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*A bulletin of the Child Care  
Human Resources Round Table*

## Our Child Care Workforce



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## We're on a roll!

Here's a quick quiz.

1. What's the name of the purple child care report on your bookshelf — the one with the purple logo?
2. What's the name of the group that grew out of this report?
3. What's this group doing these days?

Here are the answers.

The well-thumbed book is *Our Child Care Workforce: From Recognition to Remuneration* (a.k.a. the Sector Study)—the groundbreaking study on human resource issues in child care. The group is the Child Care Human Resources Round Table, founded in April 2000, to move the recommendations of the study forward. Now, after a year of planning and negotiating for resources to do its work, the Round Table is on a roll.

It now has a five-year strategic plan and a three-year operational plan. It spearheaded a Status of Women research project to make the job of home-based child care providers more viable and improve their working conditions. And it's got four other projects it hopes to work on:

- Developing human resource strategies for child care in light of the socio-economic and policy changes of the past 5 years.
- Devising strategies for child care providers to access pensions and benefits.
- Developing curriculum modules and resources to support leadership in the child care workforce.
- Finding ways to fund the Round Table so that it can put in place its operational plan, engage in capacity building and outreach, and strengthen its profile.

As a group that brings together the diverse voices in child care across Canada, meets infrequently, and whose members volunteer their services on top of their full-time jobs and other commitments, the Round Table has come a long way!

"It's been exciting to see all our

organizations—the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, the Canadian Child Care Federation, the Canadian Labour Congress and the Confédération des syndicats nationaux—working together on these issues," said Round Table Chair Gyda Chud.

### CRISIS LOOMS!

Chud said the Round Table's work is more important now than ever. That's because recruitment, retention and recognition in the child care workforce—some of the issues the Sector Study flagged as critical—have reached a crisis stage.

"Fewer and fewer young people are training to be early childhood educators," she said. "Of those who are, it is often only a small few who actually work in child care. Many leave after a short career, largely because the pay, benefits and working conditions are so poor. It's hard to make child care a viable occupation for any length of time.

"We really need a vehicle like the Round Table to push for the solutions in the critical areas that could address these issues, what we've been calling the 3 Rs—remuneration, respect and recognition."

### TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

The projects you'll read about in this newsletter form the Round Table's operational plan for the next three years. To obtain a copy of the plan, contact us by mail, e-mail or fax. (See details on how to reach us at the end of this bulletin.) We'd also like your feedback on the plan or any of the projects described in the bulletin.



## Helping us do our work

The Round Table has put together an 18-month proposal for funding from Human Resources Development Canada to build the CCHRRT's capacity and its outreach activities.

"Simply put, we need the resources to do our work the way it should be done," said Round Table coordinating group member Jamie Kass. She noted that while the Round Table represents a significant economic sector with many workers, it has not yet had access to the same resources as other sector bodies.

"We need resources to start to operate in a sector capacity," she said. "It's also about respect for the sector."

The CCHRRT's request includes funding for a project director to put in place the operational plan; an administrative coordinator; communications materials, such as fact sheets, bulletins, and a presentation kit and speakers' notes on the Round Table; an outreach working group and outreach activities; the development of a web site; and Round table meetings.

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## Call for nominations

**The Round Table is calling for nominations for the vacated research and informal child care constituency positions. (See *Comings and Goings*, page 6.) All other Round Table members will continue to serve out their 18-month term, at which time we will welcome new members. Our work is both informative and challenging! Please contact us if you or a colleague are interested in receiving a nominations package. (Contact information is included at the end of the bulletin.)**

## We're everywhere!

**R**ound Table members have been on the go this past year. Here are some of their activities across the country:

- The CCHRRT held an informal session with local child care leaders in Calgary. We introduced the Round Table, shared our goals and learned about the local sector's needs and experiences. The session coincided with the Round Table's meeting in Calgary.

