

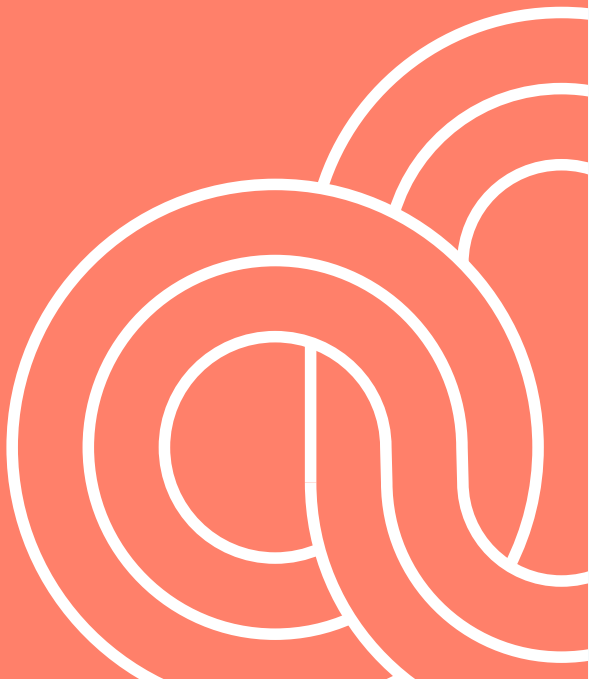
A WHOLE LIFE

The Impact of \$10-a-Day
Child Care on the Health
and Socioeconomic
Well-being of Low-Income
Lone Mothers in BC



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Zeynya S. Alemayehu



**CENTRE FOR
FAMILY EQUITY**

A WHOLE LIFE

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PREPARED BY

Lea Caragata, Viveca Ellis and Zeynya S. Alemayehu.
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ORGANIZATIONS

Centre for Family Equity, and School of Social Work,
University of British Columbia.

PUBLISHED

December 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Centre for Family Equity recognizes the stolen and occupied lands of the over 200 diverse Indigenous nations in the territories referred to as British Columbia. We acknowledge the historical and present-day impacts of colonization and recognize that poverty for Indigenous communities is interwoven with Canada and BC's colonial past and present. The Centre for Family Equity's Basis of Unity foregrounds our shared commitment to decolonizing the organization and impacting decolonization broadly. We would like to acknowledge that our official address is located on the x^wməθk^wiŷəm (Musqueam), Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlił-wətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) territories.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This timely research began with an awareness that the health and well-being of low-income, lone mothers in British Columbia is jeopardized daily by their poverty and their solo struggles in caring for their children. We queried “what difference does universal child care make on the health and well-being of low-income lone mothers?” as the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia (BC) rolled out a commitment to \$10-a-day child care.



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

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Our concern for the health and welfare of lone mothers arises amidst the lone-mother poverty crisis in BC. We know that when relationships end, women continue to assume the family care roles in dramatically disproportionate numbers. Across Canada, 80% of lone-parent families are headed by women.¹ There are nearly one quarter of a million lone-parent families in BC, and 80% of them are female-led.² As of 2020, over 116,500 children (aged 0-17) were living in poverty, of which over half, 65,230, were being raised in lone mother-led households.³ It is important to note that more than half of these children are under the age of six, a critical developmental time during which the effects of deprivation shape long-term outcomes.⁴ Decades of research on early childhood development in BC indicate that 32.9% of kindergarten children are at risk in one or more areas linked to their healthy development.⁵ Early vulnerabilities in childhood are predictors of long-term outcomes; children impacted in one or more areas are more likely to experience challenges in their school years and future.

The depth and magnitude of lone-mother poverty arises from a set of complex structural factors. The most salient and simple among these is how difficult it is to maintain employment while solo parenting. The significance of accessible and quality child care is therefore a key poverty reduction tool impacting both mothers and their children, as it enables women's equitable inclusion in all aspects of social, economic, and public life.

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified in Canada in 1981,⁶ positions access to quality child care as an essential right that is incorporated into all aspects of the Convention.⁷ The Early Childhood Educators of BC and the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC co-developed BC's \$10 a Day Plan, and the Coalition's advocacy highlights the importance of child care as a poverty reduction strategy.⁸ The First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society and the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, alongside many allies, have been positioning a universal child care system as a key policy solution to child and youth poverty in BC for decades — particularly in relation to high lone-mother poverty rates and their exclusion from the labour market due to lack of quality, accessible child care.⁹

In 2018, the government of BC introduced a 10-year plan to build a fully universal, \$10-a-day child care system, now called '10 a Day ChildCareBC'.¹⁰ The federal government's commitment in 2021 to build a \$10-a-day child care system across Canada by 2026 enabled BC to roll out a new wave of deeper affordability measures to reduce the cost of child care by 50% in 2022. As of the date of publication of this report the number of 10 a Day ChildCareBC spaces in BC is now at 13,261.¹¹

Making Mothers Matter is a qualitative, participatory action research (PAR) initiative aimed at understanding the health and well-being impacts of \$10-a-day child care spaces on low-income, lone mothers in BC. The PAR aspect of the research reflects our commitment to hearing and valuing the voices of those with lived experience. Accordingly, seven low-income, lone mothers were hired and trained as research associates and peer interviewers. They assisted with all aspects of the study, including conducting the majority of the interviews.

Recruitment occurred throughout 2022 and 2023 through emails and outreach to all \$10-a-day centres in BC and snowball sampling by peer researchers in their locations throughout the province. Criteria initially included low-income, lone mothers with one or more children under six accessing a \$10 a Day ChildCareBC space. Despite varied, sustained, and significant recruitment efforts, we were unable to identify a sufficient number of lone mothers that met our initial criteria; in response, we amended the criteria to include low-income, lone mothers accessing non-\$10-a-day spaces.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 lone mothers, 17 of whom were accessing \$10-a-day spaces and paying \$0 to \$10 per day per

child and 13 of whom were accessing non-\$10-a-day spaces and, in most cases, accessing fee-reduction affordability measures.

The sample reflects the diversity of low-income, lone mothers in BC: 78% in the lower mainland, 14% in the Interior region, and 7% of participants in the Vancouver Island region. Over half (53%) of the study participants identified as Indigenous, Black, or from other racialized groups. More than 63% of participants earned less than \$30,000 per year.

Of the 17 participants accessing \$10-a-day spaces, 59% were employed full-time or part-time and 41% were accessing provincial income assistance. Of the 13 participants who were not accessing \$10-a-day spaces, 30% were employed part-time or full-time and 70% were accessing assistance.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and identifying information was removed. Members of the research team reviewed and identified a core set of themes confirmed in consultation with peer researchers. We report here on four major themes: Economic Impacts; Health and Well-being; Quality Care for Children; and Challenges in 2023: Our Incomplete System.



FINDINGS

A prevailing issue through all thematic areas is something we call the 'hectic scramble'. This refers to the depleting and sometimes-dangerous daily 'scramble' to manage work, income and resource generation, solo-parenting, and family life on a low income. This scramble sometimes meant leaving children without good supervision and taking a range of risks in order to manage everyday care and work demands. All participants of this study identified secure child care as significantly reducing this 'hectic scramble'.

More specifically, our robust data provides strong findings in our four key areas: Economic Impacts; Health and Well-being; Quality Care for Children; and Challenges in 2023: Our Incomplete System.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

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Many research participants worked in the gig economy, sometimes in addition to more regularized, full-time work. These additional work demands were essential to maintaining their families, in part because of the enormous burden of child care costs.

Four important changes occurred for these families when they obtained a \$10-a-day space:

01

Mothers were able reduce reliance on precarious work and gig work.

02

Some had the time and energy to find and maintain full-time work.

03

Lower-waged workers (e.g., retail and service industry) were suddenly able to sustain these jobs.

04

Some participants were able to leave income assistance for work.



Among the many powerfully expressed views of participants, Malia's captured the importance of this change — both for her, her children, and more broadly:



“It just makes me feel better as a mom as a single parent with one income to be able to afford to pay my own bills and not have to rely on the government subsidies. Being able to afford to pay my own bills is a really big deal because I’ve been in this system on income assistance for so long and now that I’m going back into the workforce; that pride really builds up your self-esteem...”

MALIA

There were marked differences between participants accessing \$10-a-day and non-\$10-a-day spaces. Although the sample size is small, the latter group did not show such positive outcomes and were largely still engaged in the ‘hectic scramble’ to make ends meet.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

FULL SECTION PAGE 20 

Safe and affordable child care, as any parent knows, relieves parental stress, guilt, and anxiety. Our findings bear this out with exceptional strength.

