



# **THE KEY TO CARING**

A resource guide for the  
CUPW Child Care Fund

Produced by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers





## CUPW and child care

I think it's great. Our union is progressive. Treating people like human beings is important. A worker is not a machine. We are people, we think.

– **Marcel St. Louis, clerk**

**F**or CUPW, child care is a collective responsibility and an important equity issue.

- It's not fair to expect parents to deal on their own with finding and paying for high quality early childhood care and education, especially given the social and economic pressures working families are under today. Moreover, quality child care does not just benefit parents and children: society also gains.
- With high quality child care that meets their needs, parents can work with peace of mind, enjoy family life and provide their children with a good start.
- Women in particular need quality, dependable child care so that they can enter into and remain in the workforce, and participate fully in family life and in their union.



## The early years count

**W**e now know that the first five years of life set the stage for children's lifelong emotional, intellectual, physical and social development, and affect the health and wealth of our society today and tomorrow. Isn't it critical that we all take responsibility for making sure our children get the best care and education possible in their early years?

CUPW thinks it is. Our long struggle to obtain the Child Care Fund shows how reluctant employers are to do something about helping parents balance work and family. It shows how most governments still treat the early years as the least, instead of the most, important period of development. But above all, it demonstrates that progress can be made when workers stick together and demand that child care be treated as a priority.



## A history of the CUPW Child Care Fund

(APPENDIX L)

I've been in the Post Office 30 years. I don't have any small children left so this is for my grandchildren.

– **Dave Moist, clerk**

- 1980 CUPW women push to make child care a priority issue in the union. It becomes part of the debate on women's issues at the union's national convention.
- 1983 Two child-care policies are adopted in the National Constitution:
- Opposition to cutbacks and support for the concept of 24-hour a day universal child care services as a responsibility of government (D-11).
  - Opposition to all for-profit child care centres (D-12).
- 1984-87 The union begins to put child care on the bargaining agenda. In 1987, it puts forward a comprehensive demand for employer-paid child care services. The

eventual mediation/arbitration award includes a joint child care study.

1989 The joint study finds that CUPW members have a variety of child care problems:

- arranging back-up care
- providing for sick children
- finding affordable care
- consistent care for evening and night work

The union puts a demand on the bargaining table for 1 cent-per-hour-per-worker to finance a child care fund for child care programs and activities.

1991 The union wins a jointly administered child care fund (Appendix L). The employer puts \$200,000 in to the fund every three months. The fund is capped at \$2 million. The fund can be used for projects to provide child care services to postal worker families, child care information programs, needs assessments and child care research. However, the language in Appendix L is limiting: the fund cannot be used to advocate for better government policies on child care.

- 1994 After more than 25 meetings with the employer and virtually no money spent, there is little to no agreement on anything. Frustrated by Canada Post's stalling, the National Women's Committee ensures that the union puts forward a demand for complete control and administration of the fund.
- 1995 CUPW wins control of the fund.
- 1995-2000 The union develops 11 community-based projects which provide high quality child care services to postal worker families. Through the union's education efforts, members are more aware than ever about the need for high quality child care and government action to solve the child care crisis facing postal worker and other parents. As a result of collective bargaining, the employer agrees to increase its contribution to the fund to \$250,000 by April 2003.



## Objectives of the Child Care Fund

- To help members who have the most trouble finding or affording high quality child care. This includes shift workers, and members who need infant care, whose children have special needs, or who require summer care for school-age children.
- To create high quality, affordable child care. This includes creating innovative child care services, such as services that meet the needs of members who work irregular hours, and making existing quality services available and affordable.
- To work with our allies in the child care community to create high quality, non-profit child care services for postal workers.





## The Child Care Fund at work

I take my hat off to the union. It took an enormous weight off my shoulders.

– *Denis Blondeau, letter carrier*

The union just made it happen – it was such a nice surprise. Wow, someone is offering to help.

– *Kathy Hauck, inside postal worker*

CUPW's eleven Child Care Fund projects were put in place after an extensive assessment of the specific child care needs of the members and a comprehensive design phase. Every Region has at least one Child Care Fund project, and the Special Needs project is available to local unions across Canada. The services provided through the projects are subsidized by the fund. All projects accommodate children with special needs and provide at least one of the following services:

- Child care services at non-profit child care centres that accommodate irregular hours of work.

- Supervised child care provided in the member's home or licensed care in the home of a caregiver to accommodate early morning starts, evening or night shifts.
- Short-term, emergency child care for members whose child care arrangements break down unexpectedly.
- After school and summer care for school aged children.
- Summer camps.
- Child care information, referral and resources.
- A project across Canada and Québec for parents of children with special needs.



## THE KEY TO CARING

### A special project for special needs

It is a real shuffle to be able to work full-time and my husband works full-time and to have a child with special needs.

— *Kathy Hauck, inside postal worker*

**K**athy is a postal worker in Wainwright, Alberta whose son is among the 6 to 10 per cent of children with special needs in Canada and Québec. Ian is 10 years old and has Down's syndrome. His complicated medical history limits his ability to communicate.

