used by the individuals to describe their workplaces and their jobs are used. For more information about the uses of terminology in the sector, see Appendix 3.



SHIRLEY MILLER

Shirley Miller is the owner-operator of Activ-Time, a child care centre and nursery school in Conception Bay South, Newfoundland and Labrador.

From the moment she arrives at work at 7:45 each morning, Shirley Miller never seems to stop. In fact, it's been this way ever since she became involved in child care.

As director and owner of her own centre, Activ-Time, for the past 25 years, Shirley works between 50 and 55 hours a week, and has overall responsibility for programming, administration, scheduling, meeting with parents, personnel, payroll and complying with licensing requirements.

The programs Shirley operates have always been in demand. The first year she offered both morning and afternoon programs for three- to four-year-olds, and 102 children attended. This year, 132 children are enrolled at Activ-Time, which now serves children from two to 12, and offers full-time child care, before- and after-school care, kinder-care and its original preschool program. The child care centre is open from 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The preschool centre operates Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 12 noon.

Shirley says that much of the expansion in programs and enrollment is due to the changing needs of the community. As more families began to have two parents in the labour force, they began to enroll their children in both the morning and afternoon preschool programs requesting that children stay over the lunch hour. They also began asking for care for their kindergarten age children for the balance of the day. It became obvious to Shirley that she had to introduce additional programs and full-time care to help parents balance their work and family obligations.

Shirley herself is no stranger to this juggling act. When she was hired as a substitute teacher after two years at Memorial University in primary education, she found it difficult to deal with the unpredictability of work and caring for her young child. She would often get called by a school in the morning, right after her husband left for work with the family car. It was always a mad scramble to arrange child care for her daughter so that Shirley could get to work on time.

Finally, she decided to take a job with regular hours and went to work for Statistics Canada as a senior interviewer for special projects. Shirley then became involved in preschool when her

daughter went to kindergarten. She ran morning and afternoon programs in the home of her daughter's teacher.

In 1978 she built Activ-Time – a purpose-built preschool program on an acre of land. At the same time, she was determined to continue her education. She went back to Memorial in 1979, enrolled in the distance education program for an early childhood education (ECE) certificate, all the while running her preschool. Between 1985 and 1987, she took summer and evening programs at the university to complete her education degree, and finished her Masters in Early Childhood Education in 1998.

As hectic as it was to try to balance work and school, it became even harder when a second daughter was born in 1982. Shirley was back at work within a month of the birth because, as a self-employed person, she was ineligible for maternity benefits. She juggled child care arrangements between her mother, other relatives and babysitters. The first year was particularly difficult: she felt torn between her daughter and her preschool. Shirley was happy when her daughter turned 3 and started attending Activ-Time two mornings a week.

Activ-Time today

In 2001, when new regulations required the separation of older age groups and younger children, Shirley added an extension to her building to accommodate an additional 33 children. This extension became a second child care facility operating on the same site as the original one. Her programs now operate in two buildings, with a total of 5,000 square feet inside and a playground of 7,000 square feet. Shirley is in the process of adding another room to one building in order to conform to a regulation that limits group size to a maximum of 16 children. She has applied for a renovation grant to cover the cost.

Shirley has some children with special needs in the program – usually children with behavioural challenges. The new building is wheel-chair accessible, but the downstairs of the old building is not, which creates some logistical difficulties for children with mobility limitations.

Most children enrolled at Activ-Time come from middle- and upper-income families. Only a few children are subsidized. Parents pay \$100 per week for full-time care, or \$25 per day for part-time care. Kindergarten fees are \$90 per week or \$20 per day. School-age care rates vary, depending on the number of hours. During the school year, fees are \$50 per week for before- and after-school care and \$100 per week in the summer for full-day child care. Fees in the preschool are \$100 per month for two mornings a week, \$150 per month for three mornings, or \$200 for four mornings.

Workers and working conditions

Shirley employs 14 staff members, including herself. (The staff person with the most seniority has been with Shirley for 25 years.) There is no formal contract but there is a written job description. Staff are given a handbook that outlines their general duties and centre policies.

Wages and benefits

- Wages start at \$6.25 per hour for no experience or training, and go up to \$9 per hour for experienced staff with considerable training.
- Staff receive 4% vacation pay bi-weekly on payroll.
- Staff with an approved one- or two-year ECE credential also receive the educational supplement from the Ministry of Health and Community Services. The supplement is paid quarterly directly to the staff by the government and ranges from \$2,080 per year to \$4,160 per year, depending on qualifications. Shirley gives her staff annual raises and believes her staff are worth considerably more than she pays them. She would raise their wages substantially if she could afford it.
- Some long-serving staff have health coverage through PACAL, the Provincial Association of Childcare Administrators Licentiate. As president of the association, Shirley was able to obtain the comprehensive coverage for \$9 to \$11 per month for an individual or \$38 per month for a family. Several years ago, the insurance company eliminated the low-cost coverage but allowed existing policy holders to maintain their coverage at the same rates. Since current rates are very expensive, newer staff only have coverage if their spouse has a plan.
- Staff receive seven statutory holidays per year.
- Staff can build a sick leave bank. After working 2,000 hours, they are entitled to 12 hours of sick leave. This rises to 24 hours after working 3,000 hours and 30 hours after working 4,000 hours.

Working conditions

- Staff work at least a 35-hour work week, except for two cooks who each work 22-25 hours.
- There is a one-hour lunch and a break. Since she cannot afford to hire people to cover lunches and breaks, Shirley follows Labour Standards for setting the maximum hours permitted for staff to work. The schedule is arranged so that staff can get their hour off after four hours of continuous work. There is a fair degree of flexibility for staff who have appointments and need to leave the centre for short periods.
- Staff meetings are held once a month. There are also other planning meetings: for child care staff, once a week; for school-age staff, twice a month; and for preschool staff once a month. Meetings are usually after-hours.
- Shirley provides some in-house training. For example, she recently provided a six-week Working Effectively with Violent and Aggressive Students (WEVAS) program.
- She pays for staff to go to PACAL conferences and pays partial registration for staff to attend the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador conference.
- Staff can get 1½ paid days to attend workshops and conferences

per year. Every year, Shirley takes one staff (selected by draw) to an out-of-province conference and pays expenses. Last year they went to New York City for the National Association for the Education of Young Children conference.

Highs and lows

Is her job rewarding? Definitely, says Shirley. She finds it much more rewarding than teaching in the school system. She says it's great to see the achievements of the children, especially in the preschool program. Every June, she gives parents progress reports so that they can see how their children have developed.

But there are challenges too. The biggest is finding qualified staff who can do the job and paying them what they're worth. Shirley says it's harder and harder to find even entry-level staff. She says no one wants to spend two years and a considerable amount of money getting trained for the extra \$2 to \$3 per hour in wages that she is able to pay trained entry-level staff.

Shirley plans to operate Activ-Time for at least five more years. Then she would like to teach ECE students or work in child care policy.

Differences between preschool and child care

Shirley says that parents of children about to enter kindergarten have been eager to enroll their children in the preschool program. Parents believe the preschool experience should be different from child care. Shirley explains that children in a high quality program would receive the same play and learning opportunities, but that her preschool program focuses more on readiness skills for kindergarten. Shirley says she has also observed that even though both programs are developmental, goals and child outcomes are more clearly defined in the preschool program.

Shirley also finds that child care children are less compliant than those in the preschool program and tend to relate to the staff differently. She says the children in full-day care seek attention more often and treat the other children more like siblings. The preschool children are more focused on the activities and learning opportunities, and there is more peer cooperation and interaction. She says this also holds true for children in the preschool program who attend child care for the rest of the day.

Shirley strives to provide more than just care for the children in the child care program by offering stimulating activities in a well-equipped, pre-planned environment with qualified, caring staff. The preschool provides more of an educational foundation before kindergarten and preparation for the more structured environment of formal schooling.

Another difference she has observed between preschool and all-day child care is the parents' attitudes toward staff. Shirley finds that the preschool parents view staff more as professionals than do the all-day care parents. She believes that the all-day care parents do not really value child care as an occupation. She feels that about 80% of these parents view child care as babysitting.

Shirley's recommendations

Shirley thinks that child care programs should be legislated by the Department of Education. Under the Department of Education, staff might be viewed as professionals and wages might increase. Shirley believes the private sector should play an important role in delivering the services in such a system. She would like the government to have a more open mind about private sector involvement and perhaps consider partnerships with the private sector.

Shirley would like to see more government staff in the regions and have them develop closer relationships with child care centres. She also thinks it would be beneficial to pilot new policies within the field before implementing them province-wide or before changing regulations so that government could understand the implications beforehand. She would like to see more flexibility in allowing multi-age family groupings, rather than promoting small, segregated age groupings in individual homerooms that are required now.

As someone who knows how difficult it is to attract good staff and provide quality care, Shirley is concerned about the future of her occupation. She would like to see a media awareness campaign to heighten awareness of early childhood educators as professionals and of the job as a career with good potential.



DENINE McCORMACK

Denine McCormack is assistant director and a kindergarten teacher at the Child Development Centre at Holland College in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.

When Denine McCormack was at the University of Prince Edward Island studying Education, she found that she really missed the children at the child care centre where she'd worked full-time for two years. That's when she knew she wanted to make child care her career.

Fourteen years later she has no regrets, even though it's only lately that she's been able to stop working an additional part-time job to supplement her income – as a weekend respite caregiver to families with children with disabilities and, most recently, as a service station gas jockey 10 hours a week.

As assistant director and kindergarten teacher at the Child Development Centre, Denine, 33, makes \$15.40 per hour. That's better than the \$9.50 per hour she was making when she started at the centre as a special needs assistant and later as a kindergarten teacher. She had no wage increases between 1993 and 1998 – and it wasn't until the 2001 school year that PEI began to publicly fund the kindergarten program.

Nonetheless, when Denine first came on board at the centre almost 10 years ago, she was considered luckier than most of her co-workers. That same year, Holland College privatized the unionized centre, putting it out to tender. The new owners – two former staff of the old centre – started with a fully-equipped and renovated space provided by the college, but were responsible for future capital needs and ongoing operating costs. They offered all previous employees their jobs back, but at a significant wage cut. Denine was able to retain her \$9.50 an hour salary. As a special needs assistant, her wages were covered by the Department of Health and Social Services. All but one staff returned to work at the new centre.

Denine's work

This year, Denine is splitting her time between the Child Development Centre and the Department of Education, where she has been seconded part-time as a kindergarten mentor. The centre was one of the sites used to pilot the provincial kindergarten curriculum in 2000. Denine is sharing the secondment with her centre director, who is very supportive of staff growth and encouraged her to apply for the position. The department pays the staff replacement costs and a small honorarium to each mentor.

At the child care centre, Denine teaches the kindergarten program two mornings a week. The program is generally theme-based and follows the provincial curriculum. In the afternoons, she usually spends one day covering for other kindergarten staff while they attend a staff meeting and another afternoon filling in wherever she's needed.

Denine also supervises early childhood education (ECE) students on placements. (The centre usually takes seven at a time for five- to six-week blocks.) In addition, she acts as a mentor for two new graduates at the centre who need support working with their groups of children. On Fridays, she spends her mornings at the Department of Education in a staff meeting and then goes straight into the child care office to do payroll, prepare parent newsletters and pay bills. The centre has a close relationship with the ECE program at Holland College, where Denine sometimes serves as a guest lecturer, giving presentations or lectures to the students on such topics as ethics or language development.

At her job with the Department of Education, she has responsibility for 11 kindergartens from Charlottetown to St. Peter's (about 45 minutes away). Her goal is to visit each program at least once every two months during the 10-month school year.

Denine's role as a mentor is to model curriculum, provide resource materials and instructions on how to apply them, and make programming suggestions. The kindergarten teachers have been very receptive. This is the second year of the new provincial program, and the teachers are comfortable with the supports. They know they can ask for help and that the purpose of the visits is not for quality assessment.

Denine likes the fact that all kindergarten programs in PEI use the same approach as a starting ground. The Department of Education provides staff training, and there is a curriculum guide and teacher resource books for math and language arts.

The secondment is an excellent professional development opportunity, says Denine, who believes she's getting more out of the work than she's giving. It's provided her with chances to learn how different staff approach the same activity, communicate with a range of people and discover new ways of doing things.

Denine's child care background

Denine started in child care when she was 19, working with two-, three- and four-year-olds. During the evenings she took courses to get her ECE certificate. Since she was already working in the field, she was eligible for funding from Human Resources Development Canada. She was able to continue working and get her Program Staff Level 1 without incurring any education debt.

Over the next two years, in Charlottetown and Summerside, she took the four additional courses necessary to become a supervisor, managing to pay for them herself without having to take out a student loan. She gained her ECE Level II in 1992 and, in 1991, enrolled in the Education program at the university, continuing to work part-time at the child care centre. She left the Education program after one year to return to the children.

During the first three years at the Child Development Centre, she worked with children with fetal alcohol syndrome, autism, spina bifida and global delays. In 1997, she started working as a kindergarten teacher, taking over for a staff person on maternity leave. Denine was made assistant director in 2001.

Denine's workplace

The Child Development Centre cares for between 42 and 48 children aged 2 to 6. They are organized in mixed-age family groupings of about eight children each. There are 23 five-year-olds in kindergarten with two staff. These children join the other groups when kindergarten is not in session.

Some parents have told Denine they think their kindergarten-age children would learn more in a stand-alone program. Denine, however, feels the mixed-age groupings are a positive feature. She says the children have the same learning opportunities in the mixed-age groupings as children in stand-alone programs do and having a wide variety of equipment helps all children, regardless of their developmental stage.

The centre fees for children from 2 to 4 are \$120 per week. The Department of Education pays for three hours of kindergarten each day, 10 months of the year. Only three of the children in kindergarten stay for the three hours and then go home. The rest stay at the centre for the remainder of the day at a fee of \$85 per week.

The centre is open from 7:15 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. five days a week. It is closed for a week in August. One and a half days are spent on professional development activities in areas of interest to staff, such as workshops on play and theory in practice; a half-day is devoted to a staff meeting; and two days are given over to cleaning to get the centre ready for the fall. The staff get the remaining day off without pay.

The only other time the centre closes its doors is on statutory holidays and for a major PEI event: e.g., Gold Cup and Saucer Day, the end of a week-long celebration of agriculture and horse racing and culminates in a big parade.

Parent meetings are held each September and there are a couple of parent luncheons during the year – at Easter and on National Child Day in November. In February, parent-teacher interviews are held.

Centre wages and working conditions

Average wages at the centre are \$9 an hour, with staff earning anywhere between \$8.25 and \$10.25. All staff work full-time hours, except one who chooses to work five hours a day. All staff get two weeks paid vacation, regardless of length of service.

Denine finds it hard that, after 10 years of working long hours at the same centre, she still gets only two weeks vacation per year. And although she now earns more than before and more than other staff, she still has to rent out a room in her house to help pay the mortgage.

As a single person with no dependents, Denine is entitled to eight sick days a year. Staff with dependents get five sick days a year plus three more they can use for their own illness, for that of their dependents, or for personal days for such things as parent/teacher meetings or to attend their children's special events. The philosophy of the centre is that adults need to be healthy, prepared and full of energy to do a good job with the children.

There are two 20-minute breaks a day, but there is no lunch hour – the staff eat lunch with the children. At the same time, an effort is made to be flexible. If their hours can be covered, staff can take leave with pay for up to 1½ hours for things such as medical appointments. Anything over 1½ hours is taken as vacation.

Medical, dental and disability benefits are available on a 50:50 cost-shared basis with the employer.

Staff attend monthly meetings on their own time. Staff also have two hours planning time per week during their regular work day. There is an effort to have performance appraisals once a year.

There is usually one day a year when the college provides professional development on topics such as team work or developing a mission statement. Staff also have some opportunities to attend conferences and Early Childhood Development Association workshops. The centre either shares the cost of these professional development activities with the staff or pays the entire fee. Occasionally, there are in-service opportunities for the kindergarten staff, paid for by the Department of Education.

Rewards and challenges

Denine likes her job and all its challenges, including working with different adults and children, and having a range of responsibilities. She finds that parents value her work and she usually feels well-respected. She also enjoys her secondment, which affords her the opportunity to see other programs and take new ideas back to her centre. But she does miss the children when she is away from her regular job, because she likes to see daily what they are learning and observing, and how they are developing.

Denine feels there are several serious challenges facing the child care sector. For example, she is worried about high staff turnover at the centre. When she started, all the other staff had been there for at least five years. But since 2000, only four staff have stayed. Many have left to work as teacher aides for children with special needs in the school system. After all, in the school system the work day is shorter and there are no programming responsibilities. There are paid holidays and salaries are close to double those in child care. Other staff have left to work at a Superstore, at a call centre and other jobs unrelated to child care.

Denine is also concerned that students aren't entering the field but she can understand why – low wages, long hours, few benefits and difficult working conditions are disincentives to people finding child care an attractive occupation.

Funding imbalance is another issue. For example, the Department of Education now requires that kindergarten teachers be paid at least \$12 per hour (including benefits). This is positive, but sets up inequities in the centre, since parent fees cannot cover this level of wages for the rest of the day as well as the wages for staff working with the younger children. Last year the centre put the government funding for kindergarten into the general budget and paid all staff the same. With the new requirement, this may not be possible in future.

Nonetheless, Denine would like to see kindergarten remain within the child care system. She thinks that children have to go to formal school too early in their lives – it's too much responsibility at a young age. Child care offers a full-day program with fewer daily transitions for the children. There is a lower child-to-staff ratio. In Grade 1, children can expect to be in a class of at least 23 children with one teacher, compared to the maximum of 24 in kindergarten with two staff. Child care staff are also required to have more child development knowledge (about children up to six years of age) than teachers of young children in the school system.

Future plans

In the past, Denine has thought about opening her own centre, and she has been approached on a couple of occasions by interested business people. Five years ago, when the University of PEI privatized its centre, she submitted a proposal but the contract was awarded to someone else. Now, after looking at the responsibility, the costs and the necessary parent fees, she is no longer keen on the idea. Maybe down the road she could help a community group establish a program, but for now, she does not see any big changes in her immediate future.

MARGARET BURKE

Margaret Burke is executive director of Town Daycare in Glace Bay, in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

It was the woman with the gerbil who hooked Margaret Burke on working in child care. It happened when Margaret, a high school graduate at loose ends, attended a career fair in 1977. At first, she thought the woman with the pet gerbil was a vet. Intrigued, she watched as the woman put up her table among the other displays for careers for teachers, police officers and lawyers. The display had lots of pictures of children engaged in all sorts of activities. Margaret started talking with the woman. She found out that her name was Sharon Hope Irwin and that she had recently started Town Daycare Centre in Glace Bay.

Margaret had always gravitated towards children – and when babysitting, she always wanted to do activities with them. But until Town Daycare opened, there was no child care centre in Glace Bay. Sharon told her all about the program and the opportunities for employment. She also told her about a new two-year Child Development Services training program at the teachers' college in Truro, Nova Scotia. And that was it – Margaret has never looked back.

She went to Truro and was among 11 others who were accepted into the program during its first year in 1977. She graduated from the training program in 1978, and was immediately offered a position at Town Daycare, where she'd already had a placement and worked during the summer. But she also had an offer to go on a six-week tour of child care programs and preschools in England, which Sharon encouraged her to do. When Margaret returned, she started working at Town Daycare as a "unit aide" with two other staff with a group of between 25 and 28 3½- to 4-year-olds.

By 1993, married and with two children then aged three and six, she had become executive director of the centre – a job she still loves and plans to stay in until she retires.

As director, Margaret has overall responsibility for the centre and its day-to-day operation. She is also responsible for advertising, for being involved with the personnel committee in hiring, scheduling staff, organizing meetings and in-service training, conducting performance appraisals of individual staff and each unit, and for relieving staff when necessary for their staff planning times. If Margaret is not needed to maintain ratios in the program during unit planning meetings, she tries to spend a little time at the meetings to take notes and stay familiar with each unit. When she became director, Margaret really missed being with the

children all day and still struggles with keeping the staff as excited and empowered as she was when on the floor. In general, Margaret finds students and younger staff less enthusiastic than older staff. She feels that students and younger staff are not as keen to get down on the floor with the children. She has noticed that some students do little more than hold up the pillars located in the playroom. Other directors in her community have expressed similar concerns.

Margaret reports to the centre's board of directors. She has a written description of her duties and has a performance and salary review about every two years. She belongs to the Cape Breton non-profit directors association, and gets lots of support from the group meetings and occasional social gatherings where common issues and interests are discussed.

Town Daycare

Town Daycare is a non-profit, unionized centre licensed for 94 children aged 18 months to 12 years. The centre is run by a board of directors made up primarily of community members and some parent members. Margaret says that in recent years, with so many competing demands for time, it has become harder to find people to serve on the board. This year, only two parents had the time and inclination to do so. Moreover, several community members have expressed concern about the legal liability of boards.

In addition to a director, the centre has: an office manager; 13 full-time teaching staff (all have an ECE certificate or a degree in Child and Youth Studies); one staff person who works five hours a day with the school-age children; a full-time cook; a full-time custodian who cleans the centre; and a maintenance worker who is available for any necessary repairs.

As one of two child care centres in Glace Bay, Town Daycare does not experience a lot of staff turnover. During the last five years, some staff have left to work in early intervention or as aides in the school system. But now the schools are cutting back on aides, so some are returning to child care.

There are 72 subsidized spaces at Town Daycare and they're always full. Twelve spaces receive differential funding to accommodate children with special needs. Although there is an occasional vacancy in the full-fee spaces, the centre is generally full with a waiting list during the school year. Enrollment dips during the summer months.

The centre has:

- 11 children aged 18 months to 2½
- a group for three-year-olds, licensed for 25, but averages 16–20 children a day
- 25 four-year-olds
- 25 after-school children.

The centre is open every day except statutory holidays. Parents can drop in whenever they want to spend time in the program.

At one point, the centre had a group of infants 12–18 months, but infant care was too expensive to maintain so it was discontinued. Nor was there infant child care in Glace Bay when Margaret's children were babies. At that time, her husband was a lobster fisher and could be the primary caregiver when it was not lobster season. Otherwise, a few caregivers and other family members were enlisted to look after her children.

A few years ago, Town Daycare started to offer part-time care two or three days a week, in response to demand from parents who were not in the labour force but wanted their children to have the opportunity for socialization. Margaret tries to accommodate requests for flexibility, but believes that the part-time children have a better experience when they attend two consecutive days. This helps keep them engaged with projects or activities that continue for more than one day.

Inclusion a priority

Inclusion has been a significant part of the program philosophy at Town Daycare since its inception. Staff ask themselves what *they* need to do rather than what the child needs to do to adapt. The program does not segregate or separate children needing extra support. To Margaret, this seems like the most natural approach. She sees no benefit for a child with special needs to be separated from other children other than occasionally, when a therapist is conducting formal testing, or when an easily distracted child needs some quiet time.

The program's approach grew from observing resource teachers withdrawing children from the group to do a particular activity. There seemed to be little value to have a child undertaking an activity or task away from their peers and with no context. When a child with a disability needs to work on a specific skill, staff might do so by working with a group of four children. The child with special needs is included in this group of typically-functioning children. Therapists and psychologists also usually work with a child with special needs in the classroom, rather than in a separate space.

Margaret will admit any child regardless of his or her extra support needs. Sometimes the staff need additional training to support the child appropriately. Parents may have to wait a little longer to enroll their child so that everyone is comfortable that the child's needs will be met. Margaret credits the strong leadership of Sharon, the centre's first director, for instilling this approach in all the staff and making it work.

The centre has a special advisory board made up of a special needs resource staff, speech therapists, volunteers and parents. This committee reviews the needs of each child with a disability to ensure that appropriate supports are in place when she or he

first enters the program, regularly reviews what supports are working and what needs changing, and helps determine what needs to be in place when the child moves into the formal school system.

The centre also houses Kids Early Intervention Board – a separate organization that provides support to children with disabilities. Margaret serves on its board of directors.

Unionization

The staff at Town Daycare have been unionized with the Canadian Auto Workers union since 1990. Margaret and the office manager are the only management staff. Margaret has mixed feelings about the role of unions in a non-profit environment. She was on the other side of the bargaining table before she became the director, but still finds negotiations and dealings with the union the most stressful part of her job. She was pleased that one time when she and the staff were in arbitration, they were able to leave those discussions at the door and maintain friendly relationships. She understands the need for good wages and working conditions, and thinks the staff deserve more money. But she also says the centre's future will be in jeopardy if wage demands exceed what parents can pay. There have been no strikes at the centre since Margaret became director, but there were two strikes in earlier years.

Margaret finds it a challenge to balance the needs of the staff, the parents and the children. Recently, an employee/employer relations committee was established to address any staff issues or concerns that emerge between contracts, and meets every two or three months. Margaret finds this committee offers an opportunity for open exchange between her and the unionized staff.

Wages and working conditions

Staff make between \$10 per hour for an aide and \$12 per hour for a unit assistant. All staff in each position make the same wage, regardless of length of service. These wages include Nova Scotia's new stabilization grant, which is paid to the staff as a separate cheque each month. Margaret thinks the stabilization grants have really helped staff (each person gets about \$160 per month). But she feels wages and benefits still need to be improved.

All staff have a comprehensive benefit package, the cost of which is shared 50:50 with the centre. This includes medical, dental, optical and long-term disability. Last year, the centre began making small RRSP contributions for staff.

Staff receive two weeks vacation after one year, three weeks after three years, four weeks after 10 years and five weeks after 15 years. Margaret has worked at the centre for 25 years but receives four weeks vacation: when she was hired as executive director her full seniority did not apply to her new position. Staff also receive 12 personal leave days a year to be used at their discretion and six sick days.

There is a monthly staff meeting that starts at 5:30 p.m., right after the centre closes. It usually lasts between one and 1½ hours. The agenda includes reports from each unit as well as reports from various committees, such as occupational health and safety. Staff are given time off in lieu for attending staff meetings.

All staff receive two paid 15-minute breaks: one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Staff in the toddler room have a paid one-hour lunch; staff in the other units generally take a half-hour lunch since most of the children in the older age groups do not nap and it is too difficult to maintain ratios any other way. Staff may leave a little earlier at the end of the day if they have taken a shorter lunch hour. Margaret generally goes to the unit to replace them.

There are lots of in-service opportunities for staff paid for by the centre. Staff can also get reimbursed 50% of tuition for courses they take at the University College of Cape Breton. The staff all had Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) training last year for a full Saturday and were given time off in lieu.

Margaret's child care recommendations

Margaret would like to see more recognition and respect for child care staff. While she thinks the situation is improving, she feels there is still some stigma attached to the job. Child Care Awareness Day is a good beginning to help recognize the occupation. Margaret recently delivered a “train the trainer” program for Building Blocks for Inclusion (on how to offer inclusive care). There was a good turnout from other professions and lots of recognition for the work being done in child care.

Margaret thinks ongoing, continuous professional development is necessary for quality care and consistency across programs. She would like to see more ongoing training opportunities for ECEs in the community, such as an upcoming workshop sponsored by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada on emergent curriculum. Often such activities are only available in Halifax and it is not possible for staff to take the time to attend.

She would also like to see more direct communication with government policy and regulatory staff. Often, the child care branch provides information in written form only. It is either open to interpretation or raises questions that need addressing. Margaret says it would really help quality if centres from a community could get together as a group and have government officials from Halifax meet with them when there are changes to regulations or a new policy is implemented. Margaret would also like the province to seek input from the child care community on changes in direction or policy. She thinks this would help centre directors have a better understanding of the rationale for policy changes, and would ensure a greater degree of consistency in the application of policy directives and of the quality of programs across the province.

Margaret has a number of concerns about the current direction of the education system. Every year the centre invites the teachers who will be receiving the children with special needs into the school system to a meeting of the special advisory committee. With the permission of the parents, videotapes are made of each child – to show the challenges faced by the child and the supports in place to offer an inclusive environment. Margaret finds that many of the children, especially those with global delays, are not faring well in the school system.

In Glace Bay this year, the school has established a Learning Centre, which Margaret describes as a “holding tank.” Nine children of all different ages and special needs (including children with autism, global delays and physical disabilities) now spend their days at the Learning Centre. Margaret thinks that the school board used to have a vision of inclusion, but now there is no money to train and support the teachers. In addition to being very hard on the parents and children, many gains are being undone.

A satisfying career

The challenges in child care remain big ones, but there are many rewards too. Margaret's greatest is seeing how involved the children are in the program. She gets a lot of satisfaction out of small gestures, such as a child helping another do up a button or one child hugging another. It gives her a thrill when an older child who left the centre years earlier comes up to her and talks about good memories from child care. Judging from Margaret's continued enthusiasm, hard work and love for children, she'll be remembered by many more children for many years to come.

ROSE DEAN

Rose Dean is coordinator of children's services at the Military Family Resource Centre (MFRC) in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

When Rose Dean graduated from the Froebel Institute's ECE extension program, she thought she knew what her future would be: operating her own centre. She got right down to work, renovating a space in her Fall River house outside of Halifax, and opening Fall River Nursery School in 1989.

The nursery school offered a program two mornings a week for three-year-olds, and three mornings a week for four-year-olds. Rose also provided before- and after-school care for school-age children. She had an agreement with the preschool parents that on school in-service (professional development) days, the preschool would be closed so that she could offer full-child care to the school-age children. On those days, she hired a local person to work in the program. Fall River Nursery School was licensed for 12 children.

Rose didn't start out in child care – she originally went into nursing. The shift work was hard on family life but the pay and benefits were good. In 1972, in her second year of marriage, she got a job in a doctor's office so she could work Monday to Friday with weekends off. She stayed there until her first child, Karen, was born in 1976. She had planned to go back to work, but after a 6-month maternity leave, she realized she couldn't leave her daughter. She decided to stay home.

