

Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada

BULLETIN

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SPRING 2004

A message from the Chair

The March federal budget was a disappointment for the CCAAC, which had pressed the Martin government to bolster its encouraging early learning and care promises and rhetoric with a more substantial plan. We were also hoping for much-needed conditions to be placed on the federal transfers, and funding that reflected the needs of children and families.

Instead, the budget provided for only a modest step-up in spending to previously committed dollars — \$150 million additional dollars to be spread over 2004/05 and 2005/06. The government claims this new money means up to 48,000 new spaces or up to 70,000 fully subsidized spaces. But our analysis puts the figure much lower. Only 19,000 fully subsidized spaces would be generated if provincial/territorial governments spent all of the new dollars making child care more affordable or creating new spaces — not including start-up and capital costs. (Visit www.childcareadvocacy.ca for a full child care analysis of the budget contained in our news release of March 25.)

The worst news is that the figures in this budget represent a net drop in federal spending on child care over the past decade. At the end of the five-year “ramp-up”, the federal government will be spending about as much for child care as it did in 1996 when Finance Minister Martin eliminated the Canada Assistance Plan (the pan-Canadian social welfare program) and brought in the block-funded CHST.

So much for the budget saying that “ensuring all children get the best start in life and equal opportu-

nities throughout their early years is a fundamental legacy Canadians leave to future generations.”

But small as it is, there is new money, and the Multilateral Framework is now a line item in the budget — a struggle advocates across Canada waged and won. There’s an even greater need now for advocates in all provinces and territories to take on the role of child care watchdog. We need to:

- Hold provincial and territorial governments accountable, making sure they spend all of the federal funding on high quality, licensed and regulated child care.
- Make sure provinces/territories spend their own dollars on child care and don’t use federal funding to let themselves off the hook.
- Pressure provincial/territorial governments to lobby for more child care funding from Ottawa.

Child care advocates will also need to put all candidates and parties in the federal election on the hot seat about their platform and positions on child care.

Please let CCAAC know what you’re doing in your regions and how we can support you in your advocacy efforts. Keep in touch with us via e-mail (info@childcareadvocacy.ca) or through your provincial/territorial CCAAC representative. I also invite all members to go to our web site to sign up for our e-mail broadcasts of child care advocacy news, campaigns and upcoming events.

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The importance of a pan-Canadian network of watchdog advocates — that’s all of us together — has never been greater now that we have federal promises of funding for child care, inadequate as they are. The one thing we know about child care advocates is that we will never give up until the day that all children in Canada have access to universal, inclusive, high quality, not-for-profit child care.

Federal election?

As I write, rumours continue to swirl about when the election will be called. But whatever the date, CCAAC intends to make child care a key election issue across Canada. Watch for our public education materials and election tools on the web site.

SOS a hit!

The CCAAC paper, *Seeing and Solving the Child Care Crisis: Options for Progress*, has generated spirited and tremendously helpful discussion on how Canada could put in place a good early learning and child care system and what that system should look like. The consultations prove that there’s a real concern about where Canada is going with its child care policy. Giving all children a good start in life is a fundamental principle that everyone cares about. Read more about the SOS discussions elsewhere in this issue of the newsletter. The results of the consultations will help CCAAC shape specific, workable demands for government action to ensure every child in Canada has access to high quality, publicly funded child care.

Christine McLean
CCAAC Chair

www.childcareadvocacy.ca

If you haven’t visited our web site lately, don’t delay! It’s updated weekly to bring you current child care news.

SOS discussions build energy

Enthusiastic. Passionate. Serious and stimulating discussion. These are just some of the words CCAAC members used to describe their experience of the cross-Canada consultations on the discussion paper, *Seeing and Solving the Child Care Crisis: Options for Progress*.

More than 400 discussion papers were mailed out, and copies were accessed online. By early March, nine facilitated consultation sessions had been held in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia, and individuals were responding online. At least nine more facilitated sessions were planned before the deadline for feedback.

The discussion paper looked at eight policy lessons from a four-year study of early learning and child care services in 12 countries. The paper presented policy options and questions to address gaps and identify priorities.

SOS project consultant Kerry McCuaig reported that feedback from the first nine consultations was positive overall. Participants indicated they enjoyed the discussion and benefited from it. There were several suggestions about the importance of doing more to address federal/provincial relations and the fact that the child care needs of school aged children also need to be met.

The consultations were primarily designed to provide input to the CCAAC in developing a comprehensive child care policy paper to guide its work over the next 10 to 15 years. But another very important goal was to engage advocates and new sectors in discussing child care policy – to build capacity and help advocates develop their regional positions. It’s a goal that the evidence so far suggests will be reached.

Watch the CCAAC web site for information about the availability of the final SOS strategy paper.

Cross-country check-up

What does it take to help to move child care forward in Canada? The answer is the dedication (and staying power!) of advocates across the country. From coast to coast to coast, there are stories of small improvements in some regions, but even more, unfortunately, of continued uphill struggles. A cross-country check up shows that if it weren't for the vigilance of advocates, the child care crisis in Canada could be much worse than it is.