Improved health and well-being of lone mothers and their children were identified in three areas:



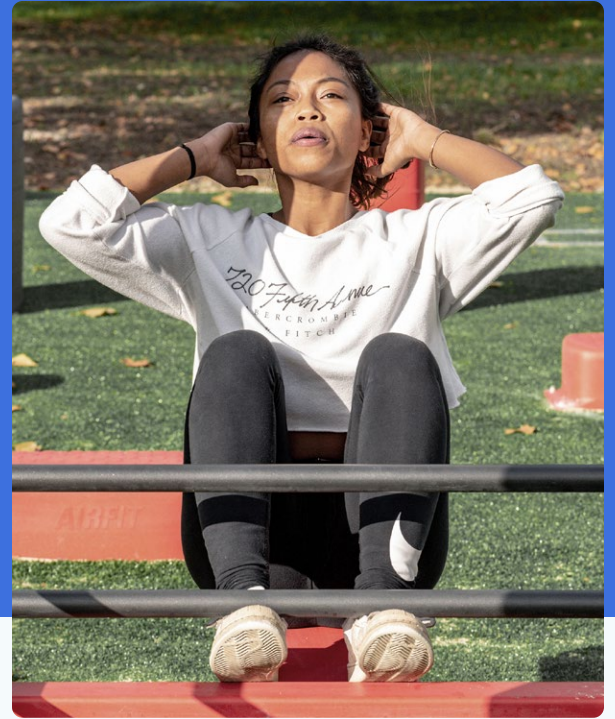
Lone mothers working in precarious labour faced continual stress over their work hours being reduced, injury, or illness. Any such circumstance would put their child care at risk and begin a potential and dangerous downward spiral. These fears and stresses were negated for those with a \$10-a-day space.



The ability to engage in self-care was strongly associated with a \$10-a-day spaces, including such things as exercise and attending to medical issues.



Lone mothers with limited incomes, who were enduring the 'hectic scramble', report limited time to socialize with others, engage in educational opportunities, and be more active citizens. \$10-a-day child care changed this for all the participants.



Abigail expressed her worry: "What if I'm not working this week? What if I didn't make my paycheck if I was off for two weeks due to sickness?" Naomi advised: "Because child care was not available, I didn't get to go to all my appointments because you can't take a child into an HIV clinic...Once I got child care it helped me so much to a point where my health has gotten a little better". Hannah added: "I don't have to work 16 hours a day, which is kind of nice. So, I get to be home with my kids and see my neighbours and go to the barbecues and do all that kind of stuff."

Broadly speaking, all participants communicated a strong belief that quality, affordable child care improved their parenting and family life. \$10-a-day spaces gave mothers a chance to be fully present when they were at home with their children.



IMPACT OF QUALITY CARE ON THEIR CHILDREN

FULL SECTION PAGE 24 ▼

In addition to improved parenting, family socialization, and economic outlook, respondents spoke consistently to the effect of high-quality child care for their children. These manifested in improvements in their children's communication skills, development of routines, and overall well-being. Emily shared:

“I think the fact that he’s really nourished and enriched by his experience there means that he comes to me from that place too when I pick him up.”

EMILY

A significant negative finding in this area is staff turnover. Mothers spoke to their children's upset when a favourite daycare staff left, often citing the demands of the work combined with the poor pay.

CHALLENGES IN 2023: OUR INCOMPLETE SYSTEM

FULL SECTION PAGE 25 ▼

It is unsurprising that this research found significant challenges with the BC \$10-a-day child care system and we wish to acknowledge its growth and strengths as well as its possibilities for improvement.

Our respondents identified six primary system issues:

- 1 There is a lack of sufficient spaces.
- 2 There is no transparent process for space allocation and a failure to prioritize allocation to those most marginalized.
- 3 Waitlist fees were significant barriers to access. The need to apply in multiple locations made fee payments insurmountable. Furthermore, there was little transparency with respect to waitlist management.
- 4 There is inadequate capacity for children with special needs — this was identified as a consistent and seemingly system-wide issue.
- 5 Locations and hours of operation were an acute issue for these respondents, who are often employed in precarious labour across a 24-hour time span. Participants also identified the desperate need to have all their children in the same daycare and the need to have their child care near either home or work.
- 6 Child care centres experience high staff turnover which, as previously noted, affected quality of care.



CONCLUSION

FULL SECTION PAGE 30 

Overall, \$10-a-day child care positively impacted low-income, lone mothers' health, well-being, and economic outcomes. In the words of one mother, it made her life "whole." We offer the following recommendations and urge the reading of our full report, which more fully represents the voices of the low-income, lone mothers who gave their time — already in such short supply, because quality affordable and accessible child care matters so very much to them and to the wider community.

We respectfully recommend that the Government of Canada:

- 1 Implement the key recommendations of Child Care Now by investing the following over three years, starting in 2024:
 - \$10 billion in capital costs to cover costs associated with increasing demand and existing need for child care across the country.
 - Adding \$7 billion in federal transfers to the provinces and territories to support the full implementation of competitive and equitable wage grids, improved benefits, and working conditions for early childhood educators and other staff.¹²

We respectfully recommend that the Province of BC:

- 1 Transition all interested existing programs to \$10-a-day sites and create up to 50,000 fully publicly funded spaces to establish a cohesive child care system in BC.
- 2 Prioritize the establishment of new \$10 a Day ChildCareBC centres in BC's child care 'deserts'.¹³
- 3 Implement an Early Childhood Educator wage grid in BC of at least \$30–\$40 per hour, depending on qualifications, experience, and years of employment.¹⁴
- 4 Implement an equity-based approach to ensure marginalized, low-income families have access to \$10-a-day spaces.
- 5 Expand the capacity of \$10 a Day Child-CareBC centres to provide quality accessible care for special needs children.
- 6 Ban the collection of waitlist and registration fees at all child care centres in BC.
- 7 Ensure \$10-a-day child care better accommodates shift work and the diverse labour market needs of parents and caregivers.
- 8 Establish a ChildCareBC Parent Advisory Council, comprised of a diversity of parents and caregivers including those with lived/living experience of low income, to provide ongoing input into the development of the \$10-a-day child care system.
- 9 Establish public delivery of before-and-after-school care using the public school system, to address the province-wide shortage of school-age child care spaces.¹⁵

We conclude this summary report with appreciation for our peer researchers, the 30 low-income, lone mothers whose experiences we report on here, and the governments of Canada and BC — both of whom have finally begun to recognize and respond to the urgent need and liberating possibility of universally accessible, publicly funded child care in women's lives.

INTRODUCTION

Making Mothers Matter: Understanding the Role of Child Care on the Health and Socioeconomic Well-being of Low-Income Lone Mothers in British Columbia is a three-year participatory action research (PAR) project conducted in partnership by the Centre for Family Equity and Dr. Lea Caragata, Director and Associate Professor, UBC School of Social Work. The research project sought to understand how BC's new child care affordability policies and \$10-a-day spaces impact the health and well-being of low-income, lone mothers raising children under six in BC. *Making Mothers Matter* was a participatory action research project funded by the Vancouver Foundation, with further support from the Health Sciences Association and the Vancity Community Foundation.

In 2021, seven lone mothers with lived experience of poverty and lack of access to child care, some Centre for Family Equity members, and others recruited from the public, were selected to become peer researchers



and form a project advisory committee. The advisory committee trained in research design and methodology, determined the research question, and carried out data collection through 2022 and 2023. The diverse group of lone mothers who comprise the advisory committee are in six locations in the province, including Vancouver, Burnaby, Richmond, Port Alberni, Prince George, and Revelstoke.

This report offers a contextual background, framing our study in current literature regarding lone-mother poverty and the importance of child care in low-income women's lives in a BC policy context. We follow this by detailing the methodology utilized for this research and sharing our findings, analysis, and discussion. The report concludes with a series of recommendations to improve access to \$10-a-day child care for low-income, lone mothers in BC.

CONTEXT



LONE PARENTS AND FAMILY POVERTY IN BC

Accessible, quality child care has long been credited as a key lever to uphold the full human rights of women, ensuring their inclusion in economic and public life, physical and mental health, healthy parenting, and overall socioeconomic thriving.¹⁶ The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)¹⁷ positions access to quality child care as an essential right that is incorporated into all aspects of the Convention, ratified in Canada in 1981.¹⁸ A 2016 report from BC's West Coast Legal Education and Access Fund (West Coast LEAF) explored the BC context in *High Stakes: The Impacts of Child Care on the Human Rights of Women and Children*. The report highlighted the stories of 15 diverse women to expose the multi-faceted ways in which lack of access to affordable, quality child care violated their fundamental rights. BC mothers and caregivers' rights to economic security and health, and their rights to parent, were all significantly and negatively impacted by lack of access to accessible child care.¹⁹ For women experiencing socioeconomic marginalization, quality child care is demonstrably linked to their full social, cultural, and economic engagement; it is much more than just *child care*.

British Columbia has a female lone-parent poverty crisis that drives high rates of child and youth poverty. As of 2020, over 116,500 children (aged 0-17) were living in poverty in BC, with approximately one in every eight children in BC impacted.²⁰ Of these, a staggering 65,230 children experiencing poverty in BC are being raised in lone-parent households that are predominantly female-led. The gendered reality of lone-parent poverty in BC reflects the complex impact of gender inequality on women's and mother's lives. According

to 2022 Statistics Canada data, 80% of lone-parent families are female-led.²¹ While only 20% of families in BC are lone-parent led, 58.6% of children in poverty are in lone-parent led families. The child poverty rate in lone-parent families in BC is a shocking 38.3% — nearly six times higher than for children in other families. It is critical to note that 35,230 out of the 644,990 people living in poverty in BC in 2020 were young children under the age of six, with many of them being raised in lone-mother led households throughout the province.²²

Our research participants represent the families cited above — those raising children below six years of age and living in poverty through the important early years, when deprivation impacts life-long outcomes.²³ These outcomes are well documented, affecting children's futures across social, developmental, educational, health, and economic spheres.²⁴ Decades of research on early childhood development in BC indicate that 32.9% of kindergarten children are at risk in one or more areas linked to their healthy development.²⁵ Early vulnerabilities in childhood are predictors of long-term outcomes; children impacted in one or more areas are more likely to experience challenges in their school years and future. Given the demonstrated impacts of poverty on children, it is noteworthy that many lone-parent led households often rely on BC's Employment and Assistance programs and/or work below the poverty line and thus face these poverty-associated risks.

