

a Childcare Resource and Research Unit publication

occasional paper 30

Child care can't wait till the cows come home: Rural child care in the Canadian context

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Childcare Resource and Research Unit
September 2016



childcarecanada.org

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Occasional Paper No. 30
September 2016
iii, 94 pp.
ISBN: 978-1-896051-64-2

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This Occasional Paper No. 30 is available from the Childcare Resource and Research Unit
in an online format only.

Acknowledgements

The Child Care Fund of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) funded this project under the terms of their collective agreements with Canada Post Corporation. The Child Care Fund is financed by Canada Post and administered by CUPW. It funds resources to support postal workers on child care as well as research to help serve CUPW members and the broader community.

We are most appreciative of the contributions to this report made by provincial/territorial early childhood education and care (ECEC) officials, who provided time and expertise for the provincial scan. The project had the benefit early-on of Jane Wilson's expertise and thoughts about rural child care in context. Many thanks as well to Barry Forer, who provided his valuable advice and time to help us with Statistics Canada demographic data. Thanks, too, to Jane Beach, who collected the provincial information. We are also most appreciative of the time, effort and insights contributed by the rural child care service providers we interviewed at length to develop the case studies.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge the brothers and sisters at the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, especially Sister Jamie Kass and Sister Shellie Bird, for their ongoing support and patience not only with this particular piece of work but for the support that the CUPW has provided in the long, elusive search for a universal child care program to support their members and all Canadians.

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Executive summary

“There’s no reason why children in inner cities or rural areas should not receive the same quality education or opportunities as those in suburbs or wealthy neighborhoods. If we truly believe in giving all citizens a chance to pursue happiness and pursue their goals, then we cannot continue to marginalize entire groups of people.”

— Al Sharpton, controversial US civil rights activist

Canada has been a predominantly non-rural country for almost a century. But although the rural population is now relatively small, there are nevertheless many young families among the 6.3 million Canadians living in rural areas who need and want high quality, affordable early childhood education and child care (ECEC). That many parents in rural communities—like those in towns, suburban areas and cities—need and want child care has been well documented. But in 2016, accessing regulated, affordable, high quality child care is still mostly a matter of luck for Canadian families wherever they live. For rural families, child care opportunities are even more limited. This is, in large part, linked to Canada’s marketized approach to child care. The market model—largely unplanned, primarily financed by parent fees and provided almost entirely by private non-profit and private for-profit service providers—is especially unworkable in rural, remote and northern areas.

Two main rural-specific factors contribute to rural families’ child care challenges: low population density and the prevalence of non-standard hours and seasonal work. Large geographic distances not only make it harder for parents to access child care but it is difficult for service providers to survive financially when serving populations who not only have a variety of schedule and seasonal needs but are spread out over considerable distances. As well, finding and retaining qualified staff – a pressing issue in child care across Canada generally – is significantly harder in rural, remote and northern areas due to financial pressures that keep wages low and to limited career options. These factors conspire to create an unsustainable situation for child care service providers attempting to respond to the needs of rural, remote and northern children and families. As a result, most rural communities have few options for regulated child care. The combination of all these characteristics, coupled with rural-specific child safety issues, adds up to concerns about the lack of child care in rural communities that have persisted for 30 years.

At the present time, there is no up-to-date pulled together information that can inform parents, service providers and policy makers. The purpose of this paper, aimed at a wide range of stakeholders, is to provide a current overview of the state of rural child care and to

stimulate and inform discussion aimed at improving it. It begins with current demographic data about rural family life and its challenges, then presents current information to inform and bring to light what is known about rural child care in today's Canada. This includes: a literature review of research, descriptions and analyses of rural child care to highlight issues facing contemporary rural families and child care programs. It follows this with a scan of provincial/territorial approaches and initiatives pertinent to rural child care, then presents several descriptive case studies of successful rural child care programs across the country and a brief summary of the situation of rural child care beyond our borders. It concludes with a discussion of the possibilities, then puts forward recommendations to the various levels of government and to community stakeholders.

The literature review, provincial/territorial scan and case studies conducted for this report indicate that the state of rural child care in Canada has been largely static since the topic was first considered in the 1980s. Notably, the information confirms that the same structural and funding issues and market-based approach to child care provision continue to limit the development and sustainability of rural child care. Reliance on the private market to set up and maintain child care perpetuates the lack of child care overall but especially for harder-to-serve populations such as those in rural communities. The physical, geographic and employment elements of rural communities usually make the operation of child care even less financially feasible than it is in urban and suburban communities. Limited public funding and heavy reliance on parent fees make it very difficult to develop and maintain rural child care services while keeping them affordable for families and high quality for children.

The literature identifies the reasons that rural families need and want child care: many mothers of young children are employed in rural communities; rural families desire early childhood education and socialization experiences for their children; rural parents have concerns about farm safety for their young children who may be in danger from equipment, animals or chemicals in a farm family's "workplace". At the macro level, provision of child care has been identified as a component of effective rural economic development both in North America and in the European Union.

The Canadian literature and the case studies conducted for this project identify the key factors that present barriers and those that contribute to successful operation of rural child care. In addition to the overall weak Canadian approach to ECEC, rural-specific barriers identified as affecting rural child care include: difficulties finding and retaining qualified staff; absence of suitable physical facilities together with limited capital funding; low en-

rollment—not due to a lack of need but to affordability; fluctuating enrollment; and the lack of base funding as a further barrier to providing ongoing affordable care. The importance of additional or more public funding and governance by an organization with enough critical mass was noted repeatedly, while leadership was identified as a key factor. That is, it takes considerable commitment from people and organizations to continually find new ways to meet the needs of their communities and keep the program operating.

The report concludes by observing that the evidence suggests that what is needed is a broad-based child care strategy that supports the flexible approaches needed to ensure that rural families have the child care options they need and want. Although the report identifies the value of specialized funding and flexibility that can play a role in initiating and sustaining rural child care services, the evidence makes it quite clear that even targeted approaches need to be sustained by the support of a systemic approach to ECEC—a publicly-funded, publicly-managed universal system of high quality early childhood education and child care aimed at meeting the needs of all families and children. A systemic approach to planning and developing affordable, quality services and maintaining them with reliable, adequate funding would have a profound impact on the accessibility and affordability of child care for Canadians living and/or working in rural communities across Canada.

This year, the 2015 federal election renewed possibilities for Canadian child care once again. How rural child care will fare in this environment depends on whether federal/provincial/territorial governments “get the architecture right” when developing the National Framework promised by the now-Government of Canada. As the evidence presented in this paper shows, rural families—like other Canadian families—will benefit most from a planned, publicly-financed child care system that is both evidence-based and flexible enough to meet the needs of all.

Recommendations based on the study

To the federal government

1. Lead in working with provinces/territories/Indigenous communities to develop a comprehensive national ECEC policy framework¹ based on the best evidence leading to access to high quality services for all Canadians including those living in rural communities. This will mean:
 - Moving away from the market-based system that makes it so difficult to develop and sustain child care in rural, remote and Northern Canada;
 - Committing to a plan for long-term sustained federal ECEC funding, transferred to provinces/territories/Indigenous communities that agree to implement comprehensive policy frameworks and plans;
 - Recognizing that Indigenous communities have an immediate need for remedies to long-standing inequities, and that culturally-sensitive ELCC could play a valuable role in truth and reconciliation;
 - Working with provinces/territories/Indigenous communities to establish a research, data and evaluation agenda that includes the issue of child care in rural communities.

To provincial/territorial governments

2. Each province/territory should commit to a plan aimed at meeting rural communities' needs for early childhood education and care. This should include:
 - Reviewing and analyzing its approach to rural child care;
 - Developing ways to identify need and demand for ECEC in rural communities;
 - Developing a policy approach that uses the best available evidence about facilitation and maintenance of accessible, high quality ECEC services in rural communities where there is local need or demand;
 - Developing an approach to providing public funding that recognizes the actual cost of operating accessible high quality child care in rural communities;
 - Developing new approaches to ELCC workforce issues such as low wages, career opportunities and recognition that limit the possibilities for quality services in rural communities;
 - Providing informative materials online and in print for parents about regulated child care services in rural communities.

1 [Shared framework for building an early childhood education and care system for all](#) has been put forward to national and provincial/territorial politicians by the national ECEC community.

To the union

3. Convene a national working group comprised of provincial/territorial/Indigenous community representatives and policy makers, researchers, employers and unions to examine the situation of families living and/or working in rural communities and to make recommendations for a variety of options for better ECEC and workplace support for rural families;
4. With stakeholder partners, develop research and analysis that would be useful in understanding rural child care better and to contribute to moving it forward;
5. Provide support for pilot and other special initiatives in the area of rural child care both to meet the needs of members and to provide illustrations of successful rural child care;
6. Continue to advocate with governments on the issue of access to child care generally and rural child care in particular;
7. Ensure that issues and concerns specific to Indigenous ELCC are recognized by all levels of government with the goal of developing remedies consistent with the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission;
8. Develop, support and provide resources for member parents (such as the Finding Quality Child Care website and other educational resources) to help them understand and address the issue of rural child care.

To parents in rural communities

9. Join with others such as unions, employers, social justice groups, child care advocates and other community partners to advocate for a universal national child care program to meet the needs of all families including those living and/or working in rural communities;
10. Be as well informed about your child care options as you can be, although they may be limited, so as to maximize the possibility of securing suitable, affordable, high quality child care.

To human rights specialists

11. Explore rights-based legal and other remedies to Canada's current child care situation that fails to support rural parents who need and want early childhood education and child care. This work could be supported by such documents as the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Résumé

« Il n’y a aucune raison pour que les enfants des quartiers urbains défavorisés ou des régions rurales ne bénéficient pas des mêmes perspectives d’avenir ou d’une éducation de même qualité que les enfants des banlieues ou des quartiers riches. Si nous avons vraiment à cœur de donner à l’ensemble des citoyennes et citoyens la chance de rechercher le bonheur et de poursuivre leurs objectifs, alors nous ne pouvons pas continuer de marginaliser de larges pans de la population. »

— Al Sharpton, militant américain controversé luttant pour les droits civiques

Depuis près d’une centaine d’année, la majorité de la population canadienne vit en milieu urbain ou suburbain. Mais bien que la population rurale soit maintenant relativement petite (6,3 millions), bon nombre de jeunes familles vivant en milieu rural ont besoin de services d’éducation et de garde à la petite enfance abordables et de qualité. Il a été bien établi que de nombreux parents vivant dans des collectivités rurales veulent des services de garde et en ont besoin, au même titre que les parents qui vivent en ville ou en banlieue. Or, en 2016, l’accès à des services de garde de qualité est encore principalement une question de chance pour la majorité des familles canadiennes, peu importe leur lieu de résidence. Pour les familles en milieu rural, les possibilités en matière de services de garde sont encore plus limitées. Cette situation est en grande partie attribuable au modèle de garde d’enfants axé sur le marché qui est en vigueur au Canada. Conformément à ce modèle, les services de garde ne font pas en général l’objet d’une planification, ils sont financés principalement par les frais payés par les parents et leur prestation est presque entièrement assurée par des entreprises privées à but lucratif ou non lucratif. Un tel modèle est particulièrement inapte à répondre aux besoins des parents dans les régions rurales ou éloignées et dans les collectivités du Nord.

