

Grassroots Women

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Early Childhood Learning Agency Response Form

1. What are your thoughts on full school day kindergarten for five-year olds?

While the move towards a full school day kindergarten for five-year olds would benefit the childcare needs of working-class families, adequate resources and funding should be allocated to meet the before school and after school care needs of working-class families.

2. What about parent choice for full-school-day pre-kindergarten programs for four-year olds?

The notion of “parent choice” should be seen within the reality of the needs of working-class families. Currently middle and upper-class Canadian parents have the “choice” to either hire a foreign live-in caregiver under the federal government’s Live-in Caregiver Program which we see as the federal government’s de-facto national childcare program. We do not believe supporting parents’ “choice” to hire live-in caregivers through this exploitative program contributes to women’s equality and liberation overall, particularly for Filipino women who are the majority of live-in caregivers. These women are often the lowest-paid and most poorly treated childcare workers, yet their experiences go unnoticed.

What are the current “choices” for working-class women and other marginalized women? Long waiting lists, no spaces, high fees, bureaucratic and punitive processes to access subsidies and a lack of qualified workers because of low-pay and poor working conditions are the daily realities for many working-class families looking for affordable and accessible childcare. Many working-class women ‘choose’ to remain in abusive relationships for lack of childcare, rely on the support of grandparents, enter casual or part-time jobs, are forced to rely on sub-standard childcare or stay at home because of a lack of affordable and accessible childcare. This is the reality of the childcare crisis that exists in this province which the Early Childhood Learning Agency’s Consultation Paper does not address.

Publicly-funded pre-kindergarten programs that are accessible to all children regardless of the employment and immigration status of their parents will benefit the needs of working-class women. But the government must also ensure that there is adequate funding and support for school and community-based before and after school programs.

3. *What about parent choice for full-school-day pre-kindergarten programs for three-year olds?*

Again, any pre-kindergarten program for three-year olds should consider the needs for quality programming, qualified, trained and well-compensated workers and before and after school programs.

4. *What do you think are the most important factors to consider in expanding early learning programs in British Columbia?*

Before the expansion of early learning programs in B.C., there should be more time and opportunity for genuine consultation with parents, teachers and school officials, childcare workers and community organizations. A four question response form in a limited time period will not elicit enough opinions and dialogue on this issue which we believe is very important to all British Columbians.

The B.C. government should also conduct a genuine assessment of the current conditions of childcare in the province, to better assess the needs of any early learning programs.

If the B.C. government really wants to ensure that all children have life-long success and a foundation on which to build individual, social and economic well-being, then the comprehensive needs of working-class and other marginalized women must to be addressed. Grassroots Women – B.C. believes all levels of government should address on a comprehensive basis their commitment to women's equality and the need for universal childcare. This consultation paper does not address these issues in a comprehensive way. For example, there is no mention of the childcare needs for infants and children under three-years old.

Government policies under globalization such as flexibilization of labour, no raise to the minimum wage along with cutbacks to social services including the lack of support for working mothers, single mothers and women leaving abusive relationships, the LCP and other temporary immigration programs, create poverty and deskilling and undermine women's economic development.

We encourage the B.C. government to work with all levels of government to implement a universal, national childcare program that is both public and non-profit. Universality means that childcare is a free program that is not tied to women's economic, work, immigration or education status. We also encourage the B.C. government to increase funding for childcare programs, childcare spaces and wages and benefits of childcare workers. The B.C. government must also pressure the federal government to review the LCP which we view as an abusive, racist and anti-woman policy.

Genuine women's equality cannot be achieved without a universal childcare program as well as access to adequately-funded social programs such as education, health, Employment Income assistance, welfare, and housing. Such government policies would genuinely promote women's equality and would benefit the social and economic well-being of women and children and all residents of British Columbia.