

## CHILD CARE SECTOR AND LOW WAGE REDRESS A BRIEF HISTORY

The B.C. government's low wage redress strategy was introduced in 1994. Low wage redress dollars for child care workers were initially delivered through the Wage Supplement Initiative (WSI) and are now delivered through the Compensation Contribution Program (CCP). Currently, the wages of approximately 6000 child care employees in group child care programs across B.C. are enhanced through CCP.

The following 'brief history' provides information about child care and low wage redress. The story is complex, so here are some key events that are still relevant today.

**From 1993 - 1997, child care is clearly included in government's low wage redress strategy for the public sector. Here are the facts....**

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| 1993 | Acting on recommendations of the Korbin Commission, government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· includes child care in the newly created Community Social Services Employers Association (CSSEA) and funds a community project to build the Child Care Membership Division of CSSEA.</li><li>· establishes the Public Sector Employer's Council (PSEC) with responsibility for establishing low wage guidelines under the government's Monetary Management Framework (MMF). Child care, as part of CSSEA, falls within these mandates.</li></ul> |
| 1993 | Government informs child care programs that they will introduce the Wage Supplement Initiative (WSI) as the "first step towards addressing the low wages of child care staff."   |
| 1994 | Government provides WSI to licensed group child care program to enhance wages and benefits of child care employees for the 1994/95 fiscal year. Government informs the child care community that guidelines for increasing wages will be established by PSEC in consultation with CSSEA.   |
| 1997 | Government approves additional funding for WSI for 'equity adjustments effective July 1, 1996  |

### **So - why does this matter today?**

Events up to 1997 are still important for two reasons. They show that, from the start:

- child care was included in the low wage redress for the public sector
- money for child care wages came from a separate pot (MMF), set up to improve low wages across the public sector, not from the child care program budgets.

**From 1998 on, the trends begin to change. Here are the facts...**

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| 1998 | To simplify administration, WSI and Infant/Toddler Grants to child care centres are merged into the Compensation Contribution Program (CCP). |
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The CCP budget is increased by \$1.5 million to bring in all child care centres on CCP waitlist. *This was the last increase to the CCP budget and a new waitlists begins to develop.*

1998 CSSEA begins 'big table' bargaining on behalf of member in 4 unions (BCGEU, CUPE, HSA and HEU) who represent workers in the Community Social Services Sector. 18 child care employers, whose staff are in the BCGEU, participate in these negotiations.

Parties at the table expect that increases to wages and benefits for child care staff will continue to fall under PSEC's low wage guidelines, which cover both union and non-union staff, and will continue to come from the MMF, not from the existing child care program budgets.

Late in 1998, government begins to isolate child care from the overall low wage redress strategy. They see CCP as a program of the Ministry for Children and Families, not part of the low wage package funded through MMF. They assert that the \$1.5 million increase to CCP earlier in 1998 was MCF money and represents child care's share of low wage redress.

**So, why does this matter today?**

While government says that their policy hasn't changed, the ground is shifting. The specific funding mechanism designed to deliver wage supplements to child care is now considered to be part of the child care program budget. Fair and equitable access for child care to low wage redress dollars is in jeopardy.

**In the spring of 1999, child care staff from 18 child care programs and other community social services sector workers go on strike. Here are the facts...**

1999 In the Spring, 'big table' bargaining comes to an impasse. A full scale strike is called and 18 child care programs are closed for 12 weeks. The impact of the strike for child care receives considerable media attention.

Government says that low wage redress dollars for child care will not be addressed through this collective bargaining position however the unions won't settle without fair and equitable treatment for their child care members.

In May, a mediated agreement, "The Munroe Settlement" ends the strike. Unionized workers from the rest of the community social services sector who were part of the 'big table bargaining' receive substantial wage and benefit increases. The Munroe Accord provides for separate but comparable agreements covering the current employees of 22 child care agencies for a 5 year period.

In February, Treasury Board approves the recommendations of PSEC to provide wage and benefit increases totalling 15% to all provincially-funded, non-union workers providing contracted community social services except for child care workers. CSSEA, PSEC and the funding ministries agree to explore the complexities of wage/benefit increases for child care workers.