Through the CUPW special needs project, the family hired a sign language teacher to alleviate some of the frustrations they were having trying to communicate with Ian.

"[The interpreter] taught all three of my children sign language," says Kathy. "It was absolutely wonderful, 'cause my children were communicating. But the difference in [Ian], it was just night and day."

### *The first of its kind*

The special needs project had its origins in CUPW's ground-breaking study, *In Our Way*. The study was the first of its kind in Canada and Québec, and was based on a 1996 research survey on the workplace barriers and child care problems of CUPW parents whose children have special needs. It led to a new understanding by the union of the unique and often overwhelming stresses faced by these parents.

The project provides financial help for child care and child-care related services that reduce stress on parents and provide opportunities for children to develop their skills, and spend time in positive learning relationships with other children and adults.

### *How it works*

- CUPW parents contact SpeciaLink: The National Child Care Inclusion Network at 1-800-840-LINK. The staff helps them develop an appropriate plan for their child, find educational and resource materials and link up with groups working in the disability network.
- Parents receive financial assistance to bring their child care costs more in line with those of other members.

- Parents can also receive a newsletter, Member to Member Connection, which helps them communicate with each other. Members write small “want ads” with ideas to share or offer others, or requesting help.



## Your solidarity counts

We really didn't have a solution. No one wanted to look after them. They are hard to look after. It's very hard on the couple, on the family ... If it weren't for the program, I don't know if we would still be a family.

– *Marcel St. Louis, postal clerk*

A key finding of the special needs study was the need for co-workers to better understand the stresses and workplace problems facing parents of children with special needs.

### *Stresses:*

- Exhaustion from spending most time outside of work meeting their child's special needs.
- Increased tension between spouses, who never have time for themselves or each other.
- Financial stress (additional costs of treatments, drugs and equipment not adequately covered under drug or health plans).
- Lack of accessible community services and resources, including child care.

- Lack of financial and resource supports for dependent care as children age.

### *Workplace problems:*

- Supervisor harassment and mistrust. Parents are harassed because medical or therapy appointments are frequent and sometimes run late, and because they receive calls at work from professionals. Also, supervisors often don't believe that parents are leaving work to meet the needs of their child.
- Difficulty getting special leave. Parents of children with special needs have to leave work abruptly more often than other parents. This is because many child care arrangements aren't set up to deal with all the circumstances that arise with a child with special needs. Also, children with special needs are often prone to frequent illness.
- Lack of flexibility or choice in work schedules. These would help to accommodate the hours of the type of care required for children with special needs.



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### Helping shift workers in Québec City

I had a babysitter where I brought the kids in the morning. But I had to wake them up at 5:30, 6:00 o'clock. They'd tell me they were tired, they found the morning too hard.

– *Denis Blondeau, letter carrier*

**D**enis Blondeau's early morning start time was making it hard to find good child care and jeopardizing his shared custody arrangement. The Child Care Fund offered a solution for the Québec City letter carrier and other CUPW members working shifts that don't fall within the traditional nine-to-five day. In Denis' case, help arrived in the form of a caregiver who came to his home early every morning.

For workers like Denis, finding and affording quality child care can be a nightmare. Very few child care centres or supervised caregivers working in their own homes offer services that meet the needs of workers who have irregular hours. Finding a qualified caregiver who will come into the child's home is also difficult.



### *Strict guidelines prevail*

In Québec City, CUPW works with Les Petits Mulots, a community-based child care agency, to provide child care for shift workers. Members have access to child care in their own home or in the home of the caregiver (family child care). The child care agency employs the caregivers, providing critical supervision and support through home visits, and some training.

While family child care is regulated by government, care provided in a child's home is not, making quality difficult to monitor. To deal with this challenge, the union and the agency developed strict policies and operating guidelines to assure high quality.

"I have peace of mind when I leave the house," says Denis. "You know, when you leave for work there are three little ones that you leave with a caregiver. I've never worried to leave for work with the [agency] caregiver there."

The project and others like it have helped alleviate shift workers' child care worries. But child care alone cannot eliminate the major downside of irregular hours of work for CUPW parents with young children: the lack of quality time to spend with families, and the ensuing family ten-

sions. Better ways to help shift worker parents balance work and family life need to be found.

### *Caregivers are workers too*

The provision of in-home child care for shift workers raises a number of other issues:

- The irregular hours of shift work mean irregular, and mainly part-time work for caregivers. This is because in-home care is often used just to “bridge” the few hours when other regulated child care options are not available. The union is working to find a fair solution to this problem for the workers.
- In-home caregivers are often not covered by minimum wage laws, making them among the poorest paid workers in society. But the in-home caregivers in the CUPW project are better paid, and receive benefits, support and training. This means, however, that the service is expensive. It is affordable for CUPW members because it is subsidized by the Child Care Fund. But without government funding, this type of high quality in-home child care would be difficult to replicate for other families with young children.