Rose's interest in child care arose after the birth of her second child, Ally, in 1978. Ally was in the same preschool his sister had attended, and Rose thought it was so wonderful that it piqued her interest in early childhood education (ECE). She offered to substitute for the preschool and did so for a year. She enjoyed it so much that she decided she would pursue a career in child care, and enrolled at the Froebel Institute in 1986. She graduated in 1990.

The program at the institute was part-time, and she commuted every second Saturday to Truro for full-day workshops. Every Tuesday evening she attended classes in Lower Sackville with the institute's extension program.

In her 2nd and 3rd years, she did a practicum at a preschool near her home in Fall River. They were looking for a staff person with some training to act as director so that they could keep their license; Rose went to work there two mornings a week for a year.

Rose says she wishes she had taken her ECE program before she had her own children. It really helped her understand child development and to be more open and clear when communicating with children.

Opening and operating the Fall River Nursery School was a wonderful achievement. But after two years, Rose closed the program when her family moved back to Cape Breton. She says she really enjoyed the work at the nursery school, but found it complicated to have her workplace in her home. She felt she could never get away from all the chores. She also had to be a Jill of all trades: the janitor doing all the cleaning; the teacher doing the programming and teaching; and the accountant collecting the money, giving out receipts, going to the bank, paying the bills and making payroll for the staff. She also had to shop for food and other supplies for the programs.

During the three years Rose lived in Cape Breton, she worked part-time as a nanny for two young girls for 18 months. She then went back to college full-time for one year to study computerized accounting.

In 1995, her family moved back to the Dartmouth area. Shortly after the move, Rose saw an ad for a preschool teacher at the MFRC in Shannon Park, Dartmouth. She was hired on part-time – four mornings a week – and worked on her own with 12 children, doing programming with another preschool teacher who ran the younger preschool class.

In 1997, after 2½ years at the MFRC, Rose saw an ad for an assistant director at a child care centre in the community – a full-time job. She applied and got the job. The private centre was located in a business park and had approximately 70 children. She worked in the office with the director and was responsible for many aspects of running the centre, such as scheduling, arranging for substitutes, shopping for food and supplies, banking and filling in for the director if she was not in the child care. Rose says she learned a lot from that work experience.

While she was working at the child care centre, she had an opportunity to become certified in ECE through a pilot program run by Child Care Connection-NS. She mentored with two other staff from different child care centres in Halifax. For two years, she spent half a day four times a year at the other centres observing the staff. They in turn visited her centre observing her work. It was an excellent experience and she hopes that all ECE teachers become certified some day.

In 1999, Rose left her job and didn't work for the next two years. In fact, she thought she would retire. But she received a call from the child services coordinator at the MFRC asking if she would be interested in applying for the job of director at Stadacona Daycare, a centre that opened after Rose left. She applied, was interviewed and got the job. Stadacona Daycare had 22 children aged four months to five years – all children of military personnel. After five months as the director of the centre, Rose learned the child services coordinator was leaving the MFRC. She applied for that position, and, after another interview process, was hired.

Work environment and the work

The Halifax Military Family Resource Centre (HMFRC) is a non-profit entity with a board of directors comprised of 51% civilian spouses of military members. The HMFRC has several child care and related programs for military families:

- A full-day child care centre, licensed for 50 children with fees ranging from \$22-25 per day for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.
- A casual child care program, which can be booked in advance for a maximum of six children for up to three hours at a time. Minimal hourly fees are charged.
- A parent and tot program, which operates one morning and one afternoon a week for a nominal fee.
- Emergency child care: care in the child's own home if one spouse has an emergency while the other spouse has been deployed.
- A preschool program (nursery school), licensed for 12 children, operating 10 months a year, either Monday to Wednesday or Tuesday to Thursday.
- A toy-lending library.
- A new mothers program, which includes a post-natal home visit that provides information about the children's programs and services available at the HMFRC.

As executive director, Rose is responsible for all the programs and services of the HMFRC. She reports to the deputy director/program coordinator.

Rose's job

Rose works from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday to Friday. She makes herself available to the parents every morning when the children arrive for the preschool and casual child care programs. Her daily office work keeps her busy. She frequently goes to the classrooms so that the children will know who she is if she has to replace a teacher or facilitator.

As child services coordinator, Rose oversees the preschool program, the casual child care program, the parent and tot program, and the toy-lending library. She also coordinates special events with other coordinators such as the Christmas open house, and events for the children such as Halloween celebrations. In addition, she arranges child care in the evenings and on weekends for coordinators so that military parents can participate in programs and workshops offered by MFRFC. Rose also partners with other coordinators when presenting twice-yearly parenting programs that each run once a week for 10 weeks. She also attends weekly staff meetings and parent-teacher nights twice a year for the preschool program.

Rose's responsibilities include:

- Hiring staff (in consultation with two other HMFRC personnel)
- Conducting screening, including military police checks, child abuse record checks and reference checks
- Staff and parent orientation to the HMFRC
- Developing and managing the child services budget, child services business plan and child services work plan
- Managing admissions to the preschool program with promotions and advertising to maintain enrolment
- Overseeing supplies and equipment ordering for all programs.

Rose says she is pleased with the salary she earns. She also receives 15% in lieu of benefits. The salary for her position increases annually, with a ceiling at five years employment. Rose gets sick days, professional development days, long-term disability and three weeks vacation.

There are many professional development opportunities available to her. Last year, she attended a play therapy workshop in New Brunswick. She attends the annual conferences put on by Child Care Connection-NS, and other workshops throughout the year. The HMFRC also puts on annual first aid/CPR courses in-house if there is a need to be re-certified. HMFRC reimburses formal courses if they are job related – Rose sends her requests to the executive director for paid professional development she wishes to attend.

Rose has a written job description and an employment contract. She receives quarterly and annual performance appraisals.

Rewards and challenges

Rose likes the autonomy of her job. She enjoys the independence and opportunity to be self-directed. There is a very positive atmosphere at work – staff interact well with each other and she loves coming to work every day. There is almost no turnover among staff in her programs.

By contrast, says Rose, the staff at most child care centres work in an environment similar to emergency room nurses: once they enter the centre, they are “on” all the time. They work long, high-stress days and burnout is prevalent.

Rose's biggest challenge at work is to keep the programs' enrollment at the maximum. She is always promoting, advertising and trying to reach the military personnel, who no longer all live on the base but are spread over a wide area of the city. Also, because of deployments, some children leave the programs when a family is transferred to other parts of Canada.

Recommendations

Rose believes that child care should be recognized as a profession and that staff need better wages. Parents insist on quality child care and their expectations are high. Rose feels ECEs should have professional attitudes and be more confident about themselves so that better wages and working conditions become the norm. Becoming certified in early childhood education would be an important step toward this end.

Rose thinks the time for an ECE professional association is long overdue. She sees young graduates struggling with large loans and making little money. A professional association could help them gain recognition.

Rose wishes new parents would prepare for their role by taking some training in early childhood education. They would gain much more this way than through an occasional parenting course. Rose says ECE training would help parents better understand their children's development and allow them to talk to their children more positively. After all, she notes, children come into our lives for such a short time.

Future plans

Rose will stay at the HMFRC until she retires, but she says she always wants to be involved in ECE in some capacity. She has applied to serve on the Nova Scotia Round Table (a government-appointed advisory body) because she wants to be a genuine voice for change. She hopes she will also have time to start some writing.

Another career is beckoning too. She'll soon be a grandmother – one more way, she says, to stay connected to children.

JASON KEAYS

Jason Keays is a child care worker in the four-year-old room at the at the Union Street Preschool Centre in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

For Jason Keays, one of the biggest rewards of working in child care is seeing young children – especially those with special needs – reach developmental milestones. There are lots of other positives too: watching the children's self-confidence grow, working to provide a developmental and stimulating environment that's also fun, and the overall satisfaction that comes from interesting and involving work.

But there is no denying the downsides. From low wages and lack of respect, to the isolation of being a male teacher in child care, Jason wonders whether there's a future for him in the occupation he loves so much.

Work and family background

Jason started work at the Windsor Street Preschool Centre in Fredericton, New Brunswick in 1997, filling in for the cook who had gone on disability leave. His wife, Charlotte, a teacher at the centre, suggested he apply for the job. She thought his institutional cooking experience would stand him in good stead.

After eight months as the cook, he applied to be a teacher's aide for a child with a disability, and later, for a job in the school-age program. For three years, he worked as a teacher's aide in the mornings and in the school-age program in the afternoons. For the past two years, he's worked in the four-year-old room, where he team-teaches a group of 20 children with one other staff.

The road to child care was a gradual one for this native New Brunswicker. He spent the major part of his younger years in Germany and Québec because his dad was in the military. When he was 16, he quit high school after completing Grade 10. At the time, he lived in St. John's, Newfoundland with his mother, who had separated from his father. Jason moved in with a girlfriend and got a job at the Heath Sciences Centre for \$22,000 a year – more than his current wages as a child care worker and over 15 years ago. He later moved to New Mills, New Brunswick to live with his grandparents, finishing high school there in 1992.

By the time he was hired by the Preschool Centre, he'd worked at a number of jobs:

- At a Rotary summer camp for people with disabilities, where he worked for four consecutive summers (He really enjoyed the job, and met his wife there.)
- As a cook
- With the SPCA for six years, until he could no longer stand to euthanize animals (The cat that spurred his resignation is still a family pet.)

- For an agency providing respite care for families with disabled dependents and care for dying patients
- In a group home for adult men, where he still puts in 30–35 hours a week.

Jason now has a nineteen-month-old daughter, Lily. He and Charlotte own a home. She has returned to her job at the Clark Street Preschool Centre following a one-year maternity and parental leave. Jason would have loved to take time off when Lily was born, but couldn't afford it. Instead, he'll take some vacation and care for her after Charlotte returns to work.

Union Street Preschool Centre

Jason's workplace is a non-profit cooperative licensed for 42 children aged 4–12 years. Nine children have designated special needs. His centre has about 66 children enrolled, since many attend part-time. It is one of three centres operated by the organization – Jason's in a renovated portable building on the same property as one of the other centres. His program for four-year-olds and for the school-age children moved into this building in the fall of 2003.

The original Preschool Centre opened on Windsor Street in 1966. The second centre, on Clark Street, where Jason worked for one year, opened in the spring of 2002 with funding from the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and the Union of Postal Communication Employees (UPCE). As part of a project to accommodate the child care needs of their members, CUPW and UPCE also provide ongoing operating support to help offset the additional costs of offering flexible care and the administration of a family child care component, established for union members for whom the centre is not convenient. The unions paid to completely renovate the building and paid the start-up and equipment costs. The centre is located a block from the call centre where UPCE members work. It offers full- and part-time care, and extended hours care as needed. About half the spaces are used by CUPW and UPCE members; the rest are used by the community at large.

In total, the programs run by the three Preschool Centres employ 39 full-time staff, three cooks, a number of part-time teacher aides and three administrators responsible for day-to-day operations. The centre is not unionized. All of its locations and programs are operated by a board of directors comprised of parents with children in one of the programs.

More than 350 children are enrolled in the Clark Street, Windsor Street and Union Street Preschool Centres. They come from a wide variety of backgrounds: they are children of postal employees, children whose families are on social assistance, children enrolled for early intervention reasons, and children whose parents are students, secretaries, doctors and lawyers.

Jason's job

Jason has a written job description and his performance is appraised at least once a year. His main responsibility is to plan for and deliver an age appropriate program for the children. But he also has a long list of other duties and responsibilities:

- Supervising and evaluating about 10 students who do a practicum throughout the year. Jason usually has 2–3 in his program at a time. There is also a new early childhood education program for Aboriginal students, which requires a 30-page evaluation for each student.
- Supervising and training teacher aides, and working with them to ensure appropriate programming and activities/protocols for children with special needs.
- Attending regular case meetings for children with special needs as part of a team of public health, speech and language pathologists, doctors and other professionals.
- Regular meetings with parents, mostly at closing time. Some meetings are scheduled; others are as needed, initiated by Jason or the parents. Jason deals with many complex issues affecting families and their children. These range from the effects of separation and divorce and referrals for extra support for children, to moral support for parents feeling overwhelmed by their responsibilities and issues regarding children with special needs.
- Attending monthly staff meetings during lunch hour.
- Participating in developmental activities, particularly those that address the specific needs of a child with special needs (e.g., Hanen speech and language for children with language delays).
- Cleaning the classroom, including washing tables, floors and toys, and vacuuming and cleaning the bathrooms.
- Serving snacks and lunch.
- When on the last shift (which is often), ensuring the overall cleanliness of the building, doing a last clean-up of the kitchen and the playground, ensuring the computers, air conditioner, photocopier and coffee pot are turned off, locking the windows and doors, and setting the alarm.

Low wages, few benefits

Jason does all of this for \$8 an hour plus a few other benefits:

- Blue Cross family health benefits, cost-shared with his employer. The plan covers 80% of dental care, prescription drugs and eye care, as well as extended health and disability.
- 1¼ sick days a month, which can be accumulated to a maximum of 25 days.
- 12 vacation days per year with his current seniority. In another two years, he'll be eligible for the same vacation entitlements as his wife: three weeks.
- An additional \$450 per quarter through the New Brunswick government Child Care Quality Enhancement Grant. This money is paid out separately from his hourly wages since the centre won't be able to sustain the payments if the grant is ever withdrawn.

(Jason pays for additional private health coverage himself. He also contributes to a retirement fund and an educational fund for his daughter.)

Jason's workday is 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. He gets two 15-minute breaks and an hour for lunch, none of which are paid. He receives five hours overtime a month for planning, which takes place outside of working hours and is taken as straight time off. But the overtime provision doesn't cover much: he estimates he spends at least 12 hours a week planning activities with his co-teacher.

Education and training

Jason has not completed any formal training in early childhood education. But he has taken numerous workshops, short training programs and most of the professional development opportunities available to him in his community. Much of his professional development is paid in full or in part by his employer. The Preschool Centre also often arranges in-house paid professional development. About four years ago, Jason took his first sociology course at the University of New Brunswick towards an undergraduate degree. But it's hard to keep going – time and money don't allow him to get the education he would like.

Some years ago, he completed a certificate in graphic design – an area he might look at in the future. He also took many on-the-job courses while working at the SPCA. Interestingly, he says the animal control officers received training in recognizing symptoms of child abuse. This is because research indicates that individuals who abuse their pets are also likely to abuse their children, but the public is more likely to report animal abuse than child abuse. In fact, until the early 1970s, child protection legislation fell under the SPCA.

A second job

Not surprisingly, Jason has to work a second job in order to make ends meet. He works a double shift at a group home for adult men on Sundays, from 5:00 p.m. to midnight, and midnight to 8:30 a.m. That's more than 15 straight hours. Mondays and Tuesdays are just as gruelling. He works the midnight to 8:30 a.m. shift, then goes straight to his job at the child care centre, changing into a fresh set of clothes in the bathroom. He gets no sleep on the overnight shift at the group home, thanks to cutbacks that eliminated a second staff person on the shift. He also gets no breaks on either his single or double shifts.

Jason's job is to ensure the safety and well-being of the residents, and that the building is maintained and the alarms are functioning. At \$10.20 an hour, the pay is a little better than at the child care centre, but there are hardly any benefits. He gets 4% vacation pay instead of time off, and often finds it difficult to get time off when he is on vacation from his job at the Preschool Centre.

Another difficulty of working two jobs is income tax payment. Jason's two employers deduct tax at a rate consistent with each job. But at tax time, he ends up paying a lot more to Revenue Canada because his income from two jobs puts him in a higher tax bracket. But if more money were deducted at source, he wouldn't have enough to pay his bills. Revenue Canada is now insisting on greater deductions and Jason is not sure what will happen.

The challenges of child care

Overall, Jason loves his job and the working environment. There is good communication among the staff at the centre, and strong leadership and mentorship by the director. Conflicts are usually easily resolved. The work itself is very rewarding on many levels.

But the challenges are daunting:

- Jason often wonders how long he can keep working for so little money. He would love to stay in the field, but it's exhausting working two full-time jobs to make ends meet. If the pay was higher and he could quit his second job, it might be workable.
- Jason feels a lack of respect for his work from other professionals. For example, teachers in the education system often have little interest in his observations and recommendations at meetings to discuss the transition of a child with special needs to school from child care.
- Competing demands from some parents and licensing staff make it a challenge to provide a quality environment. It's hard to explain to some parents that the needs of the group have to be taken into account in addition to those of an individual child. The most demanding parents, Jason says, often give the least in return.
- Jason is concerned about the approach to regulations. New health standards stemming from a death from E. coli in Saint John last year require bathrooms to be completely cleaned every two hours and a detailed journal kept on each child's eating and toileting habits. It will be hard to conform to the new requirements without taking away from the children's programming and activity time.
- It hurts when parents are suspicious about his motives for working in child care. Jason tries to develop a warm and open relationship with the parents, and most end up being happy to have their child with a male teacher. But it doesn't always turn out that way, and some are uncomfortable having him help young girls with bathroom routines, or with hugging or touching a child. Whenever possible, Jason tries to ensure that his room partner attends to any of the children's physical needs. But this type of skepticism demoralizes him. When he thinks of his future, he says that if there's so little respect and trust for a 31-year-old male in child care, it will be even worse for a 50-year-old.
- It can be isolating being the only male in his workplace. In fact, at this time, he no longer knows any other males in child care. On the positive side, he says that working in a female environment has made him a better listener and has increased his respect for the caring work that women do.
- While he feels well equipped to do his job, he would like additional training. But he can't afford it, never mind find the time to go back to school. He says it would be great to have options for getting formal ECE credentials while staying at work, along the lines of the Manitoba workplace model.

Making it better

Jason has two key recommendations for making a child care a more attractive occupation:

- Increase wages so that people can earn a decent living and so the work is valued more by others.
- Recruit more men to child care. Children relate differently to men, and there is often no other male role model for children in lone parent, mother-led families. Jason believes there are men who would like to work in child care, but they are even less respected than women.

What does the future hold for Jason? He's not certain. He does know that he would love to stay in the field. But he also says he knows that something has to give in order to make this a realistic option.



ODETTE BOUCHARD

Odette Bouchard is head of school-age care at Notre Dame du Lac-Etchemin school in Lac-Etchemin, Quebec, which is operated by the local school board.

Odette Bouchard always wanted to be able to get up in the morning and look forward to going to work. Having a job she could love was a big priority. In 1998, when she became head of school-age care in her son Jérémie's school, Odette reached this goal. "Every morning when I welcome the children it makes me feel good," she says.

Odette decided to work in child care fairly early on. She had been interested in a career in the social sector, and liked to work with children. After consulting a guidance counsellor, she felt confident that early childhood education was the field for her. She obtained a diploma in techniques for teaching children [Techniques d'éducation B l'enfance] from a private college in Cap-Rouge. The training she received at the college, she says, showed her the importance of an overall early childhood education approach that emphasizes creativity, openness and variety.

"These things aren't just about the activities that we do with the children," says Odette. "It's even more important how we interact with them and the adults – the parents and teachers – who are part of their lives."

Odette's first job after graduating from college was as a maternity leave replacement for a teacher of people with disabilities and other specific needs. She then started working part-time in a preschool with four-year-olds in Lac-Etchemin, the town of her birth and where she grew up. By 1982, she had been hired as director of Lac-Etchemin's family child care agency for 21 hours a week. She also kept her part-time job at the preschool, Passe-partout, for the next 10 years, largely because she felt it was important to maintain direct contact with children.

Odette felt lucky to be hired at the director level so close to the beginning of her career. She says she learned a lot at the agency – about family child care, about the ways in which boards of directors work, and about facilitating sessions with groups of adults. But the job had its challenges as well. She was a young early childhood educator, recently out of college, and yet she was already responsible for supporting and directing a team of family child care providers who were older and more experienced than her.

Moving into school-age care

Odette was still working at the agency when Jérémie, now 11, started kindergarten at Notre Dame du Lac-Étchemin school. (She and her partner Bruno also have a 14-year-old, Rébecca.

Odette was worried about the children who couldn't go home at lunch and stayed to eat at the school. Her son wasn't eating at all, and the environment was noisy and badly set up for the lunch hour. She saw kindergarten children in the playground who were afraid of the older children. She felt something had to be done so that the children had a more secure and positive environment. Odette reasoned that if they had to be in kindergarten all day (something she was not really keen on), then the school should provide them with a more suitable environment. She decided to push for action and, with the collaboration of the school principal, devised a plan to put in place a school-age care program.

In March 1998, the school board approved the plan. The principal turned to Odette for advice on hiring, giving her a list of possible candidates for the job of running the program. With her extensive background in child care, he felt that Odette was well-placed to assess the candidates' qualifications.

It was then that Odette decided she should apply for the position herself. The job was very appealing and the timing was right. It was a period of change and struggle in the sector – the first year of implementing Québec's \$5-a-day child care system. Odette had also been working long hours at the agency, often into the evenings. As well, she found that her role as director was changing, and was becoming more about control and supervision than about providing support to family child care providers. Her initial training had not prepared her for the administrative responsibilities of being director of an agency, such as managing human resource issues, budgeting and accounting. She'd had to learn all of these tasks on the job. She felt the stress had had an impact on her health. Moreover, by this time she hardly ever had any contact with children.

Another stress was the necessity to continually lobby the provincial ministry. Odette felt the ministry had too much control over the way things were run. She felt the government was showing an enormous lack of confidence towards those who had put in place and developed Québec's child care programs. To top it all off, the ministry was not providing the necessary supports.

Odette says she was somewhat surprised to discover that she had lost her enthusiasm for her work. The sudden opportunity to change to a job that would allow her to influence and improve the lives of children was irresistible. She had always wanted to be able to plan and organize programs for children on a more global, visionary level, over and above working with them directly as an early childhood educator.

As soon as she told the school that she was interested, they hired her. The school board quickly recognized her experience with the agency and her educational qualifications. She started her new job that June.

The program

The school-age program at Notre Dame is truly integrated with the school, says Odette. "Everyone is important in this school, there are no distinctions made." Program staff work in close collaboration with the school. Three rooms have been converted for use by the child care program. One group is for kindergarten children, another for children in Grades 1 and 2, and the third for children in Grades 3 to 6. As well, the program has access to all of the other school facilities – gym, library, computer room and staff rooms. Odette also has her own office.

The cost of school-age care is \$5-a-day plus \$2 for lunch. Seventy-one children are enrolled in the centre and the number swells to 152 at lunch time. There are five children who have disabilities or other special needs.

Odette's job

Odette supervises six staff: three work more than 15 hours a week and three work less. All positions are unionized and the school board does the hiring. Odette is responsible for the school-age program service and budget. She also organizes the staff hours of work, greets the children in the morning, participates in special educational projects, helps whenever needed, and works closely with school staff and the principal to coordinate services and work with children who have behavioural problems. She is the primary contact for the parents of the children in the school-age program and sits on the school committee. She also has official responsibility for the school when the principal is absent (and is compensated at a higher rate for performing that duty).

Odette's child care philosophy rests on several principles. The primary objective of child care, she says, should be to create a healthy environment for children. Services should be accessible to all children. Different types of child care settings should offer comparable quality and all be based on meeting the needs of children. School-age care programs, Odette believes, are a way to round off the school experience for children.

Wages and working conditions

Odette's position is unionized. She has a written job description and is evaluated regularly by the school principal. She earns \$40,000 a year, a salary she feels is not really adequate for the amount of responsibility she has.

She has a 35-hour work week, with normal hours of work from 7:15 a.m. to 4:15 p.m., but she controls her time according to the needs of the program. She does not work evenings or weekends, but does work about 10 hours overtime per week. However, she says this is her choice. During this time, she often meets with parents or confers with staff on ways to work with children who need extra support or attention. She also spends time with the children at the end of the day.

Depending on the time of year and subject to approval, she is able to take time in lieu of overtime pay. Odette has a right to collect Employment Insurance in the summer, when the school-age program closes for five weeks, but to this point she has never applied for it. She receives one month's paid vacation.

Resources and support

Odette has regular opportunities for paid professional development sponsored by the school board. The board organizes four meetings per year for principals and for those in charge of school-age programs in the schools. At the school, Odette says that the principal, the school psychologist and the administrative personnel are sources of support for her work.

Rewards

Odette loves many things about her job. First and foremost is being the first person the children see at school in the morning. She takes joy in being part of an educational project and an integral part of the school team. She says that she and her staff have developed increased self-confidence over the years, which has paid off in the program and in the education of the children. She feels she has the respect and affection of the children and the adults in their lives. She doesn't spend energy on useless conflicts. She supports her staff to provide appropriate support to the children.

The future

Odette feels she will have to move on in four or five years, but isn't sure where she will go since she is completely happy with her current job. Perhaps she will move into another sector altogether. She believes she has attained the peak of what her career can offer her financially.

Who knows – maybe she will go into psychology, a field she sometimes regrets not pursuing. If she had, she thinks she would have more recognition and better compensation for her work. All in all, though, she says she's had a fulfilling career and has no complaints about the way she's been treated as a child care worker.

SYLVIE MELSBACH

Sylvie Melsbach is a pedagogical director for les Mousses du Mont Inc., a centre de la petite enfance (CPE) in St-Bruno, Québec. (Québec's CPEs provide regulated centre-based child care services and family child care.)

For Sylvie Melsbach, the path to child care was quite accidental. In 1975, she was working as a pattern designer in a clothing factory and was unhappy with her job. She knew that she wanted to work with people and be close to nature, but that was as far as it went. On the constant look-out for other employment, she learned about an opening in a child care centre and applied. She got the job at Garderie d'enfants St-Bruno Inc., a for-profit child care centre that was later transformed into a non-profit centre and then into a CPE: les Mousses du Mont inc., her current workplace.

It has been almost 30 years and Sylvie is still with les Mousses du Mont. She's now the pedagogical director for the CPE's la Rose des vents location. (The other two locations, Alizé and La brise, have their own pedagogical directors.) At one point she was acting director when the founding director took sick leave.

Sylvie is responsible for managing the education budget and the workers at la Rose des vents. While she no longer works on the floor, she supervises the other child care teachers and intervenes when necessary to provide support. She also oversees the plans for specific services for the centre's children with special needs, and manages the centre's waiting list for spaces. In addition, she supervises one-third of the providers of family child care who are affiliated with les Mousses du Mont.

Sylvie says there are fewer and fewer differences between centre-based child care and family child care. Mixed-age groups are becoming rarer in family child care. Hours are becoming more standardized: 10 hours a day, from either 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., or 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. But not all things are the same. For example, when a family child care provider has an appointment or a family obligation, she closes her doors for the day if she can't get a replacement.

Sylvie's background

Sylvie comes from Cap de la Madeleine, where she went to primary school and high school. She later studied law and fashion design at a community college. Her child care experience prior to getting the job at les Mousses du Mont was occasional babysitting, working in a day camp for children in Cap de la Madeleine and as a hospital volunteer.

After she became a child care teacher, Sylvie enrolled in a college course on family studies, part of a pilot project subsidized by the *Ministère des affaires sociales* for people working in child care. She studied part-time in the evenings for 2½ years. She had met her partner in 1975 and, by the end of the course sessions, was pregnant with their first child. (The couple now has two grown children, one of whom is studying ECE and works in CPEs substituting for absent child care teachers.)

Sylvie says she originally lacked confidence and felt she could not be a child care worker all her life. So she decided to continue to study on her own time, paying for courses herself. She received certificates from l'Université de Montréal in pedagogical intervention and in facilitating small groups, and a certificate from l'Université de Hull in ECE.

In spite of her education credentials, her job at the centre was still rated at the teacher level (child care worker) and she was paid according to the salary scale for teachers. Nonetheless, because of her experience and qualifications, she was often called upon to write educational documents and started to take a leadership role in the centre's educational planning. She became the centre's pedagogical director in 1999.

As pedagogical director, she had to give up working on the floor of the centre. But she says she wanted to do the job because she had already been playing the role of educational advisor for a long time. Moreover, she often left the floor to do other things such as research and organizational duties, and she felt the children needed more continuity.

The workplace

Les Mousses du Mont opened its *Rose des vents* location four years ago. There are 60 child care spaces. Three teachers provide infant care; three provide care for toddlers; three for three year olds and three for four-year-olds. Another teacher ensures there is a full staff complement at the end of the day. There are also 50 family child care spaces and nine providers. Children with special needs are integrated into les Mousses du Mont's programs. Each room has a head teacher and an assistant whose duties include replacing the teacher during breaks and preparation time, and ensuring the room is clean. There is no staff room, but staff have access to a kitchen, a large meeting room and Sylvie's office.

Working conditions

Sylvie works a 37.5-hour week. She says she has a lot of control over her hours of work. She gets to work at 7 a.m. and leaves at 4:30 p.m. on days when she is teaching ECEC (*Technique d'éducation l'enfance*) at the CÉGEP (community college). Other days she leaves at 5:30 p.m.

Sylvie does not receive regular evaluations – she's had two since 1999, one right before the centre's director left to work elsewhere. Her job description is now up for review. The centre has no human resource policy and she has no written employment contract.

Sylvie earns \$44,629 annually, which is at the top of the G-2 category range. Examples of other jobs in this category, which starts at \$33,707, include directors of facilities (who report to a CPE director-general) and administrative assistants. Sylvie is eligible for annual increases of between one and five per cent if the Board of Directors feels that she has met her yearly objectives. Sylvie gets 5 weeks paid vacation and 11 personal leave days, including sick leave.

The centre pays for her professional development from the 1% of total payroll it is required to set aside for staff for this purpose. This has paid for the courses she's taken in the past 12 months, and for workshops in conflict resolution, self-evaluation and personnel management.

Sylvie says she gets support in her job from the two other directors of pedagogy (at the *Alizé* and *La brise* locations) and from the administrative team, as well as from her partner. She attends meetings of other CPE directors of pedagogy and advisors initiated by the organization for child care centres in the region, le *Regroupement des centres de la petite enfance de la Montérégie*. As well, she sits on the *Regroupement's* Board of Directors.