As of July 2023, there are 22,946 lone-parent clients on disability assistance in BC.²⁶ A further 36,824 lone-parent clients are accessing income assistance, broken down into a diversity of groups that are or are

not expected to look for work.²⁷ Many of these lone caregivers remain disenfranchised from our labour market, raising their children in significant depths of poverty on income and disability assistance for complex reasons. They often work on and off in sectors defined by precarious work, low wages, low or no benefits, and lack of job security, hence their continued reliance on provincial income assistance.

CHILD CARE AS A POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

In 2018, the province released the Poverty Reduction Strategy Act²⁸ and *TogetherBC: British Columbia's Poverty Reduction Strategy* in March 2019.²⁹ Among 12 key priorities, TogetherBC's focus on children and youth refers to the fact that "the lack and cost of child care has historically prevented many parents, particularly single mothers, from getting and keeping a full-time job."³⁰ High-quality, universally accessible child care is a powerful poverty reduction tool that is broadly impactful for socioeconomically disadvantaged families. The Early Childhood Educators of BC and the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC co-developed BC's \$10 a Day Plan, and the Coalition's advocacy highlights the importance of child care as a poverty reduction strategy.³¹ The First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society has, for decades, positioned a universal child care system as a key policy solution to child and youth poverty in BC — particularly in relation to high lone-mother poverty rates and their exclusion from the labour market due to lack of quality, accessible child care.³² The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition steadfastly included universal child care as one of seven key pillars in their advocacy for a poverty reduction plan to achieve and sustain poverty reduction in BC, which is now a central plank in their *Blueprint for Justice*³³ to end poverty. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – BC Office, alongside many stakeholders, made the case for a policy shift towards a universal child care system — one that prioritizes a well-paid, highly trained, and valued Early Childhood Education workforce to deliver quality \$10-a-day universal child care for families in BC.³⁴ This brief history points to the broad and sustained claims from all sectors for a \$10-a-day universal child care system to address family poverty in BC.

The data we report here from the *Making Mothers Matter* study further points to the impact of BC's emergent \$10-a-day child care system as a poverty reduction tool for low-income, lone-mother led families with children under six.

A UNIVERSAL \$10-A-DAY CHILD CARE SYSTEM FOR BC

In 2018, the government of BC introduced a 10-year plan to build a fully universal \$10-a-day child care system after decades of advocacy led by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and their original *\$10 a Day Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Learning and Care*.³⁵ System-building began with an initial \$1 billion in funding over three years and the subsequent rollout of the first \$10-a-day initial 'prototype sites' throughout the province. We will provide a summary of some actions and progress taken to develop BC's \$10-a-day system since 2018.³⁶ The new Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative introduced a basic fee reduction of \$350 per licensed space in 2018. More than 2,500 spaces and 50 \$10-a-day centres were initially approved for operation through the *Canada-British Columbia Early Learning and Child Care Agreement – 2021-2026*.³⁷

A new Affordable Child Care Benefit replaced the existing Child Care Subsidy targeting low-income families. The benefit provides a subsidy for low- and middle-income families making below \$111,000 pre-tax in income; however, some with higher incomes who meet various criteria may still be eligible. The official name of BC's burgeoning system is now '\$10 a Day ChildCareBC'. For the lowest income families accessing \$10 a Day ChildCareBC centre spaces who meet eligibility criteria, the benefit eliminates the fee of \$10 per day within a fully publicly funded space, bringing the cost to zero for very low-income families.

In the BC Budget 2021, over 4,000 additional \$10-a-day spaces were added for a total of 6,500 spaces by April 2022. The subsequent investment made by the federal government in 2021 to build \$10-a-day child care systems in every province by 2026 provided an opportunity for BC to further partner with the Government of Canada and roll out deeper affordability measures that aim to reduce the cost of child care by 50% in 2022. The number of \$10 a Day ChildCareBC spaces is now at 13,261 at the time of publication of this report.³⁸

Our peer researcher advisory group aimed to capture the complex and multi-dimensional impacts of the new fully publicly funded \$10 a Day ChildCareBC spaces on low-income mothers' mental and physical health — inclusive of their well-being, social inclusion, parenting, and parent-child relationships, as well as a picture of their economic outcomes.

METHODOLOGY



A LIVED-EXPERIENCE LED APPROACH

Making Mothers Matter was shaped by a value of lived experience, community connectedness, and hope for change. Reflections gathered from the project's seven peer researchers capture the valued connections and experiences that shaped the project, as well as the importance of inquiry shaped and led by those with lived experience. Given the opportunity to generate the interview questions, peer researcher Sally³⁹ stated that "it made sense for us to create the questions ourselves. We are the ones who have lived through being single moms looking for child care so we know deeply the impacts of that struggle." Carolyn added: "This research reminded me that I'm not alone in the injustices of single parenthood and that equitable and supportive policies must be formed to support parents to provide quality care for children. Parents cannot do it alone. Having the opportunity to be a peer researcher has been transformative in my journey...and has inspired me to continue this work outside of this project."

Benilda emphasized that it was important to address stigma around lone mothering and shared that "holding space as mothers shared their stories, witnessing them feel the value of their voice and exchanging empathy...these are outcomes of my experience as a peer researcher that cannot be captured by data. Luckily, I keep these experiences close to my heart."

RECRUITMENT AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Making Mothers Matter gathered data from low-income, lone mothers accessing publicly funded \$10-a-day child care spaces in BC to understand its impact on maternal health and well-being. The initial inclusion criteria sought out lone mothers with children under the age of six accessing \$10-a-day child care centres who had lived in BC for at least six months and had a minimum of four months experience in their \$10-a-day site. A disproportionate number of people in poverty — about 40% — often work full-time *below* the poverty line due to low wages and precarity, including many lone mothers.⁴⁰ *Making Mothers Matter* aimed to recruit both low-income, lone mothers working below the poverty line and those accessing provincial income assistance.

Recruitment occurred through 2022 and 2023 through emails and outreach to all \$10-a-day centres in BC and snowball sampling by peer researchers in their locations throughout BC. We also collaborated with agencies serving low-income women and mothers to locate qualified participants, such as the YWCA Metro Vancouver, Atira Women's Resource Society, and the Pacific Immigrant Resources Society. Posters and other recruitment materials were mailed around the province and delivered in person by staff to a diversity of sites around the province, including neighbourhood houses and other centres co-located with community services.

As previously stated, we initially sought to include participants accessing \$10 a Day ChildCareBC program spaces and the full Affordable Child Care Benefit.⁴¹ After recognizing recruitment challenges, we altered our criteria to include those who were still paying the maximum fee of \$200 per child per month in a \$10-a-day centre space. Overall, 17 participants were accessing \$10-a-day and paying \$0 to \$10 per child per day.

Further recruitment challenges necessitated we change the criteria to include low-income, lone mothers accessing non-\$10-a-day spaces. This shift was warranted for two important reasons. Most simply, we wanted a stronger, more representative sample. Additionally, and importantly, given the seeming paucity of low-income lone mothers accessing \$10 a Day ChildCareBC spaces, this shift enabled an important contrast of these two sets of experiences. Thirteen additional participants were included, each accessing non-\$10-a-day spaces and most of them accessing fee-reduction affordability measures. Currently, there are only enough \$10-a-Day spaces for 2% of children under age 12 in BC.⁴² When the province continued to expand the number of \$10-a-day spaces during our data collection phase, we redoubled our recruitment efforts in \$10 a Day ChildCareBC centres. Despite intense recruitment efforts, we still experienced significant challenges recruiting participants who met our participant criteria of receiving \$10-a-day child care and being low income. We identify this recruitment

challenge as a telling issue, which we take up in a subsequent section of this report.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

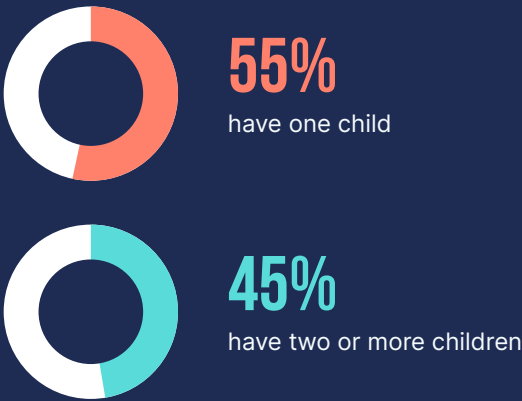
Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews by phone and using Zoom. Participation consent forms were emailed to participants and written consent was obtained prior to the interview. A total of 30 interviews were conducted, with each lasting from 30 to 60 minutes. Most of the interviews were conducted by peer researchers. To accommodate the schedules of a few participants, interviews that were outside of working hours — including evenings and weekends — were conducted by staff on the research team.

