



Press Release

R00025

April 4, 2013
University Marketing & Communications
905-688-5550 x4687

Brock University brief: Can Niagara families afford child care?

A mother in the Niagara Region would have to earn almost \$38,000 a year to feel that it was affordable to return to work after having just one child.

That number - based on economists' calculation that families spend between 20 to 30 per cent on the mother's annual income on child care - shoots up with two or more children.

These are among the findings of a new brief released April 4 by Brock University's Niagara Community Observatory.

The brief, titled *Can Niagara Families Afford Child Care?*, outlines ongoing problems and issues of early childhood education and care faced by families in the Niagara Region and across the country.

"Middle-class families have been saying for years that high quality licensed child care is expensive and a strain on the household budget, yet the federal and most provincial governments have failed to significantly address the issue, primarily due to the high costs," says the brief's author Carol Phillips.

Families in Niagara particularly feel the crunch.

"Comparing the child care costs in Niagara Region to the median income of its taxpayers is one way of illustrating the financial burden," says Phillips.

Canada ranks last out of 11 comparable industrialized nations - including the United States - for spending on early childhood education. Economists estimate that it would take more than \$3 billion to bring Canada up to the average spent by other industrialized nations.

Increased investments in child care and early childhood education reap many rewards.

"The availability of affordable quality licensed child care makes it easier for primarily women to return to the workforce, if they desire, or continue their education to acquire or upgrade skills," says Phillips.

"Society benefits in general from the taxes these parents pay, as well as from the high quality of early childhood education the children are receiving, which helps down the road."

The availability of affordable and accessible licensed child care needs to enter the public policy conversation as governments tackle problems of an aging society and its overall economic and social health, says the brief.

Copies of the report can be found on the Niagara Community Observatory website: <http://www.brocku.ca/niagara-community-observatory/policy-briefs>

For more info and media interviews contact:

* Carol Phillips, researcher, Niagara Community Observatory, Brock University, 905-688-5550 x5350

* Mary Louise Vanderlee, early childhood education expert, Brock University, 905-688-5550 x4066; mvanderlee@brocku.ca

* Darlene Edgar, director, Children's Service Division, Niagara Region, 905-984-6900 x3876

For assistance setting up interviews:

* Cathy Majtenyi, research communications/media relations specialist, 905-688-5550 x5789; cell: 905-321-0566; cmajtenyi@brocku.ca

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BACKGROUNDER: Niagara Region child care facts and figures:

* in Niagara, the mid-range cost for a two-year-old accessing full-time licensed child care in a centre is \$36.33 per day, which would equate to approximately \$9,445.80 per year;

* the province funds 80 per cent and Niagara Region funds 20 per cent of the region's child care costs, but splits its administrative budget 50-50. Niagara Region received \$24.8 million from the province in 2012 specifically for child care and added \$6 million from its 2012 budget. At the end of 2011, Niagara was able to provide 4,861 children with a fee subsidy for child care;

* as of September 30, 2012, there were 9,742 child care spaces in Niagara operated by 168 licensed child care centres. (This includes junior and senior kindergarten spaces, plus before- and after-school care for children aged six to 12 years). There are also three licensed home child care agencies in Niagara who contract with approximately 156 home child care providers. These providers can care for up to five children within certain regulations (such as the age of the children) giving the region approximately an added 780 spots;

* the 2011 Census population for this age group (0-12 years) showed 56,910 children in Niagara, meaning the current child care system has the capacity for 17 per cent of the

region's children;

* as of 2010, the child care industry in Niagara employed more than 1,000 people directly and generated approximately \$115 million in economic activity annually, of which \$87 million came directly from parent fees (76 per cent). The other \$28.4 million in funding (24 per cent) came from government support. The size of the child care workforce in Niagara, including Registered Early Childhood Educators plus support workers, is comparable to some of the region's largest employers.