



Community Action Toward Children's Health

Funding Cuts Devastate Child Care Community

January 12, 2007: Devastated and disillusioned, the Central Okanagan Child Care Community is struggling to comprehend news of provincial government cuts that could decimate the child care system and put children's health and safety at risk.

Betty Cleland, a preschool operator and early education consultant, says the community is in shock.

"I don't see how any child care center is going to buffer the impact of these cuts other than increasing fees and passing the impact on to parents," Cleland said. "For me the biggest disappointment is that we keep going two steps forward and five steps back – and just as the child care profession is beginning to feel the government is behind us."

The impact of cuts will vary, however Cleland estimates a program with 12 infants and 25 preschoolers will see deficits of between \$10,000 and \$12,000 per facility. She said most centres are already operating on a shoestring budget and hopes of paying their staff more than the average of \$12.30 per hour wage have been squelched.

"Child care operators will have only two choices. Close their facility or pass increases of as much as \$4 per child per day on to parents who are already struggling," she said.

Minister Reid has suggested child care providers pass the increase on to parents who can then make up the difference using the universal child care benefit, but the reality is most families are already using that \$100 to pay for childcare.

"I don't think anybody has been letting that money sit idle," Cleland said. "They've been spending it."

At the Kelowna Child Care Society Lynn Burgat worries about how these cuts will affect their child care program for young parents completing their highschool education. Funding for the Society's Child Care Resource and Referral Program is also being cut Oct 1. The program provides essential services including free child care referrals and information for parents, as well as support, outreach and training for more than 200 childcare providers.

"We have a service that has been well used in the community for 30 years and it will no longer be available," said Burgat. "We provide services many parents and care providers consider essential. Things like supporting child care programs in providing a quality early childhood environment and providing up-to-date information that helps parents determine what care is available and where."

Menno Salverda, Manager of Community Action Toward Children (CATCH), says the timing of Reid's announcement – just as CATCH is completing a community process that found the Central Okanagan's child care system in crisis – is ironic. He says the community has said emphatically that it needs more child care spaces, not less.

(more)

“Both parents and children need child care opportunities. For parents it allows those who must work, or chose to, to do so. For children, it provides opportunities to interact with peers, develop social skills, learn problem-solving skills and gain emotional maturity.”

Salverda says investing in children’s early years is an investment that has been shown to create economic returns of as much as \$17 for every \$1 invested. It is also one the Central Okanagan community has said it is willing to make. A recent survey conducted by CATCH found 89 per cent of respondents in favour of government support for young children. This in spite of the fact that the Canadian government spends less on early care and education for young children than many developed countries including the United States.

“It doesn’t matter what level of government pays for it just as long as one does because the kids need it, the parents need it and the economy needs it,” Salverda said. “It’s time governments of all levels responded to community needs and I urge all of our public servants – regional, municipal, provincial and federal – to visit our website at catchcoalation.ca and see what it is the public wants.”

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Editor’s Note: Please see attached fact sheet

For More information contact:

Menno Salverda
CATCH Manager
763-5100 ext. 222 or cell 469-4057

For more information or assistance arranging interviews contact:

Anne-Rachelle McHugh
CATCH Communications Coordinator
769-4532.