Deux facteurs propres aux régions rurales contribuent aux difficultés des familles rurales à trouver des services de garde répondant à leurs besoins : la faible densité de population et la prévalence des horaires de travail atypiques et du travail saisonnier. En région rurale, il faut souvent parcourir de vastes distances pour obtenir des services, ce qui complique l’accès des parents aux services de garde et fait aussi en sorte qu’il est plus difficile aux fournisseurs de services de survivre sur le plan financier. En effet, non seulement ces derniers servent-ils des populations aux horaires différents et aux besoins qui varient selon les saisons, mais ces populations sont aussi dispersées sur un vaste territoire. De plus, il est beaucoup plus difficile de trouver et de garder du personnel de garde qualifié (un problème

urgent dans le domaine de la garde d'enfants au Canada en général) dans les régions rurales ou éloignées et dans les collectivités du Nord en raison des pressions financières qui maintiennent les salaires à la baisse et limitent les options de carrière. Mis ensemble, ces facteurs créent une situation intenable pour les fournisseurs de services de garde qui essaient de répondre aux besoins des enfants et des familles des régions rurales ou éloignées et des collectivités du Nord. Par conséquent, la majorité des collectivités rurales ont peu d'options en matière de services de garde réglementés. Une combinaison de toutes ces caractéristiques, jumelée à des questions propres aux régions rurales touchant la sécurité des enfants, s'ajoute aux préoccupations relatives au manque de services de garde en milieu rural qui perdurent depuis une trentaine d'années.

À l'heure actuelle, il n'existe aucune compilation de renseignements à jour qui soit en mesure d'informer les parents, les fournisseurs de services et les décideurs. Le présent rapport, destiné à un large éventail d'intervenants, vise à fournir un aperçu de la situation actuelle de la garde d'enfants en milieu rural et à stimuler et à alimenter la discussion sur l'amélioration de la situation. Le rapport présente tout d'abord les données démographiques actuelles sur les familles vivant en milieu rural et sur les défis qu'elles doivent relever. Il présente ensuite des renseignements à jour pour mettre en lumière ce qu'on connaît au sujet des services de garde dans les régions rurales du Canada aujourd'hui. Ces renseignements comprennent notamment : un examen de la recherche effectuée sur la question, des descriptions et des analyses de la garde d'enfants en milieu rural pour mettre l'accent sur les obstacles que doivent surmonter les familles et les programmes de garde d'enfants aujourd'hui dans les régions rurales. Le rapport passe ensuite en revue les démarches et les initiatives provinciales et territoriales concernant la garde d'enfants en milieu rural, puis présente plusieurs études de cas descriptives de programmes de garde en milieu rural qui ont été couronnés de succès dans différentes régions du pays, ainsi qu'un bref résumé de la situation des services de garde en milieu rural à l'étranger. Le présent rapport se termine par une discussion sur les possibilités, et présente des recommandations destinées aux différents paliers de gouvernement et aux intervenants communautaires.

Selon l'examen de la recherche, la revue provinciale et territoriale et les études de cas effectués dans le cadre du présent rapport, la situation relative à la garde d'enfant en milieu rural au Canada n'a pratiquement pas changé depuis que la question a été examinée pour la première fois dans les années 1980. Notamment, l'information confirme que le développement et le maintien de services de garde en milieu rural continuent d'être limités par les mêmes problèmes relatifs à la structure et au financement et par la même démarche axée sur le marché. Parce que la mise sur pied et le maintien des services de garde dépendent du secteur privé, il continue de manquer de places en garderie en général, mais plus

particulièrement à l'intention des populations plus difficiles à desservir, comme celles des collectivités rurales.

En raison des aspects propres aux collectivités rurales sur le plan des installations physiques, de la géographie et de l'emploi, l'exploitation d'un service de garde y est généralement encore plus difficile sur le plan financier que dans les collectivités urbaines et suburbaines. Le financement public limité et la forte dépendance à l'égard des frais payés par les parents font en sorte qu'il est très difficile de mettre sur pied et de maintenir des services de garde en milieu rural, tout en veillant à ce qu'ils soient abordables pour les parents, et de haute qualité pour les enfants.

Les études publiées à ce sujet cernent les raisons pourquoi les familles rurales veulent des services de garde et en ont besoin : dans les collectivités rurales, de nombreuses mères de jeunes enfants occupent un emploi; les familles rurales veulent offrir à leurs jeunes enfants des expériences éducatives et des occasions de socialisation; et les parents qui élèvent leurs enfants dans le contexte d'une exploitation agricole familiale se préoccupent de la sécurité de leurs jeunes enfants qui font face à des dangers propres à ce « milieu de travail » (équipement agricole, animaux, produits chimiques). À grande échelle, la prestation de services de garde est considérée comme un élément clé du développement économique rural efficace en Amérique du Nord et au sein de l'Union européenne.

Les études publiées au Canada et les études de cas effectuées dans le cadre du présent projet cernent les principaux facteurs qui font obstacle aux fournisseurs de services de garde en milieu rural et les facteurs qui contribuent à leur succès. Outre la démarche globale déficiente du Canada en matière de services d'éducation et de garde à la petite enfance, d'autres aspects propres aux régions rurales contribuent à faire obstacle à la prestation de services de garde abordables sur une base continue : difficulté de trouver et de garder du personnel de garde qualifié; absence d'installations appropriées, combinée à un financement très limité; faible taux d'inscription (parce que les services ne sont pas abordables, et non pas en raison d'un manque de besoins); fluctuation du taux d'inscription; et financement de base insuffisant. Les études en question notent à maintes reprises l'importance d'accroître le financement public et la nécessité que l'administration des services de garde soit prise en charge par une organisation bénéficiant d'une masse critique suffisante. Elles soulignent aussi que le leadership est un facteur clé à cet égard, c'est-à-dire qu'un engagement important est requis de la part des personnes et des organisations concernées pour trouver continuellement de nouvelles façons de répondre aux besoins de leur collectivité et de veiller à ce que le programme poursuive ses activités.

En fonction des preuves observées, le présent rapport conclue que ce dont le Canada a besoin est une vaste stratégie en matière de garde d'enfants qui appuie les démarches flexibles nécessaires pour veiller à ce que les familles en milieu rural aient les options en matière de garde d'enfants qu'elles souhaitent et dont elles ont besoin. Bien que le rapport reconnaisse la valeur du financement spécialisé et de la flexibilité qui peuvent jouer un rôle dans la mise sur pied et le maintien de services de garde en milieu rural, il est très clair que même les démarches ciblées doivent être soutenues au moyen d'une démarche systémique en matière d'éducation et de garde à la petite enfance, c'est-à-dire au moyen d'un programme universel d'éducation et de garde à l'enfance de première qualité financé et géré par l'État, visant à répondre aux besoins de l'ensemble des familles et des enfants. Une démarche systémique en ce qui concerne la planification, le développement et le maintien de services de qualité abordables au moyen d'un financement fiable et adéquat aurait une profonde incidence sur l'accessibilité et le caractère abordable des services de garde pour les parents qui vivent ou travaillent (ou les deux) dans des collectivités rurales partout au Canada.

Cette année, grâce aux résultats des élections fédérales de 2015, les possibilités pour le secteur de la garde d'enfants au Canada sont de nouveau renouvelées. Dans cet environnement, le sort de la garde d'enfants en milieu rural sera fonction de l'architecture mise en place par les gouvernements fédéral, provinciaux et territoriaux au moment d'élaborer le « cadre national » promis par les libéraux, qui forment maintenant le gouvernement du Canada. Comme le démontrent les preuves présentées dans le présent rapport, les familles vivant en milieu rural — comme d'autres familles canadiennes — bénéficieront davantage d'un programme de garde planifié et financé par l'État, fondé sur des preuves et suffisamment flexible pour répondre aux besoins de toutes les familles.

Recommandations en fonction des conclusions du présent rapport

À l'intention du gouvernement fédéral

1. Prendre l'initiative en travaillant avec les provinces, les territoires et les communautés autochtones à l'élaboration d'un cadre stratégique pour l'éducation et la garde à la petite enfance* s'appuyant sur de solides constats afin de permettre à l'ensemble de la population canadienne, y compris en milieu rural, d'avoir accès à des services de garde de qualité. À cette fin, la mesure suivante est nécessaire : s'éloigner du système axé sur le marché qui fait en sorte qu'il est si difficile de créer et de maintenir des services de garde dans les régions rurales et éloignées et dans les collectivités du Nord du pays;
 - S'engager à suivre un plan pour le financement soutenu à long terme des services d'éducation et de garde à la petite enfance, et transférer les fonds aux provinces, aux territoires et aux communautés autochtones qui acceptent de mettre en œuvre les cadres stratégiques globaux et les plans;
 - Reconnaître que les communautés autochtones ont un besoin immédiat de solutions aux iniquités de longue date qui les touchent et que des services d'éducation et de garde à la petite enfance qui tiennent compte des particularités culturelles de ces communautés pourraient jouer un rôle important dans le cadre du processus de vérité et de réconciliation;
 - Travailler avec les provinces, les territoires et les communautés autochtones à l'établissement d'un programme de recherches, de données et d'évaluation portant sur les questions des services de garde en milieu rural.

À l'intention des gouvernements provinciaux et territoriaux

2. Chaque province et territoire devrait adopter un plan pour répondre aux besoins des collectivités rurales en matière de services d'éducation et de garde à la petite enfance. Un tel plan devrait notamment comprendre les éléments suivants :
 - Passer en revue et analyser la démarche de la province ou du territoire en matière de services de garde en milieu rural;
 - Élaborer des façons de déterminer les besoins et la demande en matière de services d'éducation et de garde à la petite enfance dans les collectivités rurales;
 - Élaborer une démarche stratégique s'appuyant sur de solides constats pour faciliter la mise sur pied et le maintien de services d'éducation et de garde à la petite enfance accessibles et de qualité en milieu rural aux endroits où il existe un besoin ou une demande pour de tels services;

* La communauté canadienne des services d'éducation et de garde à la petite enfance a présenté aux élus provinciaux et territoriaux un cadre commun pour la mise sur pied d'un programme universel d'éducation et de garde à la petite enfance.

- Élaborer une démarche pour fournir un financement public qui tienne compte du coût réel d'exploitation d'un service de garde accessible et de qualité en milieu rural;
- Élaborer de nouvelles démarches pour régler les questions relatives à la main-d'œuvre dans le domaine des services d'éducation et de garde à la petite enfance (notamment en ce qui concerne les bas salaires, les perspectives de carrière et la reconnaissance), qui limitent les possibilités en matière de services de garde de qualité en milieu rural;
- Fournir des documents, en ligne et en format papier, pour informer les parents au sujet des services de garde réglementés en milieu rural.

À l'intention du Syndicat

3. Mettre sur pied un groupe de travail national formé de représentantes et représentants des provinces, des territoires et des communautés autochtones, ainsi que de décideurs, de chercheurs, d'employeurs et de syndicats pour examiner la situation des familles qui vivent ou travaillent (ou les deux) en milieu rural et faire des recommandations relativement à une variété d'options pour de meilleurs services d'éducation et de garde à la petite enfance et à du soutien au travail pour les familles des régions rurales;
4. En collaboration avec les partenaires-intervenants, mettre sur pied la recherche et l'analyse qui aideront à mieux comprendre la situation de la garde d'enfants en milieu rural et qui contribueront au progrès de ce dossier;
5. Fournir du soutien pour la mise sur pied d'un projet pilote et d'autres initiatives spéciales dans le domaine de la garde d'enfants en milieu rural pour répondre aux besoins des membres et fournir des exemples de programmes de garde en milieu rural qui connaissent du succès;
6. Continuer de faire la promotion, auprès des gouvernements, de la question de l'accès aux services de garde en général et des services de garde en milieu rural en particulier;
7. Veiller à ce que les questions et préoccupations propres aux Autochtones en matière de services d'éducation et de garde à la petite enfance soient reconnues par tous les paliers de gouvernement dans le but d'élaborer des solutions conformes aux recommandations de la Commission de vérité et réconciliation;
8. Élaborer, appuyer et fournir des ressources aux membres qui ont des enfants (comme le site Web « Trouver des services de garde de qualité » et d'autres ressources éducatives) pour les aider à comprendre et à aborder la question des services de garde en milieu rural.