- The Round Table hosted an Ottawa-based gathering with its four organizational partners and their representatives to endorse the operational plan and discuss current projects and activities.

- In January 2002, the CCHRRT held its meetings in Halifax to coincide with the Child Care Connections Nova Scotia conference. Round Table members facilitated a well-attended workshop on recruitment and retention, and the need for support to address these critical issues.

- Two Round Table members, Chair Gyda Chud and labour representative Jamie Kass, are on the advisory committee of the Canadian Child Care Federation's training project. The project is developing occupational standards for the field and exploring a range of issues such as certification and accreditation.

- Round Table members have also been busy in their home communities, participating in forums and meetings to get the word out about the CCHRRT, do outreach to various parts of the sector, and learn about ways we could work together with other groups.

- This spring, RT members will participate in provincial child care gatherings in Manitoba and British Columbia.

### **We'd love to connect with you!**

If there's an upcoming event that Round Table members might participate in, please let us know. A list of CCHRRT members and how to contact them is included in this bulletin.

## A new publication

***In Just 30 Years***, is a recently released paper on the history of child care and the labour movement in Québec. The paper was prepared for the Round Table. To obtain a copy, e-mail us at: roundtable@on.aibn.com.

## Did you know?

**I**f you're a home child care provider, you could have access to workers' compensation in case of accident or disability. Contact your provincial or territorial Workers Compensation Board for more details.

# We need more child care providers

Across Canada, high school students interested in a career in early childhood education are getting this message: Study to be a teacher, work as a teacher aide or with children at risk in a higher paying government-funded program. But don't go into child care.

**A**nd they're listening. They're not enrolling in early childhood education programs. Worse, those already in the occupation are leaving in droves, with an annual turnover rate of close to 22 per cent in centres alone.

The Round Table hopes to take a big step towards changing this situation through a proposed Labour Market Update study. If approved, the study would take an in-depth look at the reasons for these disturbing human resources trends, and help us understand them so that strategies can be developed to deal with them.

"Our proposal is important because the sector is continuing to experience the same high turnover rates reported in the 1991 *Caring for A Living* study and discussed in the Sector Study," said Gillian Doherty. Doherty is the CCHRRT's outgoing research representative

and was the principal consultant in the *You Bet I Care!* studies.

"When we did *YBIC!* we found that those who were leaving tended to be those with higher education in early childhood and more experience, so the people the field is losing are its potential leaders," she said.

## Reasons obvious

There are obvious reasons why it's difficult to recruit and retain child care providers in centre-based and regulated home-based child care.

"The wages are very low, the work is hard and the occupation has a publicly perceived low status," Doherty said. "Those who invest in formal training often have to take out student loans to cover the cost of tuition. Given the low income levels in child care, these loans may take what feels like forever to pay back."

The proposed study would examine the social, economic and policy changes that have af-

ected recruitment, retention and recognition in child care as an occupation. The first phase would focus on an environmental scan, followed by an in-depth analysis. The final phase will include the development of an action plan.

"We want accurate, timely information so that we can better understand what's going on. We need to collectively come up with recommendations to address the labour market crisis facing our sector."

The study will look at ways to inform:

- The development of strategies to secure adequate wages and appropriate working conditions that encourage trained child care providers to enter and stay in the field.
- Career awareness strategies.
- Government policies that affect the supply, quality and viability of child care.
- Identification of required levels of funding necessary to stabilize the field.

- Provision of information on the issues to child care groups and organizations, and governments.

Doherty said a failure to address the serious shortage of centre-based and regulated home-based child care providers will put the entire regulated system at risk.

"It's becoming increasingly difficult for centres everywhere to ensure enough staff to operate. For example, in Manitoba about 1/3 of centres have a government exemption allowing them to operate without the required number of qualified staff. This sets a precedent with respect to regulations, and the children are not being cared for by the required number of trained staff."

The Labour Market Update will provide the sector with current critical information that will be useful for all jurisdictions as we collectively move forward with labour market strategies.

