

ALBERTA FACTS

Number 5

What Happened to the Care in Day Care?

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"I pay just over half my net salary in childcare. I shudder when I imagine what life would have been like if I had been a single parent."

Mother of two, 1986

Even cheap day care is expensive

Daycare costs in Alberta average over \$3,000 a year per child. It is not unusual for many Alberta parents to pay as much as \$5,000 or more a year PER CHILD!

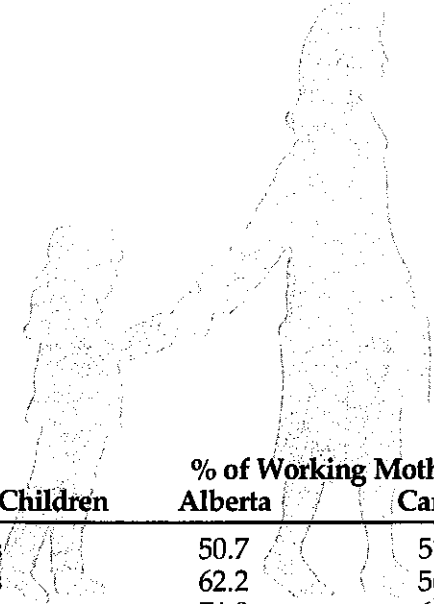
Contrary to what most people believe, low income parents have no free ride when it comes to paying for daycare. A single parent earning less than \$1,100/month must pay a minimum fee of \$45/month. The maximum subsidy is \$195/month. This means that low income parents are usually limited to daycares that charge \$240/month. If the daycare fees are higher (and many are) parents must either pay the difference or search for a cheaper daycare.

To work or not

Many people still believe the daycare problem would be solved if all mothers stayed home and raised their children.

The reality is that more women (and mothers) are working and that they are here to stay. Almost $\frac{2}{3}$ of Alberta women over the age of 15 are in the work force. More than $\frac{1}{2}$ of mothers with children under

Working Mothers Are a Fact of Life



Ages of Children	% of Working Mothers Alberta	Canada
0-3 years	50.7	51.5
3-5 years	62.2	56.9
6-15 years	74.0	64.4

Data Source: Labour Canada, Women's Bureau 1986

the age of 3 work outside the home. As the table above shows, the trend of working mothers is the same for Canada as a whole.

Many mothers work because two incomes are needed to pay the household bills. In fact, it has been estimated that 68% more families in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba would fall below the poverty line if wives quit work!

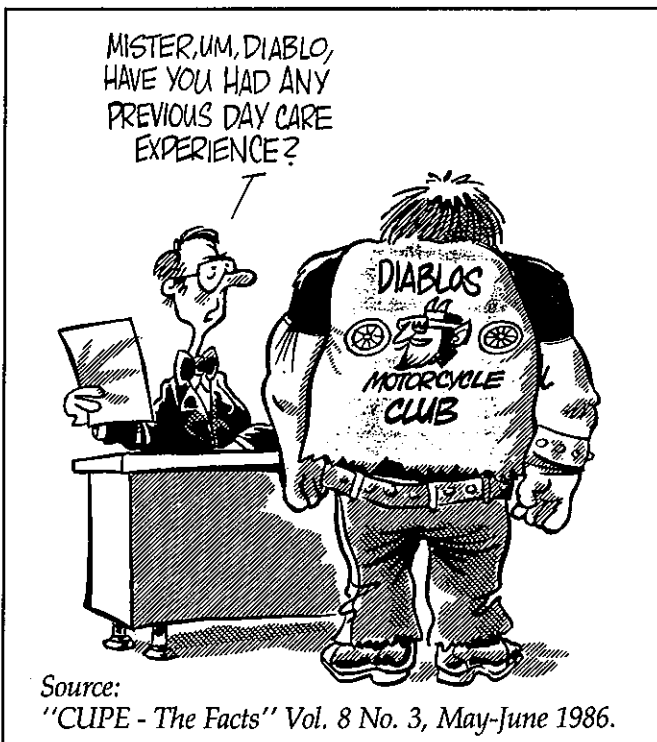
The question of quality

Many parents, and surprisingly, many daycare operators, are not aware of what good quality care is. Most experts agree that three key ingredients are needed:

- a high ratio of workers to children;
- small group sizes; and
- professionally trained staff.