Challenges and recommendations

The fast pace of development the organization and other CPEs have experienced during the last six years has left the administrative structure in a fragile state. Sylvie would like an outside consulting firm to be hired to help with reorganization.

Sylvie also sees a number of broader challenges for child care:

- Parents are increasingly questioning the wisdom of putting their children in child care and the level of quality of services. This is leading to more difficult relationships between parents and child care teachers. Sylvie wonders whether this questioning stems from the fact that services cost only \$5 per day. She thinks that perhaps the lower fee lessens the perceived value of the services.
- Child care teachers have to make sure parents understand the importance of play in children's development. Parents often want a more formal educational approach for their young children instead of stimulating their development through age-appropriate toys and activities.
- Sylvie believes parents should take an active role in child care, but must never lose sight of the fact that the children's well being is the top priority when making decisions about child care services.
- The government must ensure that it retains a central role in planning and developing child care services. Sylvie says all the evidence points to a link between access to child care services and the birth rate in the province. Child care is a real support for families.

Sylvie has some recommendations to make. Children should be given more physical space than they now have. The ratio of teachers to infants and toddlers should be lowered. And the importance of children's socialization should be promoted to parents.

For Sylvie, child care services are meant to respond to the social needs of families and, in this sense, should not be viewed strictly as a support for working parents. Child care should be accessible and affordable to *all* families, regardless of whether or not parents are in the workforce. A child care centre fulfills more than one purpose. It is like an extended family, providing both an educational and a social environment, says Sylvie.

Sylvie says she has continued to work at the centre because she loves her job and because children's intelligence never ceases to amaze her. She enjoys the people she works with very much. In fact, the team at the centre is her greatest work satisfaction. She also likes the fact that child care teachers have a lot of autonomy in their work: they can do many different things within the scope of the educational plan for the day. She feels that her knowledge and the resources she contributes to the centre's programs are making a difference in the lives of the teachers and the children. Sylvie's story is a good example of someone who had neither experience nor strong interest in child care when she first started working in the sector, but then fell in love with it and made it a lifelong career.



MARIO RÉGIS

Mario Régis is the former director-general of le Regroupement des centres de la petite enfance de l'île de Montréal.

Mario Régis' first involvement in child care was as a volunteer. It was 1991, and he and his partner, Nathalie, had recently enrolled their son in regulated group care. Mario wanted to make a contribution to his son's child care centre and he did. He got involved in the centre's board of directors and became its president.

Six years later, he found himself involved in child care again, but at a different level. He became director-general of le Regroupement des centres de la petite enfance (CPEs) for the Montréal region, an organization that promotes regulated, non-profit, quality, accessible, early childhood education and care services. The Regroupement's membership is comprised of CPEs, which bring together non-profit child care centres and family child care agencies.

Mario wanted to make a difference to this organization too. And again, he did. When he started as director-general, the Regroupement had five employees. Today, it has 23 regular employees and an annual budget of \$4-million. He says he has a feeling of great professional satisfaction about his time as director-general. He left the organization financially viable and ensured a smooth transition for the next director-general. He is also proud of the important role he played in the merger of Québec's two major CPE organizations. He was faithful to his principles – respect, honesty and consistency – and was able to establish strong links between regional Regroupements des centres de la petite enfance in other parts of Québec.

A remarkable time

Mario feels he was also in on the ground floor of a remarkable period of development for child care services in Québec – the transition to universal, \$5-a-day child care services. He recalls the difficulties of finding and affording quality child care when he and Nathalie, a translator, first placed their son Vincent in regulated child care. At the time, they paid a monthly fee of \$400 – about four times the cost of child care before the government introduced its new family policy in 1997.

The couple had tried unregulated child care arrangements twice previously for their boy. The first time, the provider had to stop work because of a high-risk pregnancy. The second time, the care was inadequate. After two weeks, they decided to enroll Vincent in a centre not far from Mario's office.

Mario was then the YMCA's director of community development. He later left that job to go to work for a community development agency for the city's Hochelaga-Maisonneuve district. There, he came face-to-face with the problems of poverty, lone parenting, the difficulties of balancing work and family, and the need to find specific solutions for these issues.

When Mario and Nathalie had a second child, regulated child care was no longer an option for them. At \$810 a month and without any possibility of subsidies, they just couldn't afford it. Once again, they had to use unregulated care. They placed the children in a family care arrangement located close to their home until Vincent entered kindergarten at 5, at which point they enrolled their younger daughter, Marie-Andrée, in a community child care centre.

Today, Mario fears that the gains made in child care over the last seven years in Québec are very vulnerable. Québec's new Liberal government has already said that the \$5-a-day fee will be raised. Mario says he is not certain that the public fully understands the importance of quality child care to children, families and society. Judging from the tone of newspaper articles and editorials, he says, it seems as if the public still views child care merely as a more evolved form of babysitting. Furthermore, there seems to be little understanding of the differences between for-profit and non-profit child care services.

Mario's background

Mario has a degree in social services from l'Université de Sherbrooke. As a student, he worked as a probation officer. Before taking the job at the YMCA, he worked for the Children's Aid Society in Drummondville. He also worked as a mental health practitioner in Abitibi, and as a counsellor in a group home for young people at risk in Montréal.

As director-general at the Regroupement, he reported directly to the organization's board of directors. The board ensures that the director-general implements and follows the organization's vision and policies. Board meetings are held 11 times a year. Mario was evaluated annually by the board. Part of his evaluation included a questionnaire distributed to employees.

Mario was the Regroupement's principle public spokesperson as well as the spokesperson for the CPEs that belonged to the organization. He was responsible for establishing and maintaining closer links with the directors of individual CPEs and with parents on the organization's parent council. He also supervised and coordinated the work of the Regroupement with child care providers and front line workers.

As manager of the organization's employees, he ensured that job descriptions were developed for every position, completed a human resource policy, and put in place an evaluation process, a salary grid and written agreements with all employees.

Wages and working conditions

Mario earned \$29,000 when he started at the Regroupement. At that time, it was a small organization with few employees. With the merger of the family child care and centre-based programs, the organization grew, as did his responsibilities and salary. When he left six years later, he was earning \$51,000 annually. Nonetheless, during this period he chose to forego salary increases for several years so that he could create more jobs at the Regroupement and put in place a solid team to carry out the organization's work.

As director-general, Mario received five weeks paid vacation annually. The Regroupement's office also closes down for two weeks during the Christmas season. In addition, employees all receive 15 days a year of personal leave for any reason. (A reason needs to be provided if the leave is three or more consecutive days.) The leave is intended to help balance work and family responsibilities.

Mario's hours of work at the Regroupement were flexible, based on a 35-hour work week. Mario is a strong believer in balancing work and family. Only rarely did he work more than 40 hours a week, and he made sure to set limits in his job to ensure it did not overtake his life. For example, he had a rule that he would not work more than two evenings a week. If he was asked to do so, he would prioritize the meetings and either reschedule or cancel one of them.

Preparation for meetings, such as board meetings, was part of his regular paid work. He used the board's agendas as his overall work plan as director-general. During his time at the Regroupement, he also started graduate studies in social administration. He says the courses were very helpful for developing strategies and tools as a manager.

Mario had good support and resources to draw on in the organization. Internally, the members of his team were responsible for different files and had specific skills and abilities that were different from his. He was also supported by several members of the Board and the members of the organization's policy advisory committee. The latter makes recommendations on strategies, positions and actions the Regroupement should take with respect to government policies and developments related to child care.

Mario says he also drew on informal networks of support and continues to do so. For example, he was part of a group of seven professionals involved with social organizations, who had dinner meetings once a month. Each meeting had a three-part agenda: debriefings, exchanging ideas and advice, and a special theme. He also networked with colleagues from the CPEs and public servants from the *Ministre de la famille et de l'enfance*.

Future challenges

By the time he left the Regroupement in September 2003, Mario had done a lot of reflecting on the challenges facing child care in Québec. He believes that child care services are first and foremost beneficial to children and their development, and that any changes should be made with the interests of children as the top priority. He also says there is a need to consider parents and families. Child care services should help parents learn about child development, for example through parent contact with child care workers. Child care should also be a support for parents to enter and stay in the workforce.

The specific challenges Mario sees for child care are:

- Building bridges with other organizations involved with children and families with a view to offering more cohesive and integrated services.
- Finding ways to better support families.
- Opening up to different ways of providing child care.
- Finding ways to ensure that parents play a more significant role in the organizational structure of the CPEs.
- Finding a flexible model of governance for the CPEs, where all the stakeholders, especially parents, have real decision-making power at the local level.
- Developing ways to preserve the family character of family child care, ensure its services are of high quality and ensure good working conditions for providers.



MARINA A.

Marina A. is a family child care provider with Andrew Fleck Child Care Services in Ottawa, Ontario.

Marina A. starts her work day reading books, wrapped in a blanket with children. It's 7:45 a.m., and at least one or two children – still sleepy – have arrived at the home of this former high school teacher from El Salvador, who is now a family child care provider in Ottawa.

Her first job after coming to Canada in 1984 was as a nanny. Shortly after that, she found Andrew Fleck Child Care Services through a social worker from the Catholic Immigration Centre (CIC). A staff person from Andrew Fleck came to do a home visit, accepted her as a family child care provider, and she began working in this capacity in July 1985.

Five years later, she took on additional responsibilities related to child care. She joined the Multi-Cultural Enrichment Project of Andrew Fleck, which provided training in English as a Second Language along with a child care curriculum. Marina became a peer mentor in the project. She then enrolled in the early childhood education (ECE) program at Algonquin College through continuing education. She completed an ECE diploma with honours in seven years, receiving about seven course exemptions for her teaching credentials from El Salvador. Her final placement was with a licensed home child care program. She did not receive recognition for her work as a home child care provider.

Marina says that taking courses at night was demanding, but she learned a lot and was able to put new approaches into practice in her home child care program. She found the course content very useful for home child care.

Marina also directed three 10-week parenting courses in Spanish for the Parent Preschool Resource Centre. She feels it is very important to keep communicating with parents. Her sessions ran one day a week for two hours and dealt with a different topic each week. Marina used a curriculum developed by licensed and independent agencies for provider training. About 14 providers and parents attended the course.

Marina's family child care business

Marina cares for five children from 1½- to five years. She has cared for five children since she became a family child care provider. Some of the children move out when they enter school; others stay into their primary school years until Grades 2 or 3. The age range is typically mixed. Most children stay with Marina for several years, unless the family moves. Even then, parents often make long commutes so that they don't disrupt the continuity of care for their children.

In Marina's program, there are about 15 minutes of reading in the morning. Often, the older children also want to colour. They have easy access to papers, markers, straws, other materials (like feathers and sticks) and glue. Once the children are settled in, it's time to get moving, dancing to music for about 20 minutes. Marina finds that movement helps everyone feel part of the group and ready for a day together.

Morning snack is often fruit (bananas, apples) and yogurt. After snack, Marina often takes the children for a walk outside. When they come back, they have time to play with each other and the toys – it's free choice. Marina changes toys every couple of weeks. Those not in use are kept out of sight in containers. Marina particularly likes to have Lego and puzzles geared for different age groups.

Late morning is a regular circle time. Marina has made a collection of felt figures that accompany books, stories, rhymes and songs. Even the 1½-year-old likes to take part and put the figures on the board. The figures really capture the children's attention and are special to them.

During circle time, the child who attends kindergarten usually arrives (on the school bus) and joins the group. Circle time also includes exercise activities such as clapping, imitating actions and rhyming. Children learn the names of body parts through songs such as Hokey Pokey.

Lunch is varied – a favourite is tortillas. The children wash their hands (something Marina frequently reminds them to do), and take part in the preparation of the meal. They start with corn flour and make their own tortillas. They get their choice of beans, cheese, red pepper, chicken, tomatoes and other fillings. Lunch also includes milk and fruit.

After lunch there is a brief, quiet play time. Children choose their own activity – such as a memory game, flash cards or Bingo. The youngest child is usually happy with a tactile toy.

Then it's time for a rest, starting with a maximum of 20 minutes of a children's television program. The TV then gets shut off and Marina turns on soft music. Everyone naps. Even Marina lies down for 20 minutes, but she does not sleep. The oldest child is up within an hour; the youngest in about 1½ hours. As the children wake up, they look at books and Marina reads to them. Later they branch out into free play time, which often includes painting, play dough and other activities.

The day ends when the children get picked up between 4:30 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. Marina makes sure to establish the hours of care when families first register their children to attend her home care. Parents sometimes want to take advantage and come a little bit late at the end of the day. But Marina is quite firm: her program closes at 5:00 p.m. Most parents respect her hours and make adjustments to their work.

Marina's day is not limited to 7:45 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. She spends about five hours each day preparing materials, programming and cleaning. Marina feels that planning is an ongoing part of quality family child care. She finds it challenging to keep children of different ages engaged in learning activities that are geared to each child's intellectual level. She does some of her tasks in the evenings, and rests in the early morning before the children arrive. There is lots of laundry to do – towels, extra clothes – plus cooking and cleaning.

The program takes place on the ground floor, basement, family room and backyard of Marina's house because she wants the children to change environments throughout the day. The second floor of the house is private for her family alone. The children know the rules: only quiet activities in the living room on the ground floor; messy things happen in the basement; and the family room is for dancing, exercising and playing with balloons.

Marina's husband of 32 years (their two children are now aged 25 and 30) loves the children in the program and the children love him, which is really important. He is often at home in the morning or before the children are picked up. Marina considers him part of the program the children experience. The children see Marina and her husband as extended family.

Benefits and views on work

Marina gets no benefits – no health insurance, no sick leave. She receives a per diem for every child in her care, a set amount determined by Andrew Fleck's purchase of service agreement with the City of Ottawa.

The agency encourages parents to take their vacations at the same time as their caregivers so that caregivers can have paid vacations. If it doesn't work, the caregivers don't get paid when they go on holiday.

Marina finds her work very rewarding, and the agency, Andrew Fleck, very supportive of its child care providers. She says her home child care consultant is very professional as well as like a friend – she is always ready to talk to Marina about the children and their families. The agency deals with the financial aspects of the program. Marina says that Andrew Fleck backs up providers about being strict about their hours of work and other issues. It also provides many opportunities for professional development, such as workshops and short courses.

Isolation is not an issue for Marina as it is for some other home child care providers. She meets with two or three other providers regularly, and Andrew Fleck promotes play group activity.

Marina has often been asked by families to make private child care arrangements but has always said no. Andrew Fleck has been very good to her, and she feels loyal to the agency. She sends parents who request private care to the agency.

Rewards and challenges

The main reward of Marina's job is the smiling children she watches grow. She sees them flourish from babyhood to five or seven years of age, and is gratified to know she has contributed to their development. Sometimes, the relationship she develops with the children lasts long after they leave her care. One girl started at Marina's program 14 years ago at three months. She left the program six years ago but still calls Marina if something bad happens.

Marina has some complaints about her work, but not about the children or the parents. She feels it is unfair that child care providers are so inadequately paid and that, as self-employed contractors, they receive no sick leave, no benefits and don't have a pension plan. She says the government should treat child care providers as professionals and their pay should reflect the valuable contribution they make to society. Some parents on their own, she says, can't afford to pay the costs of quality care.

"We are professionals," she says. "We do the most important job. We are constructing a little child moment by moment. Better pay and benefits are absolutely necessary and deserved."

Marina's future plans

Five years ago, Marina applied to be a home child care consultant with Andrew Fleck, but she says she would not be happy to leave the children. Her feelings about this were confirmed last year, when she worked for three weeks with a delegation from Argentina came to Ottawa on a Canadian Child Care Federation project. Andrew Fleck replaced her for this period, and by the end of it, she found she missed the children.

Marina plans to continue working with Andrew Fleck, leading parenting courses and staying connected to the field.

She admits that the work tires her out from time to time as she gets older. But it's the children who renew her energy. "Children keep me young and energetic," she says. "I will never leave my children – they keep me going."

JOANNE MURRELL

Joanne Murrell is project coordinator at Corvette Early Years, a Toronto First Duty site. (TFD is a new service delivery system intended to provide early learning and care for every child by integrating existing early childhood and family programs, initiatives and services in a local community.)

"I'm a keener who jumps on things," says Joanne Murrell. Two and a half ago, this keener jumped right into one of the most interesting and innovative projects on early learning and care. Joanne has been coordinating the Corvette Early Years (CEY) project since it began in April 2002. CEY is about creating a community where child care, kindergarten, school, health and community programs and services work together to create a seamless program for all young children and their families. It is about using best practices in early childhood education, family resource programs and kindergarten to provide quality learning environments for children. The project is located in Corvette Junior Public School in Scarborough.

CEY serves a culturally-diverse neighbourhood. About 57% of the children are in English as a Second Language (ESL). Twenty per cent are newcomers to Canada, arriving within the last five years. Tamil is the mother tongue for 20% of the children. Altogether, there are 30 language groups represented in the school.

Not Your Average Daycare (NYAD) is the lead community agency for the CEY project (and Joanne's employer). Other partners include Corvette Family Resource Centre (East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club), Seneca College, Toronto Public Health Unit, Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre, and Toronto Community Living.

The project partners form a joint management committee that makes programming and resource allocation decisions. Joanne reports to this joint management committee. Her job is to coordinate the partners and seek opportunities to enhance existing capacity through increased collaboration and integration.

The project partners are now working on a single registration form for parents that will mean a one-time sign up for numerous activities. New activities include a preschool afternoon program, community nutrition programs, and an outdoor summer program for children 0-12 years with parents and caregivers, for children 0-6 enrolled in child care programs, and for children registered in Parks and Recreation programs. The project also aims to increase parent and caregiver participation in a variety of ways, including management of the project in an advisory capacity.

Kindergarten teachers, ECEs and family resource staff meet regularly to plan program activities, and are now looking at early intervention strategies. Joanne finds that integrating staff in multiple areas provides support for the team, parents and children, and opportunities to exchange ideas on curriculum.

Joanne's background

For Joanne, working at CEY is like going back to her career roots in Great Britain, where her first early childhood care experience was working with others in a team. Born in England in the 1970s, Joanne attended Dunstable College in England, receiving her NNEB in 1986 (A British early childhood education qualification received after completing a 2-year postsecondary education program).

After graduation Joanne had a number of jobs in England in the child care field:

- Supply teaching in an Education Funded nursery school for children 3-5 years, and then in a school for children with special needs, both using the team teaching approach similar to Joanne's current work situation (one ECE, one teacher and one resource teacher).
- A two-month stint in a private child care centre.
- Running a camp for two summers in a local hospital for staff's children aged five to 14.
- Working for a British holiday program on a Greek island for six months. She says it was lots of fun and long hours – 10 a.m. to noon; then 5 or 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. The program allowed vacationing parents to go to the beach and out for dinner.

In 1991, Joanne came to Canada as a nanny through the federal Live-In Caregiver Program. She worked for one year with a family of three children 1½-3 and found it very difficult. The family had adopted two Romanian children and had one of their own. Joanne left that family for another one, but had to return to England for four months when her father passed away.

She then returned to Canada, again through the Live-In Caregiver Program and worked as a nanny for another two years. After that, she decided to seek landed immigrant status and stay.

Her next job was not very fulfilling. She went to work in a preschool program located in a school, operated by a large multi-service, non-profit organization. The program was underfunded and Joanne says there was a lack of respect for her work. Different directions came from different people. Frontline staff were burned out and just tried to get through their daily routines.

Joanne was the ECE in a classroom of 16 children 2½- to six-years-old in a high needs community. She had one untrained assistant. It was a frustrating experience because it was simply not possible to meet the needs of the children. Stress levels were high and daily schedules unrelenting. There were program expectations and lots of evaluation, but Joanne found that she was running as fast as she could to just get through the routines and keep everyone safe.

There were no links with the school and the space was not built for preschool children. There was no washroom in the classroom so it was necessary to take all of the children down the hall for toileting.

It wasn't long before Joanne quit, returning to work as a nanny. At that point she started to attend a neighbourhood family resource program in downtown Toronto with the children in her care. She liked the program's philosophy and became more involved, to the point of leading parenting classes.

In 1997, she started as a family support worker at Davenport Perth Neighbourhood & Community Health Centre where she stayed for three years. It was a big learning opportunity. Her centre was involved in numerous initiatives; CAP-C, CPNP, School's Cool, food access and advocacy projects. The centre was also involved in a provincial accreditation process (Building Healthier Organizations), and Joanne was involved in working with a multidisciplinary team that included nurse practitioners, social workers, a medical doctor and a variety of community workers.

In 2000, Joanne moved to a well-established family resource program for 10 months – Early York East Toronto (EYET). She says that once there, she discovered that she had moved from a well-funded organization to one with few resources. She did, however, appreciate the advocacy role played by the organization and its leadership, Marg Cox.

The Boys and Girls Club of Ontario was next, where in 2001 Joanne became the Early Years Challenge Fund coordinator, whose main responsibility was to identify best practices and set up Early Years programming. The organization was small and she worked from home. She prepared a manual on how to set up early years programming in local Boys and Girls Clubs, consulting with clubs about program selection and implementation. This project gave her the opportunity to hone her computer, financial management and presentation skills.

In 1999, Joanne applied for ECE-equivalency at the Association of Early Childhood Educators, Ontario. She found the process frustrating since there was no seamless recognition of her experience. She had to take ECE courses at George Brown College in planning, advocacy and management, and infant, toddler and preschool skills. She also was required to complete one field placement. The course content focused almost exclusively on child care centre settings.

In 2000, she enrolled part-time in the sociology degree program at the University of Toronto. Since then, she has switched to the ECE degree program at Ryerson University (through continuing education). The change is due to a rekindled interest in early childhood education because of her work at CEY. Previous child care experiences had turned her off because of the custodial nature of the work, and the lack of emphasis on programming, child

development and curriculum. It will take her another five or six years to complete her ECE degree part-time. She will also be required to complete a special needs placement.

Views on work

The CEY project and the program at Not Your Average Daycare are very different from the child care programs Joanne had experienced earlier in her career. She likes the collaborative approach, and the different skills and experiences the staff bring to CEY. Joanne's own varied background is a valuable asset in the position. She also finds there is lots of support from team members.

Joanne feels that Not Your Average Daycare brings an emergent curriculum perspective to CEY that is positively influencing the programs and some of the kindergarten teachers. ECE staff, the teaching assistant and two of the kindergarten teachers participate in professional development activities that focus on the Reggio Emilia emergent curriculum approach. Joanne is stimulated by the interdisciplinary approach and values the contribution of the ECE stream in the project.

The team put together a summer program in 2003 using emergent curriculum, basing the curriculum on observations and children's interests, with emphasis on the physical environment (for example, innovative equipment and extensive use of sand and water). The program included daily feedback sessions led by Joanne with full staff participation. It was amazing to watch children playing and creating environments, and wonderful to see staff getting excited about opportunities and working together in a way they hadn't before. "We were able to showcase what we are doing, and the parents and children seemed to love it," said Joanne. The hope is that it might influence what is happening in other places.

Joanne says that TFD is an exciting, innovative initiative – you can never be sure where it will go next. In addition to its strong ECE focus, TFD involves parenting and health promotion. Joanne says that family resource programs bring a strong emphasis on parenting and family support, child care brings a focus on child development and kindergarten, curriculum and education. TFD has the flexibility to develop new programming that knits the various perspectives together.

Joanne finds it a challenge to prioritize resources – time and dollars – in her job. It isn't easy figuring out what the next doable step will be for CEY. It's also challenging to think about human resources. The basis of the positive change TDF is trying to achieve is the willingness of staff members to make changes to their daily practice. Joanne says it's difficult to assess staff readiness for the next step.

The life of the project is June 2005 (the same as the term of Joanne's three-year contract.) Joanne feels it is important to focus on what the community needs, not just the outcomes that funders want.

Joanne's views on ECE

Joanne has many observations about ECE and some recommendations:

- Other child care centres have the same problems she experienced when employed in the centre operated by the large multi-service organization. For example, the emergent curriculum approach now in favour in many child care centres calls for staff documentation of children's activity without designated planning time. But there is a significant difference between the work environment of teachers and that of ECEs. Teachers have a common lunch with each other and with teaching assistants, and their day with the children ends at 3:30. In child care, scheduling is very complicated and does not allow time for the planning necessary to meet program expectations. Required ratios push people into corners about who must do what and when, leaving very little flexibility. Furthermore, there are no dollars available to provide needed support.
- Strong child care is not only about education. We need to provide programs and services that support the child, family and community.
- Improvements to work environments for staff in child care will require additional funding and flexibility in the application of regulatory requirements, or perhaps some changes to the regulations. For example, multi-age grouping can work well. When children are all the same age, competition (and conflicts) increase, but in mixed aged groupings there is often more cooperation.
- Child care supervisors need a thorough grounding in what constitutes quality. They should continue to learn things and bring them to the centres and the staff team. Supervisors should model consistency, fairness and equality, have a good understanding of staff needs and be very good communicators.
- College ECE diploma programs are not graduating ECEs with the skills needed to work in integrated programs. The focus is largely on child care programs alone. There is a need to consider a wider range of field placements so that all students participate in a range of settings.
- Low wages and lack of respect for staff make it very difficult for projects like TFD, which are trying to build staff teams where all members are equal. Nonetheless, Joanne is finding that her work with CEY and TFD is an opportunity to take an active role in bringing together the different backgrounds and cultures of family resource program staff, child care/ECE and kindergarten teachers. With support and opportunities, collaboration results in a richer understanding of everybody's work with young children and families. Joanne is also finding a growing respect for the ECEs in this process. Structural barriers, such as different pay levels and reporting requirements, have not disappeared. But CEY, with Joanne's leadership, is making space for the team to develop.
- Services should be linked so that they are accessible in every community. Parents have different needs at different stages. Before a child's birth, they need prenatal support through health programs. The need for child care comes later. The Davenport

Perth Community Health Centre has an on-site child care centre, health services and programs for seniors. That was a more holistic approach to child and family service delivery.

Future plans

Joanne says she loves the challenges of her job and plans to continue. Doing administration and management is a way to have an impact, but she says she also tries to keep a close connection with front line work. Joanne says her skills have benefited from the fact that she has worked in different environments. She has developed a repertoire of organizational strategies that she can apply in diverse situations. In addition, the computer skills she honed while working at the Boys and Girls Club have been enhanced through consultation with her partner, Sharon, who manages an archive.

Joanne wants to see what happens at CEY and TFD. The project is not intended to be a pilot that ends. Rather, it is intended to be a pilot that fundamentally changes how programs are delivered. The road ahead is not clear, but for Joanne, that's part of the excitement. She is committed to seeing where the journey takes her.

DONNA HUYBER

Donna Huyber is a program supervisor at Lakeview Children's Centre in Langruth, Manitoba. The centre is operated by the Childcare Family Access Network (C-FAN), a non-profit organization that helps to develop and operate a number of child care, parent and child, and nursery school programs in rural Manitoba.

Among Donna Huyber's many qualities is the ability to be flexible. This is a very good thing, since she works at a rural child care centre in Manitoba that accommodates weekly enrollment, flexible groupings of children according to their numbers and interests at any time, extended evening hours during harvest time, and a year-round nursery school program. But it works out well – so well that Donna and two other staff from C-FAN recently received the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Early Childhood Education.

For Donna, 37, child care is a lifelong career. She has been working at Lakeview since she was 24, after short stints as a secretary, cook and Legion bartender. She expects to stay at the centre until she retires. Langruth, a community of about 300, has been her home since her birth.

Donna got into child care through her own initiative. In 1989, she started to take some correspondence courses in early childhood education and care through Red River College, after she heard a rumour that a child care centre might open in her community. Lakeview came into being the following year and was only too happy to hire a young woman with some ECE training.

Since the centre needed an ECE Level II to meet its licensing requirements, Donna was then "fast-tracked" and accepted into the province's Competency-Based Assessment Program with just one year of experience (typically the program requires two years).

The program, paid for by the provincial government, is an alternative way to acquire an ECE Level II. For the next two years, an advisor from Winnipeg would meet with Donna regularly in both Langruth and Winnipeg. Donna also had to spend time in a number of other child care centres. During the process, she had to demonstrate competency in 13 functional areas, and had ongoing projects and assignments, conferences to attend, and other professional development activities. She got her ECE II by the end of the two years.



But she didn't stop there. Close to half the children at Lakeview were of Aboriginal origin, so she enrolled in the Aboriginal Child Care Certificate Program at Red River College. Her employer paid for her to take the six required courses by teleconference and she got her ECE III in 1995. In 1997, she took more training for another two years, again through distance education, but this time paying for it herself. She got her special needs certificate and became the centre's special needs worker in 1999.

Now, as program supervisor, Donna reports to the centre director and is responsible for scheduling children and staff, all art activities, payroll and maintaining diaper charts on the younger children.

Lakeview Children's Centre

The centre where Donna works is housed in a building that was once Langruth's municipal building and later its post office. Federal grant money covered three-quarters of the cost of renovations to make it a child care centre; the rest came from the community. The centre now has a large main floor room with arts and crafts activities, and table toys. There is also an indoor gym, a small sleep room for infants and two bathrooms. Downstairs is a large room used for the nursery school and school-age program, and the child care office.

The families whose children attend Lakeview are mainly farmers or self-employed. Many of the mothers from the farm families work off the farm. Families live as far as 30 kilometres away from the program.

The centre is licensed for 28 children from three months to 12 years of age. It operates from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday throughout the year. Some children are at the centre for 10 hours a day, which Donna feels is very long for them. During the harvest season in September and October, the centre is open until 8 p.m. Enrollment is flexible: every Friday, parents make their requests for the following week and Donna does her best to accommodate them.

