



## **Brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance Pre-Budget Consultations for 2012**

### **Economic Recovery Depends on the Value Placed on Children and Families**

#### **Submitted by the Canadian Child Care Federation**

**July 26, 2010**

The Canadian Child Care Federation (CCCF) is pleased to submit this brief to the House of Commons' Finance Committee as part of its pre-budget consultation process.

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High quality, affordable care and education in children's early years matters for children's development, for future economic growth, and for a more equitable society. The benefits that result from well-developed systems of high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) are increasingly recognized for the contributions they make to children's learning and development, and as effective means to promote social inclusion, parenting, and parents' employment and/or participation as adult learners (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008; Friendly & Lero, 2005; OECD, 2006).

Research conducted over the last 40 years in North America has demonstrated the value of high quality early childhood programs for all children, with particular contributions to the development of children at risk. Research on the contributors to, and dimensions of quality in early childhood programs has been advanced, in part, by processes such as the development of quality standards in Europe (*Starting Strong II*, 2006), and the use of tools to assess program quality such as the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale* (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 1998).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides additional legal and moral impetus for governments to ensure that young children have the opportunity to participate in quality early learning programs that support their development. These values are also reflected in the Canadian Child Care Federation's National Statement on Quality Early Learning and Care and in the Occupational Standards developed for Child Care Practitioners and for Child Care Administrators by the CCCF and the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council.

And still, Canada is tied only with Ireland at the bottom of UNICEF's 2008 international comparison (Innocenti Research Centre – Report Card 8, 2008) of early childhood education and care, achieving only one benchmark each. For policymakers, the priorities are clear. First, they need to focus on



generating growth. Canada with its relatively young, rising population, will find that difficult without quality early learning and child care programs.

The reality is that today, 70 per cent of families have two parents working – up from about 30 per cent in the 1970s. Canada needs to embrace the structural reforms necessary to make its economies as fast-growing and flexible as possible. Canada's children and families need their federal leader to provide accountability and the leadership necessary to ensure that Canada will no longer occupy the lowest ranking of OECD nations as it pertains to Early Childhood Education and Care.

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**The Canadian Child Care Federation offers the following priorities and recommendations for the 2011 Federal Budget to ensure prosperity and a sustainable social and economic, future for Canadians.**

**1. Develop a national capital granting fund that will renovate and update child care programs throughout the country**

One of the most significant barriers to growth and enhancement of current early learning and child care programs is the access to capital to build and renovate existing spaces. A simple, but very effective use of federal funds for early learning and child care is to establish a granting fund that would provide funds to community groups and others who so desperately need the capacity and assistance to enhance the quality and physical space that Canada's children utilize daily.

**2. Establish a leading ministry for children and youth**

The Canadian Child Care Federation supports the recommendation put forth by Senator Art Eggleton's 2009 Senate Committee Report, *Early Childhood Education and Care Report: Next Steps*, in which it states to appoint a Minister of State for Children and Youth. Recognizing that early learning is so important, its impact on later life outcomes so powerful, the Throne should announce a co-coordinated policy framework with a lead ministry to provide focus and direction to advance quality early learning, parenting programs, child care and research into human development.

**3. Invest in a national strategy and funding framework for early childhood care with universal access and national quality standards**

Best practices also point to providing universal access, recognizing that quality of early learning is too often determined by the income of parents. Some children in Canada have high quality care and education in their early years – but many do not. If we are to give all young children the support they need, changes are required in the funding and regulation of child care services for young children and in integrated family supports. Such a framework would recognize and respect federal leadership, but allow



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provincial governments to regulate early learning and make decisions about funding. This approach enables the provinces to have the flexibility to respond to local priorities.

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CCCF is committed to working together with the federal government to make quality early learning and child care a priority in Canada. CCCF is not an advocacy organization but can contribute valuable input to initiatives to improve the quality of child care in Canada, drawing on the broad expertise of our 10,000 members across the country. The preceding brief puts forward ideas for consideration on a number of ways that the federal government can support and expand on its existing commitments to quality child care – a key component to a prosperous future for our country.

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