All interviews were recorded, and the audio files were transcribed verbatim using Otter transcription software. Interview transcripts were assigned codes and all identifying information was removed before analysis. To establish inter-code reliability, each member of the research team from UBC and the Centre for Family Equity reviewed and identified a core set of themes. The final themes were determined by the research team in consultation with peer researchers. We report here on four major themes: Economic Impacts; Health and Well-being; Impact of Quality Care on their Children; and Challenges in 2023: Our Incomplete System.

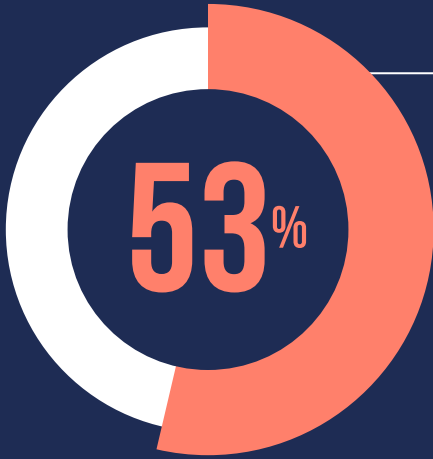
FAMILY SIZE

All participants were lone mothers, most of whom have sole custody of one or more children under the age of six. Many of the participants shared that they are raising their children in a single-income household without child support. 45% of participants have two or more children living with them and the rest are raising one child.

ALL PARTICIPANTS WERE LONE MOTHERS



53% IDENTIFIED AS INDIGENOUS, BLACK, OR OTHER RACIALIZED GROUPS



31%

Chinese, South Asian, West Asian, Pacific Islander, Latin American



14%

Identified as Black



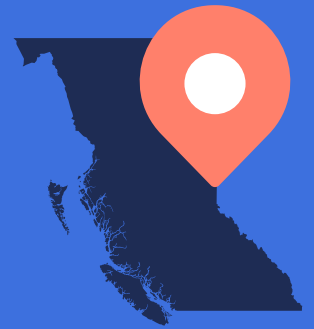
8%

Identified as Indigenous



RACIAL IDENTITY

Over half (53%) of the study participants identified as Indigenous, Black, or belonging to other racialized groups. From within this group, 8% identified as Indigenous and 14% as Black. Thirty-one percent of participants identified either as Chinese, South Asian, West Asian, Pacific Islander, or Latin American. A total of 47% of participants identified as white.

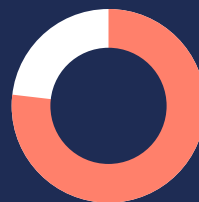


LOCATION

Participants were located throughout BC, with 78% distributed through the Lower Mainland, 14% in the Interior region, and 7% of participants in the Vancouver Island region.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Nearly two-thirds, or 63%, of total participants earned less than \$30,000 per year. Overall, 69% of participants had household incomes below the Market Basket Measure (MBM)⁴³ for their region based on their family size, with the remaining 31% living above the MBM. It is important to note that those with incomes above the MBM were still relatively low and these participants still self-identified as 'low income' due to their living circumstances and daily struggles.



63%

of participants earned less than \$30,000 per year



69%

of participants had household incomes below the Market Basket Measure

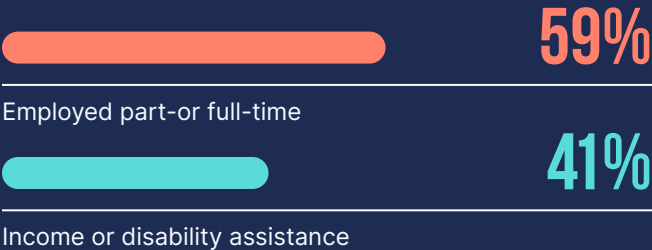
EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Of the participants accessing \$10-a-day centre spaces, 59% were employed full-time or part-time. Forty-one percent of those accessing \$10-a-day spaces were accessing provincial income assistance, some cited earning additional income through gig or casual work, self-employment, or being in school full-or part-time. Among the group of participants who were accessing assistance, most of them, 71%, were accessing income assistance, while 29% were accessing disability assistance.

Among the participants who were not accessing \$10-a-day centre spaces, 30% were employed full-time or part-time. The remaining 70% were accessing assistance, and some reported that they engaged in part-time work, gig work, or personal employment to earn additional income. Out of those accessing assistance in this group, 55% were accessing income assistance, and the remaining 45% were accessing disability assistance.



ACCESSING \$10-A-DAY CHILD CARE



NOT ACCESSING \$10-A-DAY CHILD CARE



STUDY LIMITATIONS

Making Mothers Matter experienced challenges locating our specific target demographic of low-income, lone mothers with one or more children under six accessing \$10-a-day child care spaces in BC. While we were able to conduct enough interviews to thoroughly capture and illustrate the health and well-being impacts of \$10-a-day spaces on low-income lone mothers’ lives, we also adapted in response to this challenge. We pivoted to gather data from those within the same demographic who were accessing non-\$10-a-day spaces. Based on 30 interviews with low-income, lone mothers in BC, we suggest that we have strong and robust data that strongly supports our recommendations; however, this is a small sample and hence generalizations from these data must necessarily be limited. As discussed in our findings, our data do point strongly to several issues that call for the immediate and focused attention of policymakers in BC.

Two out of seven peer researchers were Indigenous and informed the project regarding engagement with Indigenous community members and the impact of accessible child care for off-reserve Indigenous lone mothers. However, *Making Mothers Matter* did not specifically capture the needs of Indigenous lone mothers accessing \$10-a-Day centres and the extent to which these centres were meeting their cultural needs. Due to the outreach efforts of our Indigenous peer researchers, 8% of our total participants were Indigenous and we were grateful to capture their experiences in this study. However, *Making Mothers Matter* could only illustrate the unique challenges experienced by Indigenous lone mother participants to the extent that our general questions from a non-Indigenous context would allow.

FINDINGS



Making Mothers Matter data demonstrates two critical issues. First, there continues to be a significant shortfall in child care spaces to meet existing needs. A recent report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives maps child care ‘deserts’ in Canada,

”

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HANNAH

revealing that almost two of three BC children not yet attending Kindergarten live in child-care ‘deserts’, which are defined as more than three pre-school aged children for every one full-time licensed child-care space.⁴⁴ Perhaps more alarming are data revealing the deep ways in which inequality in access is exacerbated by an incomplete system that serves the lucky few rather than the deserving many.

A persistent challenge throughout all four of our thematic findings is this trend we call the ‘hectic scramble’. This descriptor captures low-income, lone mothers’ experiences as they try to sustain and support their families while experiencing multiple barriers and challenges. The ‘hectic scramble’ impacts all aspects of their lives as workers and parents, the quality of their family life, and the health and well-being of themselves and their children. We begin with a discussion of the economic impacts of affordable child care.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS



\$10-a-day child care access had a multifaceted impact on economic outcomes for research participants. It impacted the quality of their working lives and their family life and had a significant impact on their incomes and economic outcomes.

For some, \$10-a-day access decreased their reliance on debilitating and time-consuming extra gig work and increased their ability to engage with quality, less-precarious work. Data revealed some mother's shift to quality, full-time employment. Others cited the value of funds to put towards key expenses, such as after-school activities for their children. Lone mothers who were not able to access publicly funded \$10-a-day spaces did not fare as well, with many of them left struggling to pay for child care despite fee reductions and unable to shift to more sustainable and family-supporting wages, incomes, and working situations. Two major findings emerged: a reduction in precarious work and an increased uptake of quality employment.

PRECARIOUS WORK

Participants juggled multiple jobs in the form of extra shifts and side jobs to be able to pay for child care, resulting in the overall effect of 'time poverty'. 'Time poverty' describes a situation wherein most of one's hours go towards working and chores related to surviving, such as accessing food banks and filling in forms for subsidies, with little time left for anything else.

Making Mothers Matter did not set out to scrutinize whether \$10-a-day child care was able to vault mothers entrenched in deep levels of poverty quickly out of poverty. Rather, we captured a portrait of a demographic in transition to better economic opportunities and outcomes with improved health and well-being,

due to the diverse impacts that publicly funded child care had on their lives. This transition takes time, and the nuanced impact of how child care impacted their working lives is crucial to understand.

The majority of participants accessing a \$10-a-day spot reported no longer working extra shifts or precarious side jobs to pay for child care. Hannah shared, "I don't have to work triple overtime or pick up the side gigs anymore to try to pay for the care...and it has lowered my stress levels a lot." Rose described shifting to full time work; "I'm super grateful I can still work full time and have my daughter in daycare and work seven hours a day." Another participant, Malia, noted, "I do two jobs now and my daycare is paid for rather than having to do like eight jobs. And I'm able to pick her up...because I'm not having to work so hard to make ends meet."

The ability to stop juggling 'extra' precarious work had an impact on their ability to take care of their families. Participants' stress was reduced and more time was available for quality parenting. A key observation frequently made was the significance of being *present* instead of working multiple jobs and scrambling to keep everything together. Aylin shared the cascade effect of stress reduction passed on to her child:



The fact that I've been able to work part time allows me time as a single mum to do all the household things too, and a little bit of self-care in there as well. And I just feel so fortunate. I think it's contributing to my mental health, of course, which in effect is contributing to my daughter's well-being and her upbringing. So, it's huge.