Here's some of the bad news first:

- In Newfoundland and Labrador, more than 70% of children in care are in unregulated care. It remains very difficult to access infant care (there is none outside of St. John's).
- Child care centres are closing their doors in Nova Scotia because while costs have gone up, operating funds have not increased in the last five years.
- Money for child care expansion in Québec will mainly go to the commercial sector and the service will cost families more – \$7 a day, up from \$5.
- The Ontario Liberal government's sole child care announcement since taking office last October has been the creation of a new Ministry of Children's Services. Using the deficit as an excuse, the government has released no plans for child care.
- Saskatchewan remains a province of fragmented and desperately underfunded child care services. Advocates are asking, "Where's the money from the Multilateral Framework Agreement?"
- Alberta is piloting an alternative means to support families living in areas with limited licensed and/or formal care options or for those requiring care during non-traditional care hours. The initiative, KinCare, allows qualifying parents to access

AGM 2004: Don't miss it!

Friday, June 25, 2004 · 7pm to 9pm
Les Suites Hotel, 130 Besserer, Ottawa

Please join our Board of Directors and Council of Child Care Advocates at this year's CCAAC Annual General Meeting. You'll hear all about the findings of our pan-Canadian consultation on Seeing and Solving the Child Care Crisis, and about the state of child care in Canada today. Here's your chance to meet advocates from across the country!

Refreshments will be served.

financial support under the provincial subsidy program to secure family as caregivers. So far, 30 families in central Alberta are using the pilot program.

- In 2002/03, the B.C. government cut \$23 million to child care subsidies for low and moderate income parents at the same time that it received \$50 million from the federal government for Early Childhood Development Initiatives.
- Child care policy continues to be unresponsive to the needs of families and children in rural and remote parts of Canada. Children with special needs cannot access inclusive child care.

But there are also some bright spots:

- Yukon child care community completed its consultations on a four-year strategic plan for child care. The government provided some top-up money for child care wages and advocates expect more to come, likely in the March 2004 budget. (*Editor's note: The March budget announcement included \$675,000 for child care workers' wages.*)

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- Saskatchewan child care workers, advocates and parents staged a media coup recently. They invited MLAs to tour a Saskatoon child care centre and pressed them publicly on the funding issue. They got a commitment that the MLAs would meet about child care with the premier and the minister of social services.
- Manitoba has spent the majority of its ECDI money on child care. The Manitoba Government Employees Union continues to unionize centre-based child care workers, and will push to negotiate with the government as the employer.
- New Brunswick's Advisory Council on the Status of Women has been working with child care advocates and recently got a commitment from the Minister for the Status of Women to discuss a long-term plan for the child care sector.

- In Nova Scotia, some ECDI money was used for licensing. A stabilization grant has made it possible for more child care workers to stay in the field.
- In a meeting with advocates, Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Danny Williams made a commitment to put child care front and centre on the agenda in discussions with Prime Minister Paul Martin.
- The federal government is sponsoring a four-year project about the policy changes at the federal and provincial levels needed to support integrated services in rural areas.

Cross-country check-up is a regular feature of CCAAC Council of Child Care Advocates' meetings. All members provide a good news/bad news report on what's going on in their regions. This is a very condensed version of reports from the March 2004 meeting.

Parent Voices still being heard

Parent Voices has been unstoppable these past few months. The project received funding for January to March for "Strengthening the Network" to bring parent perspectives on universality and quality to the CCAAC's SOS consultations – and that's exactly what parent representatives made sure happened in their regions. The funding also allowed the project to develop educational material on the thematic review of child care by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), to sustain the web site, and to develop several new fact sheets. (Visit www.parentvoices.ca.)

Parent Voices has made a real difference to parent advocacy, with a focus on providing practical tools and resources to people who don't have a lot of time but want to engage in child care activism. The virtual network continues to grow, and the reach of the project's e-mail broadcasts is ever-expanding. The web site (accessible through the CCAAC site or www.parentvoices.ca) is a treasure trove of educational material, news and reports. The Parent Voices Resource Kit, an invaluable tool of information,

strategies and how-tos, is now in its second printing. (You can request copies by e-mail at info@parentvoices.ca.)

Judging from the reports of the Parent Voices representatives at the March Council of Advocates meeting, parents are making their voices heard loudly and clearly in the child care debate by submitting briefs to federal and provincial budget consultations, participating in the Memo to Martin, lobbying their MPs and MPPs/MLA's, developing provincial child care campaigns and activities, and providing input into the SOS consultations.

"It's been amazing," says Dianne Goldberg, project consultant for Parent Voices. "The parents are very skillful advocates. They've brought a wonderful perspective to CCAAC and made a strong contribution to the collective strength of child care advocacy in Canada."

Parent Voices: Making the Case for Child Care has been funded by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program.