

Young Manitobans

CHILD CARE FUNDING IN MANITOBA

Investment in child care stimulates local economies, provides social infrastructure to parents, supports workers, and their employers, and is an investment in human development and education, which leads to a productive environment. Yet finding quality and affordable child care is often an enormous challenge for working parents.

Statistics Canada information from 2006 indicates that two-thirds of Manitoba mothers and 92% of fathers with children under 6 years of age are in the labour force. Finding quality and affordable child care is not just a problem limited to urban centres. Many communities throughout Manitoba are facing severe shortages of child care spaces that are directly related to years of insufficient capital and operating funding for child care facilities.

In April 2008, the Province announced Family Choices, the second Five-Year-Plan for Child Care. Family Choices has committed to fund 6,500 spaces and 35 new child care sites by 2013. It also recognizes the development of a centralized, early learning and child care availability waiting list is necessary to provide parents with current, reliable information about the availability of child care in their communities. Further, there are also plans to increase the number of child care workers by 1,900.

While the government has made an effort to increase the number of ECEs through wage increases, recruitment campaigns, scholarships, and increased training opportunities, more can be done. According to PeopleFirst HR Services, the wages of ECEs are 19-23% below market. In 2009, Manitoba

ECEs received a 3% funding increase to support their salaries. Currently at the wage employers are willing or able to pay, not enough ECEs are interested in filling the many vacancies that exist across the province. Unfortunately, compensation remains a barrier in pursuing child care as a long-term career.

Manitoba municipalities recognize the importance of having quality child care services and are particularly concerned with the sufficient availability of child care since these services are part of a thriving economy. In fact, every \$1 spent on childcare in Manitoba generates \$1.58 worth of economic activity (*Municipal Leader, Spring*

2008). Since 2007, the AMM has been working with the Province of Manitoba to establish more rural childcare services to strengthen the rural economy.

More recently, at the AMM 11th Annual Convention this past November, Convention Resolution #18/09 became official AMM policy. This policy will see AMM lobby the Province of Manitoba to meet with stakeholders to determine the needs of adequate daycare, and then initiate the programs necessary to ensure those needs are met.

The AMM appreciates the Province of Manitoba's recognition of the need to improve child care through the announcement of the five-year Family Choices agenda. In the meantime, the AMM will continue to lobby the Provincial Government for immediate and long-term action to address the needs of families and child care facilities across the province. ■



Licensed childcare facilities are also struggling to recruit and retain Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). According to Manitoba Child Care Association (MCCA) President **Michele Henderson**, the gap between the supply of and demand for ECEs continues to be the most significant problem for licensed child care centres suffering a decade-old workforce shortage. In a recent letter to Manitoba MLAs, she describes directors of licensed child care centres as “terrified” with each resignation and each time they hear government announce new spaces, because the shortage of ECEs grows with each new facility licensed or each existing program expanded.

The Manitoba government made a commitment to improve and strengthen child care with the launch of the first Five-Year Plan for Child Care in 2002. This program funded over 5,000 additional child care spaces, implemented new child care subsidy levels, and increased wages for Early Childhood Educators in its first five years.