AYLIN

Darya, who is a recent newcomer to Canada, shared how \$10-a-day child care access enabled her with time to network towards employment and learn English — two crucial activities for a newcomer lone mother. As she stated:



My [mind] is free to try to find my next job. During this time...I have enough time to participate in different workshops and do a lot of volunteering jobs in different organizations because of my network. Through this volunteering, I could learn a little bit of English, and I find some friends.

DARYA

QUALITY EMPLOYMENT

For participants accessing income assistance, those who were unemployed or working part time because of a lack of child care, \$10-a-day access allowed them to leave income assistance or precarious work to achieve more secure, full-time employment. One mother spoke about the value of being able to make this change, which impacted her income, self-esteem, and sense of agency. “I really value having my own identity, not just as a mother, because I really enjoy working and child care allows me to work full time.”

Participants identified reduced stress and increases in self-esteem as they achieved more *stable* work or shifted off income assistance. Access to publicly funded \$10-a-day child care did not necessarily vault them into higher-waged careers but made their existing work in lower-waged sectors feasible. Without access to \$10-a-day child care, participants explained that their jobs were not economically sustainable. Even if they were able to attain full-time work, their incomes would not have allowed them to afford the child care they needed. Abigail described her life working a full-time, lower-wage job before and after attaining a \$10-a-day space:



My job, it's not a high income. I work in retail. So, I could never have afforded full-time child care because that would almost be the amount that I make a month working...So that's why I was planning to do part-time before I was given the option to enroll him full-time because of the \$10-a day

opportunity. I consider myself fortunate to get a \$10-a-day space because I didn't even know about it.

ABIGAIL

Malia revealed the emotional impacts of being able to shift away from a reliance on government subsidies and income that previously lowered her self-esteem.



It just makes me feel better as a mom and as a single parent with one income to be able to afford to pay my own bills and not have to rely on the government subsidies. Being able to afford to pay my own bills is a really big deal because I've been in this system on income assistance for so long and now that I'm going back into the workforce that pride really builds up your self-esteem...Having to stress about paying \$1,200 for child care or putting food on my table — that's not even a worry anymore.

MALIA

Abigail described how her relationship with work changed after accessing a \$10-a-day space, now defined by deeper intrinsic motivation to support herself and her family rather than feeling debilitated by the prospect of just toiling to afford child care.



By having the \$10-a-day, as a single mom, you're more likely to want to work, just to better yourself. Because now I feel like if I was working in a full-time job paying regular price, not \$10-a-day, I'd feel like why I am working, because all the money is gone to child care. So being a single mom and having access to \$10-a-day, I feel like 'I'm making my own money. I'm kind of separating myself from my child, I have my own life, I have my own sanity'...So that's one good thing mentally...you are no longer stress[ed] about work...I'm happier. I'm creating a social network for myself. So, it's really a good thing for me.

ABIGAIL

Salient data from *Making Mothers Matter* points to the need for more investigation into the impact of \$10-a-day child care space access specifically on those accessing income and disability assistance in BC. We find it telling that within our two groups of participants, 41% of those with children in \$10-a-day spaces were accessing income and disability assistance at the time we collected data. This is in stark contrast to the fact that, within the group unable to access \$10-a-day child care, a whopping 70% were accessing income or disability assistance during data collection.

Those on disability assistance need support to maximize their earnings exemption allowance with stable, quality employment that meets their unique needs — which is best achieved with access to publicly funded \$10-a-day child care. For those on ‘temporary’ income assistance in the ‘expected to work’ categories, as well as those in disability assistance, our data reveals that a non-\$10-a-day spot appears to leave them still in the lurch of the ‘hectic scramble’ and striving to attain the desired training, education, and/or labour market inclusion with quality work to support their families.

FEE REDUCTIONS NOT ENOUGH

Participants who were in the labour market and accessing a non-\$10-a-day space and fee reductions did not fare so well. Many were still not able to afford child care costs even while working a full-time job. They took additional shifts and other side jobs that worked with their caring responsibilities in order to afford child care. The ‘hectic scramble’ set in when they shared that they must access an array of support services just to survive, in addition to working and parenting. Claire, accessing a non-\$10-a-day space, articulated her frustrations:



It's not ideal because it costs a lot of money. Right now, half of my paycheck goes to child care, and the other half goes to my rent. So that's why I'm accessing all those other services right now just to arrive at the end of the month and be able to pay for all my bills, rent and food and all those things. But again, not taking a job would have been worse, because I would have had no income.

CLAIRE

Many participants have been raising their families in poverty without access to child care for some time. For some without a \$10-a-day space, their awareness of how much better life would be if they could access a \$10-a-day space was clear. Awareness that a better option existed but was out of reach to them was a stark reminder of inequality.

Riley noted that the opportunity to work less and keep more funds in her pocket would have an enormous impact on her family. She shared that a \$10-a-day spot “would certainly free up a lot of income for other things. And I will not have to penny-pinch and make sure that our meals cost \$2 per meal. It means I just wouldn’t have to work so hard to make ends meet and probably just stress less.”

Jade shared how she struggles to pay for child care even with the subsidies: “I think my biggest challenge is just the financial part that I am paying that is not covered by the subsidy.”

While we recognize the importance of the fee reductions that have been put in place, as Riley, Claire, and others so powerfully note, they are not enough. And their inadequacy is made more poignant in the presence of the \$10-a-day spots.

Access to a universal child care spot meant a significant reduction in the precarity of many participants’ working lives and a reduction in their uptake of precarious, extra gig-based work to ‘make ends meet’. Getting relief from the burden of child care costs and the ability to access fully publicly funded spaces to enable work is what participants who were not able to access \$10-a-day spaces hoped to experience.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Making Mothers Matter explored how quality universal child care impacts the health and overall well-being of low-income, lone mothers. Participants described the multidimensional impact that child care access has on their daily lives and their physical and mental health. The following section highlights the common themes that emerged regarding health and well-being. We will discuss the impact of \$10-a-day child care on their overall stress reduction, an increase in social connectedness and sense of community belonging. We will also discuss a shift to positive parenting replacing stress-based toxic parenting, and the chance for mothers living with long term health and illness to meet their physical and mental health care needs while their children thrived in quality care.

STRESS REDUCTION

Research has illustrated the lifelong impacts of toxic stress in parenting, and parental stress and depression in general.⁴⁵ Participants shared that they previously struggled to balance their needs amidst the time-presures of raising children given their solo parenting roles with their stress levels hugely impacted by their poverty. They described utilizing child care as a tool to manage both their physical and mental health, stress, and general well-being. While the complex burdens of life below the poverty line did not magically disappear, child care was a major stress reduction aid with positive impacts for themselves and their families.

Due to the prohibitive cost of child care across the province, participants who paid for standard child care with fee reductions still reported child care costs as a

significant source of stress, despite the subsidies. This was illustrated by Luna when she spoke about what her life might look like should she be able to access a \$10-a-day space: “I would have enough money to pay rent and to eat food and to go out occasionally with my son...I could get things that he would need without having to struggle too much and worry about daycare costs.”

\$10-a-day care access significantly eased the stress of having to pay for child care on top of all other expenses. For participants who worked precariously with the stress of uncertain income combined with fixed expenses, a publicly funded child care space significantly reduced their stress levels.

Another huge stressor lone mothers reported is loss of income due to unforeseen circumstances such as injury or illness, which might leave them unable to pay for child care and other bills. Participant Abigail articulated the stress of such uncertainty:



...As for my mental state, I feel it's a good thing. I feel like it's less stressful. I don't have to feel like how am I going to pay if it was \$400 or \$500? What if I'm not working this week? What if I didn't make my paycheck if I was off for two weeks due to sickness? That's the one thing that I was worried about. So, it kind of relieves the stress and pressure from that.

ABIGAIL

Participants shared the diverse ways affordable child care affects their stress levels. Ling noted, “it takes off mental and physical stress a little bit while you’re either at work or just taking a couple hours to yourself, at least.” The ability to access self-care was raised by many participants as an integral part of the positive impact of universal child care. As lone mothers, many of the participants raise their children with little to no support and thus find it difficult to find the time to tend to their own health and well-being. Daily activities, such as getting some exercise, can be hard for lone mothers as they battle time poverty. For most participants, the \$10-a-day child care space they attained allowed them much-needed space and time to focus on themselves. We know that such self-care leads to reductions in daily stress that have a significant and deleterious impact on long-term wellness. The public and social costs of these impacts must thus be balanced against the costs of these policy provisions that ameliorate negative health conditions.

The ability to work reasonable hours and earn a living, as well as the opportunity to work towards better-waged and stable employment and education created an atmosphere of hope in participants’ lives. Eva described this impact as the “freedom to move around,” citing that “self-care for me meant feeling supported and feeling free with at least [some] certain time of my life. That freedom that I can move around and make plans was the biggest self-care for me, but I got child care after I [had already] lost a lot of things.”



