

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

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

3rd Floor, 210 West Broadway, Vancouver, British Columbia V5Y 3W2
tel: 604.709.5661 www.cccabc.bc.ca fax: 604.709.5662

CHILD CARE AND UNIONS **Taking the Next Step!** March 2006

In November 2003, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) formally agreed to actively promote unionization as part of our strategy for achieving a publicly funded, not-for-profit, high quality, accessible, affordable child care system.

Our position is based on research that clearly demonstrates the relationship between unionization and quality child care. It builds on 10 years of cooperation between the CCCABC and organized labour and reflects our understanding that, just as advocates call on labour to stand up for child care, we too have a responsibility to publicly stand up for the positive role that unionization can play in advancing child care.

In short, we support unionization as part of our overall advocacy strategy because:

1. Unionization promotes quality

Unionized child care settings are more likely to pay higher wages, provide better working conditions and benefits, and support professional development. Unionized settings employ staff with higher levels of training and experience lower levels of staff turnover. These characteristics are all associated with quality child care and, as a result, unionized settings are more likely to provide quality care that supports healthy childhood development.

2. Unionization gives workers a voice

Unions are democratic organizations that can empower front line child care workers. They “give providers the right to demand to be heard and recognized both in the workplace and in the union, which is accountable to its members and obligated to defend their interests.”¹ Unions can help end the isolation child care workers experience by bringing them together to have a collective say in building a child care system that works.

3. Unionization influences public policy

Unions have a long history of advocating for universal, publicly funded and democratically controlled social programs. Until governments agree to fund a child care system based on these principles, child care workers won't get the wages and respect they deserve and families won't have access to the affordable quality child care they need. Unionization will strengthen our collective capacity to advance the progressive child care policies that children, families, child care workers and communities need.

¹ Child Care Human Resources Sector Council. “The union advantage in child care: How unionization can help recruitment and retention. “

For these reasons, the CCCABC supports unionization in the child care sector and encourages child care workers to exercise their democratic right to join a union.

But – we know it won't be easy.

There are some real and perceived challenges to unionization in the child care sector.

- Quality child care settings are often small, intimate workplaces. They are characterized by a culture of consensus – especially when parents are the employers. Traditional, industrial-style labour/management relations are not always a good fit.
- Without significant increases in public funding, the only way non-profit child care employers can cover the costs of legitimate bargaining demands is by increasing parent fees. This pits parents against workers, reduces access to child care, and may lead to closures when fees cannot cover the 'costs' of a collective agreement.
- Workers expect that if they join a union, they will get better wages and benefits. But, without more public funding, unions are limited in their ability to negotiate good contracts and may not be able live up to their members' expectations.

As a result – there is a growing understanding that unionization in the child care sector needs different and innovative approaches. While no one has all the answers – now is the time to begin finding ways to bring the 'union advantage' to child care.

Related Research:

Unionization and quality in early childhood programs

Doherty, Gillian and Forer, Barry (Sept 03)

<http://cupe.ca/updir/UnionizationQualityReport-adb.pdf>

The union advantage in child care: How unionization can help recruitment and retention

Kass, Jamie and Costigliola, Bozica (July 03)

http://www.ccsc-cssqe.ca/english/pdf/research/2004/CCHRSC_union.pdf

Organizations and Unions: Supporting the child care workforce

Child Care Human Resources Sector Council

http://www.ccsc-cssqe.ca/english/pdf/research/2005/organizations_e.pdf