



July 15, 2008

Submission to Early Childhood Learning Agency Consultation

Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre is a provincial organization that inspires and promotes excellence in child care and early learning. In collaboration with communities and governments, Westcoast provides information, referrals, training and resources to families, individuals and organizations who are seeking the best care and early learning for children.

Westcoast is recognized as a values-based organization. Our work is grounded in the following beliefs.

1. We believe accessible, affordable, inclusive, quality child care and early learning is at the heart of every healthy community.
2. We believe every family, regardless of socio-economic status, is entitled to have access to quality child care and early learning services.
3. We celebrate the diversity within our communities and make every effort to meet the diverse needs of the people and organizations we serve.
4. We believe in the value of information and education to help families make informed choices for their children.
5. We promote professionalism and the development of innovative, quality services through advocacy, research, education and best practices.
6. We work in collaboration and shared leadership with other committed individuals and organizations.
7. We are a learning organization that embraces excellence, capacity building, flexibility and creative change.
8. We work with integrity and integrate our values into everything we do.

These beliefs provide the guideposts for our response to Early Childhood Learning Agency Consultation, July 2008.

The possible expansion of early learning programs for children aged 3-5 through BC's Ministry of Education is a significant public policy development that can offer benefits to the lives of children, families and communities. Universal access to programs for young children is a welcome public policy change provided that the expanded programs for BC's 3-5 year olds are designed and implemented in ways that truly meet the needs of children, families and communities. This depends on how government applies the evidence and lessons learned from research and practice.

Westcoast appreciates the recognition that the underlying principles of our public education system - legislated entitlement, universality, and public funding - are equally important to sound public policy for younger children. Families, service providers, and communities have all called for appropriate policy and adequate funding to realize these benefits.

The following outlines some key considerations that Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre believes to be essential to quality early learning and care service for young children and their families.

- Early Childhood Education and Child Care services cannot be separated. These must be integrated experiences for young children and their families. Care routines offer opportunities to support early learning and literacy as readily as formalized lessons.
- Early Childhood Education and Child Care services must be provided within a *wrap-around* service delivery model that offers a seamless day for young children and their families - from early morning to early evening and year round.
- The programs and activities offered to young children through Early Childhood Education and Child Care services must be developmentally appropriate and set within a play based pedagogical approach and curriculum. As well as an non-institutional indoor environment that includes elements of home based care, young children need ready access to natural outside play spaces that provide safe, stimulating and flexible opportunities for exploration and imaginative play that are contiguous extensions of the indoor play environment.
- Early Childhood Education and Child Care services must be provided by early childhood educators with the training that is appropriate to the developmental and learning needs of very young children. It is essential that young children experience continuity of staff throughout the day. This fosters development of the caring relationships that are vital to young children's emotional, physical and cognitive development.
- Early Childhood Education and Child Care services must be equally available to all families, regardless of income or geographic location. Families also need access to quality, affordable care and learning opportunities for their infants, their toddlers and their school-aged children.
- Relying solely on school space for new programs for 3-5 year olds will not provide universal or equitable access to Early Childhood Education and Child Care services in our communities. Schools in neighbourhoods with high child populations are not likely to have enough vacant school space for new programs for 3 – 5 year old children. New Early Childhood Education and Child Care services must be built on the foundation of the child care and preschool programs that already exist. These are important community assets that provide integrated care and learning for children, and meet the needs of working families. Existing programs need to become part of Early Childhood Education and Child Care Service Network supported by sound public policy that ensures universal access and is supported through a fair share of public funds. New settings in schools should be established where existing early childhood programs cannot accommodate all the young children whose families need and want such services.

Westcoast shares the concern of others regarding the short time line for this consultation. We understand there will be a second round of consultation on 'options' in the fall. Westcoast would welcome the opportunity to work with the Early Childhood Learning Agency and other community stakeholders to develop and/or respond to these options.

Yours truly,



Rebecca Clarke
 Chairperson, Board of Directors
 Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre