

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY INCLUSION?

Child care inclusion means that *all* children can attend and benefit from the same child care programs. *Inclusion* as a core principle in a pan-Canadian child care system would eliminate any exclusion based on disability and would go beyond non-discrimination — assuring that children with disabilities get the supports they need to benefit from child care. The principle of *inclusion* fully incorporates basic values that promote and advance participation, friendship and a celebration of diversity.

In the June 2004 federal election, the federal Liberal Party made a commitment to develop a pan-Canadian child care system based on four principles – **Quality, Universality, Accessibility** and **Developmentally appropriate programming**. This set of principles is referred to as QUAD.

These principles, along with the principle of **Inclusion**, are cornerstones of the child care community's agenda. To ensure that these principles provide the foundation for developing a new child care system, we need to clearly understand what they mean. This is one of a series of fact sheets that briefly explains the principles.

INCLUSION

Simply put, child care inclusion means that *all* children can attend and benefit from the same child care programs. It means that children with disabilities go to the same programs they would attend if they did not have a disability. Inclusion means *all* children, not just those who are easy and/or less expensive to include. All means *all*. For children with disabilities, this means that the necessary supports of training, equipment, physical modifications and extra staffing are available to all programs, at no extra cost to parents or to the individual programs. The principle of inclusion goes beyond the notion of physical integration and fully incorporates basic values that promote and advance participation, friendship and a celebration of diversity. Children with all disabilities are active participants, not just observers on the sidelines.

Children with disabilities need child care for the same reasons that all other children need child care. They need child care for:

- early education and learning;

- parental employment, training, and respite; and
- friendships and social inclusion.

Research is clear. Inclusion works. Children with all levels and types of disability benefit from social and developmental experiences with their typically developing peers. There is no evidence that children with even severe levels of disability are poor candidates for integrated programs. Demonstration programs and comparative studies have shown that children with severe disabilities can be successfully integrated. Typical children also benefit from inclusive experiences.

Social inclusion matters. Children are more vulnerable in communities without connection to needed supports, in segregated settings, or isolated from recreational opportunities. In inclusive settings, all children learn about respect for difference, new forms of communication, empathy, friendship and solidarity across difference. Inclusion begun at an early age leads to better inclusion for all citizens later in life.

Inclusion in child care includes six key elements:

- zero reject — no child is excluded on the basis of level or type of disability;
- natural proportions — programs include children with disabilities in rough proportion to their presence in the population;
- full participation — activities and routines are modified and adapted to include all children;
- same range of program options — parents of children with disabilities have the same options (eg., full day, part day, flexible hours) that other parents have;
- maximum feasible parent participation — parents are actively encouraged to participate in the child care program; and
- pro-action for community inclusion — staff and parents promote inclusion in the whole community.

Each of these elements must be present if inclusion is to be a reality in child care.

In Canada, many children with disabilities are still excluded from child care. Parents of children with disabilities can still be told, “We can’t include your child.” While many child care practitioners and programs have worked tirelessly to include children with disabilities, the necessary resources, training and support are often not present. Children with disabilities are excluded when programs feel overwhelmed at the challenge of providing service to them, and are unable to access necessary supports. *Inclusion* as a core principle in a pan-Canadian child care system would eliminate any exclusion based on disability and would go beyond non-discrimination — assuring that children with disabilities get the supports they need to benefit from child care.

Disability crosscuts all income gradients and cultures. Approximately 10% of children have a disability, health condition or disorder that requires extra support if the child is to benefit from child care. Some of these

children will require very limited extra support; other children will require one-to-one staffing support, intensive consultation, specialized equipment and physical modifications to the program facility.

In a high quality child care system, many of the necessary attributes of child care for children with disabilities will already be present — in particular, well-trained staff, limited staff turnover, reasonable wages and benefits, appropriate staff-to-child ratios and group sizes, developmentally appropriate curricula, and appropriate physical environments. Disability-specific supports would be added, as necessary, to assure that the system is inclusive.

In a universal and inclusive system, most child care programs will enroll some children with disabilities some of the time — in natural proportions to their presence within the general population (10%). In a small program, this might mean that in one year, one or two children with mild-to-moderate disabilities would be enrolled, but in another year, there might be a child with severe disabilities. In still another year, there might be no children with disabilities enrolled. But over time, all programs would enroll children with disabilities. Staff learn from formal training and from their experiences of including children with differing abilities; programs develop resources that help them better accommodate other children with disabilities. Eventually all programs can accommodate all children, regardless of the level or type of disability they may have.

Accountability, transparency, and third-party monitoring will be essential to assure that programs and provinces/territories are moving toward inclusion in child care. Programs must be regularly monitored for inclusion quality and governments must be responsible for assuring that targets and timetables are set with regard to enrollment of and support for children with all types and levels of disability. The tools for measurement are available; the skills for third-party monitoring already exist.