MOTHERS LIVING WITH DISABILITIES AND ILLNESS

Participants living with chronic illness, short-term illness, and long-term disabilities shared that \$10-a-day spaces were crucial to enabling them to access the health care they required. Child care allowed them the time they needed to attend medical appointments and treatment. Naomi, who lives with chronic illness, shared her experience of struggling to find child care:



It was hard to get anywhere because I needed my rest and sleep, and I had a lot of appointments to go to every time. Because child care was not available, I didn’t get to go to all my appointments because you can’t take a child into an HIV clinic...Once I got child care it helped me so much to a point where my health has gotten a little better from it. I got the rest and the medical treatment I needed. If I didn’t have [child care], I would have not even been able to have my medical treatment.

NAOMI

Catalina, a participant undergoing cancer treatment, described the impact of having both her children in \$10-a-day spaces. While time with her children was the priority, child care was instrumental in assisting her to balance quality time with her children while accessing her medical treatment. She shared, “I have stage four cancer...The child care definitely helps because otherwise I just won’t be able to do anything.” Similarly, Mia shared that “when the kids are in child care, I’m able to go to my doctor’s appointment and do any of my medical stuff that I need to do to make sure I’m on my medication. I go for a walk and do things for myself. So, I always book appointments while they’re in child care.”

Making Mothers Matter data illustrates the complex and multifaceted way that child care enables low-income, lone mothers to thrive and access existing health and support systems they would have struggled to access otherwise. In this case, the impact of child care on the health and well-being of chronically ill lone mothers is both an access and time issue. One cannot experience the benefits of medical care unless they can access it; for these mothers, child care was the ticket to accessing the crucial treatment they needed to survive and thrive.

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

In Canada, over 1 in 10 people feel lonely always or most of the time.⁴⁶ Studies have shown that there is a two-way link between poverty and social isolation.⁴⁷ Participants described lone motherhood below the poverty line as an isolating experience that is often worsened by the struggle to survive. Many shared that they lack social connections and family networks and find it challenging to carve out the time to forge and maintain social connections or, on the other hand, experience the toll of having to rely on existing networks without other available supports. Eva spoke of this reality as follows:

“ *Actual relationships lose their meaning when you have expectations. It just makes your life whole – having child care.... Before, I was so embarrassed to ask friends to look after my son and people who were friends with me knew that I might need child care, but I had to [ask] sometimes.*

EVA

Access to universal child care had a distinctly positive and profound impact on participants' social inclusion, sense of belonging, and connectedness. One primary impact was the opportunity to benefit from being a part of the community around their \$10-a-Day ChildCare BC centre including centre staff. The centres were cited as an important means through which participants were able to build social connections and interact with others in a more meaningful way, rooted in the caring communities around them. Participants appreciated the community networks around the centres that share information and provide resources in emergencies. This sentiment was expressed by Jane:

“ *Well, the child care has definitely made things less stressful. It made me able to take the time to work and get help from other people. I feel like it made a huge difference because I don't have family or anything here. So, it made me feel like I had network like a community of people that are able to help me.*

JANE

Child care access also enabled many participants to increase their inclusion and expand their social networks by freeing up social time they previously did not have. Hannah shared that the reduction in the amount of overtime and extra work she had to complete enabled her to connect socially in her neighbourhood.

“ *I don't have to work 16 hours a day, which is kind of nice. So, I get to be home with my kids and see my neighbors and go to the barbecues and do all that kind of stuff. And see adults in a non-work capacity, which is always a treat when you're a single mom, right? Because you always talk with kids 24/7, so that's been good. I think that's been mostly the social side [that has had an impact].*

HANNAH



THRIVING AS PARENTS

Making Mothers Matter data illustrates the significant positive impact of universal child care on the parenting of low-income, lone mothers in BC. The impact of child care access on lone mothers' parenting was multi-faceted; reduction in stress levels, time gained to spend quality time with their children, reduced economic pressure, and time for self-care all enabled them



[CHILD CARE] MAKES US HAVE MUCH HIGHER QUALITY TIME TOGETHER AND THIS IS ACTUALLY A VERY, VERY, VERY IMPORTANT THING...WHEN THEY COME HOME, WE CAN PLAY OR BATH OR WHATEVER. AND I DON'T HAVE TO DO MULTIPLE THINGS AT A TIME. I CAN FOCUS MY ATTENTION ON THE KIDS WITHOUT HAVING TO HAVE FIVE OTHER THINGS TO DO.

CATALINA

to 'show up' differently and, in their words, in a much *better* way than before. Participants described being less 'irritable' and less 'impatient' with their children, leading to calmer, lighter, and happier homes.

Jane became a less stressed-out parent with a reduction in her 'hectic scramble'; "even though I work full time, it gives me a break. I can have time to run to the grocery store...to pick up something. So, it gives me extra time and I have time to myself as well. So, it makes me a less stressed-out parent for sure." Another participant, Emily, noted that, "[child care] allows me to bring my best parenting game to the table when my son is with me."

Another mother, Aylin, achieved connectivity with her daughter that she did not have before:



In my case I'm the only financial provider for my daughter, so I still have financial constraints. But just taking some of that away and giving space for a bit more lightness and connection with myself and my daughter – that's what it's ultimately 100% done. It's given me space to be more grounded and more present.

AYLIN



Because [child care] removes so much stress, it really makes me less irritable and less impatient with them. So, I can spend more time with the kids without me feeling so stressed. And so that's why I think the whole house is a lot more relaxed now. I don't have to work so much, and I can sit and spend time with them. Whereas previously, I barely got to see them because I was just trying to work to pay the bills...now I can spend weekends with them...and go see their activities and be there for them.

HANNAH

IMPACT OF QUALITY CARE ON THEIR CHILDREN



Participants shared their perception of the high quality of care provided by \$10-a-day child care centres and the very positive impact it had on their children's social-emotional and overall development. They felt that securing spaces in centres they perceived and experienced as high quality allowed their children to socialize and learn skills that helped in their development. They highlighted improvements in their children's communication skills, development of routines, and overall well-being. In a salient example, Emily shared:



I think I've become so grateful since having child care, in general, and towards this centre, specifically in terms of recognizing that other people are raising your kid with you, which is very different than the way that I thought of it...Even like really logistical things like learning toilet training, how to be kind to other people, how to be creative, and all these amazing things. So, I think the fact that he's really nourished and enriched by his experience there means that he comes to me from that place too when I pick him up.

EMILY

Luna spoke about the value of deeply trusting her child care centre and having a happy, beaming child return to her at the end of each day.



I feel like I can put my trust in the daycare and everyone who works there...When I go pick him up, he is always smiling and when I drop him off, he is always smiling. He always really enjoys his time there. So, I feel it's fulfilling to see how happy he is.

LUNA

We know that the hazards of unlicensed care are many, and quality and nurturing child care yields critical impacts for parents and children but it also yields broader societal benefits as children have new experiences, build new relationships, and see positive modelling from other adults — all of which contribute to their healthy development.

CHALLENGES IN 2023: OUR INCOMPLETE SYSTEM



Making Mothers Matter data reveals challenges arising from BC's incomplete \$10-a-day network of child care spaces. Although we currently have fully publicly funded spaces across the province, we have no system to ensure equitable access and appropriate availability of spaces based on need. The very women most in need of spaces — marginalized, low-income, lone mothers — are too often those who lack such access. The recurring theme introduced earlier in the report, the 'hectic scramble', comes into play here. When there is a lack of spaces, exorbitant waitlist fees function as an access barrier, and with the uneven availability and affordability of spaces, securing a \$10-a-day space takes time, resourcefulness, and energy — all in short supply in the families under discussion here. Participants reported a lack of transparency and experiences of unfair selection across the province.

We will also address a lack of appropriate care options for special needs children and issues related to location, hours of operation, high staff turnover, and waitlist fees. These issues combine to erode the tremendous gains at least partially being made in rolling out publicly funded \$10-a-day child care for BC. This long-overdue public policy, which is an enormous achievement, needs some critical revision and significant expansion to truly make it a system that works for those who need it most.

While we cannot draw a clear conclusion about the exact numbers of low-income, lone mothers who have access to spaces in \$10-a-day centres, our recruitment struggles point to a problem. Some centres reached out to inform us that they did not have any low-income,

lone mothers accessing their centres. We know that identifying and reaching out to the lone mothers in their centres takes time and is an extra demand for already overburdened staff. This is likely an additional factor, but we also know that in the many centres we contacted with \$10-a-day spaces, it was reported to us that those spaces tended to go to families other than those of our focus here. It is important to acknowledge that these other families also needed the spots; however, it is a continual social policy challenge to ensure that social benefits are equitably disbursed and there are many examples of those with greater privilege being more able and adept at accessing them.

It is imperative that we consider the barriers that our target demographic faces to access *any* child care spaces at all, let alone coveted \$10-a-day spaces. Low-income, lone mothers face a complex set of intersecting marginalized identities as they may be newcomers, racialized, Indigenous, and often living with the lifelong impact of gender-based and intimate partner violence.

LACK OF SPACES TO MEET EXISTING NEED

The availability of *any* child care space was identified as a significant barrier by participants, limiting all the positive outcomes our research has demonstrated. Participants who accessed \$10 a Day ChildCareBC centres felt "lucky". For others, securing a \$10-a-day space was impossible; unable to secure the child care they needed, some settled for inadequate care settings. Participants had to sign up for several child care sites in hopes of getting a space at one of them.

