

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY QUALITY CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PROGRAMMING?

It is now widely acknowledged that learning begins at birth and has a profound affect on life long development and adult well-being. We also know that quality child care promotes healthy child development at the same time as it supports families, reduces child poverty, advances women's equality, and deepens social inclusion. Experts agree that a high quality child care system provides all children with excellent learning opportunities to optimize their physical, cognitive, cultural, social and emotional development; experts also agree that development suffers when children experience poor quality care.

In the June 2004 federal election, the federal Liberal Party made a commitment to develop a pan-Canadian child care system based on four principles – **Quality, Universality, Accessibility and Developmentally appropriate programming**. This set of principles is referred to as QUAD.

These principles, along with the principle of **Inclusion**, are cornerstones of the child care community's agenda. To ensure that these principles provide the foundation for developing a new child care system, we need to clearly understand what they mean. This is one of a series of fact sheets that briefly explains the principles.

QUALITY CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PROGRAMMING

Quality child care promotes healthy child development at the same time as it supports families, reduces child poverty, advances women's equality, deepens social inclusion and builds a knowledge-based economy. Educators and researchers have concluded that the quality of child care is positively impacted by:

- **the learning environment** – a quality child care setting is one that is child-centred, providing care integrated with developmentally appropriate activities.
- **adult to child ratios** – the number of adults as compared to the number of children are crucial given that high adult to child ratios enhances the capacity of staff to more sensitively interact with the children and parents, and to engage the children in a range of developmentally appropriate activities.
- **qualifications, remuneration and morale of staff** – highly qualified, well-trained, well-paid and well-supported staff who experience high job satisfaction are better able to respond to all children, to plan and support developmentally appropriate programming, and to provide care that respects diversity and values all children and families.
- **public and not for profit delivery** – public and not-for-profit service delivery promotes accountability, community development, and stable, community based services delivered in the best interests of children and the public. Public funding is directed solely to the delivery of the child care programs.
- **legislated standards and capacity for monitoring and enforcement** – strong regulations regarding

group size, physical space, health and safety precautions take into consideration the needs of all children, best practices to stimulate play and learning, and approaches to promoting well-being and safe care of all children.

- **funding** – stable public funding and adequate infrastructure positively affects adult to child ratios, employees' wages and benefits, staff morale and job satisfaction, provision of resources to sustain a quality physical environment, capacity for long term service delivery and accountability to the community and funders.

Experts agree that children benefit from a high quality child care system and that development suffers when children experience poor quality care. Even an advantaged family background can't protect children from the effects of poor quality care.

High quality child care programs have the capacity to provide all children with excellent learning environments to optimize physical, cognitive, cultural, social and emotional development. The most critical factor in determining quality is the stable, consistent and developmentally appropriate care and early learning opportunities provided by staff. This requires predictable public funding and infrastructure, good wages and working conditions for all child care employees, a supportive working environment which enhances job satisfaction, and a well educated workforce.

High quality child care programs provide day-to-day support to families and complement parenting responsibilities; they reflect the racial, ethnic and gender diversity in the population; and they support the inclusion of children with disabilities. Quality programs have the resources to coordinate and liaise with other education, health and social services in the

community in order to provide a seamless transition as children grow and develop.

Canada's current investment in child care is significantly less than most other developed countries and achieving high quality across all child care programs in Canada with the status quo presents serious challenges.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF HIGH QUALITY CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PROGRAMMING?

It is now widely acknowledged that learning begins at birth and has a profound affect on life long development and adult well-being. Parents are the child's first and most powerful teachers. Successful learning environments for children emphasize positive communication with families.

While the majority of today's parents are in the workforce and seeking quality non parental care, many parents who are not in the workforce are also seeking developmentally appropriate learning opportunities for their children for some part of the day.

High quality child care programs simultaneously support families to balance work and family commitments while they provide developmentally appropriate learning environments for children. Population health studies highlight the importance of positive early childhood experiences in determining healthy outcomes for all areas of children's development. Nurturing, stimulating child care helps strengthen children's dispositions to be life-long learners and productive participants in society.