Although Alberta's standards for child/staff ratios and group size are acceptable, these standards are often not implemented by daycares.

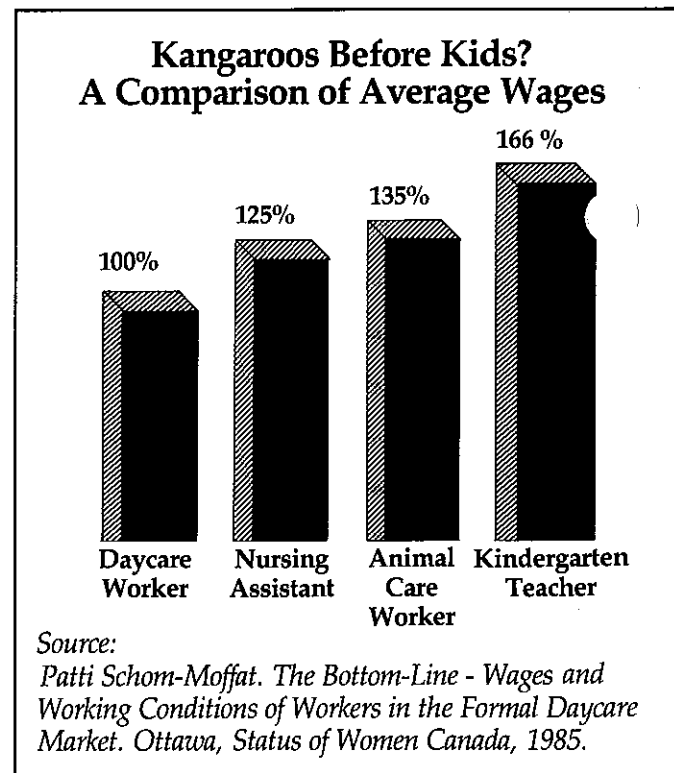
Enforcement of these standards by the province has a low priority. More than 20,000 pre-school children are in Alberta daycares, yet there are only 21 licensing officers. Seven of these work in the Edmonton area where they are responsible for inspecting 350 child care centres as well as other facilities such as group homes and auxiliary hospitals. It is only very rarely that an Alberta daycare will lose its license. The chances for rural centres being inspected regularly are even less likely.



Research shows that the quality of child care and its impact on the emotional and physical development of young children is directly related to the amount of training child care workers have. Many parents and organizations believe that child care workers should have at least two years of child development studies at the post-secondary level.

The oldest non-paying profession

Most child care workers are women who are forced to work at poverty level wages, even when trained. The average weekly wage of a child care worker is \$273. This is just over half of the average Alberta weekly wage of \$444. The low wages of child care workers often result in high staff turnover. This means little consistency for the children in their care.



Alberta's staff training standards are the lowest in Canada. Alberta requires only that child care workers be 15 years or older. A child care supervisor must be 18 years or older and have a first aid certificate.

Daycare as a business

The Alberta government views daycare as a business. Alberta is the only Canadian province that provides generous operating allowances to all centres, regardless of the quality of care they provide. Because of the province's generous approach to daycare funding, Alberta has more daycare spaces for children below the age of six than in any other province. The majority of these spaces are provided by for-profit commercial centres.

More than 75% of the daycares in Alberta are run for-profit. Edmonton may well be the for-profit daycare capital of Canada. More than 90% of its daycares are for-profit centres. Nationally, only 38% of all daycares in Canada are for-profit.

Profit vs. non-profit?