Even though participants registered several months in advance, most were not able to get into child care when they needed it. Riley summarized her experience: “I contacted 103 daycares when I was five months pregnant, and I got into one. I live in Vancouver. I only got into one daycare, and it wasn’t even in Vancouver.”

Due to the lack of spaces, participants not accessing \$10-a-day spaces were forced to compromise on crucial factors that they would have considered in choosing child care arrangements. As Hannah noted, “I would love to have options and think about what I want in a daycare, but what I really wanted from a daycare was a spot in a daycare.” Participants described the process of finding child care spots as “demoralizing.” Hannah compared the process to a competitive “hunger game” scenario where parents and caregivers must hunt fiercely to secure a child care spot while competing with other families in need.



It’s one of the most stressful things to have to contend with finding a spot, and then finding a spot you can afford, and then finding a spot that you can get to work from...So, it’s affecting your mental health because it’s hard to focus on anything else when you have to focus on that...just to make everything else work.

HANNAH

The lack of available spaces limited their choices, including where they live and work. Some participants had to settle with part time care or get their children into two child care centres to access full time care. This led to participants reducing their hours of work and earnings. Some participants were forced to relocate to a neighbourhood or city where they were lucky enough to secure a child care space, while others felt forced to stay in homes or locations that were inadequate because they couldn’t afford to leave their nearby child care space. Echoing the sentiment shared by several participants, Catalina described her experience with the lack of available spaces as follows:



I think the greatest barrier is hands down availability. It took us three years to get child care and I’m here, and I’m not moving...I have child care. If it were easy to get into a child care center, I wouldn’t be

so constrained. I could find an apartment where we won’t be living on top of each other. My kids share a den now and they’re not going to be able to share it forever...Even if they may not need full time care, if I leave, after school care will still be a thing. And I can’t just up and go to a different school where I don’t have after school care. So, availability is the biggest barrier.

CATALINA

While *Making Mothers Matter* focused primarily on child care for children under six, Catalina and other participants frequently brought up lack of access to before- and after-school care for their older children — and as their young children age into kindergarten — as another key child care barrier hindering their ability to work and thrive.

Even though finding child care spaces was challenging across all regions where participants are located, participants living in small towns were more significantly impacted. In locales with only two or three child care centres, participants described being forced to settle for any type of child care, including unlicensed child care spaces with less accountability and no fee reductions. Jane described her hard choice: “there were some things that I thought were ‘iffy’ but that was the only one I could find at that time.”

The risk of putting kids in inadequate care out of desperation was a big concern for participants. Riley had an experience with unlicensed child care and shared her concerns: “I think it’s just so easy to take a spot and put your kid in danger with someone who is not qualified or trained because you’re so desperate for care, because you have to go back to work, because you need an income.”

In addition to a general dearth of spaces, the uneven affordability and uneven availability of spaces presented a challenge for families with more than one child in need of child care. For those with one child in a \$10-a-day site with no other spots available, the only option was to enroll their other child or children in a non-\$10-a-day spot and face an increase in cost and the challenge of having to drop off and pick up at multiple daycare centres. An uneven system wedged participants into paying fees for one child and not the other and running around to multiple child care centres

for drop-offs and pick-ups in that ‘hectic scramble’, effectively cancelling the benefits of a \$10-a-day space for their family.

Ultimately, participants who are not able to access \$10-a-day spaces questioned who is getting the coveted and rare spots; they believe that the \$10-a-day system should be purposefully leveraged to help low-income families like theirs. Sophia shared her doubts about how equitable the new system is for families for whom child care is a “survival thing.”

“ I think all families would need the cheaper child care...but I think for some families like mine it is a survival thing. And I know there are wealthy families that are accessing \$10-a-day spots in town. I wonder what kind of process or system could be put in place so that the most vulnerable families can access it. It just goes so much on a ‘first come first serve’ basis and connection that I feel like we might be missing some families. ”

SOPHIA

Our data illustrates BC’s limited network of \$10-a-day spaces may be reinforcing access barriers through the lack of a purposeful equity approach to ensure the inclusion of barriered families.

WAITLISTS AND FEES

Due to the lack of adequate spaces, long waitlists are a debilitating aspect of the search for child care. Malia shared, “so, if you’re going to have a baby, you basically have to plan for child care the minute you conceive or you’re never going to get a spot and you are never going to get back to work.” Malia expressed a similar experience: “I put my name on the waitlist when I was 20 weeks pregnant, and she didn’t get into day-care until she was 32 months.”

Participants had to apply to several child care centres to get into one. Participants share that they often lost count of the number of centres they applied to. Riley positioned herself on 35 waitlists. A similar experience was shared by Catalina: “I just got the list from the west coast child care resource people, and I just applied to everything...I applied to everything that was walking distance or biking.”

Most families must pay a registration fee to get on a waitlist. The fees reportedly ranged from \$25 to \$60, according to the participants’ experiences. All participants shared that they did not hear back from most of the child care centres that they applied to. As Hannah described,

“ It is usually \$25 or \$50. But it adds up because you can’t just be on one list because they’re probably not going to call you. I spent I think \$600 on that. And I heard back from one of them five months after I needed it. ”

HANNAH

Similarly, Lilian shared her experience signing up to get a child care spot for her children:

“ I’ve had to pay the registration fee. Back then that it was like \$50 or \$75 and some of them are getting up to like \$200 and it’s non-refundable, and it’s for emergency, like an earthquake fee, it’s fine and dandy, but how does a single mom on income assistance pay a \$200 registration fee and not get it back? Nobody offers support for paying that. ”

LILIAN

Low-income, lone mothers without the means to pay registration fees are effectively locked out of the system. When a child care centre transforms into a \$10 a Day ChildCareBC centre, some centre staff and directors informed our research team that they continue to work with existing waitlists, thus prioritizing those who had the means to access the waitlist in the first place.

Another issue is children’s graduation to higher-aged care settings within \$10-a-day centres. Participants accessing a toddler space faced significant insecurity and anxiety as to whether they will get a spot for that child in the 3- to 5-year-old care setting. Participants had to remain on a waiting list to secure a spot for their child or children in the same child care centre. As Hannah stated, “going up to the next level just depends on if there’s a spot or not. And you might have to switch daycares.” This issue also impacts mothers with multiple children.



The waitlists are crazy at the daycare that he's in right now. They do all the way through after-school care, but you don't get guaranteed spots. So, there's no guarantee that my youngest would get in for the three to five...but I can't take a spot because you might get that other spot. You just have to start panicking about it now or you're never going to get in anywhere and then what do you do? So that's been kind of tricky.

HANNAH

UNFAIR SELECTION

Participants shared that most child care centres don't get back to families about the status of their applications, whether they charged a registration fee or not. Our data revealed that lack of transparency in the child care waitlist system creates a significant barrier to accessing child care across the province. This situation leaves families with little to no information about the process at each centre, and little continuity between \$10 a Day ChildCareBC centres in any given region, let alone across the province.

Some participants shared that due to the lack of transparency, they fear that spaces are offered to those who have connections rather than through a fair process. A participant noted that "I was on a waitlist after a waitlist. And there's a political thing that's going on where other people are getting in based on who they know and what they know."

Confirming the fear that some had, a few participants confirmed that they were able to get a child care spot and bypass the waitlist through their personal connections. Halia confirmed this worked for her: "my friend knows the owner of the child care centre, so I got in quick. The connection through my friend is how I got in within a few weeks."

For most participants, navigating the overall child care waitlist system was described as "draining" and "demanding." In addition to having the funds to pay for registration fees, families must also be resourceful and tech-savvy to get on waitlists and continually follow up to get into the limited spaces available. As participants consistently described, living in poverty and lacking the time and connections to conduct regular

follow-ups or submit multiple forms was a huge barrier. With no information regarding how a waitlist was managed, participants felt left out of child care without the time to 'advocate' as much as other parents and caregivers. Emily shared how she reluctantly played the game required to win a spot.



I had to harass the daycare like monthly, it's a weird system where it's like the 'squeaky wheel gets the grease,' because there are just so many people on this waitlist. But the waitlist really functions as this sort of holding place. And then really, it's the parents who are like following up constantly, and being in touch with the daycare, and getting connections in other ways. That's how we got in. It's not that they're calling you when your name comes up.

EMILY

CAPACITY FOR SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

Participants raising children with special needs spoke about their challenges finding and securing appropriate care for their children at all. Ella, mother of a special needs daughter, said that "most of the child care places do not accommodate any kids who have special needs. It's very hard to look for child care that would be willing to put work to be around your kid." Another participant shared, "my daycare journey has been heart-breaking because every time I hear something and I'm excited, I get there and somehow, we require a little more assistance than what they have to offer. And so, because she cannot feed herself, because she cannot be alone by herself...they say 'we don't have support now.'" Due to these and other experiences, participants pointed to the significant investment and focus required to ensure special needs children have access to the available quality care they need within the \$10-a-day system.

