

## Family Services à la famille Ottawa

### POSITION ON CHILD CARE

Family Services à la famille Ottawa is committed to supporting families in all their forms. We believe that access to affordable, quality childcare is essential for families to balance their work and family lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The affordable, public nonprofit childcare option must be an essential component in the range of childcare options available to families. Research indicates that children in quality childcare have increased self-esteem, positive social skills, and improved academic performance, and are at a decreased risk of injury, missing meals, and experimenting with drugs and alcohol.

Therefore, consistent with our values of humanity, accessibility, diversity, relevance and social justice, we will:

- Persist in educating levels of government to change policies that hinder families' access to a range of childcare services, including access to regulated, affordable, nonprofit childcare.
- Through our workshops and employee assistance programs, persist in educating employers on how to provide viable options for employees to balance work and family commitments.
- Create and maintain partnerships and linkages with organizations working towards accessible childcare for all families.
- Through our advocacy workshops, educate community members to advocate for self and others.

#### **Background:**

The growing diversity of Ottawa communities, combined with increasing inequalities in social and economic conditions, means that many families cannot afford to purchase quality child care. Lack of access to quality child care is not good for families or communities, because it negatively impacts on family relationships, community relationships, and affects the ability of children to attain their potential.

- Some of our clients have to cancel their counselling appointments, choose not to attend groups, or don't participate in social/recreational activities because they do not have access to adequate childcare.
- Grandparents and other caring older who take primary responsibility for caring for their grandchildren because no other childcare options are available are reporting exhaustion, stress, and inability to participate in groups and recreational activities that help them cope.

- Childcare is cost-shared between the province and the municipal government. Municipalities have considerable say in the delivery of childcare – from providing subsidies to determining the use of public or private service providers. The need to cut costs has meant that municipalities often rely on unregulated, private partnerships. However, research has shown that not-for-profit childcare produces a higher quality of care than for-profit centers: nonprofit childcare centers have lower ratios of children to staff and pay higher wages, which plays an important part in motivating staff and fostering a culture of quality care.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, nonprofits attract more financial resources from donors, governments and parent fees, since they appear to be trustworthy and to be providing socially-needed services. This makes it easier for nonprofit centers to produce quality care than for commercial centers. All of these factors generate a substantial pure nonprofit advantage in delivering quality services.<sup>2</sup>
- A study done in 2003 found that of the 96,700 children under nine years old in Ottawa, only 6.5% had access to regulated childcare.<sup>3</sup> Even then, families often wait for years for their infants and toddlers to receive a childcare space. Meanwhile, the cost of quality daycare for families who do not receive subsidies is about the same as the cost of university tuition for a full-time student – over \$4,000 per year.<sup>4</sup> Many parents spend more monthly on childcare than they do on their housing (between \$500 and \$1000 per month).
- Quality childcare is fundamental to families. Childcare is needed for parents to start looking for a job, and then to maintain employment. The employment of parents should not put the well-being of children at risk.
- Childcare is a smart investment, as it contributes to the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of children<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Cleveland and Michael Krashinsky (Division of Management, University of Toronto at Scarborough), “The Quality Gap: A Study of Nonprofit and Commercial Child Care Centres in Canada,” December 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon Cleveland and Michael Krashinsky et al., Final Report: An Economic Perspective on the Current and Future Role of Nonprofit Provision of Early Learning and Child Care Services in Canada, 7 March 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Middle Childhood Matters, February 2005, [www.child-youth-health.net](http://www.child-youth-health.net).

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> Middle Childhood Matters Report, February 2005 noted that children who are in quality child care are more likely to have increased self-esteem, positive social skills and improved academic performance than those who are home alone. Increased supervision also encourages age appropriate positive behaviour, and children are at a decreased risk of injury, missing meals and experimenting with drugs and alcohol.

- Parents whose children are in quality childcare tend to experience less stress, and are better able to perform in the workplace<sup>6</sup>.
- The federal government has introduced the taxable Universal Child Care Benefit. The plan provides an additional \$1,200/year to all families with children under six. Unfortunately, the allowance is distributed unequally depending on income and family type. Upper income families (\$100,000+) stand to gain the most, at approximately \$970/month after taxes. A working-poor, single parent could receive as little as \$600/month. Families also receive less money when both parents earn an income. Thus, parents that are least able to stay at home with their children, and are in need of the greatest assistance, will receive the least financial support for childcare.<sup>7</sup>

Family Services à la famille Ottawa seeks to build a safe, just, healthy, and diverse society, where each person can thrive and contribute; enriched by their families; supported by friends, neighbours and communities; and served by dedicated community organizations. To this purpose we commit our resources, skills, creativity, and passion. The Family Services à la famille Ottawa Social Justice Framework states that, A family's ability and capacity to care for its individual members is central to building a strong community. We need to promote environments where families can care for themselves, and where there are external services available to help families. Family Services à la famille Ottawa is committed to promoting an inclusive and responsive society that acknowledges the unique face of each family and welcomes them into the community.

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<sup>6</sup>The Progress of Canada's Children: Into the Millennium, Canadian Council on Social Development, 1999

<sup>7</sup>"More Than a Name Change: The Universal Child Care Benefit", Caledon Institute of Social Policy, May 2006.