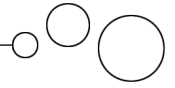


COALITION OF

child care advocates

OF BC



Working together for a community based, non-profit child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible, publicly funded and accountable.

October 30, 2009

Dr. David Turpin
President, University of Victoria
PO Box 1700 STN CSC
Victoria BC V8W 2Y2

Dear Dr. Turpin,

We are writing to express our alarm and concern that the University of Victoria is considering entering into a contract with the commercial child care chain **Kids and Company** to provide child care services for your faculty and staff. While we understand and appreciate the urgent demand of parents for more child care on campus, we urge you to consider the long-term ramifications of the decision you are making.

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC is a voluntary organization of interested citizens – parents, child care providers and community activists – working together for a publicly funded, community-owned child care system that is high quality, affordable and accessible.

We know that responsibility for the child care crisis at the University of Victoria and across British Columbia rests squarely with the provincial government. Over the last 8 years, they cut their own child care budget, squandered federal transfer funds that could have built the child care system that BC needs and have no plan or commitment to solve the resulting crisis.

In the face of government inaction, the ‘too good to be true’ proposal from **Kids and Company** may seem attractive. However, a substantial body of evidence and the lived experience of families and child care providers clearly demonstrates that big box, commercial child care is **not** the solution.

As you no doubt have heard in more detail from others, the financial plan proposed by **Kids and Company** as outlined in a report to the Board of Governors (September 29, 2009) simply won't work. On their own, parent user-fees will not provide quality, affordable, financially viable child care services over the long term. In most countries, public funding fills the gap. But the BC government's 3 year service plan shows no growth in operating funds for child care programs. So, presumably **Kids and Company** will not receive the Child Care Operating Fund currently provided to existing licensed programs. That's a financing shortfall of over \$30,000 annually per program, before they even open their doors – and child care programs across the province are already struggling to stay afloat, even when they have access to these small operating grants. Realistically, the University cannot plan on solving the demand for quality, affordable child care for only \$5,000 per year.

You have also no doubt heard of the significant body of evidence showing that commercial, for-profit child care does not provide the same level of quality as non-profit or public child care. And, as we know, it is quality child care that makes the difference. Good quality promotes healthy child development, but poor quality does harm.

As we recently saw in Australia, where the government put the country's child care future in the hands of a large commercial child care chain, corporate financing might provide initial capital and operating funds, but sooner or later investors want to see a return on their investment. Experience

shows that the pressure for profits inevitably drives parent fees up and/or staff wages and working conditions down. Meanwhile, quality suffers, demands for less regulation and/or more funding increase and programs close.

Just 2 years ago, our organization alerted the public to the threat of large foreign-owned commercial child care chains moving into BC and buying out community-based centres. Community reaction was overwhelming and we were able to stop big box child care from getting a foot-hold in BC. Now, a Toronto-based commercial child care chain poses a similar threat.

Over the years, your university has supported quality, unionized, on-site child care programs. Like other child care programs across BC, these services have worked hard to provide high quality early care and learning in spite of the lack of adequate public funding. Your support for these child care services sends an important message to the university community and beyond that learning is life long and that the success of future post-secondary students rests, to a large degree, on the quality of their experiences in the early years.

In the face of this proud history and your University's leading role in academic research into child and youth care, surely you do not want to be the first organization to welcome big box, corporate child care chains into BC.

The good news is that there are solutions to the child care crisis at your University and across British Columbia. All other developed nations have built high quality, universal systems of early care and learning and, with the help and support of institutions like the University of Victoria, we can do it too.

We urge the Board of Governors to reject big box child care chain options and instead:

- Adopt policies that recognize the importance of on-site, quality, non-profit child care in a strong and vibrant university community.
- Join with the community in advocating for adequate public funds from the province to build and sustain quality child care services.
- Work with your existing on-site unionized child care providers, parents, faculty, staff and Victoria's larger child care community to develop sustainable solutions that build on the strengths of what already exists.

We welcome you to work with us to encourage the provincial and federal governments to invest in high quality, publicly-funded community owned and controlled child care that benefits children, families and communities.

Sincerely,

Susan Harney
Chair, Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

cc. Premier Gordon Campbell
Carole James, Leader of the Official Opposition
Hon. Ida Chong, MLA Oak Bay-Gordon Head
Mable Elmore, Deputy Opposition Critic for Children, Family Development and Child Care
Hon. Colin Hanson, Minister of Finance and Deputy Premier
Hon. Mary Polak, Minister of Children and Family Development, Responsible for Child Care