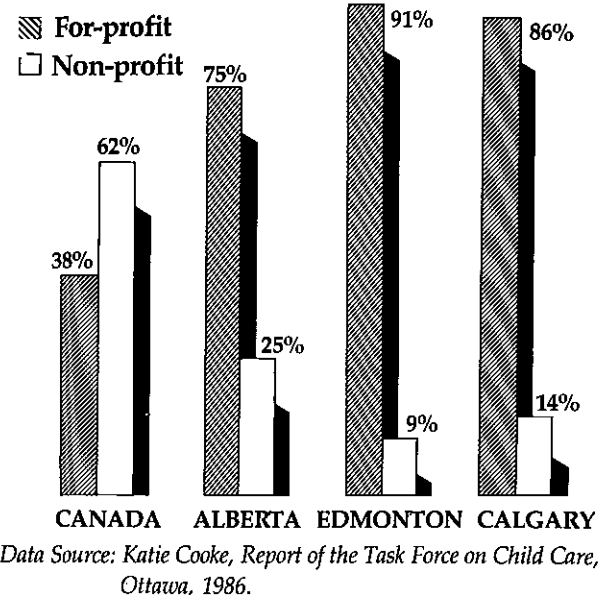
The original intent of providing generous operating allowances to all daycare centres was to enable centres to maintain provincial child/staff ratio standards. However there are no provisions in place to ensure that these allowances are used as the government intended. Since daycare operators do not have to account for how they spend this money, there is no way of knowing how centres actually allocate these funds. Many groups have argued that only those centres providing good quality child care should receive provincial funding.

Many parents and organizations believe the best form of care is provided through non-profit child care centres. These centres actively encourage parent and community participation on a Board of Directors. All of the money the centre receives is used to purchase good quality toys and equipment, improve the programs offered, provide nutritious lunches and snacks and pay higher wages to child care workers. For-profit centres often must cut back on these areas in order to make a profit.

"Lack of quality care is the number one problem encountered by parents seeking child care arrangements. The next biggest problems are finding a convenient location and affordability."

*Edmonton area survey, 1986.
Parents Information Network.*

Daycare - A Government Subsidized Private Industry in Alberta



What's at stake for you?

If there is one thing certain about daycare in Alberta, it is that parents cannot count on the government to monitor the operation of daycares. Staff training requirements are non-existent. The standards that are in place are frequently not enforced due to the serious shortage of licensing officers. Even when centres are inspected, there is presently no process in place to warn parents of major infractions of daycare standards within their centre.

As part of its deficit reduction program, the province is currently reviewing the provision of operating allowances. If they are discontinued, or based on a needs test, many Alberta parents could find themselves paying higher daycare fees in the near future.

What you can do about daycare

- When selecting a daycare facility, examine the quality of care. Arrange a personal visit. Ask staff about their programs and training. Continue to monitor the centre once your child is enrolled.
- Become informed about daycare issues and stay up-to-date. Ask questions.
- Become involved with daycare boards, or join organizations.
- Express your views to the Minister of Social Services, to your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and your Member of Parliament (MP).

Recommended Reading

- Bagley, Christopher. *Day Care in Alberta: A Review with National Implications*, Calgary: University of Calgary, 1985.
- Cooke, Katie. *Report of the Task Force on Child Care*, Ottawa: Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1986.
- *Early Childhood Professional Association of Alberta*
Box 3631,
Spruce Grove T7X 3A9
- *Parent Information Network*
#101, 8530-101 Street
Edmonton T6E 3Z5

Some Organizations

- *Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association*
c/o 11255-73 Avenue
Edmonton T6G 0C7
- *Edmonton Coalition for Quality Child Care*
c/o #418, 10010-105 Street,
Edmonton T5J 1C4
- *Parents for Quality Childcare*
c/o 12323-51 Avenue
Edmonton T6H 0M6
- *Calgary Association for Quality Child Care*,
c/o 6617-Centre St. N.
Calgary T2K 4Y5
- *Alberta Association for Young Children*
P.O. Box 4935, 10465-80 Ave.,
Edmonton T6E 5G8

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of providing daycare through non-profit centres? through for-profit centres?
2. The provincial government has stated that it is not their responsibility to interfere in the kind of care parents arrange for their children. Do you agree that the government should have minimal involvement in regulating daycare? What do you think they should do?
3. Many parents, if given the opportunity, would like to stay home with their children. What alternatives could be provided by government or private industry to allow parents to spend more time with their children?

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Edmonton Social Planning Council
#418, 10010-105 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 1C4
(403) 423-2031