À l'intention des parents vivant en milieu rural

9. Collaborer avec d'autres (syndicats, employeurs, groupes de justice sociale, militantes et militants pour les services de garde et autres partenaires communautaires) pour promouvoir un programme universel national de garde d'enfants qui répondra aux besoins de toutes les familles, y compris celles qui vivent ou travaillent (ou les deux) en milieu rural;
10. Se renseigner le plus possible sur les options disponibles en matière de garde d'enfants, bien qu'elles puissent être limitées, afin de maximiser ses chances de trouver une place dans une garderie convenable, abordable et de qualité.

À l'intention des spécialistes des droits de la personne

11. 1. Envisager des recours judiciaires fondés sur les droits et d'autres recours dans le but de remédier à la situation actuelle des services de garde qui ne répond pas aux besoins et aux revendications des parents vivant en milieu rural en matière de services d'éducation et de garde à la petite enfance. Ce travail pourrait prendre appui sur des documents comme la Convention relative aux droits de l'enfant et la Convention sur l'élimination de toutes les formes de discrimination à l'égard des femmes.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper

Most families in all varieties of communities across Canada find it hard to access high quality, affordable, regulated child care. For families in rural communities, however, it is even harder. The market model by which child care is delivered in most of Canada – primarily financed by parent fees and delivered almost entirely by private non-profit and for-profit providers with little comprehensive longer-term planning— makes initiating and maintaining child care a particular challenge for service providers in rural communities. Thus, many rural families who want and need early childhood education and child care find regulated, accessible, quality services that meet their needs to be scarce or even nonexistent.

Two main rural-specific factors contribute to child care’s special challenges in rural, remote and northern areas: a) low population density (which means that the critical mass of families needing child care at any one time is limited) and, b) the prevalence of non-standard hours and seasonal work in rural communities. Large geographic distances not only make it difficult for parents to travel to child care but providers serving small, spread-out populations—with many people working non-standard hours or seasonally—find it hard to survive financially. As well, finding and retaining qualified staff – a pressing issue in child care across Canada generally – is significantly harder in rural, remote and northern areas. This is largely due to centres’ financial pressures that keep wages low so as to maintain viable budgets and to limited local career options for educators. All these factors conspire to create an unsustainable situation for most child care services attempting to respond to the needs of rural, remote and northern families in Canada’s current market-based child care environment. As a result—although it has been well documented that many rural families need and want child care— there are few options for regulated child care in rural Canada.

These concerns about child care in rural communities are not new but there is currently no up-to-date pulled together information that can inform parents, service providers and policy-makers trying to develop services and policy. This paper provides a current overview of the state of rural, remote and northern child care. It is addressed to a wide range of stakeholders—those in the ECEC field and the many others with an interest in the topic—to help fill this basic knowledge gap and to generate discussion about ways to improve the situation.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers and the CUPW Child Care Fund

This work on rural child care was funded by the [Child Care Fund of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers](#) (CUPW). The Child Care Fund, provided under the terms of CUPW's collective agreements with Canada Post, funded the project as part of the union's commitment to support and help its members meet their child care needs. The fund, financed by Canada Post and administered by CUPW, is used to provide support and resources to CUPW members, as well as to finance research that can help inform CUPW in serving their members and the broader community better.

CUPW's particular interest in rural child care is linked to its membership—the union's approximately 6,000 members who work for Canada Post delivering mail in rural and suburban areas. Of this group, 70% are women. Many more women have partners or spouses who are letter carriers, clerks or who work as rural postmasters. Further—and of particular interest because the need for rural child care has been identified in all regions of Canada—the postal workers who are CUPW members represent a cross-Canada workforce with one employer. That is, CUPW is the sole union that represents workers who may be living and/or working in rural communities in every region of Canada and Quebec.

When is a community rural?

Rural areas are by definition characterized by low population density. They are typically made up of small communities separated by distances that are sometimes considerable. In Canada, they may be agricultural, forested, prairie or tundra. Rural areas are generally defined as being located outside cities and towns. However, different countries use different definitions of “rural” and there may be multiple definitions within countries as well, sometimes used for different purposes (for example, for statistical or administrative purposes). For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, an international economic organization of developed/wealthier countries (OECD) uses a definition of a rural community as “one with a population density of less than 150 people per square kilometre”.

In Canada, rural metro-adjacent regions are census divisions that are mostly rural and adjacent to metropolitan centres. Rural northern regions are rural census divisions fully or mostly above certain latitude parallels, which differ by province and territory.

Canadian definitions of rurality have changed over time (du Plessis et al., 2002). The definition now commonly used defines rural from a Canadian census perspective as “the population outside settlements with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants and a population density

below 400 people per square kilometre” (Statistics Canada, 2007). Thus, rurality is typically defined by distance and population density.

Multiple alternative ways of defining “rural” are commonly used in Canada. Du Plessis et al. wrote that “Census rural refers to individuals living in the countryside outside centres of 1,000 or more population; ... [and] Rural and small town refers to individuals in towns or municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centres (with 10,000 or more population)” (2001: 5, 6). Both of these definitions may be useful for child care research. De Plessis observed that: “Definition matters. Different definitions generate a different number of “rural” people. Even if the number of “rural” people is the same for two definitions, different people may be classified “rural” with the two definitions”. However, “though the characteristics of rural people are different for each definition, in general, each definition provides a similar analytical conclusion” (Du Plessis, 2001: 11).

Bollman and Clemenson compared alternative definitions of rural and reported that “at the Canada level, the general trends are similar, regardless of the definition used. The differences are found in the details because the results for the common but different definitions of rural capture population trends at differing geographic scales” (2008: 3). For example, using the rural and small town definition, they found that 19% of the general population lived in these areas, while 2011 data show that 18.9% of the general population were defined as rural (using the census rural definition and 2011 data).

This paper will be guided by du Plessis et al’s view that “if we were to recommend one definition as a starting point or benchmark for understanding Canada’s rural population, it would be the “rural and small town” definition. This is the population living in towns and municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centres (i.e. outside the commuting zone of centres with population of 10,000 or more)” (2002). In addition to this, it is important to keep in mind the working definitions of rurality used by child care officials in each province and territory as these shape child care policy and funding decisions for rural communities in those jurisdictions (See the provincial scan section).

For the purposes of this paper, remote communities that are only accessible by air or rail are not included in the discussion of child care needs and possible delivery approaches. These communities have their own unique characteristics and needs that are beyond the scope of this exercise. For similar reasons, child care in on-reserve and remote Indigenous communities is not discussed here. Indigenous child care has its own set of considerations and literature. Although some of the discussion may be relevant, child care for Indigenous Canadians requires a separate discussion about access and governance of child care services, as well as the content of programs or pedagogy (see, for example, the Childcare Resource and

Research Unit's 2015 collection of documents about Indigenous ECEC, available online at <http://childcarecanada.org/resources/issue-files/policy-issues-indigenous-early-childhood-education-and-care-2015> or the considerations identified in the *Shared framework for building an early childhood education and care system for all*, online at http://www.childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/sharedframework_jan2016.pdf).

Overview and methods

This paper has the following components developed using information gathered through a literature review, a scan of available information and interviews with a number of provincial officials, researchers and service providers delivering rural child care services:

- “What we know” about rural communities in Canada using demographic information including child population and the changing nature of rural employment;
- “The state of child care in Canada” more generally with specific reference to how the current policy and provision landscape affects child care provision for rural families;
- A review of relevant academic and “grey” literature. This review is not exhaustive but rather highlights the most pertinent works that comprise current knowledge base about rural child care needs and challenges to rural child care provision;
- Provincial profiles that provide an overview of provincial/territorial policy and initiatives affecting rural child care;
- Several case studies of successful rural child care programs that consider what has gone into their success, what challenges and problems they grapple with and what we can learn from them;
- A brief summary section that looks “beyond our borders” presents an opportunity to look at how more robust child care systems can address the needs of rural populations;
- Discussion of the findings and recommendations to different levels of government and to non-government stakeholders.

Rural communities in 21st century Canada

As noted earlier, rural areas are those characterized by low population density and small communities, broadly defined as being located outside cities and towns. Population-wise, Canada has been a non-rural country for almost a century, with the rural population becoming a minority after 1921 (Bollman and Clemenson, 2008).

Numerically, the rural population has been relatively stable since 1991 but has been decreasing as a proportion of the total population. According to the 2011 census, more than 6.3 million people were living in rural areas (defined in this case as having fewer than 1,000 inhabitants and a population density below 400 people per square kilometre). At the same time, the population living in urban areas has been increasing relative to the population living in rural areas. Consequently, in 2011, the proportion of the Canadian population that is rural fell to 18.9%, or fewer than one in five Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2012).

There is large variation in the proportion of the population that is rural across provinces/territories, with the proportion of people living in rural areas ranging from 13.8% in British Columbia to 53% in Prince Edward Island (2011 data). The Atlantic provinces and the territories had the highest proportion of rural population by province/territory across Canada. In all provinces/territories the proportion of the population that was rural declined between 2006 and 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2012).

Curto and Rothwell compared employment characteristics between men and women in urban and rural communities. They found that workforce participation rates were very similar for urban and rural men and that part-time employment rates for men were low in both urban and rural settings. There was, however, a significant difference between urban and rural work patterns for women. Although in both urban and rural communities, women were more likely to be working part-time than men, women living in rural and small town (RST) regions were 15% less likely to be working full time than women living in urban settings (2003:7).

As Table 1 shows, the child population in rural areas also varies considerably across Canada. Overall, in 2011, 18% of 0-4 year olds across Canada lived in rural areas; the proportion of 0-4 year olds living in rural areas ranged from 10% of 0-4 year olds in Ontario to 58% in Nunavut (see Table 1).

There are a number of factors that distinguish the changing characteristics of rural Canada. One that is very significant has been the change in the nature of employment for rural

residents; over time, there has been a significant drop in the percentage of the rural population employed in agriculture; by 2007, less than 7% of the Canadian rural population was involved in agriculture (Reimer and Bollman, 2010).

As well, towns that once revolved around a single industry are in decline and fewer small businesses are surviving in small towns and rural areas. As a result, many young families are either leaving rural areas or commuting to larger urban centres for employment. Reimer and Bollman identified a trend towards more rural Canadians living closer to large urban centres. They note that this is where the most growth in rural and small town communities has been occurring. They reported that, “by 2006, 35% of Canada’s census rural population lived within the commuting zone of a larger urban centre, and thus in close proximity to urban job opportunities” (2008: 8).

Generally, the rural population earns less than the urban population. Beckstead, Brown, Guo and Newbold offered an analysis of the various factors that contribute to this reality. They reported that people living in larger urban areas earned about 25% more than those living in rural areas and that the rural population overall had earnings that were 14% below national levels (2010).