Throughout this period, the Child Care Advocacy Forum calls for **fair and equitable treatment for the child care sector.**

### **So why does this matter today?**

In the face of united community and union action, unionized child care agencies that were part of joint negotiations are included in the benefits of the Munroe Settlement. This is an important victory. But, the rest of the child care sector is left behind. Child care low wage redress now comes out of Ministerial program funds - not the separate fund set aside for this purpose. Inequities within and between child care programs and between child care and the rest of the community social services sector are aggravated.

### **By Spring, 2000, the provincial government makes a commitment to a comprehensive, publicly funded child care system in B.C. Here are the facts...**

- 1999      In the Fall, the provincial government begins a public consultation on child care. The Child Care Advocacy Forum focuses on mobilizing a broad public response. Over 10,000 British Columbians respond - the vast majority calling for a publicly funded, comprehensive child care system.
- 2000      In March, the government makes a commitment to implement a publicly funded child care system over the next 5 years, beginning with before and after school care in group programs for a parent fee of \$7 a day.
- In October, the government extends the CCP program to school-aged programs currently on the wait list who join the new initiative.

### **So why does this matter today?**

The decision to extend CCP to all school-aged programs in the new initiative is a good one. But, it is only an interim measure and does not replace the need for fair and equitable treatment for the whole child care sector. The bill is still unpaid!

<p><b>THE CHILD CARE SECTOR AND LOW WAGE REDRESS</b> <b>The bill is still unpaid!</b></p>
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In 1994, the government of B.C. introduced a low wage redress strategy for staff in the community social services. The child care sector was included in this initiative. Initially, low wage redress dollars were delivered to the child care sector through the Wage Supplement Initiative (WSI). Since 1998, low wage redress dollars have been delivered to the child care sector through the Compensation Contribution Program (CCP), which now provides over \$20 million to enhance the wages of approximately 6000 child care employees in licensed group centres across the province.

The recent study "You Bet I Care", on the quality of child care in Canada, confirms that adequate wages are a key predictor of quality. The study also found that B.C. has the highest quality of care in the country. We believe there is a connection between the quality of care in B.C. and the low wage redress program. This connection highlights the importance of an on-going commitment to raising the wages in our sector.

Regrettably, over the last two years, low wage redress for the child care sector has not kept pace with the rest of the community social services sector. Specifically:

- There has been no increase to the CCP budget since 1998. As a result, there is a growing wait list of child care programs who currently receive no CCP funds. Staff who do receive CCP have had no increases and any of their coworkers who have been hired as a result of expansions in these programs since 1998 are not covered.
- Most child care workers will not receive any of the benefits of recent agreements between government and the rest of the community social services sector. Unionized workers in the rest of the sector are receiving wage and benefit increases through the Munroe Accord signed in May, 1999. (Twenty-two child care agencies, who were part of these negotiations, will benefit from this agreement for the next 5 years) In February, 2000 Treasury Board agreed to extend comparable wage and benefit increases to all non-unionized workers in the contracted community social services sector, **except for child care**. For the rest of the sector, these agreements provide three increases in wages and benefits by October, 2000.

The growing inequities within and between child care programs and between the child care sector and the rest of the community social services sector are not acceptable!

There is some good news! The Child Care Advocacy Forum applauds the provincial government's recent decision to extend the CCP program to all eligible school-aged programs who wish to participate in the new publicly funded child care initiative. This decision is key to the success of the first phase of our new system but, at best it is only an interim measure that does not address the fundamental problem.

As a result of this situation, the Child Care Advocacy Forum is reactivating our campaign to ensure that **the child care sector receives fair and equitable access, with the rest of the community social services sector, to low wage redress dollars**

We call on the provincial government to:

- publicly reaffirm its commitment to include child care in its overall low wage redress strategy
- immediately allocate an equitable share of low wage redress dollars to the child care sector, to address the wait list and to provide child care workers with the same wage and benefit increases as those enjoyed by the rest of the sector
- integrate the low wage redress strategy for the child care sector into its promised 5 year implementation plan for a publicly funded child care system in B.C.