About half the children are full-time and half are part-time. In the mornings, eight children attend a nursery school program. They are replaced by the school-age children after school. The nursery school program is not a separate program but is integrated into the full-day program. Unlike many similar programs, the nursery school program operates year round. This is possible because the centre is able to accommodate both nursery school and school-age children who attend full-time in the summer due to fluctuations in enrollment. The centre is also inclusive of children with special needs.

The children at Lakeview are in mixed age groups. They start together in the mornings and break into smaller groups as numbers increase. Children are not assigned to a particular group, nor are staff assigned to a specific group of children, except for one staff who is responsible for feeding and diapering.

The approach at Lakeview is play-based. While it exposes children to a range of formal learning opportunities, this is not a program focus. It operates around weekly themes, as well as offering "kids choice" regularly, where the children plan and choose the activities. Activities each day include circle time, and art and science activities. Art, especially painting, is a major part of the program.

Reading and stories also figure prominently in the program. Every week, the three-, four- and five-year-olds go to the elementary school library a block away for story time. Through the School, Home, Access Reading Program (SHARP), they select books to take home and keep journals on their story-time experiences that they share with their parents. The school also invites the children to attend school plays, book fairs and other special events.

Donna and the other staff have an excellent relationship with the school. The staff at Lakeview feel they are treated as professionals and colleagues by the school staff. Teachers will often call the centre to discuss issues with staff. Child care staff are invited to sit in on any meetings about a school-age child who attends Lakeview.

Fees

The centre's fees are set by Manitoba Child Care and apply to all centres receiving operating grants. Full fees are \$27.45 per day for an infant, \$18.40 per day for a preschooler, \$9.20 for before- and after-school care, and \$5.50 for after-school care. About three-quarters of the families receive a subsidy and pay \$2.40 per day.

Since the centre is open extended hours, it receives 1½ times the usual operating grant and fee subsidy rates for any child who is in the program more than 10 hours per day.

Staff

Lakeview has four full-time and three casual staff, who are scheduled weekly on an as-needed basis. A cook comes in every day for about two hours, unless the numbers are low and a staff person is available to cook without going against adult: child ratios. A cleaner comes in once a week.

The first staff person opens the centre at 6 a.m. and finishes at 1 p.m. This person usually works alone until 8 a.m. three days a week when there are usually three children at that time. At 8 a.m., 10 more children arrive. The last staff person to arrive also works alone most of the time from 5:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. There have never been any of the safety concerns that exist in larger communities – the only unexpected visitors have been the occasional person looking for the post office. Staff who work alone usually feel no need to follow the safety procedures that are in place, such as locking the door and having the parents ring the bell to get in.

Donna says that the biggest challenge at the centre is a shortage of trained staff. Lakeview is operating on a provisional license, a problem that is not unique to the centre. Donna feels there are now many opportunities for those who live in Manitoba's rural communities to get training in a variety of affordable and

accessible ways. Still, she understands that people feel they have obstacles. Older staff tend to be unwilling to return to school, and the centre's one full-time aide has small children. She loves her job but can't add school to her other work and family demands.

There is only a small pool of people in Langruth to draw from as potential child care staff. Moreover, it is increasingly difficult for Lakeview to maintain a pool of casual and substitute workers. While Donna is in favour of child care regulations because she feels they support quality child care, she says the minimum age of 18 for a staff member is difficult in a rural community. There are a number of 16- to 18-year-olds in Langruth who would be willing to work on casual part-time, and who are responsible and competent. However, by the time they are 18, they often go away to college or leave the community for better work opportunities.

On the plus side, the centre gets money every year to hire summer students who usually come from Red River or Assiniboine College. They are usually ECE students, although one year the student was a police trainee.

Wages and working conditions

It's a full day for staff at Lakeview. There is no lunch hour (they eat with the children) – and you bring your own lunch or pay \$1.50 for the hot lunch served to the children. Staff can take breaks only if there is a quiet moment during the day. There is no staff room.

Staff work a 7.5-hour day, but are paid for eight. They are paid at Manitoba Child Care Association phase 3 levels. This means that staff with no formal training start at \$7.21 per hour. As a trained staff with considerable experience, Donna's wages are \$15.80 per hour. She feels she is fairly compensated for her work, but that the gap between trained and untrained staff is too great.

Benefits include extended health, 80% of prescription drugs, dental, optical care, and short- and long-term disability. The cost is split 50/50 with the centre. Donna is looking for a more affordable benefit plan. She currently has to spend \$110 per month on benefits. Staff get one day of sick leave per month, which can also be used for child illness. They also get three personal leave days per year.

Lakeview holds a monthly, two-hour staff meeting in the evening. Staff are paid and, if business concludes early, they use the extra time for program planning. When the centre is open for extended hours and children are picked up early (for example, if it rains and harvesting stops for the day), staff are given the option to stay at the centre to do administrative or planning activities, or they go home early and do not receive wages for those hours.

Wage increments are given annually for staff who attend at least two professional development activities each year. The centre closes one Friday in May so all staff can attend the Manitoba Child Care Association (MCCA) conference. The centre picks up the registration, hotel and travel costs for staff who attend, but does not pay them wages for the day. As a condition of employment,

each staff person must belong to the MCCA. The cost is \$6 per month for an untrained staff and \$15 per month for someone who is trained.

There are other professional development opportunities for staff:

- An annual mini-rural conference in McCreary, about an hour from Langruth, held on a Saturday, with staff costs covered by the centre
- A number of on-line courses
- A centre in Portage la Prairie that operates 24-hours, seven days a week and sponsors a number of professional development activities.

The children are the best part

As the years have passed, Donna's love for her job has only increased. She is glad that parents seem to have more respect for the work she and the other staff do. Almost gone are the days when a parent calls to ask if staff can babysit a child. But the best part is always being with the children. There's never a dull moment – every day is different. Donna feels she's pretty lucky – she works in a happy environment and wouldn't trade it for any other workplace.



JENNY SANDERSON

Jenny Sanderson is executive director of Four Feathers Inc. Aboriginal Head Start Program in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

I am a third born into my family
I worked very hard at a very young age
I had many siblings that I had to care for
To give my mother a bit of a break.

The work was hard but very rewarding
To see the smiles on everyone's face
When things got done
And the bread got baked.

– from *Reflections of Me*, by Jenny Sanderson

Jenny Sanderson is all grown up now, and long gone from the family homestead in Oak Point where she lived with her parents and eight siblings before she finished high school in the early sixties. But she has continued to work hard, and she still gets lots of gratifying smiles. Now, the appreciation comes from her children and grandchildren, and from the children and parents at the Four Feathers Inc. Aboriginal Head Start Program, where she has been executive director since 1996.

Jenny built the program from the ground up. When she started, funds were already in place for renovations, toys and equipment, and a space that had previously housed the Tenants' Association. Even though the program was exempt from licensing, it still had to meet the regulatory requirements established by the province. In the first five months, she had to design the space for a preschool program, get approvals and oversee renovations, deal with building, health, fire and safety inspections, prepare by-laws, and develop the necessary centre and staff policies.

She also had to find funding to train five potential staff recruited from the community. After partnering with the other three local Head Start projects, funding was secured for Red River College instructors to train the staff. The Indian and Métis Friendship Centre donated space to deliver the courses.

Sixteen students representing all four of the local Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) programs, including four students from Four Feathers Inc., were enrolled in the early childhood education (ECE) courses. The courses were taught over 2½ years.

Jenny's background

Jenny was recruited to Four Feathers Inc. from her job as a tax supervisor. Although employed in the business sector at the time, she already had considerable qualifications and experience working with young children.

Her career in early childhood education began only after she had been a full-time mother for many years. She had stayed home to care for her five children while her husband, Maurice, worked in construction. When her youngest son was in kindergarten, Jenny started thinking about a career outside the home and applied to volunteer in the classroom. At the time, the family lived in Lethbridge, where they'd moved from Winnipeg because of better employment opportunities for Maurice.

Jenny volunteered at her son's school, assisting in the kindergarten class and in the Grade 2 oral reading program for two years. It was then that she began to get a feel for what she wanted to do.

Her first full-time job was in 1976, working in a youth detention centre in the secure lock-up facility/holding centre for children aged 6-16. The work was very challenging and she would often come home in tears. She couldn't understand how people could treat their children so poorly. Many of the children were afraid and lonely because they were away from their parents. After eight months, she left her job at the detention centre, knowing that this type of work was not for her.

Instead, she realized that she wanted to work with preschool children. One day she looked up a child care centre in the Yellow Pages, called and got an interview. She was hired immediately for the job once the centre's owner learned she played the guitar. Jenny worked at the centre for three years until she and her family decided to move back to Winnipeg.

At the child care centre, Jenny cared for children aged three weeks to five years. Mostly, she worked with a group of 20 children aged 2 to 5 whose parents were professionals. She worked together with her boss and her boss's daughter, but she was responsible for planning all the preschool activities. In 1977, there were few regulations covering child care. The two staff only had first aid training.

Jenny found that her experiences with her own children and volunteering in the schools helped her considerably in her job. She recalls that even as a young child she was always the "teacher" when playing with her friends. Back then she'd wanted to be a teacher when she grew up.

Her career changed when she decided to take some formal training in the theory of early childhood education. In 1978, she enrolled in the ECE program at Lethbridge College, taking courses in the evenings and on weekends.

When the family moved back to Winnipeg in 1980, she enrolled at Red River College transferred her credits from Lethbridge. In August, she found employment close to home in a child care centre for two- to five-year-olds, operating from a church basement. Jenny was initially hired part-time as a maternity leave replacement for \$3.25 per hour – then the minimum wage for part-time employees. There were no benefits or sick days. She started working four hours a day and then went full-time, receiving a wage increase. She also continued with her courses at the college.

By 1982, Jenny had completed her courses and was classified as ECE Level II. She continued studying one course at a time, completing the requirements for her ECE III over the next six years. Purely out of interest, she also enrolled in a distance education course on cultural awareness at Humber College in Ontario.

After six years as a child care worker at the centre, she became assistant director and subsequently director. In her first two years as director, she oversaw the centre's move from the church basement to a school environment. This taught her a lot about building codes and bylaws, which really helped her when she became involved with the Aboriginal Head Start program.

The centre occupied four classrooms in the school. Jenny says it was good to be in this setting. The activities, materials and equipment no longer had to be put away at the end of every day. The five-year-olds could just walk down the hall to their kindergarten class. The staff also had access to some of the supports and infrastructure of a larger organization, including a staff room, gym and library.

At first, the schoolteachers were a bit hesitant about the child care workers' role and treated them as glorified babysitters. But over time, as the teachers came to know more about early childhood education, they increasingly recognized the child care staff as professionals. Child care and teaching staff became more involved in joint assessments of children attending both the school and the centre.

During this period, the Manitoba Child Care Association was lobbying for better wages and benefits on behalf of all child care workers in the province. Wage subsidies were paid by the government to all Child Care Worker IIs to meet salary standards. There were also additional benefits: group/life/dental insurance, paid sick days and mental health days.

When Jenny moved to another area of the city, she found another job as director in a child care centre close to her home. The centre was unionized, and the wages and benefits were considerably better for all staff compared to her former workplace. Staff also received the same benefits: group/life/dental insurance, paid sick leave and mental health days.

At the time, there was a shortage of qualified child care workers across the province. The government implemented a six-week training program for those who worked in the field but were not yet qualified. Child care workers who completed the program were granted equivalent status to an ECE level II.

Jenny feels that those who took the course lacked the theory and understanding of early childhood development. She tried to recruit more people into the field by doing workshops in high schools, and encouraging students to consider child care as a career and enroll in ECE training.

Jenny found negotiations time-consuming and, after working at the centre a few years, she shifted gears. Her family was her priority, and she cared for her grandchild while her daughter-in-law completed school. Jenny also completed a course in tax preparing, landing a seasonal job as a tax preparer. During her first two weeks on the job she was promoted to tax supervisor in charge of her own office within a local mall.

After her daughter-in-law graduated, Jenny decided to enter business college, studying business information, accounting and computer technology. It was here that she met a colleague who was on the board of Four Feathers Inc. Aboriginal Head Start Program. The colleague convinced her to apply for the executive director position of the AHS program.

Four Feathers AHS program

Four Feathers Inc. is an early intervention program for Aboriginal children funded by Health Canada. The Head Start program is located in a 254-unit subsidized housing complex in the north end of Winnipeg. The AHS program occupies a double three-bedroom unit, which has been renovated to meet the program's needs.

The upper level has four rooms containing areas for the children's library, a housekeeping/block area, an area for science/cultural activities, a sand and water play area, and two washrooms. The main level has a kitchen, dining room/art area, a receiving room with locker space for 40 children, a washroom and the executive director's office. The lower level, which is inaccessible to the children, contains an office for the bookkeeper, a staff room/board room, a laundry room/storage room, and a staff washroom.

When Four Feathers Inc. first opened its doors, it operated two half-day programs three days a week. The remaining two weekdays were given over to a 2½-year ECE staff training program. Four Feathers Inc. now provides two half-day preschool programs four days a week. The fifth day is for staff professional development, training, meetings, program preparation, planning and cleaning. The program is generally closed for the summer months, with the exception of a two- to three-week summer fun program for the children.

The regular program can accommodate 40 Aboriginal children (20 in the morning and 20 in the afternoon). There are four ECEs in each program. The morning children receive a full breakfast and lunch; the afternoon children are served lunch and a snack. The program is usually at maximum enrollment. It had previously accommodated children aged two to five, but this past year changed to focus on three- to five-year olds for a national longitudinal study.

Parents do not pay fees, but must participate in the Head Start program at least five hours a month. All parents are low income (about 5% are in the paid labour force) and most are from the local community. The program is well-known locally. Parents find out about it through word of mouth, community agencies, open houses, workshops and community memos.

Since being at Four Feathers Inc., Jenny has added a number of other programs in response to the needs of her community. Five years ago, she instituted a Health Baby program for pre- and post-natal mothers. The coordinator of the program conducts home visits and nutrition workshops, and provides support to the mothers. There is also a community kitchen, and self-care and pre- and post-natal information workshops for the seven to 15 mothers who attend the program each week.

Jenny also received funding for one year to implement a crime-prevention strategy providing knowledge, techniques, and prevention and safety workshops to keep families in the community safe. Five peer support workers were recruited from the community and trained, and four have successfully completed the program. The project co-ordinator oversees the peer support workers in six key areas of the crime-prevention strategy: health and safety, social supports, education, crisis intervention, resources and elder support. A 24-hour help line is available for clients who need assistance and referrals while in crisis, and sometimes a person to talk to.

Jenny also receives funding for the Urban Green Team, which provides 10 weeks of summer employment for two to four youths who undertake initiatives to beautify the community and help others take pride in it.

Another project is facilitated by a parent leadership coordinator at the Parent Training Centre. It was developed at the community's request, after mapping the type of services the community wanted. Due to funding cuts however, the Parent Training Centre can no longer provide college entry-level academic training. The centre had previously graduated four community mothers. Jenny is proud that one student has continued to further her education in a two-year Aboriginal Language Specialist Training Program and has made the Dean's honour roll.

The parent leadership coordinator now provides computer training, social development workshops, and hands-on learning while children attend the AHS program.

As another way of meeting needs and reaching more parents, Jenny developed a partnership with a local Coalition for Community Internet Access. The centre provides Internet training, information, communications and job searches.

Jenny also developed a Home Base program, where a coordinator makes monthly home visits and facilitates social development workshops for parents to learn skills in sewing, crafts, cooking and activities for mothers to do with their toddlers. She finds that these activities have really helped families rebuild their self-esteem and self-confidence.

Wages, work environment and work

Staff at Four Feathers Inc. earn between \$900 and \$18.00 per hour for a 30- to 40-hour work week. Salaries depend on qualifications, training and experience. All staff receive three weeks paid vacation per year, and four weeks vacation after five years of service. The staff consist of an administrative assistant, early childhood educators, a cultural advisor, a home-based coordinator, a parent leadership coordinator and a cook/cleaner. All staff are of Aboriginal ancestry.

Staff benefits include paid sick days, group insurance, dental and medical insurance, life insurance, dental and vision care, and extended health benefits. There is no pension plan, which Jenny says she wishes she had.

Jenny is responsible for nine staff. She reports to the Four Feathers Inc. AHS board of directors, which consists of parents and community members. Her work responsibilities include staff hiring and ensuring the program meets government regulations, even though the centre is exempted from licensing. She is also responsible for: ensuring that the centre operates smoothly with full enrollment and within budget; staff training; regular contact with parents; parent workshops; organizing parent gatherings; and formal reporting to Health Canada. Reporting follows a standard format for all AHS programs in six categories: education, culture and language, health promotion, nutrition, parent involvement and social supports.

Jenny also oversees the centre's daily operations, monthly cash flow reports, quarterly reports, daily children's attendance records, parent participation and volunteer hour records, and partners with other agencies for resources to help the programs. In addition, she networks with other agencies to meet the needs of the children attending the program, including with Child and Family Services, local clinics, schools and other related agencies.

Ongoing training

Ever since her first ECE course in 1978, Jenny has been involved in ongoing training and professional development. She recently completed the Certified Applied Counselling Course at Red River College, graduating with honours. Jenny finished the two-year program in just 11 months, even though it sometimes meant attending classes four nights a week.

As well as her formal courses for credit, Jenny has participated in Cree and Ojibway basic language training, Nobody's Perfect facilitator's training and infant attachment courses. She has also taken courses on: fetal alcohol syndrome and its effects; alcohol, chemical and drug addictions; and domestic abuse and violence. She updates her courses in food handling, first aid and CPR as required. Jenny has also taken additional courses in corporate tax preparation and many other management training seminars and workshops related to her job.

In addition, Jenny hosted and participated in a four-week High Scope Training course for 23 AHS staff. She hosted the two-week training in Winnipeg and another Head Start program hosted the other two weeks in Thompson in Northern Manitoba. All 23 participants completed the course.

Rewards and challenges

Jenny says she loves working in a program that is culturally-based and promotes the children's Aboriginal heritage. It gives the children a sense of pride and builds their self-esteem. It teaches them to know who they are, and supports their successful entry into the formal school system and is the beginning of their life-long learning.

Jenny finds it gratifying to know she is making a difference in the lives of children who may not otherwise have an opportunity for a preschool experience. She says it's great to see the children happy, making friends and developing good social skills.

She also likes the fact that she is helping parents positively influence their children's lives. She says it's rewarding to see parents gain skills and make strides – even if it's one step at a time. One parent who previously participated in the program remains on the board of directors at Four Feathers Inc. The cook/housekeeper is a parent who took a course in food handling and CPR after her involvement in the AHS program, and was then hired to join the team at Four Feathers Inc.

Jenny's biggest challenge is the length of time it takes to have a child assessed who may need immediate supports. For children with delayed speech/language or development skills, or possible fetal alcohol effects, a four- to six-month wait is not workable, and becomes even more difficult because many families in the community are transient. By the time staff at Four Feathers Inc. have completed the child observations and documentation for the Child Development Clinic while working with parents to get supports in place, the family might have moved. When the process is completed in a shorter time frame, it can make a world of difference for children who require therapy and additional supports.

Recommendations

Jenny would like to see more opportunities for staff to gain the workplace experience and training in early childhood development that reflect the realities of the community. She would like to see more children have equal opportunity to participate in a high quality early childhood education and care program during their preschool years, regardless of their parent's income or employment status.

She feels that the AHS programs are better funded now than in the past. However, there is always a need for more funding so that the program can continue to grow and meet the every-changing needs of the children. Fundraising in a community with few financial resources is an ongoing activity at Four Feathers Inc.

Future plans

Jenny clearly enjoys her work – she plans to stay at Four Feathers Inc. until she retires. Before that happens, she wants to write a collection of Aboriginal children's stories. She will also continue to write poetry, which gives her great pleasure. She discovered her inner poet when she started adding a few poems to the program's monthly newsletters.

This multi-talented, creative woman has a healthy sense of self, something she has tried to instill in the children at Four Feathers Inc. Her poem, *Reflections of Me*, says it all:

We didn't have much
In terms of money
But the love we shared
Will always be treasured.

In learning about who I am
Has lifted my spirits
And has proven again that I have
Done my best and always am proud.
To be that reflection of me.

PEGGY ADAMACK

Peggy Adamack is a pre-kindergarten teacher of three- and four-year olds at Kitchener Public School, an inner city school in Regina, Saskatchewan. It is one of a number of pre-kindergarten programs in Saskatchewan for high-risk children, delivered through the school system.

Peggy Adamack says she gets paid to share joyful experiences with children – some of whom have great sadness in their lives. As a pre-kindergarten teacher in an inner city elementary school in Regina, she works with children who live in conditions of risk and extreme hardship. Most of their parents are on social assistance and have to struggle every day to get by. Dealing with the harsh realities of the lives of the three- and four-year-olds in her care is the toughest part of Peggy's job.

Peggy says that few of the children in her class are from traditional nuclear families. Many of the three-year-olds walk to school by themselves. Some of the children she taught a number of years ago are already having children. She finds the children totally honest and has learned to deal with comments at news time such as, "My dad beat up my mom and now he is in jail."

She also has to deal with the fact that children are often apprehended and taken into care. Peggy herself many times has had to report incidences of suspected child abuse or neglect to the school social worker and principal, who then make a decision about a course of action.

Social Services provides taxis for children in foster care and may have moved out of the neighbourhood so they can have some stability and consistency. Peggy says it's frustrating that as soon as a family seems to be doing better they often move and may not have any supports available in their new community.

The program

In spite of these daunting circumstances, Peggy loves her job. She says the children are wonderful and it's very gratifying to make a difference in their lives. Her program provides a caring, stimulating and fun preschool experience – something to which many of these children might otherwise never be exposed.

Her classroom is set up with many learning centres. The room contains a loft with puzzles; a work bench with nails and saws; a carpeted area for opening activities, circle and story time; a listening centre; sand and water tables; areas for blocks and trucks; a small library and tables for fine motor and art activities;

and a discovery table for science activities. The room has lots of plants, as well as lockers for each child. It also has a pet: Peggy's "teenage" turtle, Dan, who spends much of his time in the classroom, delighting the children.

There are two computers in the classroom, which can be used by parents as well as by children. An adjacent room is used for breakfast and snacks, which are available for the children who want them. There is also a mini-gym and the main school library. Peggy rarely uses the playground due to safety concerns, but takes the children for swimming lessons and excursions in the city on a regular basis. She always invites families and caregivers to come along and a few sometimes do.

Peggy is usually at work by 7:30 a.m. She has 16 children in the morning, from 9 a.m. to 11:45 a.m., and 16 in the afternoon, from 12:45 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Families are welcome in the classroom at any time and are encouraged to participate in some way throughout the year.

The children attend four mornings or afternoons a week. Fridays are Family Days, when a few of the children attend with their parents. Some family members are receptive, but many have considerable struggles of their own and do not participate. In addition to parents spending time in Peggy's classroom, there is a large room next door run by the community school liaison where parenting and information sessions are held sometimes.

Peggy has a full-time assistant, a teacher "associate" who has worked with her for many years. The assistant started as a parent volunteer and was later hired in a paid position. Over the years, she has taken a number of ECE workshops and related professional sessions. Peggy gives instructions to her assistant each day, but is not her supervisor. The principal is responsible for overseeing the work of all the staff. The parents and children view both Peggy and her assistant as "teachers." The assistant belongs to the same union as the support staff, and is paid about \$13 an hour plus benefits.

Many duties

Peggy's duties include many activities: setting up learning centres, providing a program in accordance with the guidelines set out for the pre-kindergarten best practices, conducting assessments of children, getting any additional supports needed and doing at least three home visits of every family during the year. She does the first home visit early in the school year, usually with her classroom assistant or the community school coordinator. They bring a few things, such as used magazines for the adults, books for the children, little toys, toothbrushes and pamphlets about pre-kindergarten.

Peggy usually has to find her own time for planning. It's not possible to do it during the day, and there are often parent and family events in the evenings and on weekends. These are held

as a way of bringing families into the school. A lot of parents have not had good experiences as children: many were in residential schools. They also have not had good role models for parenting. There are often no toys or children's activities in the home.

At the meetings, parents are presented with ideas about things they can do with their children. With the parents' permission, the children are videotaped in class ("Kids on Camera") and the tapes are played back to the parents so they can see what their children are capable of.

Word of mouth

Parents often learn about Peggy's pre-kindergarten program by word of mouth, or are referred by health or social work professionals. Peggy's school, Kitchener Public School, advertises the program during the summer. Priority is given to children who attended the previous year and to those most in need. There's usually a waiting list, but since the community is very transient, most children get a chance to attend during the year. Last year, 78 children attended Peggy's class at various times throughout the year. Only five stayed on for kindergarten. The province is now using health cards to keep track of children and where they are registered for school.

Children are supposed to be three or four years old to attend the program, but Peggy takes a few toilet-trained two-year-olds in her class, especially if the child has an older sibling in the class. She occasionally has children as old as six if they are significantly delayed. Very few families are in the paid labour force and none would be able to afford to pay for a preschool experience for their child.

Peggy's background

When she graduated from high school in Brandon, Manitoba, Peggy dreamed of going to San Francisco or Montreal. Instead, she opted for Regina since her aunt and grandparents lived there and it made going to university more affordable. For the last two years, she has been house-sitting for her brother, sharing her current home with two ESL students from Japan, her cat and Dan the turtle.

Peggy has extensive experience and a long list of credentials in the education of young children. She started out as an arts major in Regina, changed to phys. ed, and then decided to major in education in the middle years. This program focused on the upper elementary years – Grades 3 to 8. She graduated in 1978.

For the next 10 years, Peggy worked teaching various grades from kindergarten to Grade 4 in four remote areas. Her first job was teaching Grade 1 in a fly-in community of 200 in Northern Saskatchewan. None of the 16 Dene children in her class spoke English. She worked through an interpreter: instruction was in English because the parents wanted their children to learn the language.

Each summer, Peggy returned to Regina where she still had family. She often took summer classes in ECE at the Faculty of Education, focusing on kindergarten to Grade 3. In 1989, she returned to Regina and completed a certificate of extended studies in ECE.

Peggy applied for an educational leave for a year to continue her studies in Regina. She attended classes full-time, and taught kindergarten half-time in a community school. During this period, the Band schools took over education on-reserve and Peggy's job was made redundant. She continued her studies and got her second certificate of extended studies in reading and language arts the following year.

Peggy started teaching kindergarten full-time, and then taught half kindergarten and half pre-kindergarten at an inner city school. In 1992, she began teaching pre-kindergarten full-time and continued with her studies during the evenings and on Saturdays. Over the next five years, she completed her Masters in Early Childhood Education.

In 1997, Peggy was seconded for two years to Saskatchewan Learning as a pre-kindergarten consultant. She worked to expand pre-kindergarten and helped develop the pre-kindergarten document, *Better Beginnings*, which sets out a framework for expanding pre-kindergarten programs in high-needs communities. Regina has operated pre-kindergarten programs for the last 26 years, but increased its provision through the 2000 Early Childhood Development Agreement.

Peggy has also done contract work for Saskatchewan Learning (the Saskatchewan ministry responsible for Education) – organizing conferences; conducting professional development activities for school boards, directors, administrators and teachers; and putting on workshops for other school boards on pre-kindergarten. Sometimes Peggy found going into other classrooms disheartening. She was frustrated by how little Saskatchewan Learning was changing. Even though play-based curriculum had been in place since 1978, it was hard to tell it existed in many classrooms. But when she thought of herself as a planter of seeds, she came to find the experience worthwhile in spite of its frustrations.

Wages and working conditions

Peggy is a member of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation with the same salary and benefits as other elementary school teachers. With her years of experience and education, Peggy is at the top end of the salary scale – in the high \$50,000s. She has comprehensive medical, dental and optical benefits, one sick day per month (which can be banked), short- and long-term disability, and a pension plan. Even though she has a relatively good salary, Peggy only gets paid 10 months of the year, and has to budget carefully for the summer months when she does not receive a paycheque.

Every six years, Peggy has an in-depth performance review with her principal where she sets goals and identifies five areas of professional development she plans to pursue during the upcoming five years. In the sixth year, she summarizes the previous five years and begins the process again. In addition, she meets with a colleague three times a year, exchanging goals and discussing their plans for the year.

Peggy has many professional development opportunities, most of which are paid by the school board. She also is called upon to prepare professional development activities for other teachers. For example, last year she was a “mentor teacher.” She also conducted a professional development session on facilitating artists in the schools. She went to the art gallery with a number of families and children. She wanted them to know that they had a right to be there and to help reduce some of the isolation in their lives. She also attended a conference on women’s issues and how women are isolated in the suburbs. In addition, Peggy applied for a three-week educational leave to go to Glasgow, to visit schools and tour universities.

Recommendations

Peggy feels all teachers who work with young children should have an ECE background, as well as a teaching credential. She says that within the school system there is a general belief that pre-kindergarten- and kindergarten-age children are “only little children,” and that specialized training is not necessary. Peggy notes that to get special education funding you have to prove that the teacher is qualified. The same proof, she says, should be required for working with very young children. Moreover, some school boards do not pay pre-kindergarten staff at the same scale as other elementary teachers.

Peggy has taken the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) training and visited many child care centres. She finds that many staff do not have the skill or ability to implement appropriate programs, and that they respond to pressure from parents for their children to be “better prepared” for Grade 1. Many child care staff seem to believe this means teaching children the alphabet and how to print their names.

Peggy says she is disturbed by advertisements for “academically advanced” programs for three- and four-year-olds. She feels many parents don’t know what to look for in a good early childhood program. She would like to see standardized basics of early childhood environments and professional qualifications for all individuals caring for and teaching young children.

Peggy is also concerned about the quality of a number of pre-kindergarten programs. She thinks that the general public doesn’t appreciate the value of the work of teaching young children. She was in a dragon boat race recently, having a conversation with a fellow participant, who quickly changed the conversation when Peggy told him she taught three- and four-year-olds. The implied message was, “If you were smart enough you would be teaching older children.” There are now three men teaching pre-kindergarten in Peggy’s school district and she thinks this will help improve recognition for the job.