### *Putting pressure on government*

By getting in-home child care included in a family child care agency, CUPW is putting pres-

sure on the child care sector to broaden the range of child care services offered to parents. This in turn pressures the government to recognize and regulate an essential child care option.

And in fact, the government has taken note. Its new family policy making high quality licensed child care available to parents for \$5 a day was originally not accessible to parents who work irregular hours. So the government was pushed to look at how to include these families in the \$5-a-day program. CUPW's projects showed some ways to do this, and the government has put in place 10 pilot projects for 24-hour-a-day child care services. Included in the pilots is Les Petits Mulots and the CUPW in-home caregiving project. The union will continue to work with the child care and labour communities to pressure the government to put in place innovative measures that expand the range of quality child care services.



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### A first in Newfoundland

You're going through it for the first time, you don't know what to ask and what to look for ... And I would have to get a referral from somebody I knew who had a child out somewhere. But the resource centre was great.

– *Cathy Carroll, parent*

**W**hen Cathy and Keith Carroll had their first child, they had a lot of questions about child care but few places to look for answers. They live in a province that provides little child care funding and only recently brought in legislation on family child care, so child care resources are few.

CUPW recognized this problem and decided to do something about it. In 1996, the union opened the CUPW Family Resource Centre in St. John's, a comprehensive child care support, referral, information and resource centre.

#### *A model for the government*

At the time, child care in a provider's home was not regulated. So the resource centre developed policies, guidelines and procedures to ensure that

all aspects of child care delivery would strive to promote the health, safety and well-being of children. The centre's regulations subsequently became a model for Newfoundland's provincial family child care regulations.

The CUPW Family Resource Centre recruits, screens, trains, monitors and supports family child care providers. It operates playgroups for caregivers and parents, provides caregiver transportation to playgroups, and delivers workshops and training sessions. Caregivers and CUPW parents can drop in whenever they want to. CUPW families and affiliated caregivers have access to a toy and equipment library, and a resource lending library which includes books, journals, and video and audio tapes dealing with child development, children's issues and ideas for activities and programming.

"We asked the resource centre to find someone who'd be suitable and be a good caregiver," says Keith, a mail handler. "They were able to do the screening process and background checks and in-home interviews ... and we ended up with a good quality caregiver."

### *Breaking down isolation*

The centre provides a critical support to caregivers working in family child care-it helps to break down their isolation.

“You can become very isolated when you’re doing home care in your home for children,” says caregiver Linda Au. “But [we’re] able to get transportation and go over to the centre where you can interact with other adults that are doing the same thing, and the children get a chance to play with other children.”

Years of lobbying the government by the child care community and the union have finally paid off. The government recently announced that the centre will become the first licensed and government-funded child care agency in the province. It will now be able to serve the entire community, not just CUPW members.

### *Governments must show leadership*

This achievement demonstrates how important it is that governments view child care as a shared, collective responsibility. Clearly, the union’s initiatives in Newfoundland and elsewhere have had an enormous and positive impact on the community.

The Child Care Fund has helped many CUPW members with their child care needs. It has put the union in the forefront of finding progressive solutions to help members and other workers balance work and family—something we can all be proud of. And it has made the union stronger by

raising awareness of child care as a family issue, not only a women's issue.

But the fund can only do so much to solve the child care problems of workers. Consider:

- There's not enough money in the fund to help all postal worker parents find and afford high quality child care.
- Most unionized working parents don't have anything in their collective agreement to help with child care costs.
- Workers without unions have no one to go to bat for them on child care.

Governments must take the lead on child care. A government-funded, comprehensive child care program is vital to solving the child care crisis brought about by the lack of affordable, quality child care. This crisis has become even more acute with government cutbacks. While publicly funded child care is expensive, economists have calculated that every dollar invested in high quality child care reaps a two-dollar benefit to children, parents and society. Some people say we can't afford to fund child care. But CUPW believes we can't afford not to.



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### Questions to help move us forward

Consider these issues when viewing the video:

- How can we build on and expand the Child Care Fund so that it can benefit more CUPW members?
- How can we support:
  - CUPW members who have children with special needs and get recognition of the workplace barriers these parents face?
  - CUPW shift worker parents of young children? How do we get the employer to create more day shifts?
  - CUPW members who are grandparents and carry a major financial and child-rearing role for their grandchildren?
- How can we work with our allies in the child care community to make child care a government priority?





## Other CUPW child care resources

- Our Children Are Our Future, a comprehensive information binder on child care issues in Canada.
- What is quality child care? leaflet on the elements of high quality child care.
- Five steps to finding quality child care, a how-to booklet for parents looking for good child care.
- Juggling With Care, a video and discussion guide on the CUPW Child Care Fund and the need for a national child care program.
- In Our Way, an in-depth, ground-breaking study about the child care problems faced by CUPW parents of children with special needs in the context of problems experienced by other workers.
- An educational package on the challenges faced by parents of children with special needs.

For more information on how to obtain copies of these resources, contact your local union.

