Rural Childcare: Childcare as Economic and Social Development in Parkland

The Child Care Coalition of Manitoba studied the economic and social impact of childcare in southwestern Parkland over 2006, and released a report on the region early in 2007. The research was supported by a local Advisory Council of leading stakeholders. The report provides detailed information on Parkland’s childcare services and childcare labour force, and the economic effects of the childcare sector.

The six rural municipalities and five towns/villages of southwestern Parkland have 2,556 children aged 12 and under. For these children, there are 362 licensed spaces (in homes and centres, full-time and part-time), meaning that about 14 percent of the area’s children have access. Outside of Dauphin, services are scarce. Infant and school-aged care is particularly lacking. Many facilities cannot recruit and retain trained early childhood educators, mainly due to low wages. Parkland’s services are underdeveloped -- with long waiting lists. Services for young families are particularly important to rural regions which are losing people to out-migration, helping to mitigate population decline.

We found that childcare is important to rural Manitoba. Regulated childcare helps parents balance work and family responsibilities, and provides children with a rich environment for development and care. Childcare is also important to the regional economy. Childcare dollars ripple through the local economy with solid multiplier effects. Every $1 spent on childcare in Parkland generates $1.58 of benefits.

The childcare sector is directly worth $1.73 million to the Parkland economy. As this money “ripples” through the local economy, it is estimated to produce economic benefits of $2.74 million, accounting for direct and indirect effects. Childcare enables parents to work, and we calculate the annual earnings of parents who use full-time childcare in Parkland to be over $12.3 million.

In additional to economic and statistical data, the report includes the voices of Parkland
residents, who speak eloquently about gaps in childcare provision.

Childcare also provides jobs, as well as supporting parents. There are 76 full and part-time childcare workers in Parkland, and the sector creates the equivalent of an additional 28 full time jobs. The childcare sector is an important site of job creation, particularly for women.

We find that Parkland needs more services (at least 1,122 more childcare spaces), that childcare must become more affordable and accessible to families, that the quality of care must rise and that more trained staff must be recruited through better wages and benefits. These improvements will require policy innovation, political will, and increased public funding.

Investment in childcare creates high yields and brings significant benefits to children, families, communities and Parkland's economy. Parkland's economy, along with its families and children, would see even greater returns if childcare services were expanded.

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