

Child Care Advocacy Forum

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BC Association of
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Coalition of Child
Care Advocates of BC

Early Childhood Educators
of BC

School Age Child
Care Association

Westcoast Child Care
Resource Centre

Western Canada Family
Child Care Association
of BC

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**VANCOUVER
FOUNDATION**

Where Are The Children? January 2003

In the fall of 2002, the Advocacy Forum asked BC child care providers to complete a short survey. Our goal was to 'take a snapshot' of how changes to provincial child care policy and funding, which began in April 2002, are playing out in communities.

Over **700 caregivers** from every region and every type of care responded. They shared information about enrolment, participation rates of subsidized children, fees, hours, wages and other program characteristics.

The picture they paint is troubling indeed!

From those who responded, we learned that:

- ✓ 57% have fewer subsidized children in their program
- ✓ 49% have decreased enrolment
- ✓ 42% have decreased waitlists
- ✓ 31% have increased their fees
- ✓ 19% report that they may close their doors in the near future
- ✓ 52% are concerned about their future viability

These results raise serious questions about the current situation facing BC children and families.

YOUNG CHILDREN ARE LEAVING LICENSED AND REGULATED CHILD CARE

Survey results show that children from low and moderate income families are being withdrawn from licensed and regulated child care at an alarming rate.

This trend is evident in the reduced level of participation of subsidized children in licensed care and in the high level of vacancies across the province.

While reduced levels of employment are negatively affecting child care participation rates in some regions of the province, overall, respondents say that two provincial policy changes have caused changes in their program:

1. **Cuts to the child care subsidy program** have had the biggest negative impact.
2. **Termination of the Funding Assistance Program (FAP)** has negatively impacted school-aged programs.

As a result of these policies, a growing number of low and moderate income families are no longer able to afford licensed or regulated care. While some group and family child care programs have been able to fill vacancies with families who can afford the fees – our question to the provincial government is:

***Where are the children who are no longer in
licensed and regulated care?***

In spite of research that clearly demonstrates the importance of training and regulation on the quality of child care and the impact of quality child care on healthy childhood development, survey respondents paint a frightening picture...

I don't think this government realizes that raising the cost of daycare means that more children are left home alone.

Parents are forced to rely on unqualified, unregulated settings.

Most subsidized families left the centre to find more affordable unlicensed care.

Low income families are forced to choose affordable care over quality care.

The most vulnerable families are those being adversely affected – many more latchkey children in the community that are not being cared for.

Parents are at the point of sending young children home alone after school because they can't afford after school care... and we're the least expensive in town!

A TWO-TIERED SYSTEM

The survey data highlights that families and child care programs across BC have not been equally affected by changes in provincial child care policy. 17% of respondents report increased enrolment and about 34% report no change in their enrolment.

There are a variety of reasons for this – not the least of which is that families across BC still need child care. Survey results suggest that programs and caregivers who have traditionally served parents who can afford child care, or those child care providers who have been able to fill vacant spaces with families who can pay the full fee, are least affected by the policy changes.

In December 2002 the Child Care Advocacy Forum predicted that the new Child Care Operating Funding Program, to be in place on April 1, 2003, would move BC towards a two-tiered system – one

for those who can afford to pay full fees and another for those who can't. This is because the new child care operating funding program is based on enrolment and is not tied to affordable parent fees or adequate caregiver compensation.

As a result, programs that are fully enrolled, usually because they serve families who can afford to pay, will receive the most money, while programs with vacancies because the families they serve can't afford to pay, will receive less.

The Advocacy Forum's survey, conducted **before** the new operating funding is in place, demonstrates that a two-tiered system is already the reality in BC. The new operating funding will further entrench this trend.

Further, 31% of survey respondents indicate that their fees have increased, while only 9% report decreased fees. The affordability gap is growing.

We are now serving families that can afford the service, as opposed to families that need the service and can't afford it.

The program will survive (but) the impact will be greatest on families who are teetering on the edge of poverty.

Only... two income professionals can afford quality Early Childhood Education Programs for their children.

We would like to see pre-school available to all children... it should be funded through the tax dollars we give.

Due to the lack of spaces, spots are filled immediately but I have lost parents due to lack of subsidy or lack of jobs.