TABLE 1 Children living in rural areas by province/territory by age

	Age (yrs)	Child population in non-rural areas	Child population in rural areas	Total child population	Total child population living in rural areas (%)
NL	0-4	15,330	9,165	24,495	37
	5-9	15,140	9,965	25,105	39
	10-14	16,100	10,935	27,035	40
PE	0-4	3,360	3,915	7,275	54
	5-9	3,245	4,145	7,390	56
	10-14	3,710	4,685	8,395	56
NS	0-4	25,525	18,460	43,985	42
	5-9	24,165	20,260	44,425	46
	10-14	26,390	23,420	49,810	47
NB	0-4	20,250	16,275	36,525	45
	5-9	19,665	16,995	36,660	46
	10-14	20,720	19,670	40,390	49
QC	0-4	338,365	102,475	440,840	23
	5-9	306,615	92,960	399,575	23
	10-14	320,410	97,795	418,205	23
ON	0-4	632,205	72,055	704,260	10
	5-9	628,715	84,040	712,755	12
	10-14	663,985	99,770	763,755	13
MB	0-4	51,560	25,625	77,185	33
	5-9	49,480	25,140	74,620	34
	10-14	52,450	26,905	79,355	34
SK	0-4	43,875	24,885	68,760	36
	5-9	39,445	23,905	63,350	38
	10-14	39,790	25,960	65,750	39
AB	0-4	204,780	40,100	244,880	16
	5-9	176,750	42,240	218,990	19
	10-14	174,810	46,110	220,920	21
BC	0-4	191,230	28,435	219,665	13
	5-9	187,860	31,055	218,915	14
	10-14	203,395	35,385	238,780	15
YT	0-4	1,260	715	1,975	36
	5-9	1,220	680	1,900	36
	10-14	1,285	695	1,980	35
NT	0-4	1,910	1,375	3,285	42
	5-9	1,560	1,300	2,860	45
	10-14	1,520	1,345	2,865	47
NU	0-4	1,675	2,295	3,970	58
	5-9	1,475	1,870	3,345	56
	10-14	1,380	1,735	3,115	56
CA	0-4	1,531,325	345,770	1,877,095	18
	5-9	1,455,335	354,560	1,809,895	20
	10-14	1,525,945	394,410	1,920,355	21

Source: Data from 2011 Census, calculated by Barry Forer using online information.

What do we know about rural child care in Canada?

It has been noted again and again that Canada suffers from a child care data deficit. As child care economist Gordon Cleveland has observed, “the biggest weakness of Canadian child care data is that there is so little of it” (2010: 1). As well, the last decade has seen a reduction not only in collection and analysis of pertinent data but in support for child care research as well. Practically, what this means for smaller population subgroups such as rural families or for smaller regional units is that the data and information available to help understand and document child care needs or to support policy or service development are often lacking.

At the same time, there is general understanding derived, in part, from international policy analysis about the implications of current national, provincial and territorial approaches on child care planning and funding, what effects these have at the local service provision level and what alternative policy approaches would make a difference.

The state of ECEC in Canada and what this means for rural child care

How child care policy is structured and governed in Canada has had a significant impact on the possibilities and limitations of child care service provision and accessibility for families in rural communities. At present, Canada has no national system or overall approach to child care or to early childhood education and care (ECEC) more broadly. Fourteen jurisdictions – the ten provinces, three territories and the federal government — are involved in regulating, funding and shaping child care programs in Canada (and in Ontario, municipalities have a mandated role as well). Canada’s federal structure defines the division of roles and responsibilities for Canadian ECEC. As defined under the terms of the *Constitution Act, of 1867* and subsequent federal/provincial protocols, social services, education and health care primarily fall under provincial/territorial jurisdiction.

But that does not mean that there is no federal interest or potential federal role in child care. Although a national child care program has not developed, Canadian federal governments have a long history of interest in child care. There have been multiple attempts by federal governments to develop a role in child care beginning with the short-lived Dominion-Provincial Wartime Day-Care Agreement during World War II. This was followed by the influential Task Force on Child Care (“Katie Cook Task Force”) of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s Liberal government (1986) as mothers with young children were beginning to enter the labour force in large numbers in the mid 1980s. However, neither this nor the Progressive Conservative initiative that followed— Brian Mulroney’s Special (Parliamen-

tary) Committee on Child Care, which reported in 1987—resulted in a national child care program, both due to federal election calls.

Paul Martin's 2005 election commitment and subsequent cross-Canada bi-lateral agreements came closest to putting a national child care program in place. Executed by Social Development minister Ken Dryden, the Foundations program consisted of federal transfer funds of \$1 billion annually to support provinces and territories to enhance their child care programs based on the "QUAD" principles set out by the federal government—Quality, Universality, Accessibility, Developmental (ness). The January 2006 federal election, won by the Harper Conservatives, brought the immediate cancellation of the signed bi-lateral agreements that made up Canada's most recent attempt to develop a national child care program. Following their abrogation of the child care agreements, the Harper government was in power for a decade during which national progress² towards improving access and quality in Canadian child care stagnated.

Most recently, a Liberal government elected in October 2015 has made new child care commitments to families under the rubric "economic security for middle class families". In the federal budget documents of 2016, it declared that "high quality affordable child care is more than a convenience—it's a necessity" and noted that the "government will be taking action, as the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs develop agreements with provinces, territories and Indigenous communities to fulfill election commitments on child care". It is also noteworthy that the Trudeau government has made a commitment to evidence-based policy making in general, as well specifically with reference to child care policy (Prentice, White and Friendly, 2016).

Child care markets and Canadian federalism: barriers to equity

Two high level issues have a substantial impact on child care in Canada. First, child care is developed and operated in a market model rather than as an essential service or a public good. Child care in Canada was first developed as a welfare service under social service ministries; it is a relatively recent development that child care has begun to be recognized as "educational" in Canada. But although eight provinces/territories now administer regulated child care through their ministries of education, this does not mean that child care is a publicly funded early childhood service as kindergarten is under public education systems.

² Over the decade during which the Harper government was in power, collaborative federal/provincial/territorial/Indigenous work on ECEC stalled. However, a number of provinces/territories continued initiatives in the area of early childhood education and care. By 2016, eight jurisdictions were providing full school-day kindergarten (see Prentice, White and Friendly, 2016)

Child care is still treated as a private market service; finding it, paying for it, operating it remain primarily private responsibilities.

With limited public management and planning, it is left to the private non-profit and for-profit sectors to develop and operate regulated child care services. As a result, there is not only uneven provision across provinces/territories but also by community within them. The need for private services to “break even” or (if they are profit-making) make a profit means favouring communities with higher population density and higher family incomes. As a result, accessible, affordable child care remains hard-to-find for families in rural areas. Thus far, governments across Canada have not taken steps to move child care from its market status to a public ECEC system.

A second key structural factor with a significant impact on child care is Canadian federalism. Child care (and social services and education more generally) are considered to be provincial/territorial responsibilities. As a result, availability and affordability of child care vary enormously across Canada. In 2014, there were regulated spaces for only 20.5% of children aged 0-12 and 22.5% of children aged 0-5 in Canada, ranging from 37.4% in Quebec to 7.6% in Saskatchewan for 0-12 year olds and from 46.5% in Prince Edward Island to 11.5% in Saskatchewan for 0-5 year olds (Friendly, Grady, MacDonald and Forer, 2015). Parent fees, too, are widely variable across Canada. A 2015 analysis of fees in Canada’s largest cities (the only comparable recent data available) found a very wide range, with Toronto’s monthly median fees for an infant at \$1,736, down to \$174 median/month in the four Quebec cities the study included (Macdonald and Klinger, 2015).

Barbara Cameron, a scholar of federalism in social policy making, has summed up federal/provincial/territorial roles in child care: “It means that the provinces have responsibility for legislating standards with respect to quality of child care services, including for example the ratio of staff to children, health and safety standards, staff qualifications, and the educational content of programs. Under the constitution, the federal government cannot set standards that amount to regulating a social service under provincial jurisdiction. *It can, however, attach conditions to money transferred to the provinces for social welfare services*” (2009: 130).

Thus, many would argue that not only does the federal government have the capability to play a key role in child care as it does in health care but that the historical evidence shows that in the absence of federal leadership and funding, equitable child care to cover all families across Canada regardless of where they live is unlikely to develop. To date—notwithstanding the multiple uncompleted efforts to develop a cross-Canada approach—fed-

eral involvement has been very limited. Currently, it is limited to providing block transfers to provinces/territories under the Canada Social Transfer (CST) with no funds specifically earmarked for child care and having responsibility for special populations under their jurisdiction (Indigenous, military and some newcomer families).

Prentice, White and Friendly have argued that “parental choice, high quality and system financing are key elements of the national plan that the federal government should be championing. Working together, the federal government, provinces/territories and Indigenous communities can use these three elements as a basis for designing a common, detailed, evidence-based policy framework....All levels of government will need to collaborate using the best available evidence of what works in designing the national plan” (2016).

Provincial/territorial policies and initiatives affecting rural child care

As it is provinces/territories that have had the sole responsibility for determining how child care is set up, funded and delivered in their jurisdictions, the policies and initiatives they have developed are key. This section presents information collected through a provincial/territorial scan to identify policies and funding affecting rural child care. The scan included an online search of provincial/territorial ministry/department websites and interviews with most provincial officials responsible for child care. Policies and funding that were directly related to rural child care as well as policies and funding that may have an indirect impact on child care in rural communities were documented. A list of the questions that guided the provincial interviews and document scan can be found in Appendix A.

The provincial scan showed that there was limited data or specific information about the supply and demand for rural child care. No province pointed to current research or projects addressing rural child care. However, there does seem to be recognition that child care services are integral to economic development in rural areas.

Newfoundland and Labrador

While NL has no specific funding stream for the creation and sustainability of rural child care, there was clear recognition that rural communities are often underserved in this predominantly rural province. In its current strategic plan, *Caring for our Future – Provincial Strategy for Quality, Sufficient and Affordable Child Care in Newfoundland and Labrador 2012 – 2022*, the province identifies increasing the sufficiency of child care spaces as one of the Strategy’s three key goals. Since NL defines communities outside Metro St. John’s as rural or rural/remote, this plan will directly affect existing or new rural child care services. The Strategy includes and builds on the earlier *Capacity Initiative* to provide start up and

operating grants to community-based organizations that initiate regulated child care services in rural and underserved areas of the province.

It is interesting to note the level of child care service provision outside Metro St. John's. Recent statistics show that the share of children under 14 years living in rural areas is in the range of 37% to 40%. At the same time, 43% of child care centres providing 34% of centre-based spaces are located outside St. John's. Regarding regulated home child care services, 41% of approved homes that provide 43% of home child care spaces are in rural and remote communities outside St. John's. Provincial officials commented that these figures show the level of child care coverage in rural areas to be similar to the level of coverage in Metro St. John's (as of 2013).

Two main challenges³ to the establishment and sustainability of rural child care services were identified by NL child care officials: the lack of qualified ECE's (which is also identified as a problem in urban areas), and the potential lack of suitable facility space, especially in rural areas where resource development industries have generated population growth. To address the shortage of ECE's, the College of the North Atlantic offers ECE training on two campuses outside St. Johns and the full two-year diploma program is available through distance education.

PEI

Child care in PEI, an almost entirely rural province, has seen a number of important ECEC policy decisions of recent years including introduction of publicly-delivered kindergarten for the first time. All PEI communities outside the Charlottetown area and Summerside are considered rural. Indeed, data from the 2011 census shows that more than half of the population of PEI lives in rural communities (Statistics Canada, 2011). PEI has the highest coverage of centre-based spaces for children 0-5 among all provinces and territories, with enough spaces for 32.45% of all children 0-5 (Friendly et al, 2015). Officials report that there is enough regulated child care to meet demand in both urban and rural communities; at the time of the interview, there was one small rural area where a need for a small centre was being explored.