# Pensions are vital

**A pension can make all the difference between retiring in poverty and living out your later years with some financial security. And benefits such as sick leave, paid maternity leave and disability insurance are critical supports for workers, especially those who receive low wages.**

Yet only about one quarter of centre-based child care workers have pension coverage. The situation is much worse for regulated family child care providers, unregulated family home caregivers and in-home caregivers. And decent benefit coverage for centre-based workers is mainly found in unionized centres, which form a minority of the sector.

That's why the Round Table hopes to sponsor a study on the ways in which child care providers (whether employees or self-employed) could have access to pensions and benefits.

"We really need to get under the issue of pensions and benefits to provide child care providers with the nec-

essary supports during their working life and to ensure they don't spend their last days living in poverty," said Round Table member Jamie Kass. Kass is a member of the CCHRRT's coordinating group and the representative for the Canadian Labour Congress.

"We can learn a lot from the unions on these issues," Kass said. "They've really shown leadership and can offer ideas and strategies to help us move forward in these critical areas."

Kass emphasized that it is important to make pensions and benefit programs more accessible to child care providers and ensure they have information about which public programs and private arrangements they might already be able to access.

"It's very important to get the word out to child care pro-

viders about what's already available to them, and provide training and educational materials related to pensions and benefits packages."

## ISSUES PLENTIFUL

There are lots of issues that the Round Table proposes to study. For example:

- Are there special areas of concern to child care providers in public pension programs, such as the residency requirement for immigrant workers? What can be done about them?

- How could the Canada/Quebec Pension Plan be improved to provide more benefits to low income workers?

- Would it be possible to create a multi-employer pension plan for child care workers? For example, the Canadian Union of Public Employees recently established a

multi-sector pension plan for its members who don't have a plan or who have an inferior arrangement like an RRSP.

- Can existing plans be opened to centre-based and family child care providers?

- What about self-employed child care providers who might have to supplement their retirement income from public pensions with personal savings through RRSPs?

- To what extent are group benefits packages available to child care providers, and how many participate?

It's clear this project would be of tremendous value to the child care sector! The Round Table is seeking a potential funder to move this work forward on all our behalf.

## What guides our work

The Round Table is a formalized mechanism for the child care sector to address human resource issues. Our main purpose is to enhance and support the existing child care infrastructure; bring together the voices of child care organizations and the voices of the various child care constituencies (especially those that have been marginalized and underrepresented); and to provide a forum that is cooperative and collective.

### Our strategic priorities:

- To increase the respect and recognition of the child care sector, within the workforce itself and the general public.

- To improve the working conditions of child care providers.

**Five long-term goals** in our operational plan direct our activities:

- To highlight the importance of the child care workforce within the sector and society.

- To address issues that are relevant to parts of the child care workforce that lack well developed networks or infrastructures, such as family child care.

- To support the development of a well-trained, competent child care workforce.

- To improve the wages, benefits and working conditions of child care providers.

- To help the child care workforce meet the changing child care needs of families.

Poor human resource practices in child care are likely contributing to the high turnover rates of experienced centre-based and regulated family child care providers, says Round Table member Joanne Morris.

“The sense of being part of a team and part of decision-making is really vital to retaining experienced providers, ensuring stability of care, and influencing quality,” said Morris, the education and training constituency representative on the CCHRRT. “That’s why the CCHRRT developed a proposal on leadership practices in the child care workforce.”

The purpose of the recently submitted concept paper is to look at ways to help centre and agency directors develop better skills as leaders, administrators and managers. It is also about providing information and education to child care providers on their legislative rights—such as employment standards and health and safety practices—as well as ways to push for better working conditions.

## Teamwork makes a difference

“We feel it will address some of the crisis we’re seeing in retention,” Morris said. “How do we reduce turnover and make caregivers feel part of a system and knowledgeable about their rights?”

