



Research in Early Childhood Care, Education and Health

October 30, 2009

Board of Governors,
University of Victoria.

Dear Governors - Mr. R. Protti, Ms. J. Butler McGregor, Mr. deC.Evans; Mr. T. Gage, Dr. R. Giroux, Ms. L. Hwitsum, Ms. S. Mehinagic, Dr. E. Sager, Prof. B. Whittington, Mr. C. Petter, Ms. C Comrie, Mr. E. Pullman

HELP-UVic: REACH (HUMAN EARLY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA: RESEARCH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE, EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT) is a consortium of early childhood researchers at the University of Victoria. Established in 2003 REACH advances collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches to enhance early childhood (0-5years of age) education, health and development in community and cultural contexts. Comprised of over 60 faculty affiliates, from over 20 different departments, we are also part of the Human Early Learning Partnership, a consortium of BC research universities.

We are writing to express our profound concern that the University of Victoria is looking to a corporate for-profit provider, national child care chain Kids and Company, to address its high demand for child care services. While a for-profit provider may appear to offer an easy solution to the service gap, at minimal cost to the university, the research evidence overwhelmingly concludes that corporatized, for-profit child care services are less likely than their non-profit or public counterparts to provide quality care. Furthermore, evidence from Australia shows that a corporatized approach to child care is more costly in the long term.

It is assumed that the University would be a model for transparent consultation, evidence-based planning and equitable access to high quality child care services. We urge you to work closely with stakeholder groups to promote evidence-based solutions. It is noteworthy that public programming is the direction of the Province of BC's current policy, for good reasons. A wealth of academic research, both in Canada and abroad, underlines the differences between for-profit and public or non-profit child care. Please consider the following:

- A Montreal study by Mill, Bartlett and White (1995) concluded that **for-profit centres were "inferior to non-profit centres, both as workplaces for the educators and as optimal environments for child development"** (p. 49).
- Lower wages and poorer benefits in private child care centres result in low staff retention, thus **quality and commitment of staff tend to be inferior in for-profit centres** (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2005).
- Two large-scale studies in Quebec (Drouin, 2004) found that services provided by **for-profit programs are of considerably lower quality** than those provided by non-profit centres. On a four-point scale developed to measure observed quality in infant and preschool classrooms, **for-profit child care scored lower on all indexes** than did non-profit facilities.
- In Alberta, where 53% of child care services are for profit, the ombudsman was so concerned about quality complaints in child care centres that he launched an investigation, which found that **90% of the complaints were made against for-profit centres** (Prentice, 2009).
- Economists Gordon Cleveland and Michael Krashinsky (2004) examined quality differences between for-profit and non-profit programs in Canada and determined that **for-profit centres are disproportionately represented among the lower-quality centres**.

- Cleveland and Krashinsky also found that **non-profit centres have better ratios of children to staff** than for-profit centres; **teachers in non-profit classrooms tend to have more training and experience**; **staff wages are lower overall in for-profit centres** and about 25% lower among lead teachers; and **non-profit programs serve a wider age range of children and more children from diverse economic backgrounds (including more children with special needs)**. They conclude that **“the positive impact of non-profit status on quality is persistent, even when a wide range of variables is held constant”** (2004, p. 13).
- An analysis of large-scale Canadian data sets estimated **the difference in quality between for-profit and non-profit care to be between 7.5% and 22%** (Cleveland et al., 2007).
- Research in the United States similarly concludes that **for-profit child care, especially corporate care, is likely to have more poorly trained staff, pay them less, and be rated lower for quality than non-profit provision** (Sosinsky, Lord, & Zigler, 2007).
- In the United Kingdom, analysis of two separate data sets (Mathers et al., 2007; Mathers and Sylva, 2007) concluded that **the most reliable child care provision is found in the non-profit sector, the poorest provision is found in the private sector, and poor quality child care impacts adversely on vulnerable children**.
- Writing for the European Commission in June 2009, UK Professor Helen Penn concludes that “private for-profit ECEC services are very variable but tend to offer the lowest quality services in all countries where they have been investigated. Private for-profit provision may exacerbate social stratification.” (Early Childhood Education and Care: Key Lessons from research for policy makers). Please note Professor Penn was a keynote speaker at the Early Years Institute, at UVic, sponsored by HELP-UVic: REACH in May 2009.

In addition to unequivocal evidence that quality of care and learning environments as well as staff wages, training and professional development are generally lower in for-profit child care centres, Australia’s recent experience with the rise and collapse of “big box” child care highlights the economic and social risks of relying on this approach (Brennan, 2008).

Deborah Brennan, Professor and Deputy Director of the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of South Wales in Australia, has studied the growth of large corporate child care chains in Australia and, in particular, the largest child care corporation in history, ABC Developmental Learning. In April 2008 Professor Brennan spoke at a public meeting at the UVic (hosted by HELP-UVic: REACH) describing child care in Australia as a market failure and public policy disaster. Brennan’s analysis indicates that the Australian approach “has had devastating consequences for parents, families and staff. It has also cost the Australian taxpayer dearly.” (OSOS, 2009) While there are a range of factors that contributed to ABC’s demise, at its core is the story of a corporation that collapsed under the weight of its own expansion-fuelled debt and inflated profit projections.

Jurisdictions with impressive early childhood education and care (ECEC) systems define democratically-accountable roles for planning, standard-setting, funding and delivery of services. In its 2004 review of ECEC programs in Canada, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) noted Canada’s indecision about moving in this direction for young children’s services despite well-established public education and post-secondary institutions across the country. The OECD concluded that:

There is, in reality, no room for indecision, if Canadian governments wish to invest in human capital at this age, and lift child care out of mediocrity and weak access. The evidence has been available for years Most early childhood experts argue today that the quality of care purchased in free markets is generally inadequate, and in many cases dangerous to children’s development and future productivity. (para 109)

It is an understatement to say that early childhood research is area of strength at UVic. As noted, HELP-UVic: REACH has over 60 faculty, from over 20 departments, with active research interests in the area. Our researchers are internationally and nationally recognized. The executive alone includes:

Dr Alan Pence, recently named the UNESCO Chair in Early Childhood Education, Care and Development, was the recipient of the University's inaugural Craigdarroch research award for societal contributions.

Dr. Myer Horowitz, the former president of the University of Alberta, is recipient of the Order of Canada and holder of honorary doctoral degrees from eight universities in recognition of his activities in the area of early childhood.

Dr Alison Preece is Chair of the federally funded Understanding Early Years (UEY) project and consults internationally on early childhood issues.

Dr Jessica Ball is the recipient of the 2009 Craigdarroch Award for Research Communication and the 2009 CUFA-BC Academic of the Year Award in recognition of her work with young children and families in Aboriginal communities.

Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw is a member of the review board for the UVic child care services and is co-principal investigator of the Investigating Quality (IQ) in Early Learning Environments project and the British Columbia Early Learning Framework (ELF) Implementation.

Dr. Ulrich Mueller, member of the board of directors of the Jean Piaget Society and recipient of Early Scientific Achievement Award from the Society for Research in Child Development.

The expertise is deep, the experience extensive and the contribution to both policy and professional development significant. An endorsement of a for-profit provider by the University of Victoria has us greatly concerned as it is contraindicated by the evidence and will tarnish the University's reputation.

Rather than introducing corporatized child care services to British Columbia, we urge that you, the University of Victoria Board of Governors, work with us and others to build a process to advance child care policies and programs that reflect the best research and evidence available. We would be pleased to meet with you to discuss the research in more detail, and invite you to contact the undersigned at reach@uvic.ca

Sincerely,

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