There are no specific policies for rural child care in PEI other than funding for Early Years Centres (EYC). Rural EYCs receive an additional \$10,000 per year to address the challenges of operating centres that are smaller in size and experience a higher degree of fluctuation in enrollment. EYCs are publicly-funded programs for 0 – 4 year olds operated by man-

³ Note that these challenges were confirmed in this report in the case study of Building Blocks Quality Child Care, in Harbour Breton, NL.

dated community governance structures, supported by provincial resources and developed using a public planning process. Funding includes base funding for the EYC program and access to fee subsidies for parents. Early Years Centres must use provincially-set parent fees. While the funding was designed for larger programs (40 – 50 spaces), the additional funding for rural EYCs helps to sustain the smaller programs (10 – 15 spaces) that are needed to respond to a highly seasonal workforce. The large proportion of parents who work less than full-time in rural areas has an impact on enrollment. It was also reported that PEI's rural child care programs have difficulty finding and attracting qualified staff and finding suitable space especially in the busy summer period of high employment.

Nova Scotia

Locations outside major urban areas are considered rural in this Atlantic province. While there are no specific policies or programs to encourage or develop child care services in rural areas in NS, some general policies may help support the development and sustainability of rural child care. Capital funds in the form of loans for expansion, replacement, renovation and repairs were available to both non-profit and for-profit child care operators (albeit on different terms) during 2007 – 2010. Financial support for people seeking careers in early childhood education includes financial reimbursement for staff employed in child care who complete diploma/degree programs and a travel allowance for child care staff undertaking Continued Education programs. Distance education and “alternative” delivery of early childhood education courses including online, videoconferencing and regional locations are approaches that can assist with staffing issues in rural areas.

The availability of vacant space in rural schools (as child populations have been shrinking) presents an opportunity in some communities. At the same time, the demand for rural child care is difficult to determine. While the ratio of Nova Scotia's children (0 – 14 years) living in rural areas is more than four in ten, officials noted that the young child population is declining overall. In fact, 42% of children aged 0 – 4 years live in rural areas in contrast to 47% of children 10 -14 years.

The main challenges identified for child care services in rural NS include: lack of qualified ECE staff including leaders/administrators to replace those who retire, perceived declining population of young children, and the seasonal nature of employment in rural communities.

New Brunswick

New Brunswick, also a province with a high proportion of population living in rural areas, defines “rural” for child care purposes as all areas outside major cities, towns and Local

Service Districts with less than 10,000 people. The proportion of children aged 0 – 14 years living in rural communities is among the highest of all the provinces ranging from 45% of the youngest children (0 – 4 years) to 49% of older children (10 – 14 years). Officials reported anecdotal evidence that there is a greater unmet demand for child care in rural communities than urban areas.

The province has established a specific funding program that makes grants available to start up rural child care programs. From the Trust Fund (set up by the province in 2007 using federal funds transferred under the cancelled Liberal national child care program's initial agreements), grants for up to \$5,500 are available to start a rural child care centre with five spaces minimum and up to \$3,500 for a rural community child care home with a minimum of three spaces. Provincial officials reported that 4,144 rural child care spaces have been created since 2007. Considerable expansion has taken place in community child care homes in recent years including those in rural communities.

In addition, general grants to support the development of infant spaces in centres and in community day homes and funds to support centres providing services in the minority language (English or French) in their communities also help to establish and sustain rural child care programs.

New Brunswick faces challenges establishing and sustaining rural child care programs similar to those of the other highly rural provinces. The stability of programs is affected by: declining child populations/demand for child care; families moving out of rural communities; commuting to nearby urban areas and enrolling their children in child care near the workplace. It is expected that recruiting trained staff will become more of an issue in the future, as new regulations require the director and 50% of staff to have a one year ECE certificate. Affordability and the structure of fee subsidies may also be an issue for lower income farm families who hire farm help/employees and become ineligible, thereby losing access to regulated child care services.

A New Brunswick Task Force Report on child care, released by the provincial government in August 2016, corroborated the challenges identified by provincial officials (Government of New Brunswick, 2016).

Ontario

With a rural child population that ranges from 10% to 13% of the child population depending on the age group, Ontario has the lowest rural child population in Canada. Nevertheless, Ontario's new child care funding formula (2013) includes a Rural and Small

Community Measure (RSCM) to guide its specific allocations to rural and remote areas as part of the Rural/Remote Component of the Special Purpose Allocation. The Rural/Remote Component is intended to address the higher cost of delivering services in rural areas and in large geographic areas with population that is widely dispersed. It was projected that the Rural/Remote Component would be \$28 million for 2012-13 which was 3% of the total available funding. (<http://faab.edu.gov.on.ca/Memos/CC2012/Child%20Care%20Tech%20Paper%20-%20December%2020.pdf>, p. 7).

Ontario's governance structure for child care includes a key mandated role for local governments, which are termed Local Service Managers (LSMs). This includes overall public management/administration, a funding role, a service planning role, and operation of public child care services. This municipal role in child care dates back to the 1940s but was made more explicit in 1998 when large and small municipalities, towns, counties etc. were amalgamated into 47 social service administration units called Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DDSABs). Many of these units, which have multiple social services responsibilities, combine urban and rural areas. With regard to child care, the 37 CMSMs and 10 DDSABs (generally, northern and more remote areas) are mandated to manage child care services across their area. Many CMSMs and DDSABs include multiple smaller units: cities, towns, counties, villages, townships and other entities. This structure is significant for rural child care, especially as the provincial government has down-loaded much of the decision making about how child care funds are spent to CMSMs and DDSABs as part of child care "modernization".

Ontario's new (2013) *Child Care and Early Years Act* (CCEYA) identifies that it is a "matter of provincial interest" that there be a system of child care and early years programs and services that meets a range of family needs including the particular qualities of urban, rural, remote and northern communities. Under the legislation, Local Service Managers (CMSMs and DDSABs) develop child care programs and comprehensive service plans that address these matters of provincial interest (http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=3002, sections 49 and 51).

Manitoba

In Manitoba, where about one in three children 0 – 14 years live in rural areas, there is no specific policy or program for rural child care although general provincial policy assists rural communities. From the province's perspective, communities outside Winnipeg and Brandon are considered rural. There is a geographic Northern Region, composed of four census divisions including Thompson (pop. 13,000).

With regard to demand for child care, the province's on-line registry (centralized waiting list) provides some useful information. Data from 2014 indicated that there were 6,300 children on the registry requiring care (by April 2014), of whom 5,200 were in Winnipeg. Officials reported that the population of some rural areas is declining and, therefore, not expected to generate greater demand for child care.

A comprehensive report by the Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Commission, tabled in 2016 before a provincial election which brought a change in government, included consultation with rural child care stakeholders and officials such as rural school boards. The needs for child care the report identified were province-wide without a distinction between urban and rural needs (Flanagan and Beach, 2016). Based on the Commission report, it appears that Manitoba's approach to child care funding appears to sustain child care programs in rural communities. The Commission report called for an overhaul of governance and funding to improve accessibility, quality and viability of services, making specific funding and governance recommendations.

In Manitoba, some issues that often challenge rural child care are addressed by more general child care policies and programs. The Small Centre Grant, introduced in 2012, helps with sustainability of centres of fewer than 40 spaces. It provides 100% of a centre's operating grant, regardless of enrolment, providing a consistent revenue stream. This type of support has the potential to assist rural centres in addressing fluctuating enrolment, a major problem that is often identified.

More generally, Manitoba's operating funding⁴ and (provincially set) maximum allowable parent fees (in funded centres, which include most centres) contribute to centre viability and affordability. As well, capital funds available to support the expansion of community-based programs can support rural centres; one-third of capital costs up to \$400,000 can be accessed with the requirement that additional spaces are created and/or health and safety concerns of existing spaces are addressed. It should be noted that strategic planning is done by the province to review coverage and to prioritize capital expenditures in underserved areas.

Despite the program and funding supports that may be available to establish and sustain rural child care services, many challenges⁵ persist in Manitoba, as the Flanagan and Beach

4 Manitoba uses a funding formula for centres termed Unit Funding that provides direct operating funds to programs on a regular basis. A good description of Unit Funding can be found in Flanagan and Beach, 2016.

5 These challenges motivated the provincial government's establishment of the Early Learning and Child Care Commission (Flanagan and Beach, 2016) whose report provides a good overview of Manitoba's challenges (see http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/childcare_news/pubs/final_report.pdf)

report describes (2016). The financial viability of small centres often coupled with declining population can be hard to sustain. Finding trained staff and being able to fundraise the matching dollars for the capital expansion grant are also hurdles that can be difficult to overcome.

Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan, 15 communities are designated “cities” (including several with populations under 5,000). Communities outside these are considered rural or northern. “Northern” includes any part of the province within the Northern Saskatchewan Administrative District (NAD) that accounts for about half the land mass of the province but less than 4% of the population. There are 11 child care centres in NAD.

The proportion of the Saskatchewan rural child population (0 – 14 years) ranges from 36% to 39% by age groups. Provincial officials noted that—due to the changing nature of farming—moving from family-operated farms to large commercial ventures—there is less demand than there was previously for child care to assist farm families. In contrast, mining is a growing industry in rural communities that may generate more demand for child care.

While Saskatchewan has no specific policies or funding programs for rural child care programs, there is specific funding for northern programs. Grants for staff training, transportation of children, equipment and supplemental nutrition for family homes are available for northern child care programs. As well, rates for fee subsidies, paid to services on behalf of subsidized parents in lieu of fees vary with the location of the centres. Communities are organized into three tiers, with rural communities in the lowest or third tier with among the lowest rates. The current rates were established in 2006 based on the average full parent fees in the community and are aimed at ensuring that all subsidized parents pay approximately the same proportion of the local fee. However, concerns were raised in the provincial scan that the lower rates in the rural communities are keeping the full fee artificially low.

Some general policies that may support establishment and sustainability of rural child care include development grants for non-profit organizations and start-up grants for school-based child care programs. Since 2007, Saskatchewan has seen relatively sizeable growth (relative to previous coverage in Saskatchewan, which has been the lowest in Canada historically) in child care coverage with funding allocated for additional spaces. As part of this increase in spaces, this meant that there were 85 centres in rural areas as of 2014.

The main challenges for rural child care in Saskatchewan identified were: lack of suitable and secure physical space; lack of qualified staff; and tenuous financial viability. While there is often surplus space in under-utilized schools, there is concern about long-term availability of this space. New schools are often built through public-private partnerships, so the question of security of tenure for child care program looms large for both rural and urban programs. The availability of qualified staff remains a major issue although Saskatchewan Polytechnic (formerly Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology—SIAST) has a regional structure and offers distance education. Provincial officials also noted that there is a pattern in some rural communities wherein families use extended family care or parents off-shift each other in order not to use child care programs. It is not clear whether or how the cost of child care affects the actual demand for services but it is clear that fluctuating enrolment in child care programs makes achieving and sustaining financial viability quite difficult for rural service providers.

Alberta

Alberta's rural child population is low at 16% for children 0 – 4 years but no higher than one in five children from for 0-14 year olds. While Alberta has not developed specific initiatives to address the need for rural child care, some general child care initiatives have been available to assist in the development of services in rural areas. For example, during the final year of the Creating Child Care Choices Plan (2010/2011), grant funding under the Making Space for Children: Child Care Space Creation Innovation Fund was directed to programs to create spaces in rural or isolated areas of the province.

The governing party in Alberta government has changed since the interview with officials was conducted, with the new NDP government expressing commitment to improvements in child care. However, economic circumstances in Alberta have slowed intents and commitments considerably, so the status quo remains in place in Alberta at this time.