Peggy would like to see all children have access to high quality programs that give them a head start in life. She would like to see full-day programs for children whose families want and need them. She acknowledges that the number of programs is expanding every year and some are moving beyond the core neighbourhoods into rural communities.

What the future holds

Peggy plans for the future – no doubt about it. She will soon be starting her education doctorate in ECE at the University of Glasgow. The process will take about five years and will include a combination of on-line classes and week-long trips to Glasgow. Peggy wants to write her thesis on the lifestyles of three-year-olds or engaging families.

She was also recently invited to participate in a project of Saskatchewan Learning to develop math ideas for children in pre-kindergarten to Grade 2. The project is designed for Aboriginal and Métis children and uses some traditional tools, such as a dream weaver, to impart math concepts.

Peggy knows she will have to move schools soon. Regina Public Schools has a policy of teachers staying a maximum of eight years before being transferred. It’s not clear to Peggy where she’ll go next. No matter what happens, she feels she’s had some great professional development opportunities, and a very rewarding time working with incredible children who live in some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable. As challenging as it’s often been, she feels she’s been privileged to be able to do such important work.

LEE TYSOWSKI

Lee Tysowski owns and operates Sing a Rainbow Preschool in Regina, Saskatchewan. In Saskatchewan preschool (nursery school) programs are not licensed.

It was Spring 2000, and Lee Tysowski's dream was coming true. After years of working with young children, and with a newly-completed early childhood education (ECE) certificate, Lee was about to become the owner of a preschool centre. She'd given it a lot of thought and was ready to take the leap.

Thanks to an interest-free loan from her parents, she was able to purchase the centre, which was located in a strip mall. Over the summer, Lee and her mother cleaned and refurbished the space, and reorganized it to make it more child-friendly. The centre opened its doors that fall.

Today, Sing a Rainbow Preschool operates a program for 48 three- and four-year-olds. The centre follows the school calendar, but also stays open for school staff professional days. Sixteen four-year-olds attend three mornings a week, and 16 three-year-olds two mornings a week. There's also a class of three- and four-year-olds who come two afternoons a week.

The centre is no longer in the strip mall. It moved when the rent doubled to \$1,400 a month and is now housed in the classroom of a public school for a much lower monthly rent – just \$200 including all utilities except the telephone. The new location is working out well. The principal is supportive and welcoming, and Lee has developed a good relationship with the kindergarten teacher. Lee has access to the school staff room and to staff resources, such as for a child with a learning disability. The children have regular access to the library and the school playground and, on request, to the gym.

Good staff are hard to find

While Lee has had luck finding a good, affordable space, she's found it much harder to keep the program adequately staffed. Her biggest challenge is finding competent, child-focused, committed staff who will stay. There aren't many people who can afford to work for the \$8 an hour Lee pays for 21 hours a week. She's worried about the impact of high staff turnover on the children. But she feels she just can't pay more and maintain full enrollment. Her parent fees are already at the high end of the average for Regina: \$65 a month for children attending two days a week and \$85 a month for three days a week.

When Lee left her last preschool job to open Sing a Rainbow, she took a fellow staff member with her. But in less than a month, Lee had to let the staff person go because she was not interacting adequately with the children and was poorly prepared for the program each day. That was just the beginning of Lee's staff woes:

- She hired a friend who had been a family child care provider. The friend soon found out she was pregnant and had to leave because of extreme morning sickness.
- Interviews with 15 people who answered Lee's ad in the paper turned up no suitable replacement – and certainly no one with the ECE or teaching qualifications Lee desired. She finally found a warm and caring woman who also had a job driving a school bus. The woman couldn't start until 9:30 a.m. each day instead of 8:30, as Lee had wanted. Still, the arrangement worked until the bus company changed the woman's hours and she had to leave. Driving a bus paid \$17 an hour, more than double what the woman earned at Sing a Rainbow Preschool providing early childhood care to young children.
- Lee advertised again, and found a student teacher who finished off the year before doing her teaching internship.
- Through word of mouth, Lee found a retired Grade 1 special education teacher for the 2002/2003 school year. This arrangement worked until parents started to raise concerns about the teacher's attitude near the end of the school year. Luckily, says Lee, it was only a 10-month teaching term.
- In the fall of 2003, the student teacher returned to work at the preschool centre. But she is pregnant and will take maternity leave starting at Christmas. However, she plans to return to the preschool centre after her leave.

A snapshot of Lee's background

- Lee was born in Manitoba in 1974 and moved to Regina when she was three.
- She studied music for many years, playing both the organ and the flute.
- She started working with children in 1993 at age 19, shortly after Kade was born. She worked afternoons as a nanny for a six-month-old, taking Kade with her.
- In 1996, she got a job teaching the Orff music program at a fine arts co-op preschool centre where Kade was enrolled. (She continued to work as a nanny in the afternoons.) The preschool job paid \$9 an hour. Planning was done on her own time. There were no benefits, except for the required 4% vacation pay.
- With encouragement from the preschool centre director, Lee enrolled in the ECE program at the Saskatchewan Institute of Science and Technology in the continuing education program.
- She was later in line to become the new director of the preschool centre. But she had to make two emergency trips to England to help care for her ailing grandmother. When she got back from the second trip after her grandmother died, she found out she'd been passed over by the board for the director's job. The board had been told she had chosen to take vacation, and a letter she'd written to parents explaining her situation was never distributed.
- Although told she could continue as the music teacher, she was hurt and disillusioned so she resigned. She also left her job as a nanny that fall, when Kade began kindergarten.

- In January 2000 she worked for the YMCA preschool for six months, working one-on-one with a 3-year-old with Asberger's syndrome.
- Before opening her own centre, she worked at Story Time preschool – a privately owned preschool for 16 children. She worked five mornings a week for \$10 an hour and was paid for planning time.

Lee's views on ECEC

Lee would like to see the government fund preschools similar to the way it funds child care centres, so that staff can be paid better and so programs are stable. She feels the government should regulate preschools in Saskatchewan to reduce the number of short-lived operations in the province. There is no provincial legislation covering preschool programs now, which means that they are not required to be licensed or regulated. She also feels it is important to ensure that most people who work in preschool programs have ECE credentials.

Lee believes there are significant differences between preschool and child care. From observations of child care centres when she was doing her ECE practica, she thinks there is more program planning in preschool, with flexibility on a day-to-day basis depending on the needs of the children. She also believes the staff are more actively involved with the children and form stronger bonds with them.

She has mixed feelings about the fact that almost all child care centres in Saskatchewan are non-profit and that this is a requirement for funding. When she was working at her first preschool centre, she felt the co-op board sometimes made decisions that were not in the best interests of the children. Since the board was not involved in the day-to-day operations of the program, they sometimes based decisions on incomplete information. Moreover, the turnover of board members was high since the children were only enrolled for a maximum of two years.

Great work but low pay

Lee works hard to keep the preschool centre going. She puts in an additional 10-15 hours a week on non-classroom activities such as planning, purchasing, maintaining contact with parents and preparing the preschool newsletter and billings. For professional development, she reads early childhood literature, such as the Canadian Child Care Federation's *Interaction*, and attends the Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association conferences. She's never taken a sick day or any other day off since she opened Sing a Rainbow. She seems, though, to always get sick when the program is closed for the holidays and she has some free time.

Lee loves to work with children. Her greatest fulfillment is seeing them master new skills. For example, she recalls a child who joined the program and did not speak a word of English. After little more than a week, he picked up a toy horse when Lee used the word, and beamed with pride at his accomplishment.

Another bonus of her job is that she can spend more time with her son, Kade. Her mother had stayed home when Lee was a young child and she has always tried to give Kade the same experience. Her job allows her to be with him in the summer and on school breaks. And she and her partner Tyson have arranged their shifts so that Kade, now 10, is with one of them much of the time when he's not in school.

But the reality is Lee can only continue in the job she enjoys so much because Tyson has a good income. All the benefits she has are also through his job. She'd never be able to make ends meet if she were the sole support in the family. In fact, she doubts that she'll operate Sing a Rainbow over the long-term. More likely, she'll return to school and perhaps study child psychology.

DORIS LAZO

Doris Lazo is a child care worker at Marlborough Day Nursery, in Calgary, Alberta.

For Doris Lazo, working in child care means you are taking care of the future of the world. That's why it's so frustrating to her that child care workers are often viewed as glorified babysitters. With wages of less than \$10 an hour, the recognition of the important role Doris and other child care workers play in the lives of young children and their families clearly isn't there. If it was, she wouldn't also have to work at the Dairy Queen 20 hours a week to make ends meet.

Doris, 26, was born in El Salvador and came to Canada with her family in 1989 when she was 12. It was a huge relief to leave the political unrest of El Salvador behind, though not easy to start all over in a new country.

When Doris arrived in Calgary she didn't speak any English and had never experienced a snowfall. Her family lived in an immigrant house downtown and eventually moved into a townhouse in the northwest part of town. Today, Doris still lives in Calgary.

When she was 16 in high school, Doris started working in child care part-time. Her mother was already working at the same child care centre. During this time, Doris took the Level 1 orientation course. After high school graduation, she decided to take a year off and worked full-time at the same centre.

This work experience led her to go to college to study early childhood education and care. The Level I training she already had, she says, was inadequate: "You don't have training to deal with certain things that happen (for example, behavioural problems) and don't have the extra knowledge, patience and understanding for the children."

Doris attended Mt. Royal College for three years, received her Early Childhood Development (ECD) Certificate and achieved Level II certification. She did her first practicum at a community centre where she worked with Group Four (4-year-olds); the second practicum was at City Hall with Group Three (3-year-olds).

At that point, she went back to work at the child care centre in the kindergarten after-school and regular after-school care programs. During weekends, she took an After School Care Program Certificate course, similar to Level 1 ECD. But her Level II ECD certification allowed her to be recognized at a higher level, and she received her Level A for After School Care Advanced.

Unfortunately, her job didn't work out. She found it stressful and her role in the program carried too much responsibility. She felt she was running the program, but had neither the title nor the salary as compensation.

When Doris quit the child care centre, she went to work at a call centre for a delivery service – for the same wages but minus the stress. However, her hours were not enough and the call centre later closed. After taking a job for a short time with a friend, she decided that she did enjoy working with children after all. Through a friend of her sister's, she found out there was an opening at the Marlborough Day Nursery, applied and got the job.

Doris and her work

That was two years ago, and Doris is still going strong at Marlborough, working with Group Four, the four-year-olds. She says her job is to be with the children, take care of them and be there for them. She also tries to build relationships with the parents, letting them know how their children are doing, and what is happening at the centre and in the room.

There are three staff and 18 children in the Group Four room. The children are divided into three groups, and each staff has primary responsibility for a group, including weekly planning of circle time, sharing time, story time and art. The Group Four program is less structured than kindergarten. Doris says less structure is the main difference between child care and kindergarten, which includes seat work and alphabets. Doris helps the children in her group with their fine motor skills: holding scissors and pencils. She also does art every day with them and believes all children should do it, especially at this age when they don't have the verbal skills of older children. When the children put something on paper, it is all there as their expression.

While Doris has children with special needs in her classroom, there are none in her small group. The third staff person in her room is a special needs teacher with specific training, and some of the children in this teacher's group have special needs: behavioural, speech and physiotherapy needs.

Sometimes Doris and her team get some planning time together. They also prepare a monthly program of activities and special events. This Halloween was a bit of a challenge for Doris. One of the children in her room wasn't allowed to be part of the celebrations for religious reasons. Doris ensured that when the children were doing Halloween activities, the child was able to go and play with a favourite toy or another activity. For example, one day some of the children were cutting bats and pumpkins during circle time. Doris and the child coloured a tiger picture; their group is called "tiger." Doris tried not to isolate the child too much.

All the staff at Marlborough get together regularly to discuss what each room is doing. These meetings happen during the day and extra staff are called in to look after the children. Doris says the child care centre is very good about calling in substitutes if someone is sick, or for other reasons of absence.

Doris is the senior staff person in her room, but does not have any supervisory responsibilities. She reports to the director of the centre. A little while ago there was some confusion in the room over who would be the head staff. A new team member started who had more seniority in the centre (but less seniority than Doris in the room). At a staff meeting to sort things out, all members of the team were told they were all equal; there would be no head staff in Group Four. The situation was resolved and everything runs smoothly now.

Marlborough Day Nursery

Marlborough Day Nursery is owner-operated. The centre serves children 13 months to 12 years. It operates Monday to Friday from 6:30 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. The centre serves a mix of single parent, two-parent and foster parent families. It is also a diverse centre: there is strong Muslim community representation compared to the other centres where Doris has worked. The children who are Muslim participate in all events and the cook accommodates their diet (no pork).

Doris says Marlborough is one of the biggest and nicest centres she's ever seen. The backyard is spacious, with a wooden castle and a ball area with a basketball hoop. To enter the centre, people walk in through a gate to the back door, which opens into Doris' room, the "greeting room."

The Group Four room has a house, stove, kitchen, picnic table, crib, rocking chair and easel. There is an art centre, a science area, a stereo, a comfy couch, books, a water table and a sand table. There is also a shelf for the teachers' things. Each group of children has a long picnic-like table with movable benches to use for lunch, snack and art. One wall of windows looks onto the street and backyard.

In addition to Doris' room, the first floor of the centre contains the director's office, the kitchen, the Group Two room, and the front office. The front office has all the resources, such as books, children's encyclopaedia, arts and crafts, finger plays, puppets, programming manuals, and phone and fax machines. The washroom for the Group Four room is also on the first floor. All centre staff use this washroom since it has adult-size toilets.

Downstairs is the Group Five room for kindergarten and Early Childhood Services. There is also a laundry room, washroom, special needs office, another storage room for craft supplies, a deep freezer and the Group Three room. The second floor houses the spacious After School room, which contains an area for arts and crafts, TV for Nintendo games, homework areas and two bathrooms.

Staff

There are three staff in each preschool group (Group Two, Three, Four and Five Kindergarten), and two staff in the After School Care program. The assistant director and two management team people are included in the preschool staff. There is an additional afternoon staff person to maintain ratios for Group Three, since one of the group staff leaves early. The centre also employs a cook.

The centre's special needs coordinator works from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. and has her own office space. Therapists also use the special needs office for alone time with the children. The coordinator oversees the centre's program. She comes to help in Doris' room whenever she is needed.

Doris' relationship with her colleagues at the centre involves give and take; if someone needs her, she tries to be there for them. Doris helps as she can wherever she is needed. For example, she will adjust her shift if one of her co-workers needs to leave early for a medical appointment.

Doris feels that Marlborough is a very supportive environment and that there are a lot of resources to draw on to help manage job stress. For example, if there is a child with a behaviour problem, the special needs coordinator is available to observe the child and make recommendations. Staff also work with personnel from mental health services and can discuss ideas with the management team. Doris also feels she can talk to other staff about things. Outside her work environment, Doris has support from her mother, who is also a child care worker.

Working conditions

Each staff works a regular shift. Doris works from 7:15 a.m. to 4:15 p.m., Monday to Friday, with an unpaid lunch hour from noon to 1 p.m. (She starts her second job at the Dairy Queen at 5 p.m. and works until 10 p.m. or 11 p.m. three to four days a week.)

The center is not unionized, and staff do not have employment contracts or regular written performance appraisals. The centre does have employment policies and Doris has a written job description. There is no salary grid: staff are paid according to their certification level. As a Level II, Doris earns less than \$10 per hour. She receives two weeks of vacation and no sick days. Doris has a dental plan, partially paid for by the centre.

The centre director posts information about professional development opportunities and staff sign up for what interests them. Doris thinks staff would get time off for professional development, but she herself hasn't been able to attend any sessions because she has two jobs.

Doris has paid planning time during the day. When she needs to talk with someone about days off and staffing issues, she usually speaks with the assistant director. There is also a monthly management team meeting where Doris can raise issues and bounce off ideas. Other staff meetings are at the director's discretion and usually happen with a week's notice. The meetings are unpaid and occur during lunch hour.

Rewards and challenges

Doris says it's a wonderful feeling when the children greet her in the morning. Knowing that she makes a difference in their lives is the greatest reward of her job. She loves seeing the children grow and develop. She loves building relationships with them.

Her biggest challenge is "working under a microscope." She says there are lots of people she has to please. She has to do her part for centre management, parents and the children.

Doris would like to keep working in child care. But when she thinks about the future, this doesn't seem possible given the low wages. She longs to work just one job or two part-time jobs. She knows she could work at any other job, such as cashier, and easily make \$12 an hour. She has a friend who works at a Power Company with no post-secondary schooling and earns \$20 an hour. Doris can't understand why teachers in child care who have degrees and diplomas are struggling. Why isn't taking care of children in the early years considered a priority?

Doris now has all of the required classes for her Level III ECD certification, but needs one more optional course to complete the certification program. Doris is also interested in taking a certified sign language course. But completing her Level III and studying sign language are out of reach financially. Doris still has about \$ 5,000 left on her student loan and then there is rent, car insurance and car payments. She doesn't know when she'll be able to think about going back to school.

Recognition is key

For Doris, the primary focus of child care is to be able to teach children how to have a well-rounded life. She says child care workers are "pretty much the children's parents during the day. We provide everything for them: love, nurture. We are nurses when we need to be nurses, teachers when we need to be teachers, give discipline when they need it and, all the time, we have to make it fun and keep it interesting – we have to entertain!"

But even more, says Doris, child care staff are taking care of our future citizens and workers. Doris would like to be considered a professional since she provides children with knowledge and is a positive influence on them. "Child care workers do go to school and we are trained for this," she says. "We want to be considered professionals, not just glorified babysitters."

The government should provide more financial support to people who want to study early childhood care and education, or be more forgiving of student loans, says Doris. What Doris earns does not much help her pay off her debts.

Doris feels all centres should hire staff with training to increase professionalism. Staff should be recognized for their contribution. At Marlborough, says Doris, there is monthly recognition where the director buys breakfast or lunch. Doris would like other forms of recognition from management, like paid sick days.

Doris recognizes that things are worse in El Salvador with respect to child care, and feels that Canada is doing well despite some problems.

But still, child care workers are "at the bottom, holding it all up," she says. If this were recognized by society and by the government, everything would follow: the field would have better teachers with more education, and child care workers would have better pay, benefits and working conditions. Doris says she feels that the people who choose child care as a career love children and will keep on working under any conditions – the same as she will, for as long as she can, hopefully until retirement.



KRISTA SERFAS

Krista Serfas is a kindergarten teacher and early childhood educator at the Students' Union and Community Day Care Centre in Edmonton, Alberta.

From 9 a.m. to noon, Krista Serfas is a kindergarten teacher in Room 4 at the Students' Union and Community Day Care Centre, with sole responsibility for the learning of nine children. The rest of the day until 5 p.m., she works as an ECE in the same room, along with two other ECEs. Together they are responsible for the nine kindergarten children and nine pre-kindergarten children. In the morning, Krista follows the kindergarten curriculum set out by Alberta Learning, and earns \$1,425 per month. In the afternoon, she provides care and instructional services to all the children, making \$1,011 monthly.

They are separate jobs but they have a lot in common. Even though the day is divided, the pre-kindergarten children and kindergarten children sometimes are not. They are together in the same room throughout the day with Krista and the ECEs. The pre-kindergarten children do some of the same activities with the kindergarten children in the morning, such as calendar and circle time. All children are involved in literacy, for example, through songs. Problem-solving and community and cultural awareness are also incorporated into the day. When Krista is just with the kindergarten children, they work on reading, writing, sorting, graphing, patterns, measurement, addition, subtraction and science experiments. The whole day, says Krista, is filled with lots of educational experiences that are also fun.

Krista, 27, plans for the kindergarten program on her own time, following Alberta Learning's kindergarten program statement. Sometimes she tries to tie in with the child care program's themes, which she and the two other ECE staff in her room plan at their twice-monthly meeting during the day. For 50 minutes they discuss activities for the different activity centres (such as sand, water and dramatic play) and decide on themes for the upcoming weeks. While they meet, their positions are covered by other staff at the centre.

For Krista, who has a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, the combination of jobs is very rewarding. In the kindergarten program, she says, the activities are hands-on, fun and child-centred. However, the program is more structured than the afternoon one; it contains more skills, tasks and objectives. The afternoons are less formal – Krista gets to participate in things that she wouldn't have the opportunity to do if she was teaching in the school system.

Krista works with all of her co-workers at the centre as a team and keeps them informed about important things going on in the pre-kindergarten/kindergarten room. She also has worked hard to build good relationships with parents and keeps them informed about their children's day.

As the kindergarten teacher, Krista conducts parent-teacher interviews to discuss the children's report cards. These are based on six learning areas set out by Alberta Learning as the most important things children should accomplish before Grade 1. Last year, Krista held parent interviews in January. This year, she plans to have a child-led conference in-between the report cards and the parent interviews. The child-led conference will include different activity centres that parents and children can visit together so that parents can see what and how their children are learning.

Krista's background

In 2002, Krista moved to Edmonton from Saskatoon with her husband, a sessional lecturer at the University of Alberta. In Saskatoon, she had worked at the Parents Daycare Cooperative for three years while going to school. After graduating, she continued working there in the preschool program until she moved to Edmonton. While she was getting her degree she did her four-month internship in a Grade 1 class. At the cooperative, she worked in the preschool program with one other partner in a room with about 12 children aged 3 to 5. She loved it so much that she decided that working with younger children was for her.

She was first hired at the Students' Union and Community Day Care Centre in January 2002 as a full-time ECE in the pre-kindergarten/kindergarten room. The centre already had a kindergarten teacher but in Spring 2002, that teacher did not renew her contract. Krista applied for the job and became the kindergarten teacher in September 2002. She teaches the kindergarten program from September to May and chooses to work full-time in the child care program during the summer.

The workplace

The Students' Union and Community Day Care Centre is located in the HUB building on the University of Alberta campus. The centre has four child care rooms, plus a gym for large motor play, a staff room with couches, a table and microwave, and a resource room – a small room with table and chairs for staff planning, parent and other meetings, and all of the staff resource books. There are also offices for the director and assistant director, a kitchen, and a large outdoor fenced play area with two large sand areas with play/climbing structures, equipment, play castle and storage sheds.

The centre serves families with children aged 18 months through kindergarten age. Children are grouped by age in four rooms: 18 months to 2½ years; 2½ to 3½ years; 3½ to 4½ years; and pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, the room where Krista works. The centre is open year round from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. It is operated by a parent board of directors and is incorporated as a non-profit organization.

Many of the families whose children are at the centre are students or faculty and are, for the most part, middle class. The program is also open to the community, which is a very multicultural environment; many children come from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. The staff incorporate multiculturalism into everything. For example, there are pictures of children from all over the world on the walls of the centre. Activities each November focus on different ethnicities. Some of the children and families do not speak much English, which can be challenging. Some staff can speak other languages, such as French and Spanish, which is helpful. Sometimes families bring interpreters.

Some of the children who attend the centre have mild disabilities such as speech and language delays. Through the kindergarten program (Early Childhood Services), the centre has access to speech and language pathologists who come to the centre to work with these children.

Between 50 and 60 children are enrolled at the centre. There are 12 early childhood educators (three per room), a director, and an assistant director who covers in some rooms when needed. Most of the ECEs have a Level 3 certificate; some have Level 2. There is also a full-time cook, who prepares morning and afternoon snack and a full lunch, which staff eat with the children. Janitorial services are contracted out.

The centre has an open door policy – parents are welcome to come into the centre and room at any time and to attend field trips. The centre also invites parents to participate in many events, such as muffin mornings, pancake breakfasts, the Christmas concert, Valentine's party, and Mother's Day and Father's Day teas.

The centre is a member of the Independently Operated Kindergarten Society, which hosts a year-end conference and provides professional development opportunities. The society is Krista's main source of support outside of her work environment. She says it provides a good opportunity to share information and experiences with other kindergarten teachers who work in child care centres. The society is also able to access money for the kindergarten programs from the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement program. The funding is used to improve classrooms and pays for such things as new resources and teacher development.

Benefits and working conditions

Krista has two separate contracts, one for the kindergarten teacher position and one for the early childhood educator position. Both contracts include duties and responsibilities, hours of work, salary and benefits, certification and termination. She reports mainly to the director of the centre and to the board with an annual kindergarten report. The report details what she has done throughout the year to meet curriculum standards, highlights of the year, field trips and interesting units.

In her kindergarten position, Krista has eight half days of sick leave, 15 half days of paid vacation leave, three half days of professional development leave and one half day of personal development leave. As an early childhood educator, she gets the same sick leave and vacation, two half days of professional development leave and one half day of personal development leave.

Staff at the centre are part of the Cooperators benefit package, which provides extended health care and a dental plan. Krista gets a one-hour unpaid lunch break. During the summer months when there is no school, she is a full-time ECE and gets an additional 20-minute coffee break.

There are monthly one- to two-hour staff meetings in the evening, which staff attend without pay.

Professional development

Krista has attended a number of professional development workshops and sessions related to her job as kindergarten teacher. In 2002, she attended an Animated Literacy workshop. This is a new way of teaching phonics and reading that is fun and incorporates several different approaches. It uses a lot of movement, specific characters for each letter and sound, with a song for each character, and has a guided drawing component. Krista feels the program is excellent and uses it in her kindergarten.

Krista also attended the Independently Operated Kindergarten Society spring full-day conference, which included sessions on project-based approaches to learning and incorporating music into the daily program. There are also conferences and workshops available for early childhood educators, but Krista has not yet attended any.

Future plans

Krista would like to stay at the centre for at least another year. A lot depends on her husband, who is applying for positions all over the country. If they move, she will try to get a teaching position with a local school board in kindergarten, Grade 1 or Grade 2. Her application is already on file with the school board in Edmonton. However, recent teacher layoffs make it less likely that she will get a job there.

Krista's recommendations

Krista views child care as early education. Many children are in a child care setting for at least eight hours a day and they learn a lot during that time – everything from social, fine motor and language skills to speech development, manners and cooperative play skills. Krista feels that the view that child care is where children “just play” undervalues what is happening in a good quality child care setting. She also sees child care as a support for working parents.

Krista believes standards are very important in child care. If child care providers want to be respected, they need to plan educational activities and put children's development first in their programming. Says Krista: "If the child care field is going to gain more respect in society, then all child care centres need to have the same standards and adhere to those standards and make the development of children in their care their prime focus."

She notes that there are differences among the various forms of early childhood education and care programs:

- Child care for younger children is largely play-based. Children learn skills incidentally, not necessarily in a targeted way.
- Preschool programs are more formal and structured. Parents put children in preschool programs to gain specific skills and experiences.
- Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs target specific skills even more and programming is more structured. The focus is on preparing children for school.

For Krista, the main issues in ECEC are low wages and lack of respect. She feels child care workers are underpaid for what they do even though the role they play in a child's development is very significant. She also feels that early childhood educators are viewed by many as glorified babysitters, although the parents in her centre value and appreciate what staff do for the children and how much the children benefit. Generally, though, people don't realize how much knowledge those who work in child care settings have about child development and early learning, and the key role they play in children's development.

Krista says there is more respect for more formal education, although she finds it interesting that sometimes parents don't take her kindergarten program seriously because it is in a child care centre. They bring their children in late or don't fulfill tasks that she requests (such as a home reading program), so the child isn't as motivated. On the whole there tends to be more respect for the kindergarten program, since there it has a curriculum and structure, and is the stepping stone to Grade 1.

Krista definitely feels the government doesn't value child care as much as it should, and isn't providing the necessary resources and support to programs. Parents need child care and it should be recognized as an important service.

For Krista, the struggle for recognition and funding of child care is vital. It will require pressure from parents as well as those who work in child care. Most of all, it will require persistence.

RHONDA SYLVEN

Rhonda Sylven is a licensed family child care provider in Victoria, British Columbia.

Rhonda Sylven cuts her own children's hair, and sometimes the hair of the children in her care, if their parents ask for it. It's a nod to her high school days, when she wanted to be a hairdresser – an ambition quickly edged out by child care.

Her first experience caring for children came in Grade 11. At the suggestion of her mother, who was then president of Sea to Sky Community Services, she volunteered at a preschool centre for children with special needs in Squamish, BC

Today, married with two children, Rhonda is a licensed family child care provider. She cares for five children (including her own), and will take on another child soon. Working as a family child care provider has meant that she has been able to stay home to raise her young children, something she is very pleased about. She says that having other children in her home has taught her own children to be caring, to learn to share and to focus on the needs of others as well as themselves.

Rhonda's background

In 1988, Rhonda decided to enroll in the 10-month ECE program at Capilano College. She had already taken some general courses at the college, which she says were a waste of time and money because she had no idea how she would use them, and then worked for awhile at Whistler. The ECE course, she says, was very intense.

After Capilano, she went back to Squamish, where she was hired at the preschool as one of four staff working with a group of 12 children with designated special needs. The children attended the program 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., four days a week, and every second Friday there was staff training. Rhonda also worked from 3 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. in an after-school program housed in an elementary school.

In 1990, she was accepted into the Child and Youth Care program at the University of Victoria. It seemed like a logical step. She was interested in studying play and art therapy, but because it was only offered at the Master's level, she had to get an undergraduate degree first. She began her degree program in 1991, graduating in 1994. She financed her studies with a combination of student loans and scholarships. The university experience was life-changing for Rhonda. She says she grew a lot as a person.

While at school, she did some respite work for the Vancouver Island Integration Society as a “special sitter” for children with special needs in their own home. The service was cost-shared 50:50 between the government and the parents. In the summers, she returned to Squamish and worked for the Sea to Sky Society with adults with disabilities in a work placement program, and as a waitress in a local restaurant.

During her studies, she did several practica in early childhood settings and in youth outreach counselling with children in Grades 8 and 9. In her last year of university, she was a child care worker full-time in a Surrey treatment centre for women who had left abusive relationships. There, she had the opportunity to work with children who had witnessed violence, and to observe and assist in play and art therapy with them.