Morris said the Round Table also felt the project was important to quality child care.

“Whether you’re working in a centre or are part of an agency, if there isn’t a sense of teamwork then this affects the children in the program, communication with the parents, planning of the program, and the administrative leadership being in tune with the staff,” Morris said. “What we’d be looking at with this project is very critical to quality of care.”

The concept proposal includes consultations with a broad range of stakeholders, such

as post-secondary institutions, trainers, child care organizations, directors, labour and employers. It also includes focus groups with directors and the workforce to see what they think about the issues and what they feel they need.

The proposal envisions producing a number of fully developed workshop kits and training modules. The kits could be used to deliver stand-alone workshops, professional development training, or could become part of the curriculum in post-secondary institutions. Some of the material could also be delivered through the World Wide Web.

Occupational analysis and establishment of standards for experienced early childhood educators, directors and administrators focussing on the work environment and human resources management will provide the framework for skill development.

With approval for this concept paper, the CCHRRT can then move forward to submit a detailed proposal.

## How to make family child care work

If you’re a family child care provider, you likely don’t have access to most benefits and aren’t covered by laws that guarantee decent working conditions.

**B**ut a Round Table study for Status of Women Canada says it doesn’t have to be this way. *Making Family Child Care Work: An Examination of Strategies to Improve Employment Viability and Working Conditions in Home-Based Child Care*, will soon be completed under the guidance of researchers Rachel Cox and Josée Belleau. The Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada sponsored the CCHRRT study. It includes information and recommendations for the field, governments and organizations on ways to improve the benefits and

working conditions for family child care providers.

“We wanted to find out exactly what the present state of affairs is for family child care providers, not just around employee status, but with regards to global plans affecting benefits and working conditions,” said Round Table member Lee Dunster, Director of the National Family Child Care Training Project and the CCHRRT member representing unregulated family care.

“Even more important, we wanted to see if there were things we could suggest or do about making improvements to these areas. This was not about one sys-

tem of family child care provision versus another one, but what could we suggest that would enhance benefits for all caregivers in the regulated family child care system.”

For example, Dunster said that fishers are considered self-employed. But unlike most other self-employed workers, they have access to employment insurance.

“So what are the circumstances that make this possible, and under what circumstances might it also be possible for family caregivers to access EI? How could family child care providers, many of whom are

young women with families, access maternity leave benefits?”

### FUTURE WELL-BEING

Another big area is pensions, which are critical to retaining experienced caregivers. “We can’t expect them to continue to do this work at the expense of their future well-being,” Dunster said.

The study’s findings will also have implications for other low-paid self-employed groups of workers, she said.

The report will be submitted to Status of Women Canada at the end of April.

# How to reach us

To obtain a copy of our operational plan, or give us feedback on any of the projects you've read about in this bulletin or any other issues related to our work, contact us at:

Child Care Human Resources Round Table  
3rd Floor, 323 Chapel St., Ottawa, ON, K1N 7Z2  
Phone: (613) 239-3100  
Toll free: 1-866-411-6960  
Fax: (613) 239-0533  
E-mail: roundtable@on.aibn.com

## ROUND TABLE MEMBERS

### Gyda Chud

#### Chair

Coordinator, ECE,  
Vancouver Community College  
Phone: (604) 443-8416  
E-mail: gchud@vcc.bc.ca  
or: bishopro@shaw.ca

### Maryann Bird

Executive Director  
Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada  
Phone: (613) 594-3196  
E-mail: ccaac@istar.ca  
Representative: Child Care Advocacy  
Association of Canada

### Ron Blatz

Executive Director  
Discovery Children's Centre  
Phone: (204) 889-2689  
E-mail: ronblatz@  
discoverychildrenscentre.com  
Constituency: School Age Child Care

### Sheila Davidson

Executive Director  
SFU Child Care  
Society  
Phone : (604) 291-3226  
E-mail : davidson@sfu.ca  
Constituency: Employer