British Columbia

British Columbia has one of the lowest proportions of children living in rural areas, 13%, 14% and 15% for age groups 0-4 years, 5 – 9 years and 10- 14 years respectively. Nevertheless, there has been recognition that families in rural areas need and want child care. At one time, British Columbia had funding earmarked specifically for rural child care. Through the Child Care Capital Funding Program, until 2009 B.C.'s rural communities (outside the Greater Vancouver Regional District and the Capital (Victoria) Regional District) received 50% direct provincial funding and 50% of funding acquired through applications. This funding formula sought to provide rural and smaller communities with greater financial support in recognition that these communities often face greater funding issues. In a gov-

ernment report titled *Child care in British Columbia*, provincial priorities included “target funding in child care services to vulnerable and underserved communities, particularly in Aboriginal, rural and isolated areas” (2009: 8).

Literature review

As part of the research for this report, a review of relevant academic and “grey” literature was conducted. This review highlights the most pertinent works in the limited body of literature that comprises our current knowledge base about rural child care needs and challenges to rural child care provision in Canada. As we have noted, there is limited research on the need, provision and use of child care in rural areas when compared to research on child care generally or in urban areas (which is also notoriously incomplete). Indeed, Canadian research about child care is usually broad and tends to overlook the specific needs or circumstances of rural communities other than to categorize them as “harder-to-serve”.

This literature review aims to summarize relevant Canadian research on child care issues in rural areas including the need for child care, service models and challenges to provision. Overall, the literature suggests that rural families and communities (although they are less numerous and represent a smaller proportion of Canadians than do non-rural families), need and value child care for many of the same reasons that non-rural Canadians do: to support parental employment; to provide early childhood education and socialization; and to strengthen their communities. In addition to these common goals, rural child care is also important specifically to address farm safety issues in agricultural areas.

The literature in the following sections is organized into several broad categories. In addition to the descriptions and analyses of the relevant literature that follow, a table of the included literature is included in Appendix A.

Understanding rural characteristics, needs and programs

Writing about Ontario in a background paper for a provincial conference on rural child care some years ago, Doherty summarized characteristics that have an impact on rural communities’ child care needs:

- seasonal variation as a predominant work pattern;
- fluctuations in the need for child care from year to year;
- a scattered population with relatively few users for any one type of service;
- long travel distances and lack of public transportation;
- the presence of commuters who live in rural areas but work in a town or city and drive long distances to work each day;
- the presence of stay-at-home parents who may be without a car all day (1994).

Doherty went on to explain that responding to needs in rural communities requires a variety of kinds of child care schedules including:

- child care on a year-round, full-time basis;
- seasonal child care;
- child care offered outside usual working hours of 9.00a.m. to 5.00 p.m.; and
- child care on a periodic basis (for example, to cover an emergency or crisis).

Doherty also noted that it is important for policy makers keep in mind that:

- generally, rural communities can sustain only small child care programs; and
- child care programs must be able to identify and respond to changes in need quickly.

Doherty's research also identified the strengths and challenges of centre-based care, care in the provider's home and care in the child's home in the rural context in Ontario. Doherty's findings indicated that successful and sustainable programs and providers were likely to be flexible vis-à-vis how and when they provided care and were creative in obtaining and using their resources. A number of other variables dictated a program's success, such as having strong support from provincial staff and having enough trained program staff. Doherty stated that "the successful programs developed a number of different services which addressed a variety of needs under the administration of one organization" (1994: 23). This approach was beneficial to parents because they were able to access more services in one location, while it also benefitted the program by allowing it to be more flexible, reducing administrative costs and having stronger connections to the community.

Friendly, Cleveland and Willis (1994) examined rural child care in Ontario as part of a report on "flexible child care models" in Canada. They identified "seasonal work patterns, low population density, the nature of rural finances and year-to-year variability in child care needs" as all contributing to challenges facing rural child care provision. The report identified a number of services in rural communities and concluded that the programs "appear to be as adaptable to rural areas as they are to urban communities" (1994: 27). This report also identified systemic barriers in child care policy and funding that inhibited the development of appropriate services in rural communities: "The difficulties that rural child care programs report seem to relate more to problems of accessing adequate funding under current funding arrangements than to their ability to develop programs suitable for rural families" (1994: 27).

Since these early documents (both written in the 1980s, updated and republished in 1994) that laid out these characteristics, needs, challenges and program recommendations, further

research has borne out this way of looking at rural child care needs. Subsequent research and analysis supports Doherty's list of rural characteristics that affect child care provision – especially seasonal variation in demand, low population density and poor transport. As well, the challenges and difficulties identified by Friendly, Cleveland and Willis have persisted and are documented in the current literature. These challenges have been further confirmed by qualitative research into parents' experiences (Graham and Underwood, 2012) and personal narratives detailing the struggle of rural families (Hall, 2009).

Brownell's report on the Task Force on Rural Child Care was initiated jointly by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Ontario Rural Council. It came to similar conclusions. Brownell wrote that "community solutions are frequently thwarted because funding is applied narrowly with little fiscal collaboration between funding bodies and government departments" (2000: 14). The report recommended that the Ontario government increase the amount of base funding to child care services to provide stable funding to programs with unstable clientele and that Ontario revise the child care legislation and regulations to create more flexibility for program delivery and structure in rural communities. Similar to Doherty's earlier findings on factors that contribute to successful programs, Brownell concluded that local services should move towards more integrated models that provide multiple services for children and families under one administrative and physical structure.

Watson provided a review of the state of rural child care for the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (2001). Watson concluded that no province had a system of regulated child care that could fully address the needs of rural families. The most common issues included safety concerns, a lack of flexibility for funding and program structure, a lack of flexibility for accessing subsidies, issues with staff training and retention, financial viability and funding limitations, and transportation issues. Watson concluded that "rural and farm families would benefit from a child care system that was integrated...[and that] this level of integration requires regulation, legislation and funding mechanisms that allow and promote coordination at both the policy and service delivery levels" (n.p., available online at <http://casa-acsa.ca/content/rural-child-care-report>).

In her recommendations, Watson argued that regulations needed to be changed to accommodate extended hours and multi-age groupings; that programs and services needed to be integrated in order to provide services that are "both available and financially sustainable"; that subsidy eligibility needed to be made more flexible to accommodate rural needs; and that efforts needed to be made to recruit and train staff that understand the needs of rural communities. Watson also made the point that targeting child care services to low income groups would be particularly inappropriate in rural areas: "targeted programs do not work in rural areas as they generate social stigma and lack community acceptance" (2001, n.p.).

Beginning in 2003, a series of reports, discussion papers and events developed by Rural Voices played an important role in bringing attention to rural child care issues across Canada. Rural Voices began as a two year project funded by the Voluntary Sector Initiative, by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and by the Child Care Fund of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. The Child-Family Access Network (C-FAN) in Langruth, Manitoba (see case studies in this paper, below) hosted the project and C-FAN's founder, Jane Wilson, was one of Rural Voices' main facilitators. The project involved child care providers, child care advocates and the provincial governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Rural Voices focused on bringing stakeholders from across Canada together to try to understand, promote and facilitate early childhood education and child care for rural, remote and northern communities.

One of Rural Voices' first projects was described in *Help or hindrance: A policy review of early childhood education and care in rural Manitoba and Saskatchewan* (Rural Voices, 2003). The report was based on research involving 20 key informant interviews and eight focus groups which included 101 child care educators. The findings were consistent with previous research regarding the specific challenges that impact rural child care delivery, including difficulties with training/recognition of staff, funding issues, governance, farm safety and partnerships (with other child and family services, education, health).

Help or Hindrance was particularly informative about the perceptions and challenges of child care staff and providers. Retention and turnover was a huge problem for both home child care and centre-based providers. Low wages, poor working conditions and low status were all identified as barriers to attracting and retaining staff in rural child care. While these issues are common in all communities, rural practitioners felt that their career paths were further limited by a lack of choices and limited access to training. "The fluctuation in funding due to funding formulas of both provinces makes it very difficult for rural programs to attract, and maintain a stable trained workforce. This is further compounded by many rural families' inability to pay maximum per diems set by provincial governments" (2003: 5). Providers and staff described both (MB and SK) provinces' funding programs and subsidy systems as "urban based", and identified funding as the main barrier to improving the amount and quality of care, as well as their own working conditions.

It was felt that higher costs for budget items such as supplies and training as well as consideration for specific issues inherent in rural life such as flexible attendance and multi age groupings are not reflected in present urban based funding policies. As a result, flexibility in funding is dependent on the ability, interest and time of both the local government staff, who can

often creatively get around rules, and each community's ability to push and tweak the rules and regulations to the limit (Rural Voices, 2003: 6).

Help or hindrance also documented that rural providers felt that they had no voice in policy debates or decision making, even in situations where the government was actively seeking to integrate child care services with other social supports. The report stated that, "child care is not funded to attend, yet is expected to participate in these new initiatives. Often child care staff drop out of these partnerships, simply because they cannot afford to participate" (Rural Voices, 2003: 19).

Much of the work done by Rural Voices involved grassroots organizing focused on providing communities with opportunities, tools and examples of building rural child care that met their needs. Two models, Communities Achieving Responsive Services (CARS) and the Integrated Hub Model (IHM) were used to provide a framework for identifying the issues and the solutions on an individual community basis. As more communities engaged in the process, the hope was to connect them and begin to learn from successful models, as well as from other's mistakes. A document outlining the CARS process stated that:

in rural, remote, and northern communities, even when we are able to create public policy successes, these successes are not shared with other communities. Rural, remote, and northern communities have been the recipient of numerous pilot projects and one-time events. Generally this is how government reacts to the diversity and individuality of rural, remote, and northern communities. As a result of our inherent lack of capacity to share knowledge and lessons learned with others, communities are forced over and over again to reinvent the wheel in responding to community needs (2009: 8).

Rural Voices played a significant role in bringing people together to advocate for rural child care issues in larger policy discussions concerned with national and provincial child care initiatives and proposals. Particularly in 2005, when the former federal Liberal government was negotiating the federal/provincial/territorial agreements that were to comprise a national child care program, Rural Voices took a lead role in bringing together stakeholders to articulate why and how rural communities needed to be considered in the new program. In 2005, Rural Voices and the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (CCAAC) released a discussion paper regarding the federal Liberal's national child care strategy that was then being developed and argued that, "for most rural, remote, and northern families...access and/or choice of quality childcare options are non-existent" (Rural Voices and CCAAC,

2005: 5). The paper identified key policy areas and questions that were used to collect information on how to best support rural, remote and northern communities within the new framework.

The Integrated Hub Model supported by Rural Voices was proposed as a solution in a report by Martz and Bauer (2005). Martz and Bauer's report revealed a severe shortage of high quality, regulated child care in the Humboldt, Saskatchewan region. Focus group participants said they would ideally want some type of regulated child care. Although the majority of parents relied on a patchwork of mostly unregulated arrangements, they articulated the desire to have their children in structured, educational programs with trained educators. The barriers of distance, hours of operation, transportation, cost, and availability were again identified in this study.

Further community consultations for this project confirmed that parents' choices were limited and that the community desperately wanted more and better child care options. "As well, parents with high needs children [were] not able to access most child care facilities, there is a misunderstanding of children with special needs and people are reluctant to care for these children" (2005: 24). The community consultation participants identified a need for flexible care that was located within the community, provided transportation and was inclusive of all children and families on a part or full-time basis.

