



Working together for a community based, non-profit child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible, publicly funded and accountable.

BC government inaction invites big box, corporate child care at University of Victoria

BC's child care community is shocked to learn that the University of Victoria is actively considering contracting with the national child care chain **Kids and Company** to address the critical shortage of quality, affordable child care for U Vic students, faculty and staff.

A recent report considered by the University's Board of Governors indicates that **Kids and Company** can build and operate child care at regionally comparable fees, eliminating the university's waitlist by 2011 – all for only \$5,000 per year from U Vic.¹

While the desperation of families who need child care is real, a public institution with the capacity to thoroughly research a business proposal and investigate all aspects of best practice in the field of child care should know better than to bring forward such incredible claims.

Let's be clear – any credible plan to finance the development of child care and the ongoing operation of quality, affordable programs cannot rely on parent user-fees for long term sustainability. In most countries, public funding fills the gap.

But the BC government's 3 year service plan shows no growth in operating funds for new child care programs. Presumably **Kids and Company** will not receive the Child Care Operating Fund currently provided to existing licensed programs. That's a financing shortfall of over \$30,000 annually per program, before they even open their doors.

It took decades of advocacy to finally force government to provide these small operating grants to child care programs. But existing services still struggle to maintain quality and affordability, even with this limited public funding in place. Something has to give.

As we recently saw in Australia, where the government put the country's child care future in the hands of a large corporate child care chain, corporate financing might cover some funding gaps in the beginning, but sooner or later shareholders want to see a return on their investment. When they do, parent fees go up, staff wages and working conditions go down, quality suffers, demands for less regulation and/or more funding increase and programs close ... which brings us right back to where we are today.²

So let's just save a lot of time and trouble. It's important that U Vic hears from organizations and individuals that BC does not want or need the false fix of big box, corporate child care chains. **Email the President of UVic, Dr. David Turpin dturpin@uvic.ca; and their Board of Governors at usec@uvic.ca and tell them there are real solutions. Here's a message you can send. Do it before November 9, 2009 and help keep big box child care out of BC.**

I urge the University of Victoria to reject the false solution of big box child care. The international evidence shows us that this is NOT the way to provide affordable, quality, sustainable child care. But, there are real solutions.

Here is what you, the University's Board of Governors, can do:

- *Adopt University policy establishing the provision of on-site, quality, non-profit child care as an essential element of university life.*
- *Join with the community in advocating for adequate public funds from the province to build and sustain quality child care services.*
- *Work with the stakeholders at U Vic, including on-site child care providers, parents, faculty, staff and Victoria's larger child care community to develop real, sustainable solutions.*

¹ See University of Victoria Board of Governor's Report at http://www.uvic.ca/shared/shared_meetings/29.pdf

² Brennan, D and Oloman, M. "Child Care in Australia: A market failure and spectacular public policy disaster", Our Schools, Our Selves, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, V. 18 N. 3 (#95), Spring 2009