### Lee Dunster

Project Director  
Family Child Care  
Training Project  
Phone: (613) 731-1991  
E-mail: dunster@sympatico.ca  
Constituency: Unregulated Family Care

### Kathleen Flanagan-Rochon

Director, PEI Children's  
Secretariat, Dept. of Health & Social Services  
Phone: (902) 368-6517  
E-mail: kaflanagan-rochon@ihis.org  
Constituency: Prov./Terr. - Directors of Child Care

### Sandra Griffin

Executive Director  
Canadian Child Care Federation  
Phone: (613) 729-5289, ext. 229  
E-mail: sgriffin@cccfcscge.ca  
Representative: Canadian Child Care Federation

### Jamie Kass

Child Care Coordinator CUPW  
Phone : (613) 236-7230, ext. 7913  
E-mail : jkass@cupw-sttp.org  
Representative: Canadian Labour Congress

### Raymonde Leblanc

Conseillère syndicale/Confédération  
des syndicats nationaux  
Phone: (514) 529-4976  
E-mail: raymonde.leblanc@csn.qc.ca  
Representative: Confédération des syndicats  
nationaux

### Francine Lessard

Directrice générale  
Fédération des centres de la  
petite enfance du Québec  
Phone: (418) 659-3059  
E-mail: francine.lessard@fcpeq.qc.ca  
Constituency: Regulated Family Care

### Joanne Morris

Faculty ECE  
College of the North Atlantic  
Phone: (709) 758-7543  
E-mail: joanne.morris@  
northatlantic.nf.ca  
Constituency: Trainer/Educator

### Noreen Murphy

Executive Director  
Churchill Park Family Care Society  
Phone: (403) 266-4656  
E-mail: nemurphy@telusplanet.net  
Constituency: In-Child's Home Care

### Carol Oberg

Child Care Inspector, Yukon Territorial Government  
Phone: (867) 667-5091  
E-mail: carol.oberg@gov.yk.ca  
Constituency: Related Workforce

### Dixie Lee van Raalte

Child Care Consultant  
Phone: (506) 472-4513  
E-mail: mmmccc@nb.sympatico.ca  
Constituency: Centre-Based Child Care

# Comings and goings

**Louise Bourgon**, one of our founding members and a member of the Sector Study Steering Committee, left the Round Table in January. She represented the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), one of our labour partners. She brought a wealth of experience to our work—as Professor and Coordinator of the Department of Early Childhood Education, Collège Édouard-Montpetit, in Longueuil, Québec, and as a union leader. She helped Round Table members understand the implications for changes to Québec's child care programs resulting from the government's new family and social policy initiatives. She also shared with us the experiences of sector council development in Québec.

We warmly welcome Louise's replacement, **Raymonde Leblanc**. Raymonde is a union representative with the CSN and the resource person on the confederation's child care working group. She is also responsible for the private sector pay equity file. "I've learned a lot about the vital role that child care plays since I became part of the child care working group," said Raymonde. "And it's even more evident to me now that I have a daughter." Raymonde believes the Round Table is an important vehicle to push for recognition of the child care sector and the work done by thousands of women who provide early childhood education and care services every day.

**Gillian Doherty**, a highly respected researcher and our member representing the research constituency, is completing her term on the CCHRRT. She was the principal consultant for the *You Bet I Care!* studies, among many others. Gillian's contribution to the CCHRRT will definitely be missed, but we know she will continue to play a leadership role in our field through the many projects she is involved in.

**Lee Dunster**, a well-recognized champion of the family child care community and our member representing the unregulated family child care sector, is also completing her term on the Round Table. Lee is the author of a number of key resources related to family child care, a sought-after speaker at pan-Canadian conferences and a powerful voice for family child care issues. She was a member of the Steering Committee that guided the Child Care Sector Study and has contributed countless volunteer hours and incredible energy to the development of the CCHRRT.