

SEPTEMBER 16TH, 2006

CFUW ONTARIO COUNCIL STANDING COMMITTEES

Morning Session

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE

POLICY & ADVOCACY

Panelists:

Gordon H. Cleveland, economist and professor in the Division of Management at the University of Toronto Scarborough

Elizabeth Ablett, Executive Director of the Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare.

Both of our panelists emphasized that childcare should be at the forefront in all the upcoming elections.

Gordon Cleveland began the morning session with the statement: "Numbers are important to the study of childcare" and illustrated this opinion with some of the results of his research and analysis on childcare and early learning. In 2006, eight of ten mothers of pre-school children are employed, in comparison to 1973's figure of four of ten. Four-fifths of those mothers used non-parental childcare on a weekly basis. Thus, non-parental childcare is "normative", not exceptional. Childcare takes 5% of families' income on average, but 15% of single mothers' income. While regulated childcare may be measured qualitatively, it is difficult to measure non-regulated childcare. Québec has succeeded in measuring some unregulated childcare and found that 25% was "inadequate", compared to 5% inadequate in the regulated centres.

Professor Cleveland discussed the impact of childcare on mothers' participation in the work force and the impact of adequate childcare on the development of the child. In Québec, there is now universal childcare available at \$5 a day. Their program began in 2001 with four year olds. Now 7% more mothers have joined the labour force since daycare has been available. This work has had a positive impact on families' income, and the greatest impact on women with high school or less education.

Professor Cleveland's research in Canada and long-term studies in the U.S. indicated that a child's cognitive and language skills improved enormously with early childcare, especially in the age three to five group. The economic benefit of \$2 for every \$1 spent is remarkable. The economic benefits are based on the added participation of mothers working, paying taxes, and the economic success of the children who do better in school and life. He sees the current \$1200 per child as the least best option to assist families as it is taxed as income and therefore benefits most the families that have home care. Three to five-year olds need stimulating good care every day, and most families cannot buy this at several thousand dollars annually. We need to fight this issue at the next election, to have federal tax dollars provide universal, accessible, regulated, development-oriented childcare spaces, and then to talk about early childhood learning.

Elizabeth Ablett described the work of the Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare, which began in 1981. After the current government cancelled the Liberal plans, the national Code Blue campaign was

organized and succeeded in a massive petition, 25 metres long and a letter with 54,000 signatures going to the federal government requesting a national childcare system. The Coalition's strategy is to hold meetings with politicians locally, create childcare centre networks throughout Ontario, to offer training and other tips to their members on advocacy. They supply data to the media, work with individuals and groups at the grassroots level. Elizabeth Ablett emphasized that the Ontario government promised \$300,000 to childcare from Ontario funds and has not provided this money. She emphasized that childcare should be in the forefront at the municipal, provincial and federal elections in the next few months. We need to return to the idea of bi-lateral, multi-year funding for both capital and operating costs. You may find these two websites useful:

www.buildchildcare.ca is the Code Blue site

www.childcareontario.org is the Coalition for Better Child Care site.

Both groups and individuals may become members of the Coalition. The Coalition needs fees from members to promote their work.

The question period added some ideas:

Non-English speaking children who begin kindergarten and grade 1 need extra help between grade one and three to develop good language skills. It is estimated that without this help, 70% will drop out of high school. Therefore, these children need regulated childcare to get a good start in language skills.

European countries must have 90% of age three, school-age children "covered" by childcare by 2010 (Gordon Cleveland).

The perceived difficulty and expense of having children contributes to our low birth rate.

Judie Arrowood, Chair, Status of Women and Human Rights