After she graduated, Rhonda moved to Vancouver to be closer to her fiancé, who was in the RCMP on the Mainland. She first worked at Starbucks, while applying to a lot of child care and preschool programs. Most of the available jobs were part-time; she needed a full-time wage.

Through a friend, she learned about some opportunities at the school district. She applied and was hired as an Alternative Program Worker in an elementary school, working with children with behavioural problems. The job was unionized with the British Columbia Government and Service Employees’ Union (BCGEU). It paid \$21 an hour, and 11% in lieu of benefits. She worked 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. 10 months a year, and during the summers was able to collect unemployment benefits.

The school environment was different from her previous jobs; it was much larger than anything she had been used to and her job took her to numerous schools. She learned that she was good at moving into brand new situations and adapting to different teachers’ styles and approaches to working with children. In one year alone, she worked in four different schools, following a young child with behavioural problems whose single mother moved a lot. The school board decided to have Rhonda follow the child as a way to give him some consistency when so many other things in his life were in a state of constant change.

In 1995, Rhonda married and moved to Victoria the following year. She was still interested in doing art and play therapy and counselling, but could not find a related job. She applied to the school board and was hired immediately on an on-call basis as a special needs assistant in the classroom, working with children with special needs.

For the next 18 months she worked in a number of different schools in the Victoria School District. She was offered a permanent position in one school where she provided support to two boys with autism. She went on maternity leave in March 1998, and in April gave birth to her first child, Sam.

The move to family child care

Rhonda and her husband have a very strong belief that one of them should be at home while their children were small. When her maternity leave ended after six months, she decided to try caring for a couple of other children to supplement the family income. She registered with the local Child Care Support Service as a license-not-required family child care provider. Her house was not large, so she started small, caring for one child and adding a second one after two months.

Rhonda found the family child care experience very different from the group setting. It took some time for her to get used to her home also being her work environment. Her husband worked shifts and was often sleeping during the day while she cared for the children. It also took some time to sort out which toys were her son’s alone and which ones he would share with the other children.

When Rhonda joined the Child Care Support Services in Victoria, she was amazed by the amount of resources and support the organization offered, including toy and equipment lending, and meetings and professional development activities. (Rhonda had to attend eight professional development activities each year to maintain her membership) There were also home visits by a consultant who brought along activities and suggestions. As another support, Rhonda attended network meetings of other providers in her neighbourhood.

Rhonda cared for the same two children for over a year. The oldest child left at 3½ to attend group care because Rhonda and the child’s mother both felt she was getting bored and needed the stimulation of peers. In June 2000, Rhonda gave birth to her daughter, Clairese, and took three months off. The child who was at her child care before the birth of her daughter returned in September 2000 and was a welcome playmate for Rhonda’s son. A second child soon joined.

In April 2001, Rhonda decided to become licensed. Another family was desperate for care, and BC regulations stipulate that a family child care provider must be licensed if she is caring for more than two children in addition to her own. Rhonda says Child Care Support Services had done a great job of preparing her to meet the licensing requirements and the process went very smoothly. The biggest implication of becoming licensed was the cost: she had to pay for a business license and a licensing package. She already had liability insurance from Child Care Support Services, which she maintained.

Licensing brought with it an immediate increase in demand for her services, especially for children under age three. The maximum number of children Rhonda and other family child care providers can look after under the regulations is seven, depending on the age mix. Rhonda thinks this is too many – five children are much more manageable for one caregiver.

In her setting, she cares for her own two children and three others – a one-year-old, a 2½-year-old and a 3½-year-old. She is also in the process of integrating a kindergarten-age child one day a week. The parents need care for their child on Wednesdays, because the school does not offer kindergarten that day for children who attend in the mornings. (The hours of the morning program are longer than the afternoon program, and the Wednesday closure ensures the afternoon children get the same number of instructional hours each week.) Until the parents found Rhonda, the father was going to try to arrange for a leave of absence from his job to look after their child.

Rhonda's family child care business

Rhonda charges \$35 a day for more than six hours of care or \$5.50 an hour for shorter periods. Parents are not charged if their children are sick, which is an incentive for them to keep a sick child at home. Rhonda is closed for a month in the summer when her husband has his vacation. He gets his schedule eight months in advance, so the parents get plenty of notice. Rhonda is flexible around other holiday periods, depending on the needs of the parents, but is closed the week between Christmas and New Year.

Unlike many family child care providers who have a dedicated space in the house for child care, Rhonda uses her whole house, and views her program as an extended family.

Rhonda brings her family values and beliefs into her work. She discusses parenting styles at the initial interview with parents. She believes she is in a parenting partnership with them, and wants to make sure there is a consistent approach for the children. For example, she wants parents to know that manners and respect for others are important values to her.

Rhonda plans daily, and does large-scale planning once a month. She also puts out a monthly newsletter, letting parents know the focus of monthly themes, some of the books she will be reading to the children, and what songs they will be learning. In this way, parents can learn the songs too and sing them at home, or read or discuss the books with their children.

Rhonda's day starts at 6:45 a.m. She gets ready by setting out an art activity for the children when they arrive. Much of her program is open-ended, but scheduled. She leaves time for large blocks of play but she follows a routine. Every day includes circle time, a mix of indoor and outdoor activities, and a rest or nap period after lunch. She tries to provide a balanced day for the children, giving opportunities to learn through play, each child in his or her individual way.

Rhonda believes older preschoolers benefit from a larger environment in a more traditional setting with more children. That's why when her son Sam was three she decided to send him to a co-op preschool. The first year, he attended two days a week; when he was four, he went three days a week. Her daughter Clairese and the other three-year-old in Rhonda's family child

care now also attend preschool twice a week. The parents pay for both Rhonda's program and the preschool.

This means that on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, she and the children have an early lunch, pick up Sam at kindergarten at 11:30 a.m. and head straight to the preschool for the 12:20 start for the two three-year-olds. She is back to pick them up at 2:30 p.m. It involves a lot of driving with all the children and considerable organization, but Rhonda finds it gets her into the community and exposes the children to other experiences outside her home.

Rhonda's husband works a rotating eight-day schedule: two day-shifts, two night-shifts and four days off. He is Rhonda's designated alternative caregiver and does some of the driving when feasible. This is very helpful to her since the going rate for a substitute is \$10 to \$15 an hour, which she can't afford. If Rhonda or either of her children is sick, and if her husband is at work that day, she calls the parents and tells them to make alternative arrangements. She always discusses the need for parents to have a back up plan for such situations when they register, but finds that few actually have it in place when it is needed. Fortunately, she is rarely sick.

Support networks

Rhonda gets most of her support from Child Care Support Services. The director recommended Rhonda for the family child care position on the provincially appointed Regional Child Care Council (RCCC), a position Rhonda has held for the last two years. She says it is a good way to meet with other adults and keep current on child care issues. She is reimbursed \$4 an hour for a replacement caregiver when she attends council meetings, but this is nowhere close to the actual amount she has to pay.

Rhonda has gained some advocacy experience through her council position, responding to recent provincial policy changes by writing letters to the government. She feels the joint efforts of similar groups helped reverse an announced policy to eliminate funding to Child Care Support Services.

Rhonda is unable to afford the cost of membership to any of the child care associations. She goes to monthly meetings of her daughter's preschool program, which offers parenting education. She has also attended a parenting series sponsored by Island Parent, a local organization.

Rhonda is very glad to have the supports that she has for her work. As a licensed caregiver, she is supposed to receive an annual licensing visit, but is already two months overdue. She finds that she gets good feedback from the licensing officer, but the inspection is quite routine and is based on a checklist. From her work with the RCCC, she is aware that licensing funding has been cut back and the licensing officers are just dealing with complaints and people opening centres. She finds it interesting and alarming that the fire department visits her family child care to check her smoke alarm and fire extinguisher more often than the licensing

officer. Rhonda realizes the importance of fire safety, and it is a high priority in her setting. However, she feels the difference in the frequency of visits between the fire department and the licensing officer reflects society's attitude toward child care.

Balancing work and family

In March 2003, Rhonda made a major decision about her working conditions. She felt that she was shortchanging her family because she was working too much. She didn't feel that the two days on the weekend were enough time away from the job. She decided to move to a four-day work week and stop providing care on Fridays. She also changed her hours. She used to be open from 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and is now open from 7:45 a.m. to 5:15 p.m.

Rhonda fully expected that some of the parents would leave. But while one parent initially panicked, all the families stayed. Some decided to negotiate flex-time or reduced work-weeks with their own employers, or already had a degree of flexibility that enabled this new arrangement to work.

All in all, Rhonda's decision was based on the belief that she would be a better caregiver if she worked in a way that was best for her and her family. The goal for starting the child care business and continuing it has always been to be able to afford to stay at home with her children – to be there for them. As the business grew in numbers and hours, the focus shifted from her family to those attending child care. Rhonda says that making the decision to change the hours and days was not easy, but the result was a renewed focus on her children and family, while still being able to provide a quality child care service to the community. She feels this approach made the program more successful, and says she now has a good balance to her day and her week.

Rewards and challenges

Rhonda feels she is helping to build our future society. While she believes the parents of the children in her care respect her and her work, she would like to see more recognition from society and the government for the contribution she and other providers make to the lives of children and their families.

Her biggest challenge is dealing with isolation. She also misses the perks of other jobs: the benefits and paid leave, breaks during the day and the stimulation of discussing issues with other adults. At the same time, she likes the self-employed nature of the job, and the fact that she has many tax write-offs.

Rhonda's recommendations

Rhonda has a number of recommendations for improving child care in BC and the quality of life for families with young children:

- The maximum number of children allowed in family child care should be reduced.
- Workplaces should be more family-friendly. They should give parents the option of taking more time away from the workforce until children are 5.

- All caregivers should have training. If you need a trained professional to teach children when they are 5, why not when they are 3, she asks. After all, it's such an important period of their development. For family child care, the "Good Beginnings" training program should be an absolute minimum.
- Professional development should be a requirement for all caregivers. Rhonda says the professional development required to maintain her membership in Child Care Support Services has been very helpful.
- The government should pay more attention to finding a balance between what caregivers should be paid and what parents can afford. She has heard many stories about and seen the impact of recent subsidy cuts on families.

Future plans

Rhonda acknowledges that if she had a choice, she would not work at all. She feels honoured that the families let her into their lives and that she is part of their children's world. She says she is about 80% certain that family child care is not her long-term career. She still has an interest in art and play therapy, but isn't sure whether there are many jobs available in this field.

Meanwhile, in her spare time, she has embarked on another home-based business called Creative Memories Album Making. It involves teaching people how to create and preserve personal scrapbooks using their own photographs and written family stories. She started this endeavour earlier this year on evenings and weekends, and she likes its adult orientation after spending her days with young children. In fact, when her daughter enters kindergarten in another two years, Rhonda plans to do this full-time – and say goodbye to child care.



KISMET LOWRIE

Kismet Lowrie is a toddler caregiver at Nakwaye Ku, the child care centre at Yukon College in Whitehorse.

In 1983, Kismet Lowrie was traveling the globe, spending time in New York, Japan, Australia and Europe – earning \$120 an hour as a high fashion model. Fast forward to a child care centre in Whitehorse in 2003, where a Level III early childhood educator (ECE) earns \$15.63 an hour. And that's where you'll find her today.

Kismet enjoyed modelling, but she has no regrets about leaving the world of high fashion. It was a good gig – great wages, and travel that gave her a broader perspective on the world, especially culture and social issues. Designers made clothes specifically for her and her self-esteem was high. But she was never totally invested in the work and trappings of modelling. After 10 years, she became disillusioned, aware of body issues and the exploitation of young girls. She had become politicized, thanks to growing up in a feminist household. Unhappy with what the profession was promoting, she gave up modelling and returned to Montréal, the place of her birth.

She'd had her first taste of child care at a young age, attending a program while both of her parents were at work. But it would be a long time before she would decide that working in child care was for her.

Kismet's story

Kismet began her transient life after graduating from high school, going by herself to Calgary with one suitcase and working for a year as a waitress. Then she returned to Montreal to enroll in fashion college to study fashion merchandising and design. That was two years before she was discovered by a scout and became a model.

When she bid modelling goodbye in her mid-20s, she had a difficult transition from the somewhat dreamlike life of high-priced modelling to the real world. She got a job as a bartender, where she made in one night what she had been making in an hour. She continued bartending for a number of years.

At 30, she moved to Vancouver. She had no job or plan, but through her sister's, she secured a job with the Bank of Montreal Master Card customer service. She spent her days attached to a headset in front of a computer, conforming to the required dress code. The job was very regimented and the pay was low. She took home about \$600 every two weeks. After a year, the bank closed its head office in Vancouver, and offered Kismet a severance package or a job as a teller. She took the severance package – and a stint on Employment Insurance (EI).

Her partner at the time worked in an out-of-school program where Kismet did some substitute teaching. She often volunteered to look after a neighbour's child and discovered she had an aptitude for working with young children. She began to view this as a possible career direction.

Kismet knew that the EI program supported individuals to go back to school under certain conditions. She went to work exploring the child care programs in Vancouver, took a number of aptitude tests, and submitted a proposal to her EI counsellor to get her ECE. Her request was turned down, because the focus at the time was on the hospitality and tourism industries.

But she didn't give up. She'd done all the work and was keen to study ECE. So she got a student loan and enrolled in the intensive diploma program at Kwantlen University College in Richmond. She says it was one of the best things she ever did. She had wonderful mentors at the college, lots of theory (which she thinks essential to understanding the work), lots of introspective thinking, and wonderful support from the faculty.

Her goal was to work with disadvantaged children and families, so she chose her placements accordingly. Her third and final placement was at the child care centre at Ray-Cam Community Centre in the Downtown East Side of Vancouver. The moment she graduated, the centre hired her, first as a substitute, then as a full-time staff person.

The centre had 16 children from 2½ to 6 years and operated on a ratio of one staff to four children. There were nine spaces for children with designated special needs, but all could have fit the criteria. Some suffered from fetal alcohol syndrome, many were in foster care, most had witnessed violence in their lives and all lived in extreme poverty. Kismet's focus also included working with the families, which were often in crisis.

Kismet loved the job. Staff at Ray-Cam formed a tightly-knit group, and Kismet found the learning environment positive. She appreciated what she learned from the other professionals working with the children and families, who she says treated the child care staff as equals.

Ray-Cam was unionized. When Kismet started working there, she made \$10 an hour. When she left seven years later, she had become a supervisor and was earning \$19.16 an hour. She was also continuously upgrading, taking every workshop she could find. Through her job, she had between \$200 and \$300 a year to use on her own professional development. During this time, she also returned to school in the evenings to get her special needs certificate.

Kismet left the job because of some personnel and administrative changes within Ray-Cam that were at odds with her philosophy. She was also concerned that money was being redirected from child care to other programs, to the detriment of the children in her program.

A big move

At that point, she decided to sell everything she owned and move to Whitehorse, where she had travelled in the past. She had no job prospects, but before she left, she enrolled in the Leadership, Administration and Management program (LAM) at Vancouver Community College, and sought out advice and contacts in Yukon.

She lived rurally her first year in Yukon, about half an hour from Whitehorse. The first thing she did was to get her Yukon certification – a Level III – and send out her résumé widely. She was inundated with calls, but even though she knew she would have to start from the bottom, she couldn't believe how low the wages were and that there were no benefits.

Her first job lasted six days. She thought there were great opportunities in the position since the director was keen to have her implement lots of new ideas and to pay her well, but she found the work environment too difficult. She was working alone with a group of children and felt very isolated. The job left her little energy to think about the many changes she could make to improve the centre.

Kismet then went to work for the Child Development Centre (CDC), since at \$15 an hour, wages were higher than in other programs. The centre was organized by the Yukon Employees Union, a component of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC). The advertised job was part-time, but Kismet was able to negotiate full-time hours – the only way she could afford to take the job. She was a program assistant on a pilot project guiding children with challenging behaviour. Kismet was responsible for program planning, set-up and a number of administrative tasks. Children attended the program two afternoons a week from child care programs in the community. Kismet also spent time in four other centres, providing support to existing staff.

She worked in partnership with a developmental therapist at the CDC, but felt she was definitely in the subordinate role. Much of her time was spent at a desk doing planning instead of directly working with children, which was her strong suit. She realized there was no prospect of advancement at the CDC without a degree, and knew she could not afford to go to university. She also did not have a driver's license, which made travelling to other child care centres difficult.

After a few months, she called Nakwaye Ku, the child care centre at the college. The centre had previously offered her a job but she'd turned it down because of the low wages. A job was available in the toddler program, a group she had never worked with and wasn't sure she would like. But it offered the advantage of working with another staff, unlike the preschool room where the staff worked alone with their group – the norm in the Yukon. She's now been at Nakwaye Ku for the last 2½ years, living in Whitehorse in a rented apartment.

Nakwaye Ku

Nakwaye Ku is located in a purpose-built facility on the campus of Yukon College. It is separately incorporated as a non-profit society and is operated by a parent board of directors. The college provides free rent, and cleaning and maintenance of the centre. The centre uses lots of natural materials, the rooms are mostly open-plan, and there is a staff room and an office.

The centre is licensed for 28 children from 18 months to five years, including children who attend kindergarten, and has seven staff, including the director. It is open from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., year-round. Children can attend either full- or part-time. About 60% are children of students or faculty, and about half are subsidized. There are some children with special needs in the program who are also involved with the CDC. Kismet works with one other staff, who has a Level I orientation certification. Together, they are responsible for 12 children from 18 months to three years.

Wages and benefits

The centre is unionized with the Yukon Employees Union (PSAC). As a Level III, Kismet earned \$11.50 an hour when she started work in 2001; she now earns \$15.63. She has a written job description, and her workplace has written hiring and employment policies, as well as a salary scale.

Kismet is paid for a 7½-hour day, which includes two paid breaks along with an unpaid lunch hour. She gets 1½ hours of paid planning time a week. There is no sick leave, but she can take one personal health day a month, with no accumulation from month to month.

Kismet gets one day of paid leave per year for professional development and attends conferences through the college. While she is very interested in upgrading and professional development, the opportunities in Whitehorse are limited. Since there is a high turnover of staff and few staff have diplomas, much of the professional development available is geared to less-trained and less-experienced members of the workforce.

Advocacy work

Since moving to Whitehorse, Kismet has become increasingly involved in child care advocacy. She has served as the staff representative on the board of directors, is co-chair of the Yukon Child Care Association (YCCA), sits on the President's Committee on Programming for Early Childhood Development (PCOP) at Yukon College, and is on the board of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. She takes time off without pay or uses vacation time to attend meetings of advocacy organizations.

Through the YCCA, Kismet is involved in a government child care committee working on a four-year plan for the sector. Part of this process included wide consultations with the community to come up with the top five priorities in child care:

- Wages, benefits and working conditions comparable to other paraprofessionals
- Full revision of regulations
- Access to a resource centre for the child care community
- A code of ethics
- Measurement of quality, using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), to which all programs would be subject.

Rewards and challenges

Kismet says being with the children is her biggest reward. She loves the fact that when the toddlers in her care move up to the preschool group she can maintain the relationships she developed and nurtured when they were younger. She also likes the relationships she has with the parents. She feels these are real partnerships and some have become her good friends.

Child care is a constant learning process, she says. She takes advantage of all the learning opportunities she can find. She says that if she won the lottery, she would return to school to get a degree and continue with graduate work.

As much as she enjoys working in child care, the frustrations and challenges are big. The low wages and lack of benefits top the list – she has no health or disability benefits. The work is hard and the hours are long. In addition to her work on the floor with the children and her outside advocacy work, there are parent meetings and family events to organize. An upcoming family potluck dinner means that after a full day of work she will be cooking, setting up, attending the event and cleaning up afterwards. It will be at least 9 p.m. before her day is over.

Another major challenge is the lack of trained staff in her community and the extremely high turnover rate. The early childhood development program at the college is only offered through continuing education, so there are no opportunities for full-time study. Many opt for just the orientation program – it can take years to get a diploma through part-time study. Upgrading is not required, and this does little to increase capacity and capability of staff. Since college courses are all at night, the students don't have easy access to the child care centre for placements in the way they would if they were in a full-time day program. This probably also explains why the centre is not used as a lab school and why there is little contact between the ECD program and the child care centre.

The politics in the child care community and its fragmentation are another challenge. There is friction in the community, especially between the family-based child care community and those who work in centre-based care.

Kismet's recommendations

Kismet thinks a national child care strategy is essential to increase respect for the field and to increase the public's understanding of the critical importance of providing child care. Public education is needed to help the public and government understand that child care and early childhood development are synonymous. In Yukon, none of the federal Early Childhood Development dollars were spent on child care. However, the new dollars from the Multi-Lateral Framework on Early Learning and Care have resulted in wage enhancements in child care, creating a more positive climate.

Kismet also feels education and training requirements should be increased to a minimum of one year for all child care providers, not the hodge-podge of courses that now exist. Education, she says, is the most important factor to ensure more competent educators, with the right attributes – empathy, care and respect.

Future plans

Kismet knows that in the immediate future, she will take over as executive director of the child care centre. She's hoping that in her new job, she'll be able to address some of the more pressing staff issues such as the lack of health and disability benefits. Her wages will go up to \$20 or more an hour and she says she will finally be able to afford a suitcase on wheels for her travels to advocacy meetings. Last month, at the age of 41, she got her driver's license and hopes to get a car soon.

Kismet plans to stay in her new position at least for a few years. After that, it's anybody's guess. She can see herself branching out into different child care jobs. In the past, she has applied to work in an on-reserve child care program and in a Nobody's Perfect program. She says she would also like to be a "femtor" (feminist mentor) for other members of the workforce, sharing and imparting the knowledge she's gained over the years.

There are still many options for the future, she says. Clearly, the adventure's not over yet for this model-turned-feminist-turned-child care worker.

THE CITY OF TORONTO

The City of Toronto is committed to a vision for all children living within its boundaries: “Regardless of the socio-economic status of his/her family and community every child has the right to childhood experiences which promote the chances of developing into a healthy, well-adjusted and productive adult” (City Report Card 2003, p.1).

The City of Toronto plans, manages and funds a range of children’s services. The licensed child care programs serving almost 50,000 children and families in more than 800 centres and hundreds more of child care homes are the core of the city’s children’s infrastructure. The city’s child care budget is about \$300 million – more than any individual province or territory, with the exception of Quebec. Half of Ontario’s licensed child care spaces are in Toronto. About 8,000 individuals make up Toronto’s child care workforce.

In 1999, the province of Ontario expanded the city’s mandate for child care and family resource programs. The city’s role and scope of responsibilities grew along with the mandate to cost share not only child care fee subsidies but also wage grants and family resource programs. While the downloading has brought additional demands and constrained funding, the city views the new responsibilities as an opportunity to consolidate children’s services into a coherent delivery system. Departments within the city work together to plan and connect investments in programs for young children and their families.

A diverse environment

Toronto is an ambitious and successful city. It is Canada’s largest city and is an economic engine, accounting for 20% of the country’s GDP. Toronto is often noted as one of the world’s safest and most multicultural urban centres.

Almost half of the city’s 2.48 million people are foreign-born residents, representing over 100 different nationalities. There are approximately 360,000 children age 0 to 12 years. One out of every five children in Grade 1 is foreign-born. Unlike the trend in the rest of Canada, the child population in Toronto has not decreased.

There are troubling social trends. The 2001 Census data indicate that the poverty rate in Toronto is 30%. Almost one in every three children in Toronto lives in poverty. Overall, the poverty rate has declined from 37% to 30% but it has actually increased in poorer neighbourhoods (21% of the Census tracts), indicating a growing polarization between affluent and poor families. Census 2001 data show that the poverty rate in Toronto is still more than two times the rate in the surrounding Greater Toronto Area. While overall social assistance rates have fallen in recent years, the number of families who have been on assistance for three or more years has increased.

A long history

The City of Toronto was one of the first cities in North America to offer children’s recreation and playground programs, public school kindergartens, crèche programs for destitute mothers with young children and municipal funding to children’s programs in settlement houses. During World War II, the city operated child care centres for preschool and school-age children, taking advantage of a federal-provincial funding arrangement. After the war, despite governments turned their attention from encouraging female labour force participation to ensuring employment for veterans returning home, the city responded to public demands and remained in the business of operating child care centres.

During the 1960’s municipal re-organization led to the formation of the Regional Municipality of Toronto that included the city of Toronto and five other municipalities. The Regional Municipality took on responsibility for child care, including 20% cost-sharing of fee subsidies, directly-operated programs, and service contracts for fee subsidies in non-profit and commercial centres. Licensed child care programs expanded, taking advantage of child care fee subsidies that became available through the federal Canada Assistance Program and federal-provincial cost-sharing.

In the 1980’s building boom and economic upturn, the City of Toronto encouraged the development of workplace child care centres by negotiating increased density for inclusion of rent-free child care space. In 1984, the city allocated unspent funds from that year’s snow-removal budget to implement a small wage grant to child care staff in non-profit centres. After that first year, City Council allocated a larger dedicated fund for the wage grant, which remained in place for many years.

A leader in children's services

Toronto continues its historic leadership role:

- The annual *Toronto Report Card on Children* provides an annual assessment of the status of Toronto's children and their neighbourhoods along with service targets, policy objectives and expected outcomes;
- A *Child Care Service Plan* outlines the provision of subsidized care to low income families;
- A *Children's Charter* commits the City to consider the needs of children in all its policy decisions and allocations;
- The *Strategy for Children*, requires integrated, rather than sectoral, service delivery and outlines the City's commitments to, and expectations from, public investments in children's services;
- A new delivery model, *Toronto First Duty*, tests out the integration of child care, kindergarten and family support programs; and
- A multi-sectoral *Roundtable on Education, Children and Youth* will advise the mayor and council.

Delivering child care to young children and families

Toronto is designated as the "consolidated municipal service manager" under provincial legislation. The Children's Services Division is designated as the "child care services system manager." Children's Services is responsible to plan and manage the delivery of child care and family support programs in 900 child care and family resource programs. The Children's Services Division manages the largest concentration of child care and related programs in Canada (outside of Quebec).

The division is currently organized into four operating units.

- *Client Services* provides information to families about child care programs and fee subsidy eligibility. The unit assesses financial eligibility and client fees and manages the waiting list for subsidy. It arranges placements in child care programs for those eligible for fee subsidy.
- *Contracted Services* negotiates and monitors service contracts with non-profit and commercial child care and family resource programs in Toronto. The contracts are administered to enable the transfer of financial resources for child care wages and subsidy fees and family resource program operating funds. The city also provides specialized consulting services to support children with special needs and management consultation.
- *Directly Operated Child Care Services* operates a licensed home child care agency and 58 licensed child care centres, serving approximately 4,100 children in predominately high-needs neighbourhoods.
- *Service Planning and Support* is responsible for child care planning and the financial and information systems. It also supports events and initiatives that are part of the city's broader children's strategy.

The city manages the child care system under the terms of provincial legislation and regulations. The province pays 80% of the cost of fee subsidies, wage grants, family resource programs, and special needs resourcing; the city pays 20%. Fees paid by subsidized child care users contribute to the system. The costs of administration are split 50:50 between the province and the city. Families who are not eligible for fee subsidy pay the full child care fee.

City offers public child care

The directly-operated child care centres and home child care agency are publicly-operated child care. The programs are operated by the municipal government and the child care staff are unionized employees of the city, represented by Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 79. Toronto operates the largest number of publicly-operated child care programs in North America (apart from those operated within the school system). With more than half a century of experience, the City has a wealth of expertise to share with any jurisdiction considering a public child care system.

Public delivery of child care has its challenges. The culture can be bureaucratic and may be less responsive to the immediate needs of families and neighbourhoods. Operational practices and reporting remain centralized. While it is possible to move staff between centres to accommodate staffing needs and provide opportunities to work in different settings, this can mean increased "turn-over" from the child's perspective. The directly-operated centres seem separate from the child care community and their own neighbourhoods.

On the other hand, the city is able to establish and maintain management stability that is often difficult to find in community-based programs. It is also able to implement and follow-through on specific curriculum directions or specialized service delivery

Children's Services Division

MISSION

Committed to Children

Supportive of Families

Building Community Capacity

The Children's Services Division manages Toronto's child care system. In partnership with the community, the division promotes equitable access to high quality care for children and support for families and caregivers. Children's Services are planned, managed and provided in ways that promote early learning and development, respond to families' needs and choices and respect the diversity of Toronto's many communities. An integrated approach to providing services to children ensures public value and benefit to all.

without losing the central concept in the translation across multiple service providers' organizations.

A shift to targeting high needs and at risk families

Following a cost review in 1991 of child care programs in Toronto, the directly operated programs took a number of measures to reduce their operating costs, including a switch from on-site cooks to catering (unless co-located with a home for the aged) and reduced caretaking staff. Nonetheless, the costs of operation remained higher than those in the community and the city considered divesting its child care programs. However, the city was serving many children and families in neighbourhoods that could not support community-based programs and required additional supports. The city decided to keep its directly operated programs despite their higher costs, and specialized in services for high-need and at-risk families.

Currently, the programs provide care in predominately high-need areas, and focus service on children and families with special needs. Four of the 58 programs are delivered in shelters.

Building a system

Toronto is committed to doing more than administrating and managing child care programs within the operating rules set by the provincial government. The city continues to push boundaries and nurture innovation towards a high quality, integrated system that brings child care together with other child and family programs. Child care is at the centre of the emerging children's system.

Child care joins services supporting children and families

Toronto Public Health, Parks and Recreation Division, Toronto Public Library and Toronto Community Housing work together with Children's Services Division under the municipal umbrella. Partnerships and collaborations expand services and maximize scarce resources. For example, Children's Services and Parks and Recreation provide summer day programs and before- and after-school child care programs. Toronto Public Health and Children's Services work together to offer Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, and Preschool Speech and Language programs. Both are provincially-funded prevention/early intervention services.