Our question to the provincial government is:

Where are the children whose families can't afford to pay for the programs that you intend to fund?

CHILD CARE PROGRAMS ARE VULNERABLE

There is an alarming level of instability and fragility in the existing supply of licensed and regulated child care spaces in BC. The survey indicates that 49% of responding programs have vacancies, close to 1/5 may have to close their doors soon and over half are concerned about their future viability. While it has taken over 20 years to build the current supply of licensed and regulated care in BC, there are still not enough spaces to meet the needs of all families and children.

There are a number of factors that are leading to program closure and instability, including vacancies related to subsidy reductions, rising fees in school-aged care due to the end of FAP, and the pending loss of funding negotiated by some unionized child care workers after a strike in the community social services sector in 1999 (Munroe Agreement). The survey also indicates that policies and decisions made by school boards, colleges and other public bodies are further destabilizing child care programs.

Again, respondents say it best...

I've had no choice but to be closed because of lack of business – the first time in 9 years.

Our centre will probably close in the next few months after 27 years of service.

Our centre has been in existence for 25 years and now finds itself in danger of folding. It saddens me that a fully usable space with a great history of caring could be on the verge of extinction.

This is the first time in 10 years that we are not full and do not have a waiting list.

We are finding it almost impossible to fill our integrated spaces as we live in a low income neighbourhood and parents can no longer get subsidy for pre-school.

I think it's likely that our service could close if there is no significant shift in policies around child care. We can only guess.

We are a campus daycare and we lost a number of children due to tuition increases and decreased subsidies.

Our service could close in the near future due to: school closures or consolidating and needing space; funding program uncertainty; low income area; schools wanting more for rent to increase their budget as they face huge loss.

School bus routes don't drop children off anymore. They have to walk to and from school – way too far – 4 km. So parents had to find daycare closer to the school.

Our question to the provincial government is:

Where are the children from the programs that have closed?

If more child care programs close, where will all of our children go?

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CAREGIVERS ARE NOT OPTIMISTIC

Survey results indicate that some caregivers are demoralized and pessimistic about their future. Respondents comment on reduced hours of service, increased part-time enrolments, reduced staffing levels and lower pay.

In an attempt to respond to changes in provincial funding, some caregivers report that they have made changes in their hours and fees, but still can't make a go of it. Still others report that while administrative requirements are increasing, paid time for administrative work is decreasing and they are doing more unpaid work on personal time. 23% of License-not-Required caregivers and 13% of Licensed Family Child Care providers report that their wages have gone down. A number of caregivers are also concerned about the pending loss of Child Care Resource and Referral Programs.

Even though I have changed (increased) the hours of daycare and decreased the fee, I still have space available.

We feel the quality of our service will be diminished due to our attempts to downsize.

What about the educators? What other profession accepts (being) treated with so little respect despite the responsibility this career involves?

I am very concerned about proposed cuts to Child Care Resource and Referral. It is a vital support to parents and caregivers.

(The likely closure of the CCRR) would have a devastating affect on daycare programs... I would consider closing my program without the CCRR.

We need the continued support of the Child Care Resource and Referral Program. If this program will be discontinued, I feel certain that my services in the daycare business will probably discontinue.

I am very disappointed (that) the support and referral program is being closed. They have guided me in many ways.

Respondents indicate that they are still working hard to provide the best possible program. Some commented on efforts they are making to support families through fundraising, bursaries, food supplements, etc. However, 52% of respondents are concerned about their future and some are clearly demoralized.

I'm concerned, but hope we will be able to work it out. If (not), I think it's likely our services could close in the near future. How sad – we have been in operation since 1975 and currently have second generation children enrolled.

I have been teaching in child care for 29 years and feel that I am not wanting to continue to struggle with low wages, few benefits and lack of respect from government leaders.

We are struggling and the future does not look bright.

Our question to the provincial government is:

Where will children go when experienced child care providers leave the field?

WE ARE NOT MOVING FORWARD

This summary provides a 'snapshot' of what over 700 child care providers from across BC told us. The picture indicates that for many children, families and child care providers, things are **not** getting better. Rather, as one respondent noted:

We have returned to the way it was 15 years ago.

Our final question to the provincial government is:

NOW THAT THE REAL IMPACT OF YOUR POLICIES ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IS CLEAR – WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?