

Canada ranks last for childcare funding

There's an e-mail in my inbox this morning that simplifies, for me, the myriad of issues around childcare that have been surfacing in the past year since the federal government first decided to axe the National Childcare plan in favour of a \$100 supplement to parents.

Since then, details of a complex issue have become hazy and facts and figures seem to change daily. Meanwhile, parents who need childcare that because of cuts is becoming more expensive and harder to find, are too busy and too tired to say a word on one of the most important issues in their lives.

Case in point, the e-mail.

It is a quickly dashed off note from a young woman to explain why she won't be in the college class my partner teachers this morning — again. She has no one to watch her kids. This is not the first such e-mail. I have been watching closely the progress of this young mom and her heroic attempts to create a career for herself with no money and two young children, one of whom — just for good measure — has special medical needs. I can hear a desperation in her voice that I recognize.

But she's not demanding daycare at the college she attends. She's not demanding government assistance or a national daycare program. She's not engaging in a debate about whether she should be a stay-at-home mom or whether she should get a job.

No. She's apologizing. This young woman who has a dream to support her family with a new career isn't asking for anything. In fact, she ends each note with an apology.

A simple "I'm sorry."

She's sorry? We should be sorry. It took me, who has been discussing and debating the issue of the need for universal childcare a whole lot lately, three months to finally look at this issue with anything close to a creative and effective solution.

"Tell her to bring her kids," I suggested in desperation to my partner, a father of two who never once had put his own kids into childcare and often took them along to events where no other kids could be seen for miles. A guy who understands the need for parental attachment and the need to follow a career dream.

For the Love of Reading



Lynn Easton

"Put them in the back of the room with some toys. Make a play area. Take turns watching them."

Tada. Instant childcare program. Forget the debate about who's going to fund a national childcare program, forget about whether it should be in preschools or public schools, forget about the especially annoying argument about whether woman, most

of whom have no choice but to work, should stay home with their children and we should scrap all public childcare policies.

Currently, according to research by UBC's Human Early Learning Project, Canada ranks dead last among developed nations for the amount of funding dedicated to childcare and early learning initiatives. Dead last in the number of early learning opportunities for our children before they head to school.

Our politicians aren't about to change unless we change.

And we are. Business leaders are starting to get interested in the need for more early learning and childcare spots in the community. You can almost hear the gears shifting. Out drives the Cadillac

and in drives a bunch of Smartcars as ideas abound. Business sponsored daycare. Family friendly businesses. Childcare that works for their workers.

Respected Canadian Early Development expert Dr. Fraser Mustard has just released his latest report and suggests once again that the early years are the most important time to assist families in the development of their children's brains and social behaviour. "It can be done," Mustard said in a recent interview. "We just have to want to do it."

Just do it, says the expert. So, I guess before we can impact this issue in any real way on the provincial or federal level there has to be a fundamental shift in our attitudes toward childcare in our own minds. We have to stop seeing childcare and early learning as a perk. As an extra. As a luxury. As, let's say a Cadillac when we can get by with less. But we don't have to wait for the politicians. We can start valuing our kids now. The politicians will catch up. They always do.

• There are many people in Mission working to support improved childcare and early learning in this community. For information on local childcare initiatives begin by going to www.missionecd.com.shawbiz.ca/Home.html.