Martz and Bauer's study also surveyed approximately two-thirds of Humboldt, Saskatchewan's child care providers, the majority of whom were unregulated. The report highlighted that "child care appears to be a very short-term occupation, as almost half of those interviewed intended to stop providing child care within five years. Most child care providers entered into it as a way to stay home with their own children...as their own children become older...many leave that line of work for something more profitable or they leave because of occupational burnout" (2005: 27).

While these providers did offer flexible care (a characteristic that is often seen as one of the benefits of home child care in rural areas), the arrangements left providers with almost no time for their own self maintenance and in turn increased levels of burnout and turnover. Overall, the case study of Humboldt indicated that there were many needs not being met by child care funding or policy as it was currently designed. Martz and Bauer wrote that "there is a sense of not valuing child care...it is hard for rural parents and child care providers to access the support that already exists within the system" (2005: 24). Action committees were formed to address some of the issues identified by Martz and Bauer. One group took

on the task of establishing a licensed child care centre in the community of St. Brieux, and another aimed to set up a network of designated homes for respite care in Humboldt.

Albanese and Prentice have both written about the “ripple effect” effect of child care on the local economy in small towns, rural and northern areas. Albanese’s work explored the impact of Quebec’s publicly funded child care program on families in two conjoined towns in Quebec near the border of Ontario. Although not universal in coverage, Quebec’s child care program has addressed some of the funding issues that rural child care providers typically face. Albanese interviewed mothers and child care workers in two small towns to identify the impact that access to affordable child care was having on their lives. Mothers identified a number of significant benefits resulting from accessible child care. The benefits to their children were observed through a positive influence on their children’s emotional, social and cognitive development. Some mothers felt that time spent in child care combated the negative effects that may result for children living in isolated areas. For the mothers, caregivers and community, the impacts on domestic relationships and the larger community were very obvious. Affordable and available child care made working part-time, low-wage jobs justifiable for the women in this study. This was particularly important as these were the only jobs available within a reasonable distance from both their homes and the child care program. The added family income, social interaction, and opportunity to contribute to their personal household and community had positive impacts on their domestic relationships, as well as keeping them connected to and in the community. “The community retained some of its young Francophone families and local businesses, and more children experienced a community in which both maman and papa have paid work” (Albanese, 2006: 136).

Along with the benefits, Albanese also wrote about the challenges parents face due to demanding schedules that include long commutes, shift work and multiple jobs. She wrote that “even with affordable child care, family, neighbours and friends are essential in assisting families when balancing the demands of Canada’s changing economy” (2007: 262). It is noteworthy that whereas virtually all the women included in her study were using the Quebec child care system, many reported that the services did not cover their non-standard schedule needs (2006, 2007).

Prentice’s work in rural Manitoba used input-output analysis to calculate the potential economic and social impact of increased child care in the communities of Parkland and Thompson, in rural and northern Manitoba respectively. Her work is one of the few Canadian analyses specifically concerned with child care as a key part of rural community economic development. Prentice’s analysis indicated that every dollar invested in child

care in these communities would return \$1.58 of benefits (2007). Prentice's consultations with families in Parkland and Thompson, Manitoba also identified typical child care operating hours as a challenge for accommodating the needs of rural families with demanding schedules that included shift work, seasonal work and long commutes.

A lack of policy and funding presented multiple issues and challenges identified in Prentice's community consultations in Parkland and Thompson. These were consistent with previous research on rural child care. Prentice explained that in Parkland, "access to child-care services perfectly corresponds to population density" and "many parents and children are denied access due to distance" (2007: 13). Finding and retaining trained staff was particularly difficult in these areas and Prentice explained that "low numbers of trained staff brings downward pressure on the quality of the programming provided to children" (2007a: 22). The ability for centres to provide high quality programs that could consistently include children with special needs was again a challenge in this context.

Prentice's reports identified the limits imposed on rural and northern communities when private individuals are responsible for organizing, setting up and paying for child care.

For new childcare facilities to be established in Parkland, local residents must come together. They face the challenging task of applying for funding, hiring staff, locating appropriate space, equipping a facility, and operating a program. They will undertake this start-up work with minimal assistance, in the context of scarce capital funding. These factors make expansion of childcare services a daunting initiative and one that severely tests community capacity" (2007: 13).

In Thompson in particular, "the high cost of northern living place[d] restrictions on the resources of the community and the ability of families to afford childcare." (Prentice, 2007a: 27). The strain on community capacity was also identified by Rural Voices. The group found that maintaining volunteer board members for community based, small rural programs was a constant challenge to maintaining services. This illustrates how—within a market-based, private provider system—low population density is a challenge for both establishing and sustaining regulated child care (2004).

An Integrated Hub Model concept was again applied to a pilot project in rural parts of Ontario that was part of the provincial government's Best Start initiative. Graham and Underwood spoke to parents who were accessing these services in two Ontario communities. They provide a particularly detailed analysis of how "rurality" or rural culture influenced

parents' needs and perception of early childhood services. They argued that "accessibility is a fundamentally important issue in rural communities but it is a complex and multi-faceted concept that involves more than the distance to a given programme or service...[and that,] outcomes are connected to the design of service delivery, and appropriate services are as important as available services" (2012: 1237).

In Graham and Underwood's study, participants expressed satisfaction with the increased services provided by the Best Start initiative but challenged the "appropriateness" of these services.

Parents in this study were concerned about access to childcare. They tended to feel that centre-based childcare was of better quality than home-based childcare because it offered more learning opportunities for children. Best Start provided a substantial increase in licensed childcare spots in these communities, but in some areas licensed home childcare was much more prevalent than licensed centre-based care" (Graham and Underwood, 2012: 123).

These findings reveal important considerations for rural child care development and the importance of determining what the community needs and wants.

Confirming Martz and Bauer's 2005 findings, the impact of personal relationships was identified as both a strength and an obstacle in rural child care by Graham and Underwood. They explained that parents and staff face different challenges because of the social relations inherent in smaller communities where people are more likely to know detailed information about everyone else in the community. Staff may have very personal relationships with parents and have to negotiate this in their care giving role. They also need to be very sensitive to parents' privacy, as close-knit "cliques" that can sometimes work to exclude families from services (Graham and Underwood, 2012).

A 2011 report by the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association⁶ (OMSSA) demonstrated that appropriate consideration for rural child care needs have not yet been integrated into government policy and planning. OMSSA reported that Ontario's emerging full-day kindergarten program was having a detrimental impact on already fragile child care services in rural Ontario municipalities. Since the OMSSA report, Ontario has also revised its child care funding program so that municipalities receive funding partly based on population. OMSSA, however, had clearly stated that, "licensed child care in rural, northern, and

6 OMSSA is an organization made up of social service departments of the 47 municipalities/regions responsible for local service management in Ontario.

remote communities requires a comprehensive solution that does not base its funding solely on the numbers of children in the system. The declining child population in these areas makes a population-based funding solution entirely inappropriate” (2011: 8).

Udenigwe, in a University of Guelph Masters thesis on the impact of the introduction of full-day kindergarten (FDK) in Ontario on rural child care, confirmed OMSSA’s findings, observing that “Rural areas are more likely to bear a heavier burden due to system change than their urban counterparts because they already face challenges in the early childhood sector” (Udenigwe, 2013), describing in detail how “the child care sector (especially the rural child care sector) has been hugely impacted by its (FDK) introduction” (2013: 88).

Rural economic development and rural women’s economic security

There is good evidence that child care is important to rural economic development/ diversification and to rural women’s economic security and prosperity. Prentice’s 2007 study (described in detail in the previous section) looked at the economic impacts of child care in Parkland, rural Manitoba from an economic perspective. This study found that every \$1 spent on child care in Parkland generated \$1.58 of benefits. The research estimated that Parkland’s child care sector was directly worth \$1.73 million to the Parkland economy. As that money “rippled” through the local economy, it was estimated to produce economic benefits of \$2.74 million, through both direct and indirect effects. Prentice concluded that “Investment in childcare creates high yields and brings significant benefits to children, families, communities and Parkland’s economy. Parkland’s economy, along with its families and children, would see even greater returns if childcare services were expanded” (2007: 2). This Canadian research draws on studies in the United States that found similar economic benefits of child care to rural communities (for example, see Warner, 2006). Albanese’s work, also described in detail in the previous section, has also analyzed the economic benefits of child care to small towns, using the example of \$7/child care in Quebec (2007).

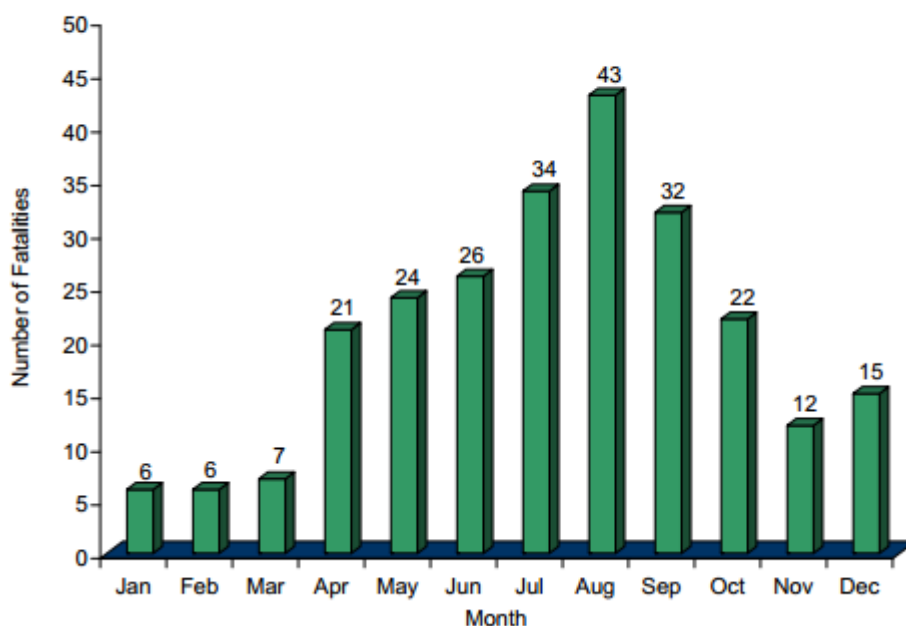
Farm safety

From 1990 to 2008, there were 248 agricultural fatalities among children under 15 years of age, an average of 13 per year (Figure 2). One hundred and nine (44%) of the children killed were less than five years old, including 17 one year olds and 68 two and three year olds. Seventy-three per cent of children killed on the farm were the children of owner/operators, and 9% were other relatives of farm owners/operators (Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting, 2011). As Prentice summed this up, “Farm children are exposed to greater dangers than are non-farm children. The proof is the fact that injuries and fatalities among farm children are much higher than in the general population.”(2007: 9). Wilson explained

that “farm children live and play in a space that could include heavy equipment, huge vehicles, specialized implements, large animals and water areas” (2012: 8).

The issue of farm safety is associated with the seasonal demand for child care in rural communities, as many of these fatalities occur during the summer months. From 1990 to 2008, 31% of all child agricultural fatalities occurred during July and August, with August having the highest proportion of fatalities (17%). 54% of the deaths occurred in the four months from June to September. (Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting, 2011)

FIGURE 2.
Fatal agricultural injuries in children and youth by month, 1990-2008
Source: Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting, 2011



In summary

This Canadian literature review describes, illustrates and confirms that important considerations for rural child care include: the predominance of seasonal and/or shift work; low population density and dispersed populations; large geographic boundaries, and farm safety concerns. Canadian research has consistently identified challenges for rural child care that are exacerbated by these characteristics. The research and program experience indicates that provincial child care legislation, regulation and funding do not provide adequate flexibility to accommodate some of the unique characteristics and needs present in rural communities.