Information is power

Toronto plans, manages and supports child care and other programs to children and families with a complex database that tracks daily information about child care spaces, enrollment and fee subsidies. The information is available on the website and allows the city to monitor utilization closely and to match allocation of subsidies and resources according to the service plan.

The database supports a coherent, transparent planning process that is the basis for decision-making, including the Child Care Service Plan. Service planning preceded both amalgamation and provincial requirements for planning. The planning process provides a comprehensive overview of child care service needs,

gaps and issues facing the city. It also states the policies and principles which guide the management of child care and allocation of resources. Equity of service access, first come, first served admission to subsidized care, priority for infant spaces and integrated program delivery are examples of the principles that now guide the plan.

Information from the database identifies gaps in children's services and proposes action, including goals for provincial cost sharing. Children Services Division and city politicians are armed with data to respond to questions about child care programs and related spending.

A variety of social indicators, including the child care data, are compiled in the annual Toronto Report Card on Children that monitors the health and well-being of the city's children. The report is a collaborative effort between City staff from Children's Services, Public Health, Parks & Recreation, Social Services, Social Development, Shelter Housing and Support, and Toronto Public Library as well as the school boards and child welfare agencies.

A commitment to quality

The Children's Service's Division philosophy statement leads with a commitment to the "promotion and delivery of quality child care. The maintenance and continued improvement of quality care demands the recognition of an underlying philosophy upon which high standards in curriculum can be developed." The City of Toronto is one of the few local jurisdictions to enforce its own operating criteria to ensure program quality, respect for diversity and parental involvement.

Child care centres operated or contracted by the city must meet Toronto's Operating Criteria for child care. The criteria contain a self-assessment tool designed to help both city Children's Services Consultants and child care directors and staff decide whether centres meet these stated operating standards. The criteria contain over 300 items in eight categories: age groups, human resources, interaction and parent information, playground, administration, health and safety and nutrition, with further supplements on multi-age grouping and integrated services. The criteria are congruent with the Ontario Day Nurseries' Act and provide the opportunity to apply the requirements of the act in specific and measurable ways.

The city has 21 children's services consultants who are each responsible for about 50 programs – including approximately 35 child care centres, 15 family resource programs, special needs resourcing and 10 summer camps. Much of the consultants' time is spent on financial accountability, working with child care operators on financial viability and governance issues, and negotiating the purchase of service agreements. They visit each program a minimum of twice a year, monitor the implementation of the operating criteria and provide consultation to centres as requested. Children's services consultants are often used by schools and public health nurses as a clearinghouse for children's issues in local communities.

Looking towards integration

The City of Toronto is committed to a more integrated delivery of early learning and care programs for children and their families. In 1997 the Metro Task Force on Services to Young Children and Families released a report entitled *First Duty* to reflect their belief that a community's first duty is to the health and well-being of its children. The report contained 35 recommendations and called for the appointment of a children's advocate to monitor the implementation of an overall strategy and to build public awareness. Principles behind the strategy included investment in children as a "top priority to ensure the future social and economic health of the community" and "... a coordinated approach to the delivery of children's services for maximum operating effectiveness and cost-efficiency."

First Duty was followed by the annual Toronto Report Card on Children, with associated action plans and reports that promote a more integrated service delivery of child and family programs.

In April 1999, City Council agreed to allocate funds to contribute to a partnership with the Toronto District School Board and Atkinson Charitable Foundation for a multi-year Early Childhood Education, Development and Care project. The project integrates and expands existing child care, kindergarten and family support programs in five Toronto neighbourhoods. The new integrated service delivery model adopted the name Toronto *First Duty* in recognition of its roots in the recommendation for integration in the 1997 *First Duty* report. Toronto *First Duty* is developing and testing new policy approaches to integration. The research findings will track the impact on programs, children and parents, and community and public awareness.

Influencing local decision-making

The city has supported two strategies that bring community voices into the political and policy decision-making process.

- The Child Care Advisory Committee includes representatives from child care programs (one representative for every two municipal wards), family resource programs, multi-agencies, and Metro Coalition for Better Child Care (a Toronto-based advocacy organization). The city is represented by the Children's Services General Manager.
- The Child and Youth Advocate (an appointed member of Toronto City Council) serves as a focal point for the city's efforts to improve the health and well-being of its children and youth. The Child and Youth Advocate Committee (CYAC) operated from 1998 to 2004 as a partnership between elected officials and representative from community organizations to support the advocate. In addition to advising on political decisions, the CYAC worked to raise public awareness of issues related to children, sponsored research and celebrated the accomplishments of service providers. The CYAC worked on a number of policy initiatives to improve the situation of children; the Toronto Report Card on Children is one of the most important.

- In early 2004, the CYAC ended and the newly-elected mayor and city council established a Roundtable on Children and Youth. The Child and Youth Advocate position continues and will work with the Roundtable on Children and Youth to continue the push for a children's system.

The city funds the Toronto Child Care Campaign to lobby for expenditure of some of the federal Early Child Development Initiative funding on regulated child care. It plans to promote a public awareness campaign that will include posters in bus shelters to promote the value of licensed child care.

A well-organized child care lobby in Toronto is able to mobilize pressure. Advocates work closely with city staff and councilors to ensure child care is on the public agenda and champion Toronto's child care agenda with the provincial government.

Escalating demands

Toronto has a complex network of programs supported by a sophisticated and innovative children's services infrastructure. But it must deal with changing and often unconnected provincial policy initiatives and increasing demands for service that cannot be met. Recent amalgamations of Canada's largest city and school boards have created large new bureaucracies that are still developing their working relationships with each other. Administrators and service providers are showing signs of fatigue. Cuts to services are inevitable and necessary reforms and innovations are threatened.

Managing scarce resources

The city's vision is one that includes all children and implies universality of programs and supports. But the combination of provincial policy, funding changes, and amalgamation of local municipalities and school boards is pushing the city to make difficult choices. The city's capacity to maintain its current level of operation in child care and other children's and family programs is threatened. The viability of the licensed child care sector is premised on a mix of full-fee-paying and subsidized users. Cuts and restrictions on the subsidy system place all child care programs in jeopardy. Plus amalgamation of cities and school boards over the past decade has brought increased responsibilities, costs and complexities.

While the city is increasingly embracing the child development purposes of child care, the province has tied the use of a child care fee subsidy more firmly to parental employment and low economic status. The provincial government has tightened eligibility criteria for child care fee subsidies. Parents looking for work or pursuing further studies have less leeway in their use of subsidized spaces. The provincial asset ceiling (including RRSPs or savings account) of \$5,000 is a significant barrier to families accessing child care. While the asset ceiling is not new, it is an increasing problem since it has not grown in decades and the amount prevents families from being able to provide for the education of their children and retirement.

Toronto's annual provincial child care funding base has been reduced by almost \$12 million. Toronto is now funding 780 spaces at 100% instead of the required 20%. Even so, Toronto is at its lowest level of subsidized spaces since 1992 and may lose over 1,000 spaces if no new provincial dollars are forthcoming.

The provincial government directed new federal ECDI dollars away from licensed child care. In fact Ontario is the only provincial jurisdiction that has not directed some of the ECDI funding to support regulated child care programs. The province has announced that the first installment of the Multi-Lateral Framework Agreement will be directed to health and safety capital costs in licensed, non-profit child care settings – approximately \$2.6-million to Toronto.

By default with amalgamation, funding policy for education no longer recognized space in school. Child care centres located in schools – about 50% of Toronto's programs – were at risk of losing space. The city provides more than \$5-million in occupancy funding and has established agreements with four school boards. This is sometimes hard to defend because it amounts to base funding that benefits full fee families while the city is forced to cut fee subsidies for low-income, working families.

The city has established a number of funding strategies that support child care development, including a child care capital reserve that can be used for capital grants and loans. In addition, the city has used loan guarantees that assist child care operators meet the capital costs of building or renovating space for child care.

The city is able to negotiate agreements with other partners to expand programs and space. For instance, when the city has provided capital grants or loans to build exclusive child care space in schools it has been able to negotiate guaranteed occupancy for 20 years. Child care programs can use loans for capital costs and build repayment into their per diems (for fee subsidies and full fees).

A tangle of networks and program fragmentation

While the City of Toronto is working towards closer collaboration and integration among the divisions responsible for children's and family programs, the landscape is becoming more complex and chaotic. There are intersecting and overlapping networks, and initiatives related to early childhood programs, partly stimulated by the Ontario Early Years Study (1999) and the subsequent federal Early Child Development Initiative.

The province has established Ontario Early Years Centres in each provincial riding using the ECDI funding. The location of the programs and allocation of resources did not take the City's Child Care Service Plan into account. The Early Years Centres are a parallel system that duplicates family resource programs and are not attached to the municipal child care infrastructure. In many instances pre-existing family resource programs are lead agencies or satellite sites for the Early Years Centres while in others they have an independent "unique" status and remain tied to the

municipal system for funding. The Early Years Centres are administered and managed through provincial area offices.

Toronto's child care workforce

The need and demand for early learning and child care remains constant. There is no decline in the 0 to 6 age group. Maternal labour force participation rates continue to increase and overall unemployment rates are dropping. Increased use of the Early Development Instrument (a population measure used to assess children's development at entry to the school system) indicates that 24% of Junior Kindergarten children in 2003 are likely to have difficulties achieving academic success.

ECE diploma programs in five community colleges located in Toronto or surrounding regions supply ECE graduates to work in licensed child care centres, although those centres offering lower salaries have difficulty maintaining minimum numbers of qualified staff. Centres also experience difficulty recruiting and retaining experienced, skilled child care supervisors and special needs resource teachers.

The perception that quality is generally higher in community child care centres located in central downtown and affluent north Toronto is supported by two acknowledged indicators of quality: qualifications and salaries. In fact ECE salaries in these centres are close to those in the city's centres and, on average, there is a significantly higher ratio of trained to untrained staff. Anecdotal information suggests that ECE staff in these centres are less likely to leave and the positions are considered attractive by ECEs who are seeking employment.

Challenges in the work environment

The average annual salary for a full-time ECE working in a child care centre with a purchase-of-service agreement in Toronto was \$29,286 in 2003 – a \$682 increase from 2000. The total numbers of ECE staff working in these centres decreased from 2,737 in 2000 to 2,624 in 2003, while the numbers of untrained staff increased by 107 during the same period. In the city's directly-operated programs, front line ECE staff earn between \$34,500 and \$38,000 annually, depending on years of employment in the position.

Toronto's child care workforce faces the same work environment challenges that are familiar throughout Canada. Apart from the directly-operated centers, salaries remain low. The average full-time ECE salary in child care centres with subsidized children, has only increased by \$682 (2%) since 2000. While the average is more than \$29,000 (higher than in most regions of the country), the cost of living in Toronto is high and it does not compare with other positions requiring equivalent levels of education and training, or performance expectations.

At the same time, opportunities in Toronto for individuals with ECE in other early child development programs and initiatives (mostly funded through federal Early Child Development Initiative

dollars) have increased. These positions are often less stressful and may have better compensation packages. As community child care centres face continued financial strains and challenges, the work environment suffers. Alongside the financial incentives, ECE staff are looking to other opportunities that offer the quality programming for which they are trained.

The directly-operated centres (which offer higher salaries) continue to attract qualified ECE staff but are having difficulty recruiting and retaining special needs resource teachers in the child care sector.

Building skills and knowledge

Children's Services supports the development of a skilled cadre of professionals who can lead the provision of quality child care.

. Skilled supervision and leadership are recognized as key levers to promote quality programs. The child care supervisor position has become more complex and demanding – more children living in difficult environments, increased reporting requirements and increased security vigilance. A two-year diploma and two years experience (provincial requirements) are not adequate preparation for most child care supervisor positions. The city's directly operated programs prepare front-line staff to become child care supervisors and ensure that a structure of support and professional development is in place. Sometimes the city will bring one of its supervisors into a community program that is having difficulty. In these instances, the city supervisor has a backup of expertise to call on and can act as a mentor to the staff team in the community centre.

- The implementation of the operating criteria encourages staff to reflect on their own practice and the programs they are offering children. Cross-checks with children's services consultants reinforce learning and presumably promote change. However, consultants are often drawn into safety or reporting violations of the criteria that draw time and attention away from program quality beyond the basics.
- The city has established supervisor networks that act as both a networking and skill exchange forum for child care supervisors. The city can draw on its substantial infrastructure to match skill needs with resources.
- The child care workforce in Toronto benefits from specific training developed and offered by the city, including Making a Difference (child abuse), and anti-racism and anti-bullying training. In November 2003, the city hosted a two day professional development conference, Raising the Bar, that included a wide variety of curriculum and management workshops.
- The city operates one of its centres for infants and toddlers as a centre that models high quality practices and is a resource for its other directly-operated programs. There are facilities and resources to support specific professional development activities at the site.

Recognizing and valuing the workforce

Advocacy efforts continue in Toronto. Child care advocates maintain a high profile at City Council and in the local media and enjoy a close working relationship with the city's staff. The child care workforce is perceived as a valuable constituent in the children's services sector and is included in all tables of discussion related to environments for child health and well-being. One child care advocate commented:

The city does not bring the child care folks in to sit at the fringes or as an afterthought. When there are issues to discuss about children and families, child care is always at the centre. We may not always agree, but we do get respect.

A glimpse of the future

The City of Toronto offers us a glimpse of what a funded child care system might look like and what the challenges might be. It demonstrates the value of local decision-making and service planning. It perceives child care primarily as a child development opportunity that supports children's well-being and development as well as parents' labour participation.

The capacity to collect and analyze social indicators and service data from a number of sources is the foundation of this infrastructure. The evolution of a full range of child care systems in Canada will require planning capacity that is on par with Toronto's information system.

The child care workforce in Toronto benefits from the city's infrastructure for child care and broader children's services. The publicly-delivered centres create a significant mass of child care and child care positions, and set a benchmark for salary and benefit expectations. The city is able to create a network of support and resources for individual programs and supervisors within their directly-operated programs and in community programs.

Toronto has pushed the boundaries around the delivery of child care in the past and continues to do so, in spite of relentless financial pressures. Toronto's leadership and innovation find their way into the province's policies and operations. For example, the former City of Toronto implemented the child care advocates' demand and moved into provincial policy and funding through the introduction of a wage grant in 1987.

The full spectrum of programs for children and families in Toronto is not yet an integrated system. But the city is coordinating child care and other services and establishing the necessary infrastructure to encourage further collaborations while stabilizing the existing child care sector. Toronto demonstrates what "early child development" could look like if child care was truly at the centre.

PROFILE OF MICHELE BUTTON

Michele Button is a centre supervisor within the system of the City of Toronto Directly Operated Child Care Programs.

There have been times when parents have shown up at the Regent Park Child Care Centre with their children and their suitcases in hand. When they come with their belongings, it's because they've been evicted from their apartments and need support. And that's exactly what they get from centre supervisor Michele Button, who makes sure they know their rights, and with their consent, helps connect them with social workers and needed community supports.

The programs Michele oversees are in inner city neighbourhoods. Since families can face very challenging situations, Michele's job extends far beyond ensuring children are well cared for while attending one of her programs. She is often involved in crisis intervention and acts as liaison between parents and social services, Children's Aid and other welfare agencies. She has been to court as an advocate for parents, and has also been part of child apprehensions when children are at risk or there is evidence of abuse. The job can be difficult but Michele loves it, even though years ago the thought of working in child care was not even on her radar screen.

Michele's background

When she was younger, the Toronto-born single parent wanted to be a teacher, and always took on that role when she played school with her friends.

After high school, Michele had no idea what to do. Since her best friend was enrolling in Early Childhood Education (ECE), she decided to give it a try too. She first applied to Ryerson but was not accepted, so enrolled instead at Centennial College. While at the ECE program there, she realized that this was really what she wanted. She was especially interested in working with older preschool age children. She graduated with honours and directly entered into 3rd year at Ryerson, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in ECE in 1990.

During her time at Centennial and Ryerson, Michele worked summers in the Metro Toronto directly operated child care programs. (This was prior to amalgamation, when all the regions within Metro became the City of Toronto.) After graduation, she still wanted to be a teacher and applied to York University to get her Bachelor of Education. However, she deferred entry for one year and worked full-time for Metro. During this period she became pregnant and resigned when she went on maternity leave with her son.

She went back to school when her son was 2½ months old, putting him into a family home child care setting. Looking back, Michele regrets that she did not use centre-based care. She feels that the family child care providers' early childhood development skills were often lacking. It was only when her son was older and attended an after-school program that she felt he was flourishing.

After graduating from York in 1992, she was unable to get a job in her profession because of a shortage of teaching positions. She went back to Metro and worked first in a casual, then in a temporary entry level position. In 1994, she applied for an ECE-1 position (team leader), which carried a higher level of responsibility. She was hired into a permanent position and was posted at Alexandra Park, one of the Metro centres. In her 18 months there, she worked with preschoolers, infants and toddlers. She was recommended for an acting supervisor position at another Metro centre in a preschool/school-age program, and eventually became a permanent supervisor in 1997.

In 2001, after working in a number of other positions in the Metro system, she became a centre supervisor for the three programs she is responsible for today: the Regent Park Child Care Centre, an infant therapeutic centre, and a nursery school/parenting program at a shelter for homeless mothers and pregnant women

Work settings

Regent Park Child Care Centre is an infant/toddler program located in the Regent Park housing complex in an inner city Toronto neighbourhood. The centre is licensed for 10 infants and 20 toddlers, and is open from 7:15 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. All children are subsidized and most live in the neighbouring housing complex. Most of the parents work or attend an education or training program. Some families are recent immigrants to Canada, and several are from Somalia. As a single parent who used the subsidy system when her son was young, Michele says she sympathizes with many of the young parents and understands some of the struggles they face.

In a separate space, but within the Regent Park Child Care Centre, is one of the City's four Infant Therapeutic Programs. The program provides early intervention for 10 high-risk, high-needs infants and their families, all of whom are referred by an outside agency or doctor. For example, many are referred by the Massey Centre, a non-profit community agency that provides housing and support to pregnant teens, and young mothers and their babies. Sometimes, parents at the child care centre are also referred to this program for additional support when there are child welfare concerns. The program operates from 8:45-11:45 a.m., and from 1:30-4:30 p.m.

Staff in the half-day program help parents, some of whom are as young as 13, develop parenting skills so that they can provide a healthy environment for their children. A number of young parents in this program were in foster care as children. Parenting,

infant feeding and bonding are big issues. Some parents are not happy to have to participate in this program, but Michele and her staff can usually win them over with time. She thinks the program can really make a difference to a struggling parent. She sees young mothers bonding and interacting better with their babies, and how much the program helps infants benefit from the skills their mothers develop.

Within the two programs in Regent Park, there are 10 full-time ECE staff, three part-time assistants and a part-time food services staff. Cleaners come into the centre every evening. Staff clean the floors and tables after snack and are responsible for disinfecting toys. Maintenance staff keep the building and equipment in good repair. Michele consults with maintenance and repair staff on many details, such as recovering chairs, installing new blinds and construction work.

The third program Michele supervises is in Robertson House, a shelter for homeless mothers and young pregnant women. The residents of the shelter are on social assistance and include new immigrants and women who have faced domestic violence. The shelter is located in a large renovated historic house in downtown Toronto.

Robertson House Children's Program offers nursery school/child care and a young mothers program to residents of the shelter. The child care centre is licensed for three infants, five toddlers and up to 32 preschoolers, but there is flexibility in the license so that age groupings and staffing can be changed according to need. The program operates from 9-11:45 a.m. and from 1:30-4:45 p.m. The parents must remain on site, or have a designated "babysitter." Alternatively, they can drop in on the program and stay with their child. Most own few toys or resources, so a drop-in allows them to read or play with their children in a comfortable and well-resourced environment. Children can attend morning and afternoon sessions – they have meals with their mothers in the shelter dining room. Families living in the shelter receive priority for child care subsidies.

Developmental screening of children is done within all three programs on all children. The program has a resource educator on staff. Referrals are also made to the West End CrPche for children who have witnessed violence.

Staff wages, working conditions and job responsibilities

Staff in city-operated child care programs are part of the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 79. As a supervisor, Michele is excluded from the bargaining unit. Salaries for supervisors are between \$65,000 and \$71,000, depending on education and experience. There is a full range of benefits, including 1½ sick leave credits per month, extended health care, short- and long-term disability, and a pension plan. With her seniority, Michele gets four weeks vacation per year.

Hiring of unionized staff is done centrally. Michele is sometimes part of the hiring committee for staffing. The Infant Therapeutic Program and Robertson House program require potential staff to demonstrate special interest by submitting a "letter of qualifications."

Staff from other programs in the city system can request a transfer, or transfers can be made by management, depending on the overall staffing needs of the programs. All hiring is internal, except for casual staff, who are hired by centre supervisors. There is usually a written and oral component to the interview process.

Michele reports to a program manager responsible for all the centres in central Toronto. In turn, the program manager reports to the director of directly operated programs in the city.

Michele's job is busy and demanding. She is responsible for staffing and staff supervision, managing the budgets, maintaining enrollments, evaluating programs and supporting staff. She is also involved in bi-weekly staff team meetings that often focus on new program components such as introducing an emergent curriculum, using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), or implementing an anti-bias checklist self-evaluation. She says she has acquired many administrative and management skills on the job, and has had to learn how to be focused and goal-oriented.

Michele also participates in or is a member of numerous community committees, such as the School Community Action Alliance of Regent Park, Regent Park Residents' Council, the Child Welfare Mandated Parent Support Group, Young Parents of No Fixed Address, Jordan's Village for Homeless Women, and a network of all child care supervisors in the ward. She is also involved in case conferencing with Parents for Better Beginnings, a longitudinal prevention policy research demonstration project underway in eight communities across Ontario, with over 1,000 children involved, including many in the Moss Park/Regent Park project.

In addition, she has to stay knowledgeable and current about multiple rules and regulations, and changes to programs like Ontario Works and the child care subsidy system, so she can be an advocate for parents when necessary.

Michele thinks there are considerable advantages to being part of the city's directly operated child care system. There is good peer support, a well-defined infrastructure with many tiers of support, and many training and development opportunities.

Lots of work to do

Michele's work load is heavy. There are a number of outside agencies she has to deal with that often have different mandates and focuses. Some focus on parents; others on the child. There are often as many as 10 individuals in a case conference on a family. Michele knows each parent, and tries to attend each case conference. She tries to focus on the positive in each situation. Some agencies do not recognize the value of child care in supporting the families, but Michele finds that she can often convert them if she can get them in to see the programs. Michele also recognizes that sometimes the family situations are difficult and/or inappropriate and she and her staff have had to make some difficult decisions, knowing that a child may be apprehended. The Infant Therapeutic Program is often a place of last resort for parents who are required to participate as a condition of retaining custody of their child.

Rewards and challenges

When she first came to Regent Park, Michele had some doubts about the job, and wondered why the decision had been made to put in her charge of such challenging programs. Now, she says that she has never enjoyed a job as much as this one, and wouldn't want to work anywhere else. Almost every day when she arrives home at night in Pickering (a 45-60-minute commute) she feels that she has made a difference in someone's life. She thrives on successful crisis intervention and enjoys not knowing what each day will hold.

Michele finds it greatly rewarding to help families become successful parents. She knows it's tough for many families to break the cycle of poverty and parenting difficulties. She concretely sees the value of parent education, and is pleased with each success. For example, she tells the story of a 14-year-old pregnant mother who had been living on the streets and herself had been born to a young homeless mother. The young mother now sees where her own mother went wrong. She took on an advocacy role to keep her baby, with whom she has a warm and positive relationship.

Michele feels that a key issue is the lack of spaces for children under 2 1/2, which means many parents do not have the support they need when their children are very young. She would also like to see universal screening of all babies at birth, and again at 18 months to identify and address issues early on.

Michele says she has wonderful and very supportive staff. She has had to let go of some of her administrative duties in order to keep her priority with the families and children. She has learned to delegate, and having a good team makes this possible.

Some of the challenges of working in an inner city neighbourhood have become routine for Michele. For example, there were two break-ins at the centre over a period of two months. The first time, easy-to-replace items were stolen, such as the TV and microwave. The second time, computers were taken and there was more damage done to the centre.

On a personal level, Michele has found raising her son on her own very rewarding. She lives in a middle class neighbourhood, far from the day-to-day troubles faced by the families she works with. She is heartened that her son, now 12, has empathy and is aware of social issues such as homelessness and poverty. She thinks he will make a great social worker some day.

The future

Does Michele feel child care was the right choice for her? Yes! She's happy she didn't go into teaching because of the political situation in the education system. She feels that the focus of the education system is often not on the children. Moreover, after she started working in child care, she was promoted quickly and has never looked back. She would take a significant pay cut if she went back to teaching, and doesn't think it would be as rewarding.

Most of all, Michele feels she's been given a unique opportunity to positively influence the lives of families who face many hardships. There's a lot to do and still so much to accomplish that she doesn't even think of moving on.



THE CITY OF VANCOUVER

“The City of Vancouver is committed to being an active partner with senior levels of government, parents, the private sector and the community in the development and maintenance of a comprehensive child care system in Vancouver” (City Council resolution on adopting the *Civic Child Care Strategy Report*, October 1990).

Even though child care is primarily the responsibility of senior levels of government, the City of Vancouver has long played a significant role in the provision of this vital service. Without the city’s leadership, new communities would have been built without any child care services, many child care programs would be less financially stable, and fewer families would be able to access them. The city has created a vision, policies and action plans to help ensure the quality services needed are there to support children and families – all of this with limited resources.

Vancouver plans and coordinates the development of and support for child care facilities, including a number in city-owned buildings; it has a society that operates new centres created through the land-use development process in the downtown core; it provides operating and capital grants to non-profit child care to help offset the high cost of quality care and provide stability to centres in the inner city; and it provides a range of grants and in-kind supports for innovative projects, professional development and quality improvement. In addition, the city provides nominal lease rates to non-profit child care programs on city land and a standard of maintenance services to city-owned child care facilities. Apart from the capital costs borne by developers, the city does all of this with a relatively small budget of approximately \$1.5-million a year in grants and in-kind contributions.

Vancouver is home to two community colleges that provide training in early childhood education (ECE) – Langara College, which offers a full-time ECE diploma program and a Post Basic Certificate in Special Education through Continuing Education, and Vancouver Community College, which offers an ECE Level I program through Continuing Education, a School-age Certificate, Continuous Workshops for the ECE community and an Introduction to Family Child Care course. Vancouver is also home to several provincial child care organizations. In March 1999, six of

these organizations formed the Child Care Advocacy Forum to work on areas of common interest and a common vision for child care. The Advocacy Forum provides vital information to the city on child care issues.

There are approximately 470 licensed child care facilities in Vancouver, caring for over 12,000 children in centre-based spaces for infants/toddlers and three- to five-year olds, out-of-school care, preschool, child minding, emergency care and licensed family child care. As well, more spaces are being planned as a result of negotiations with developers, and with funds from development levies and community amenity contributions.

The average cost of licensed, full-time child care is \$886 per month for an infant or toddler and \$535 per month for three- to five-year-olds, but the actual costs are significantly higher – an estimated \$1,500 per month and \$750 per month respectively. The difference between the parent fee and the actual cost is covered by provincial funding, and in some instances city funding and/or in-kind support and fund-raising. City funding also helps offset the difference for low-income families between the provincial subsidy rates and the fee for some inner city programs.

Vancouver demographics

Vancouver is Canada’s third largest and British Columbia’s largest city, with a population of over 500,000 within a metropolitan region of two million. The population of downtown Vancouver increased by a staggering 61% between 1996 and 2001, while city-wide, the increase was only 8.4%. More than half the population of Vancouver is made up of visible minorities, and most of the growth was attributable to international immigration.

In 2001, there were an estimated 68,500 children aged 0–12 in Vancouver. For about 53% of the children, English is their second language, and more than 70 languages are spoken throughout the city. The city also is home to the largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada, from 200 different Bands.

Vancouver is an affluent and vibrant city, but also has the second greatest income disparity in the country – with a 24:1 spread between those with incomes in the top 10% and those in the bottom 10%. In the 1998 Community Affordability Measure, Vancouver was designated the least affordable city in Canada. In the downtown east side, over 80% of the population lives in poverty, including an estimated 52% of children. Approximately 70% of Vancouver’s Aboriginal population lives here, and about 62% of Aboriginal children live below the Low Income Cut Off (LICO).

These demographics and their related social and economic needs have contributed to the kinds of supports Vancouver has developed for its children and families.

A brief history of Vancouver’s involvement in child care

The City of Vancouver has provided a number of social and community programs and supports since the early 20th century. The city first became involved in direct welfare services in 1915, and established in its early programs a City Crèche and a child care centre for the children of working mothers.

When the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) was established in 1966, the city began receiving some cost-sharing for administration of its Social Services Department, and in 1971 cost-sharing of some its grant programs. In 1973, the province integrated public and private social services, and centralized direct welfare services. The city continued to play an active role in social planning, including culture, social issues, housing, physical development and community services. In the mid-70s, the first portable buildings housing child care were installed on city-owned land, offering rent-free space to the non-profit operators. Child care programs still operate in these portables today.

In the 1980s the city began to use bonusing as part of rezoning to achieve public amenities, including space for child care programs.

In 1989, the position of children’s advocate was created within the Social Planning Department to work on issues involving children and youth. Much of the advocate’s work in the first few years involved child care initiatives.

In 1990, Vancouver City Council formalized and expanded its mandate and involvement in child care by adopting the Civic Child care Strategy. The strategy encompassed Vancouver’s child care policy, goals for a comprehensive child care system and the child care action plan. The action plan included planning for child care, capital programs, operating assistance, program support, development and administrative support, and advocacy.

