

Where to next?

October 2004

We are encouraged that Minister Hagen is now talking about spending and reinvesting rather than continuing to cut provincial child care funds and leaving federal funds unspent. We know first hand that every little bit will help some BC families; approximately 10,000 low and middle income families were negatively impacted by subsidy changes since this government took charge.

"Women, low and moderate income families in BC have carried more than a fair share of the BC cuts in the last three years," said Susan Harney, Chairperson.

Mr. Hagen commented that the \$33 million is provincial-federal money. We will be seeking further details to ensure that this signals a substantial shift in provincial policy and funding and will include significant provincial restoration of child care funding.

Research affirms that a universal approach to quality child care promotes healthy child development, supports families and their workforce participation, reduces child poverty, and advances women's equality.

The current patchwork of child care services is one of limited choices across BC due to the shortage of licensed quality spaces; long waiting lists; high fees; the costs of sustaining quality regulated child care spaces.

In the recently released report from the Organization for Co-operation and Economic Development, it is noted that the "subsidies offered to low-income families may be inflating the market price, thus making child care too expensive for moderate income families and it is often inefficient and costly to operate," said Mab Oloman, board member.

So while Mr. Hagan hails it as good news, "this may be a reallocation of funding made in response to urgent needs of some families and the current child care crisis. But it will not create new high quality spaces, nor address long wait lists or the affordability barriers for many families who are not eligible for subsidy," said advocate Sharon Gregson. "And I worry about our children when there is no quality enforcement in the unregulated sector or accountability for public spending. Some families will continue to have no choices but to use subsidy without any guarantees, even minimal health and safety standards."

Mr. Hagan will meet with the other First Ministers and the Federal Minister, Ken Dryden, next week. We expect BC to contribute to and affirm their commitment to a coherent publicly funded, universal system of early childhood learning and care with clear benchmarks, time frames and adequate budgets. We will be looking for legislation that enshrines quality, universality, accessibility, developmental programming and inclusion in the BC child care plan. After all, child care should be the cornerstone of Canadian family friendly policy, as it is in so many other developed countries.