LOCATION AND HOURS OF OPERATION

Location was consistently identified as one of the main factors that participants considered when looking for child care spaces for their children. However, the location was one of the preferences that participants compromised on to secure a space. Due to a lack of available spaces, participants put their names

on several waiting lists far from where they live and work and often ended up spending hours commuting to access these centres. In addition to the time spent, the cost of commuting financially burdens participants. Discussing her experiences, Naomi shared, “the location was the worst thing. I had to spend a lot to get from one place to another. Because she went to two child care sites that had different hours for one, I had to pick her up around 3:30, while for the other, she can stay until 6 p.m.”

Finding child care within walking distance, a bike ride, short transit trip, or a feasible drive away greatly impacts the child care experiences of participants. For working lone mothers who must conduct drop-off and pick-up on their own, the proximity of the child care centres they access impacts their hours of work, stress levels, time with their children, and ability to thrive.

Lone-mother research participants shared that child care hours are based on largely 8 am to 5 pm working schedules that do not fit for members of the workforce that perform shift work or work non-standard hours. Many participants perform non-standard work hours and gig work, which leaves them unable to find care that matches their work schedule. Even for those who have jobs that fit within an 8 am to 5 pm period, the drop-off and pick-up times are often too late and early, respectively, to provide enough time for them to make it to work. Hannah reported, “my son’s daycare opens at 7:45. So I have to be there waiting to throw him into the daycare to turn around and run back to work for 8 am.” Similarly, Lilian emphasized the need for extended child care hours:

“***I also think that they should have facilities that are open 24 hours, because there’s a lot of families that have shift workers. ...[If] they could regulate time so that it is open to a lot of different people’s work, not just Monday to Friday, 8 to 5 [type of] jobs – not very many people have those.***

LILIAN

Additional time restrictions, such as short drop-off and pick-up windows were also identified as issues. Rose, a participant accessing a \$10-a-day space, commented, “it’s a pretty narrow window. So, it means my

life is very, very scheduled. I have 15 minutes to drop her off. It’s pretty tight and doesn’t allow for me to pick up groceries, coffee, or even get gas.”

HIGH STAFF TURNOVER

Making Mothers Matter participants felt that high staff turnover negatively impacted the quality of care their children received. Many participants noted that their children found it difficult to adjust to frequent staff changes. Catalina shared that her child care centre had seen quite frequent staff turnover, which was “very stressful” for her daughter who formed attachments to the educators. Catalina described the impact of frequent staff changes on her young son.

“***I could hear him screaming two floors down in the elevator when he was assigned to a different child care worker. Then they finally got another lady...and she bonded with him, and it was great. Then the new one left within a few months!***

CATALINA

There was a common recognition by participants that these conditions are structural in nature and related to the working conditions and wages of early childhood educators. Many expressed their wishes for the educators they valued so much to see improvements in their wages and working conditions. Eva shared her frustration with the low wages of child care staff, citing that they are “not paid very well. And I would like that to increase for them because that will attract more people to doing the job.” Overall, recognition of the link between quality jobs and quality care for their children was a clear trend among participants. Maya stressed the importance of quality jobs with wages comparable to other established sectors.

“***I think they need to pay ECE more. I don’t think they’re underpaid because of the program. I think they’re underpaid because it’s a systemic issue. Like the wages, the wages as part of the program are comparable to the wages everywhere else. Undervalued profession!***

MAYA

CONCLUSION

The value of universally accessible, publicly funded child care is too often reduced to the economic impact of women's and parents' increased labour market access and attachment. While the impacts of these economic changes are monumental, our research captured other complex and multidimensional impacts that BC's new \$10 a Day ChildCareBC centre spaces and non-\$10-a-day spaces had on the health and well-being of socioeconomically marginalized mothers raising children under six across BC. However, non-\$10-a-day spaces did not meet their full needs or lead to the extremely beneficial outcomes that the fully publicly funded spaces did.

\$10-a-day child care spaces reduced the 'hectic scramble' of working extra shifts in precarious, unreliable work to pay for child care. It relieved their debilitating financial pressures and the stress of working around the clock with little time for their families or themselves. Participants were able to access better and often full-time jobs with standard working hours, leave income assistance for full-time work, and sometimes attain salaries sufficient for a decent life. These shifts had a cascading effect on their health and well-being. It impacted their ability not only to parent *more* but also to parent *better*, as they had more time to be present with their children and to do so with less stress, thereby improving the quality of their parenting. The value of enabling low-income, lone parents to have better and closer connections with their children must be recognized as a major factor in improving the life outcomes of their children.⁴⁸

Participants described overcoming the debilitating impact of social isolation and finding the time and presence of mind to improve their social connections in their neighbourhoods, connect with friends and family, and plan family activities and outings. The ability to access a full-time or a part-time space, depending on their needs, also impacted their general well-being and mental health. The reduction in time poverty in their lives allowed them time to exercise, rest, get outdoors, attend appointments, obtain needed medical

treatment, and manage the household labour demands of being a lone-parent family.

Participants had high regard for the consistent high-quality care delivered by \$10-a-day centres throughout the province. They credited this care with positive child development, including behavioural improvements, toilet-training progress, improved routines and social skills, and social-emotional development. The relief that their already economically disadvantaged children were receiving safe and quality daily care that aided their development and made parenting easier reduced maternal stress and contributed to an overall increase in well-being for their families.

Despite the extremely positive impact that access to publicly funded \$10-a-day child care space had on the health and well-being of low-income lone mothers and their families, multiple issues and challenges also emerged. The primary issue is the lack of accessible \$10-a-day spaces across the province with only 13,261 spaces in BC at the time of publication of this report and spaces for only 2% of children under 12 across the province.⁴⁹ Other primary challenges in 2023 include waitlists and waitlist fees functioning as a prohibitive barrier to access for those who are low-income, unfair selection for spaces, lack of placement transparency, and uneven affordability and availability of spaces due to a two-tier system with limited \$10-a-day spaces available. The mothers of special needs children shared that a significant lack of capacity for \$10-a-day spaces to provide the quality care required for their children meant they were entirely shut out of accessing these spaces.

Additional challenges cited by low-income, lone mothers included the importance of accessibility regarding location and hours of operation that take into consideration shift work and working conditions outside the '9 to 5' workday. Participants also identified that high staff turnover rates negatively impact the continuity and quality of care. Participants attributed this reality to a larger, structural labour issue in the early childhood education sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Making Mothers Matter data illustrates that the \$10 a Day ChildCareBC network of spaces is a very successful model with enormous potential, establishing child care as a core community service that positively impacts BC's most vulnerable families. However, to achieve the full positive impact, we need a complete system that is built to remove barriers to access. We need a system with adequate spaces to meet existing need and which is defined by fairness, transparency, and equitable access that truly levels the playing field and ensures all families thrive in BC.

WE RESPECTFULLY RECOMMEND THAT THE PROVINCE OF BC:

01

Transition all interested existing programs to \$10-a-day sites and create up to 50,000 fully publicly funded spaces to establish a cohesive child care system in BC.

02

Prioritize the establishment of new \$10 a Day ChildCareBC centres in BC's child care 'deserts'.⁵⁰

03

Implement an Early Childhood Educator wage grid in BC of at least \$30–\$40 per hour, depending on qualifications, experience, and years of employment.⁵¹

04

Implement an equity-based approach to ensure marginalized, low-income families have access to \$10-a-day spaces.

05

Expand the capacity of \$10 a Day ChildCareBC centres to provide quality, accessible care for special needs children.

06

Ban the collection of waitlist and registration fees at all child care centres in BC.

07

Ensure \$10-a-day child care better accommodates shift work and the diverse labour market needs of parents and caregivers.

08

Establish a ChildCareBC Parent Advisory Council comprised of a diversity of parents and caregivers, including those with lived/living experience of low income, to provide ongoing input into the development of the \$10-a-day child care system.

09

Establish public delivery of before- and after-school care using the public school system to address the province-wide shortage of school-age child care spaces.⁵²

WE RESPECTFULLY RECOMMEND THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA:

01

Implement the key recommendations of *Child Care Now* by investing the following over three years starting in 2024:

A

\$10 billion in capital costs to cover costs associated with increasing demand and existing need for child care across the country.

B

Adding \$7 billion in federal transfers to the provinces and territories to support the full implementation of competitive and equitable wage grids, improved benefits, and working conditions for early childhood educators and other staff.⁵³

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We conclude this report with an expression of deep appreciation to the many who made this research possible. Thirty low-income, lone mothers took time to tell their stories and share their experiences — many of which were deeply personal — as they navigated BC's child care arena. Child care centre staff throughout the province, as overburdened as they are, took a keen interest in this research and aided our recruitment efforts. And seven extremely dedicated peer interviewers committed their time and energy and overwhelming passion for supporting equitable and accessible child care to undertake this important research, holding tight to the project throughout the entire COVID-19 pandemic. Many child care advocates, non-profit organizations, and related projects supported *Making Mothers Matter* so generously with their time, thoughtful input, outreach, and research collaborations as project partners. We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the invaluable funders without whom this research would not have taken place. Thank you to the Vancouver Foundation, the primary funder of *Making Mothers Matter*, and the Vancity Community Foundation and the Health Sciences Association for providing core support towards the Centre for Family Equity and the project throughout its duration.



We hope that policy makers may, in acknowledging the above commitments and the child care worries of so many BC residents, also commit to thoughtful and proactive engagement with this report, its findings, and recommendations.

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