The strategy launched child care as a non-mandated service of the city. A Child Care Coordinator position was established within the Social Planning Department to oversee a range of services and supports such as:

- Planning, negotiating and overseeing the development of new city-owned and community child care facilities as part of the land use planning process, through development levies and community amenity contributions.
- Managing child care development projects – working with a design team on the creation of new facilities in accordance with the city-developed design guidelines, and with the Vancouver Society of Children’s Centres, established by the city to manage the centres in new developments.
- Developing, promoting, managing, administering and evaluating the Civic Child Care Grants Program, Child care Capital Grants and Child care Endowment Fund.
- Initiating, developing, recommending and evaluating civic policy on child care issues.

- Consulting, liaising and collaborating with other civic departments and the community to build capacity and develop non-profit child care hubs.
- Participating in and initiating research and program development to advise local, provincial and federal policy.
- Participating in and representing the city in provincial and federal child care initiatives to further the child care agenda.

Housing child care

The city has helped create and house many child care facilities. There are 39 licensed facilities, with about 2,000 licensed spaces, which are either on city- or Park Board-owned land and/or buildings, in community amenity space. Another 12 are under development. Non-profit child care societies in these facilities generally pay a nominal fee for the space. There are also 70 child care facilities in schools, with a licensed capacity of about 2,400; however the majority of these programs have to pay a “Daycare Cost Recovery Fee” or a negotiated lease rate.

In a few cases, the city has also facilitated purpose-built licensed family child care homes in addition to licensed group care facilities. This provides an opportunity for qualified educators to operate child care in non-market housing complexes, in spaces specifically designed for child care.

Child care and the development process

With the limited funding from senior levels of government over the years, the city has looked at ways beyond property taxes to help pay for community amenities to meet needs created by growth. Vancouver is unique in BC in that the provincial legislation giving the city its authority (the Vancouver Charter) permits Development Cost Levy (DCL) revenues to be used for child care (as well as replacement housing [social/non-profit], parks, and engineering infrastructure). Development charges and negotiating for community space have evolved gradually over the last 30 years, focusing on areas of significant new development. These tools include:

- Bonusing/Exclusions enabled by the zoning and development bylaw. Developers may request additional floor space ratios or additional height or some other minor zoning relaxation. At council’s discretion and when there is a public good served by the proposed design, council may grant the zoning variation in return for amenity-bonused or excluded space. The space typically remains under the control of the owner, but a legal arrangement spells out the terms of community uses and the rate that can be charged. These are not typically large spaces and as such house small child care programs.

- A DCL of \$6 per square foot for most new development; and \$2.40 per square foot in industrial areas to help pay for new parks, replacement housing, child care and engineering infrastructure. Some development is exempt, such as social housing, churches, residential development with fewer than four separate units and alterations to buildings where the square footage is not increased. Child care facilities pay a flat rate of \$10 per development. Five per cent of DCL revenue is allocated to child care, or approximately \$600,000 per year of the estimate \$12-million collected plus additional funds from area-specific DCLs.
- Community Amenity Contributions (CACs) to develop space for child care. CACs are used to provide community amenities when a development requires rezoning. CACs are more flexible than DCLs and can be used to create a variety of services, such as libraries, parks, community centres, neighbourhood houses and child care.
- Standard rezoning charges involving smaller development – a flat rate of \$3 per square foot in cash or in-kind for the additional floor space created – used to create a variety of services, such as libraries, parks, community centres, neighbourhood houses and child care.
- Non-standard rezoning charges in large-scale projects, when there is a change of use from industrial to residential or when the project is located downtown. The city negotiates the amenities to be built, and the details of the contribution. A number of child care centres have been created through this process and several more are in the planning stages. The developer provides the space to the city for the life of the building, and the city, in turn, enters into an operating agreement with a non-profit organization for \$1 per year, no property tax, and some maintenance support to deliver child care.

A selling feature

Excluding land costs, the cost to a developer for non-standard rezoning charges is approximately \$35,000 per full-time space. Initially many developers did not recognize the benefit of this cost, but have since seen the value of incorporating child care into new communities; a number now advertise the child care facilities as a selling feature of their developments:

Concord Pacific Place cares about your families; hence 25% of the site is designated for families with small children. We intend to build several child care centres throughout the new community. For your peace of mind, these child care centres will be fully licensed, meeting the strict requirements of the province and City of Vancouver. To be owned and operated by the City of Vancouver, the child care facility construction and furnishings are paid for by Concord Pacific Group Inc. ... Concord Pacific was pleased to design and construct this facility, ready-for-use at no cost to the City of Vancouver.

The city uses a formula for calculating the child care needs generated by new residential development, which is based on the number of children under 6, multiplied by the labour force participation rate, and assuming 72% usage of licensed child care in the downtown core and 50% outside the core. In instances where the city prefers payment-in-lieu of on-site construction of a child care facility, the funds are held in an Endowment Fund. In part, this fund helps offset the very high cost of infant care by providing \$1,650 per infant/toddler space per year to three of the developer-built programs.

Child care in city-owned buildings

There are a number of child care centres in portable buildings owned by the city or by the BC Building Corporation. The city provides the space for \$1 per year. In the case of city-owned portables and other city-owned child care facilities, a standard maintenance schedule has been established along with a capital plan to undertake renovations and repairs as required. Health and safety issues are given priority for capital funds.

Vancouver has the only elected Board of Parks and Recreation in Canada, in place since 1890. The parks and recreation system now has numerous community and recreation facilities that are home to several preschool programs, child care centres and out-of-school programs. The Park Board houses 21 child care facilities operated by community associations and other non-profit groups.

Developer-built child care facilities

In 1994, council approved funding to create the Vancouver Society of Children's Centres (VSOCC) as a single-purpose non-profit society to operate developer-built child care programs, in the downtown core. The city has provided ongoing funding for the society's administration. The board of directors is made up of 50% parents and 50% community members.

The executive director of VSOCC is part of the child care design team for developer-built child care centres in the downtown core, along with the City Child Care Coordinator, City Facilities Design and Development staff, and the Community Care Facilities licensing officials. This team works with the architects on the design of the facility. All new permanent centres built as part of the development process must conform to the City of Vancouver Design Guidelines to ensure quality space. Each centre is designed to be used in a flexible manner, so that it can be easily adapted to meet a range of early childhood development needs and be responsive to changing demands in the community.

VSOCC is responsible for staff hiring, developing policies, overseeing budgets, administration and the management of centres. The 59 full-time staff in the VSOCC-operated centres are unionized with the British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU) and are members of the same bargaining unit. Certification is site-specific and is determined by the employee group. Wages for a staff person with a Basic ECE are \$16.50 per

hour, plus benefits. Staff with Post-Basic qualifications earn \$17.25 per hour and a program supervisor earns \$18.93. VSOCC works closely with the city and with other community organizations to plan and deliver professional development activities for staff. VSOCC has 200 licensed spaces, some with family places in five facilities and has over 1,000 children on its waiting lists. It is now considering early childhood development needs beyond full-time regulated child care and will be looking for opportunities to be involved in delivering a broader range of services.

Providing funding to child care programs

The Child Care Civic Grants Program provides critical supports to the community. The program's overall objectives are:

- To support the viability, accessibility and quality of existing child care services.
- To assist child care initiatives in high need areas.
- To encourage and support efficient, coordinated administrative services required for a child care system in Vancouver.
- To lever other sources of child care funding whenever possible.

There are seven main grant programs:

- *Inner-City grants* keep parent fees below the city-wide average, provide individual child subsidies, enhance staff ratios for high-risk children, and provide a food supplement program.
- *Program Enhancement* grants for infant and toddler programs assist low- and modest-income families in maintaining lower than average fees, strengthen coordinated administration through the community hub model, develop and implement a quality improvement plan, and extend hours of operation beyond 7:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.
- *Program Stabilization* grants prevent the closure of parent-run, non-profit child care centres experiencing financial difficulties.
- *Program Development* grants provide assistance to non-profit societies with non-capital costs associated with developing new child care services, particularly in high need areas of the city.
- *Research, Policy Development and Innovations Fund grants* encourage and support new child care research policy or support service initiatives.
- *City-wide Childcare Support Services* grants support the basic infrastructure integral to developing a viable, effective, high quality child care system in the city. Services receiving funding under this category must agree to work closely with city staff to enhance child care in Vancouver and further the civic child care objectives, and to seek additional funding from senior levels of government and other funders.
- The *Grant for Administration of City-Owned Facilities* supports the administrative costs of new city-owned child care facilities negotiated as conditions of rezoning, bonusing and development permit approvals, and operated by the VSOCC.

There are also capital grants available once a year to non-profit child care organizations for major capital costs, to assist in facility purchase, construction, renovation or expansion. These grants are limited to a maximum of one-third of the cost.

Supporting quality

In addition to its capital and operating grants, the city supports quality in a variety of ways. It often acts as a catalyst to foster innovation by investing in new initiatives and using pilot projects to leverage provincial funding. For example, the city works closely with Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre, a non-profit society that provides information, services and support to the child care community. Over the years the City has contributed funding to Westcoast:

- To help with the research and groundwork in the establishment of VSOCC.
- For a staff position to provide information about child care in several languages.
- To prepare the introductory family child care training program in six languages, and current work on an Aboriginal component.
- For the Multilingual Services Development Project, which has developed a pool of translators with an understanding of child care to assist in translation using appropriate terminology and development of a glossary.
- To test the feasibility of a centralized waiting list for child care.
- To offer a monthly professional development Saturday workshop series.
- To produce a newsletter, *Westcoast Post*, three times a year, which includes a column from the City Child Care Coordinator and is distributed to every licensed or registered child care facility in Vancouver.
- To provide resources, training and consultation on multicultural, anti-bias, diversity in early childhood education.
- To chair a city-wide child care committee with representatives from six local networks.

In 2001, the city initiated and funded *The Continuous Quality Improvement Process (CQIP)*. The pilot project was developed in partnership with VSOCC, Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre, Community Care Facilities Licensing, the YMCA of Greater Vancouver and Kiwassa Neighbourhood House

The project developed and tested a continuous quality improvement process for child care administrators and staff in three child care programs, VSOCC, YMCA and Kiwassa Neighbourhood House as the lead agency. As part of the pilot, a literature review on quality was conducted, a series of three workshops and "tool kit" were developed and delivered to the three programs, and a training manual on how to plan for quality was created. Using these materials and the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS), staff assessed their programs and planned activities that were directly linked to quality improvements. Pre- and post-evaluations on quality are being conducted by an independent researcher to determine the impact of the quality improvement process. The Civic Child Care Grant for program enhancements has been tied to the development of a Quality Improvement Plan and additional workshops are underway for grant recipients.

Moving forward

In 2002, the City adopted a new vision, framework and 10-year plan that built on its child care strategy. This new vision was called “*Moving Forward*” *Childcare: A Cornerstone of Child Development Service*. There are five components to the framework:

- Improving service coordination/collaboration
- Establishing priorities and planning process
- Facilitating stable, flexible, quality child care
- Strengthening private and public partnerships
- Facilitating effective communication

A key objective of the new strategy is to better integrate early childhood education and care in city policy and practice and to improve service coordination and service collaboration. The plan addresses the fact that many services for young children are disjointed and fragmented, often as a result of different funding streams and eligibility requirements. In the past there have been few incentives for organizations and departments to work in a coordinated and collaborative manner. The city’s vision moves services from a series of fragmented “silos” to a coordinated early childhood development hub of a comprehensive range of services, such as full- and part-time child care, parenting programs, drop-in programs and playgroups for unregulated caregivers, at-home parents and child minding. The hubs will have one point of contact for parents and plan for, coordinate and deliver a continuum of services. The model is intended to maximize declining resources, and will enable the city to leverage federal and provincial funding based on an early childhood development vision. The model builds on the efforts of a number of community organizations over the last 10 years and was developed after considerable consultation and collaboration.

The city is also examining ways to improve coordination and collaboration with other public boards that have an interest in child care. A Child Care Policy Forum was held in January 2004, with elected officials from the city, park board and school board, as well as senior staff from the respective organizations. The outcome was the creation of a protocol, *Child Care – A Commitment from Local Governments*, which sets out a framework for a more coherent approach to policies and practices, in order to build a comprehensive range of childhood education and care services.

The current climate: responding to provincial funding changes Since 2002, provincial funding to child care in British Columbia has been reduced by \$50 million. The impact on child care programs and staff has been significant:

- A number of unionized child care programs that received wage top-ups as part of the Monroe Agreement (a result of a 1999 strike of the community social services sector) saw this funding end in 2003. Staff wages in many of the affected centres have seen wages revert to 1998 levels.
- Some out-of-school programs have seen their operating funding reduced significantly as a result of the changes made to provincial operating grants.

- The income eligibility level for fee subsidies was reduced by \$285 per month in net income; parents receiving partial subsidy had to pay 60 cents (previously it was 50 cents) on every dollar earned above the exemption level; and parents who were eligible for \$50 per month or less in subsidy were no longer eligible.
- Low-income families who were not employed had been able to receive a fee subsidy for a preschool space (half-day nursery school) in order for their child(ren) to have an early childhood education experience; families now have to meet the social criteria (e.g., working or studying) as well as the financial criteria, making many ineligible. This resulted in an initial 88% drop in subsidized children in preschool programs (nursery school) in a sample of programs on the east side of the city.
- Many programs have experienced a greater portion of “bad debt” from parents that are unable to pay the difference between what they receive in subsidy and the parent fee.
- Two preschools attached to two of the poorest schools closed. The preschools mainly served Aboriginal children.
- There were funding reductions to child care resource and referral programs; and a 45% reduction to Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre.
- Recruitment and retention of early childhood educators has become more difficult.

In response to these multilevel cuts, the city looked at urgent measures to protect the availability of child care spaces and programs. Council approved a child care subsidy grant for inner city programs, in an effort to ensure affordability and accessibility of quality care for low-income families. The city reassigned the funds from the program Development, Program Stabilization, and Research and Innovation Grants to the inner city grant, and topped up the Inner City Grant by \$162,000 to directly subsidize children in these programs. The funds are intended to eliminate current vacancies, and provide a fee subsidy to 20% of the licensed spaces in inner city programs to increase affordability and retain and return families with a limited ability to pay full fees. The city also took action with senior levels of government. It submitted a brief to the Standing Committee on Finance in the fall of 2003, outlining the city’s concerns for child care and federal allocations, and wrote to the province requesting: that cuts to child care funding be reversed; that the new provincial operating grant be tied to licensed capacity and affordability; and that a meeting be scheduled to discuss the state of child care in Vancouver.

The City of Vancouver continues to hold a strong leadership position among municipalities in its support for child care and other children’s programs. Working with the child care community and other community organizations, it has helped create and maintain a planned approach to quality child care, and has made every effort to preserve the stability of programs for children, their families and the child care workforce.

PROFILE OF RUTH BANCROFT

Ruth Bancroft is head teacher at the Langara Child Development Centre, Langara College, Vancouver, British Columbia.

As a child and a teenager growing up in Montreal, Ruth Bancroft was expected to help out in her mother's child care centre after school. This responsibility was enough for Ruth to swear that she would never work in child care as an adult. But something happened along the way, and Ruth eventually became the head teacher at the Langara Child Development Centre – a highly regarded centre in Vancouver known for its creativity, and its nurturing and caring attitude towards children and families.

Ruth's parents were immigrants who moved to Montreal from Israel. Her mother began taking in children so that she could stay home to look after Ruth and her two siblings. After awhile, Ruth's mother became known in the neighbourhood, and her services were in high demand. That's when she was reported to the city for looking after more than the legal number of children. The city inspector who came to her home liked what he saw and told her about the requirements for opening a licensed centre. Shortly after, her mother's child care was born: she moved into a commercial area and opened a centre that eventually accommodated more than 100 children.

Ruth was an employee at her mother's centre while she studied at McGill and Concordia Universities. She first studied sociology and anthropology and then switched to early childhood education (ECE). In 1977, she graduated from Concordia with a Bachelor of Arts degree with specialization in ECE.

A year later, the family moved to Vancouver. Ruth applied for child care jobs at Simon Fraser University and Langara College. She accepted the job at Langara and has been there ever since. During this time, she and her photographer husband have had two children, who are now students at Simon Fraser University.

Langara Child Development Centre

Langara Child Development Centre is in a beautiful purpose-built space licensed for 62 children from 18 months to five years. It is open 12 months a year, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. for the three- to five-year-olds, and from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. for the toddlers. The centre is organized into groups – one group of 12 toddlers and two groups of 25 three- to five-year-olds. All children attend full-time. The waiting list is long – more than 100 children.

Child care fees are \$500 per month for the three- to five-year-old group (\$132 if subsidized), and \$800 per month for toddlers (\$258 if subsidized). About 70% of the parents are students, approximately half of whom are single parents. The balance are staff, faculty and community members.

The centre was completely rebuilt and expanded in 1998, with funding from the provincial government under BC21, which paid for child care centre expansion and construction in public buildings. A toddler room and a 25-space room for three- to five-year-olds were added. (The centre previously accommodated only one 25-space group of three- to five-year-olds.)

As a member of the expansion committee, Ruth was involved in all aspects of the design and project implementation, with input from the other centre staff. This was a long and involved project. Discussions started in 1992, and it took a few years for construction to begin. The result, though, was well worth the planning and effort.

The indoor play space and the outdoor playgrounds of the centre make use of natural light and materials. There are separate playgrounds for the toddlers and three- to five-year-olds; each play area has a garden that the children tend. All the climbing equipment is made of wood. Thanks to a number of large covered areas, the children are able to be outside during Vancouver's frequent rainy days.

Each of the three groups of children has three types of space: a main play area, a gross motor area and a room for small groups to have time together away from the larger group. There is also a resource room where the special needs resource staff person works daily with small groups of three or four children, which include children in need of additional support.

When the children are napping or resting, staff often gather in the kitchen, where most of the communication and informal planning are done. The kitchen has half-walls and sits in the middle of the two three-to-five-year-old rooms so that both rooms are clearly visible.

After the renovations, Ruth gradually increased the numbers of children and staff. The original three-to-five-year-old program increased from 25 to 32, and the new toddler centre started with eight children. New staff were added one at a time, along with a few new children, until the centre reached its operating capacity.

The centre now employs 13 staff, three of whom work half time. Most staff are graduates of Langara or Vancouver Community College. All have a minimum basic ECE certificate; most have an infant/toddler and/or special needs post-basic credential. Ruth has a Bachelor of Arts from Concordia, and three staff have degrees – two in social work and one in psychology.

In addition to Ruth, four other staff members have been with the centre since before the expansion. All staff in the centre, new and old, take on critical leadership roles. For instance, one staff person has responsibility for scheduling; another is responsible for liaison with the college about the physical plant and any necessary maintenance or repairs. A third staff member has taken on the job

of getting the centre online. The special needs resource staff person is responsible for all aspects of the special needs programming and reporting.

Staff turnover at Langara is very low – Ruth has been at the centre for more than 25 years, and all other senior staff have worked there between 15 and 25 years. When a position becomes available, there is usually a pool of excellent substitutes to recruit from who are well known to the staff. Ruth never hires from a resume alone. She feels that finding the right “fit” is key to a high quality child care setting.

Langara is located close to the ECE program in the college. Many of the centre’s substitutes are successful graduates of the program. The centre also has three categories of unpaid adults who contribute their work: practicum students, volunteers and work/study students (college students eligible for some funding from the college, topped up by the centre). They set up activities, clean up (wiping tables, sweeping floors) and prepare art materials, enabling the staff to spend almost all their time focused directly on the children.

Ruth says she is continually inspired by her staff team, who provide a warm and welcoming environment for both children and adults. She says she feels fortunate to be able to work with such creative and intelligent people. The staff have worked together for so long that they understand each others’ loads and are able to support each other both professionally and personally. They work as a team to develop policy and approaches to programming.

The four original staff developed the philosophy and style of the child care centre, and over the years have looked for staff who are compatible with its aims. The centre’s priorities are building the children’s self-esteem and problem-solving skills, as well as peer interaction and cooperative play. All staff have input into the curriculum and can bring their own ideas into the program. The children are given lots of choices and encouraged to be self-directed. The result is a fluid curriculum approach where every room is different and the children are very engaged.

Wages, working conditions and work environment

Langara Child Development Centre is unionized with CUPE Local 15, a college-wide bargaining unit for all non-instructional staff. Centre salaries are negotiated separately from other positions, but the college used other non-instructional support staff, such as library and lab staff, as the basis of comparison for salary levels. Although she is the head teacher, Ruth is still a member of the bargaining unit. She is very supportive of the union, but finds it too difficult to be actively involved. Most staff have families and give a lot of extra time to the centre, so they are not at the table when union issues are discussed.

Starting salaries at the centre are \$17 an hour. Ruth is paid \$25 an hour for a 7½-hour day, which includes two paid 15-minute breaks. She receives an unpaid half-hour lunch break. Ruth has a written job description and reports to the dean of student and educational support services.

All centre staff receive the same comprehensive benefit plan as other college employees, including sick leave, extended health, a pension plan and vacation time that increases with length of service. Staff prepare program materials on their own time. Evening meetings, when they occur, are often social.

Professional development days are not in the collective agreement, but Ruth seeks out a variety of ways to support staff development. She says it can be difficult to find appropriate professional development for very experienced staff: they need opportunities that recharge their batteries. The centre pays for a number of professional development events each year. Staff participate in community workshops and events, such as Network 6 workshops and Partnerships Programs. (Vancouver is divided into networks, and each child care program belongs to a network). In addition, Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre provides many professional development opportunities in its Saturday workshops. Langara staff can also access courses available at the college, free of charge. Ruth also often organizes evening in-service activities specifically aimed at the needs of the staff, with a speaker coming into the centre. A recent evening was spent on conscious caregiving – ways to be more mindful and aware of oneself and all aspects of caregiving work. Another evening focused on the Reggio Emilia method.

Langara is very supportive of staff who want their children cared for at the centre. When Ruth’s son was at the centre, he found it too hard to share his mother with the other children, so Ruth enrolled him elsewhere. Largely as a result of this experience, the staff at Langara decided to find ways to make it easier for the children of staff to attend the centre. They found that it is better when staff work in a different group from their own children. They also explain to their children that at child care, other teachers want a turn to be with them, while at home, their mothers are completely theirs. Ruth’s daughter went to an infant centre at the age of 18 months and then to Langara when she was three. Most other children of staff have also attended the centre at Langara.

Ruth’s work

Ruth generally spends from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. as a staff person in the toddler program. For the first couple of years after the expansion, Ruth rotated among the three groups, thinking it was important for her to spend time with all the children and staff. Now that staffing has stabilized in all three centres, Ruth spends most of her time on the floor with the toddler group. Staff have found many ways for children and staff to visit different groups, and to spend time together in the playground.

During the afternoons, Ruth takes care of her administrative duties, such as budgeting, liaison and meetings with the college. She enjoys a good relationship with the ECE department in the college. In addition to supporting the ECE students, Ruth is exploring other ways to have closer links with the department, such as sharing workshops and other learning opportunities. Ruth is also the centre's liaison with various ministry staff regarding contracts, licensing and applications for funding. She is responsible for staff hiring, orientation and performance appraisals according to the college guidelines. She also shares responsibility for the parent newsletter with other interested staff.

The focus of Ruth's work is on both children and families, and needs vary considerably. Some families need the additional services of community organizations; many families are not aware of the availability of fee subsidy. The staff have become well-connected to agencies in the community in an effort to make sure the extra support needs of families of children with disabilities are met. Ruth is a past co-chair of the Vancouver Supported Child Care Advisory Committee.

Rewards and challenges

Ruth's love for her job and the children has grown every year. She likes to spend time in the program every day so that she can stay connected as a co-worker and member of the staff team. She also likes the challenges of other aspects of her job. She is away from the children enough to start missing them and to feel recharged when she is back on the floor with them the next morning.

Ruth enjoys the balance in her job of working with children, families and other professionals. She finds the numerous students in the program give her a sense of the scope of the work.

Money is always a challenge in child care, although Ruth realizes that her program has fewer financial concerns than most centres. The college provides considerable in-kind support to the centre in areas such as accounting, billing, subsidy administration and payroll. The college also provides rent-free space, and maintenance and daily cleaning of the centre. Still, parent fees have to cover the salaries and program supplies, and those fees have been kept low in order to be affordable for student families.

Recent cuts to subsidy eligibility have affected some families, including student parents who find themselves no longer qualifying for subsidies. Another funding concern for Ruth is the refocusing of special needs resources and the possible shift to individualized funding to parents. The centre currently receives inclusion contract funding to deliver services for children with special needs in the community. This contract has enabled the centre to offer a range of services to children and families. It has also meant continuity of support staff: the special needs resource staff has been a full-time staff member since 1987.

Future plans

The main issues for Ruth with respect to her occupation are broader social ones: the fact that society doesn't appreciate children and early childhood enough; and the fact that ECEs often don't value themselves enough. Ruth feels that ECE is still an immature profession. Low wages certainly reinforce the lack of respect given to the work, but staff need to value their own worth more. Ruth knows that she and the other staff at her centre are better compensated than most, but still feels the wages don't reflect the value of the work performed.

Nevertheless, Ruth is in it for the long haul. Ten years ago, she almost left the centre and the job that has so fulfilled and challenged her. The staff at the college were on strike and, concerned about survival, she applied for and got a position as a licensing officer. It was then that she realized she could not leave the centre – it is where she belongs, and where she will stay until she retires.



APPENDIX 1 :

SOURCES FOR THE CASE STUDIES

The City of Toronto

Key Informants

Marna Ramsden, former General Manager, Children's Services Division
Brenda Patterson, General Manager, Children's Services Division
Petr Varmuza, Director, Service Planning and Support, Children's Services Division
Pamela Musson, Program Manager, Children's Services Division
Jill Harvey, Program Consultant, Children's Services Division
Mary Lawrence, Director, Directly Operated Centres, Children Service's Division

Documents

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Children and Youth Action Committee. *Action Plan for Children 2003*
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The City of Vancouver

Key Informants

Carol Ann Young, Child Development Coordinator, Social Planning Department
Sue Harvey, Social and Cultural Planner, Social Planning Department
Rhonda Howard, Senior Planner, City Plans Division
Sandra Menzer, Executive Director, Vancouver Society of Children's Centres
Staff at Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre

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Young, C.A. (2002). *Moving Forward. Childcare: A Cornerstone of Child Development Services*
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10/09 *Revisions to the Community Services Grants Program*
07/24 *Protecting the Availability of Child care Spaces and Programs*

APPENDIX 2 :

PROFILE AND CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

The profiles were prepared using the results of telephone interviews conducted between August and November 2003, following a standard format. The profiles are intended to highlight the range of positions and circumstances of members of the workforce to provide added value to the LMU project.

The case study research methodology used multiple sources of evidence including documents, interviews and observations. Interviews were conducted with city officials in both municipalities and relevant policy, research and administrative documents were reviewed. Each case study considered the policy and work environment context, using a comprehensive research strategy aimed at explaining and exploring current ECEC human resource issues across the two different contexts.

Site visits were made to the workplaces of both individuals profiled and interviews were conducted to gather information on the organizational structure, hiring practices, funding sources and budget information, the perceived work environment and its strengths and weaknesses, the philosophical approach to the program, views on ECEC in general and issues in program delivery. Interviews and observations were conducted to gather both concrete information on wages and benefits, training, professional development opportunities and practices and demographic information, as well as (for example) perceptions of the job, views on ECEC, relationships with children, peers, parents and other professionals, and goals and career aspirations.

APPENDIX 3 :

CHILD CARE TERMINOLOGY

The terms used to describe the sector, the industry and members of its workforce are numerous, changing, and often confusing. Often these terms are imbued with values, meaning and implications according to specific communities or constituents. Terms such as child care, early learning and care, early childhood education, early childhood education and care and early childhood development programs all carry with them certain connotations, and raise certain questions. Is a program focusing on “education” or “learning” detrimental to “care”? Does it suggest an emphasis on school readiness and cognitive development and put undue pressure on very young children? Does the focus on “care” suggest a more custodial arrangement and that “learning” is not important? And does it distinguish between regulated child care with standards and training requirements for staff, and unregulated arrangements with no standards? Does one term suggest an emphasis on the child and another suggest an emphasis on labour force support for the parent?

Terms used for members of the child care workforce also vary: early childhood educator, child care practitioner, teacher, child care worker, provider and caregiver. The term early childhood educator is often used for individuals with a post-secondary ECE credential, yet Statistics Canada uses the term to describe anyone working in the sector, with or without training. Some members of the sector prefer the more inclusive term of child care worker or child care practitioner; others want their training and credentials reflected to distinguish themselves from those with no formal training.

Part of the concern about language is due to recent policy initiatives and shifts in program emphasis in a number of jurisdictions, which have resulted in the creation of new “early childhood” programs that specifically exclude regulated child care. This is part of the ABC – anything but child care – phenomenon, which has resulted in the redirection of funding and support for high quality, regulated child care centres to other types of early childhood development programs. Some organizations that provide resources and support to the sector use “child care” in their names, others use “early childhood education.” Some regulated child care centres have “early childhood centre” or “child development centre” in their names.

The focus of the LMU is on regulated child care and the individuals working in it. However, for purposes of comparison, the study does provide some information on the wages, working conditions, and education of others working in the broader early childhood sector. This report also profiles some individuals who work with young children in settings other than regulated child care, in order to provide information about other job opportunities for those with formal early childhood education training, and the nature of those jobs.

Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care, the 2001 report of the first Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in which 12 countries participated, uses the term early childhood education and care defined as follows:

The term early childhood education and care (ECEC) includes all arrangements providing care and education for children under compulsory school-age, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours, or programme content.

The report goes on to say:

The use of the ECEC supports an integrated and coherent approach to policy and provision which is inclusive of all children and all parents, regardless of their employment or socio-economic status. This approach recognizes also that such arrangements may fulfil a wide range of objectives, including care, learning and social support.