

**Atkinson Centre Internship Report**

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As an Early Childhood Educator, I have been involved in professional practice, management and policy design, through which I have developed an interest and commitment to the delivery of quality early childhood programs. My MA thesis work will analyze how quality is constructed, reinforced and applied at the policy, community and practitioner levels. Issues related to the training of early childhood educators, policy, and quality assessment will be explored.

During the Atkinson internship my primary work involved researching and writing policy briefs called “*Issues That Matter*”. Both policy briefs addressed matters of quality in early childhood settings, specifically the impacts of underfunding, the lack of a coherent provincial policy framework, and the consequent growth of corporate, for-profit child care on child care quality. I also developed a concept paper that explored the idea of creating partnerships at a community level between small non-profit child care and family support programs to enhance sustainability and quality. The work with the Atkinson Centre has helped inform the development of my thesis proposal.

**Project 1. Prepared a concept paper/project overview, to support the sustainability of child care programs.**

Early learning programs in Ontario have been transformed by the entry of thousands of young children into the education system, many of whom are exiting child care programs for universal school delivered full day kindergarten programs. The provincial full-day early learning initiative has had, and will continue to have a significant impact on the existing child care services. To enable programs to address some of the challenges, and enable local, community-led change, this concept paper/project overview proposed an innovative partnership, and coordination initiative, that will support small not-for-profit (NFP) child care programs and family support programs.

While the impetus for this project has been advanced by the impact of the full-day learning initiative, the concept paper outlines an important step in sustaining child care, helping increase efficiency, reduce administrative duplication, and enhance the quality of the early childhood programs.

**Project 2. Don't Throw the Babies Out with the Bathwater**

This *Issues that Matter* responded to reports that some municipalities were planning to divest themselves of their municipally operated child care programs. The paper argued that directly operated centres offer some of the highest quality child care available, have fairly compensated educators, and low staff turnover, all of which are consistently shown to have positive long-term impacts on children's development. The paper argued that the potential impact would be a significant drop in access to quality child care programs, and the likely increase in corporate child care to fill the void and recommends the development of a policy framework, and a comprehensive approach to quality and accessibility, in order to sustain child care.

### **Project 3. Corporate Big-Box Child Care, Coming to An Apartment Building Near You.**

This *Issues that Matter* article addressed the expansion of corporate daycare chain Edleun into Ontario, and their partnering with rental giant Canadian Apartment Properties Real Estate Investment Trust. Edleun, Canada's first corporate child care provider to be traded on the stock exchange, has been acquiring programs across Canada.

The article cites research, which consistently demonstrates that for-profit programs provide lower quality child care, while non-profit or publicly owned programs provide higher quality services. The article states that provincial underfunding, lack of a policy framework, and financial pressures on municipal governments' are undermining child care, and suggests that coherent policy and a comprehensive approach to quality and accessibility is needed, not a quick-fix, that uses tax dollars to line the pockets of shareholders.