Case studies: Learning from experience

As the preceding section describes, the literature suggests that Canada's existing market-based child care model works even less well in the rural context than it does in urban or suburban communities. The evidence suggests that not only does Canada as a whole need a radically different approach to early childhood education and care but that rural communities may need especially creative and flexible solutions. This, however, raises questions about how these concepts can be implemented practically. How flexible can regulation and funding be while still maintaining quality and safety? Can rural programs survive without extra funding that can fill some of the gaps left by lower population density? The following case studies will further explore these kinds of issues as well as highlighting some of the kinds of approaches that communities are utilizing to meet rural child care needs. These include both instances where they have additional government support and those where there is no special support.

Case studies of five programs providing child care services in rural areas across Canada were developed to inform this project. Programs were identified using an internet search as well as suggestions made by provincial/territorial officials. Two of the selection criteria were: how much information could be acquired through preliminary research and, second, was there cross-Canada representation? The case studies include services in five provinces, one from each of Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador. The programs included provide both child care centres and regulated home child care.

Preliminary research was conducted online using each of the program's websites and provincial information; the information was organized into a chart format. Key informants—supervisors or executive directors—were then contacted and asked to participate in the project (see initial request in Appendix C). All the key informants originally contacted agreed to participate in the project and a semi-structured interview of approximately one hour. The preliminary information collected about the program was sent to the key informants together with the questions that would guide the interview. Following the telephone interviews, each was summarized in a draft document and sent back to the respondent to check for accuracy and clarification.

Very brief descriptions of the five case study sites follow; the full case study summaries are found in Appendix D.

Kawartha Child Care Services (now Compass Early Learning and Child Care)- Kawartha Lakes, County and City of Peterborough and Durham Region, Ontario
Compass Early Learning and Child Care (CELC), established in 1981, is a non-profit, char-

itable corporation that operates 24 centre-based programs and a regulated home child care agency. It provides child care in small towns and rural areas in or around Peterborough, Ontario (population 79,000, about 135 km. northeast of Toronto). These licensed programs operate Monday through Friday during traditional program hours (7:00 am – 6:00 pm) and have the capacity to provide child care for approximately 900 children 0 – 12 years. All but one of the centre-based programs is located in a school. Compass was originally initiated by a group of three women who were partly inspired by the rural setting and were also interested in supporting a home child care model based on the objectives of parent involvement, high quality child development, flexible options and responsive services. At the time, this was a new approach to home child care. Compass has become a pedagogical leader, stating that they are “inspired by the educators in Reggio Emilia” and that the Compass “curriculum is constructed by carefully observing, listening to and documenting children’s experiences through their play”.

Shaunavon Children’s Learning Centre — Shaunavon, Saskatchewan

Shaunavon, with a population of 1,800, is located in southwest Saskatchewan near the Alberta border. Shaunavon Children’s Learning Centre (SCLC) is a non-profit, charitable organization started in 1995 by a group of Shaunavon locals who identified the need for an early learning and care centre. The group consisted of a few parents, concerned citizens – one of whom would later become mayor - a reporter, and a business owner – not all of whom were parents. SCLC has the capacity to offer full day, full year centre based child care for 54 children 0-6 years of age who live in Shaunavon or the surrounding area. Since 2003, SCLC has been located in a retrofitted building that was a residential home sold by the City to SCLC at the nominal fee of \$1. The centre features a sprawling backyard the size of three typical lots, allowing for excellent outdoor play and exploration. There is strong support from the community in the form of donations, in kind services and fundraising.

M.D. of Opportunity #17 – Wabasca, Alberta

The Municipal District of Opportunity (MD of Opportunity) No. 17 is located 375 kilometres north of Edmonton and includes a number of small communities. Formally constituted as a municipal district in 1995, MD of Opportunity has a population of about 5,000 residents including 2,000 people living on the Bigstone Cree Nation reserves. Families with young children across the district benefit from the proactive leadership of the municipality in developing and operating early learning and child care services. In 2009, the first centre was opened in Wabasca-Desmarais, the largest town, which is home to about 3,300 people including members of the Bigstone Cree Nation. The Wabasca centre serving preschool-age children was initially located within Northern Lakes College in a purpose-built child

care space that had not been operating for some years. Services for school-age children were also provided. In 2010, MD of Opportunity announced expansion of its child care programs to some of the smaller surrounding communities. Currently, two programs are operating in Wabasca and one in Red Earth Creek.

Childcare-Family Access Network (C-FAN)/Lakeview Children's Centre – Langruth, Manitoba

Childcare-Family Access Network (C-FAN)'s integrated hub model is a successful approach to developing and sustaining regulated child care services in rural (farming) settings. Lakeview Children's Centre in Langruth, a tiny village located about 155 km. northwest of Winnipeg, is the base for the network of six centres and a range of other services in rural communities within 75 kilometres of Langruth.

Two factors are key to integrating and sustaining these child care programs. One is the centralized administrative function that provides services to each program and reduces the overhead and other costs, enabling sharing resources including program materials and professional development. The other factor is the additional support provided by the Manitoba government. By accommodating the special circumstances of rural communities through the licensing process and modifications to the funding model that accommodate small centres, the province has made it possible to operate these programs effectively. This public policy support is critical for sustaining the flexible care arrangements (including multi-age groups and seasonal arrangements) provided by C-FAN, thereby allowing the organization to cope with the realities of rural communities.

Building Blocks Quality Child Care – Harbour Breton, NL

Harbour Breton, NL is a historic town located on the Connaigre Peninsula on Newfoundland's south coast where the community of 1,700 is the largest population centre. A traditional fishery, aquaculture and—most recently—ecotourism are the mainstays of its economy. Since a fish plant that had closed reopened in 2006, many families relocated to Harbour Breton. Originally opened in 2008, the non-profit Building Blocks Quality Child Care Centre now has two locations and is licensed for 42 children 2 years – school-age.

The program is under the umbrella of the community's successful Harbour Breton Community Youth Network (CYN). The Executive Director of the CYN was one of the centre's founders and plays a key leadership and administrative role. The province's Capacity Initiative, which provides some base funding as well as capital and start-up, allowed the initial centre in a school to be established. A community advisory committee later prepared a second submission to the province for financing to establish the second centre. There is

considerable support for the child care centres in Harbour Breton as well as successful partnerships with the school board and the town council. Challenges include finding qualified staff and paying them adequate wages.

Looking beyond our borders

Canada is not alone in facing challenges in addressing rural child care needs. Even countries with well-developed child care systems such as many of those in the European Union still struggle to fully meet child care needs in rural and remote communities. This is due to challenges similar to those experienced in Canada—low population density, seasonal demand, lack of transport, and problems recruiting and retaining qualified staff (OECD, 2001; Children in Scotland, 2010).

A 1995 report titled *Childcare services for rural families: Improving provision in the European Union* written for the European Union Child Care Network in 1995 comprised a comprehensive analysis. Although it is now twenty years old and carried out when the EU was much smaller, it provides important insights into and lessons to be learned about rural child care. The report observed that economic restructuring, increased women's employment, the "absent father" syndrome (i.e., fathers working away from home for considerable periods of time), heightened social and educational expectations and other factors were at that time driving need and demand for child care in rural areas (Cohen, 1995).

Although data about ECEC coverage for children under and over three years by rural/urban residence does not seem to have been not available when this report was written, the country profiles of the (then) 12 EU countries suggested that rural communities seemed to be providing fewer child care options for families than were urban communities. At the same time, rural families in countries with well-developed child care systems had considerable advantages. For example, the study points out that "high levels of national coverage in Denmark mean that there are higher levels of services in Danish rural areas than in many urban areas within other member states"(Cohen, 1995: 24). That is, the presence of a well-established early childhood education and care system makes meeting rural needs easier, as there are non-market mechanisms in place to plan and initiate services, develop them and provide stable ongoing operational funding rather than expecting parents or community groups to find their own resources.

Cohen observed that "Rural areas require national child care policies which recognise the diverse range of functions which childcare serves and are able to locate childcare within a context of overall community development" (1995:3). She also noted that "Improving the level and quality of rural child care services within the European Union requires better policies, more appropriate models, and more effective resourcing. The responsibilities for this must lie primarily within Member States but the findings of this report suggest the

importance of action at a European level “(1995: 66). A key recommendation from this report was that

Member States should develop a comprehensive and coherent policy to ensure access of rural children to good quality services, with a clear timetable for achieving this objective and on a basis which takes account of rural diversity and diversity in needs (1995: 66).

Almost 15 years later, a European Commission report noted that “the problem of access – at least as regards the volume of supply of ECEC has been virtually solved throughout Europe for five year-olds but this is certainly not the case for the 0-3 age group, or even for four year olds in some countries. This lack of supply is particularly acute in rural areas” (European Commission, 2009, pg. 14). A Northern Irish report notes that the lack of adequate child care for children is a significant barrier for rural women participating in the paid labour force and that current levels of services in rural areas meet the need for child care only in a few EU countries (Rural Childcare Task Force, 2008).

Nevertheless, the participation rates in ECEC in European countries have increased significantly over recent years, both for under- and over-threes (European Commission—Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), Eurydice, 2009: 14), although specific data on EU-wide ECEC coverage by urban-rural areas is not readily available.

A report titled *Inclusive workforce models for rural and remote areas* was prepared as part of the EU-wide *Working for Inclusion*⁷ project. The rural/remote report was concerned with exploring good models and characteristics of ECEC services in rural areas, linking these to “rural development and economic diversification” noting that it is “a specific goal under the new EU strategic framework, ET2020⁸, that at least 95 % of children between four years and compulsory school age – no matter where they live – should participate in early childhood education” (Children in Scotland, 2010: 5). It examined the most successful models of provision as well as the ECEC needs of rural and remote areas and how to attract the professional workforce needed to deliver them.

Delegates from across the EU took part in a study tour to Norway as part of this project. They identified some key factors that made Norwegian ECEC services in rural areas successful:

7 This project's main report can be found online at <http://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/12/05/working-inclusion-role-early-years-workforce-addressing-pov>

8 European Union Strategic Framework for Education and Training

- Integration in planning, developing and delivering ECEC services;
- High level of investment to put structures in place and support them;
- Services that were universally accessible with a single coordinated point of access were felt to be highly effective;
- Willingness to work together, to share knowledge and resources;
- Flexibility and autonomy available to local practitioners in delivering centrally-defined objectives;
- Professional standing of staff was a factor in effective rural service delivery (Children in Scotland, 2010).

In Norway, a country with a well-developed ECEC system, there remains a rural–urban gap in child care coverage: 76% of preschool children in Oslo are in child care compared to 52% in the rural Aust-Agder region (Children in Scotland, 2010). It is noteworthy (and similar to the Danish example provided earlier in this section) that although Norway’s rural coverage figure is lower than that of urban Norway, the 52% (rural) coverage is very high compared to Canadian coverage of 24.1% for all children (urban and rural) aged 0-5 years (Friendly, Grady, MacDonald and Forer, 2015). Indeed, Norway’s low rural figure is considerably higher than any of Canada’s “better” provinces. As well, Canada’s coverage figures do not take account of affordability, whereas in Norway (and in most of the EU’s countries), services are primarily publicly funded, so are affordable for parents to use.

France is also a country with relatively well-developed ECEC provision, although there is much better coverage for 2.5 - 5 five year olds (almost all of whom attend ecoles maternelles for a full school-day) than there is for infants and toddlers. The OECD’s review of France (part of the 20 nation Thematic Review of ECEC) noted that to ensure provision in rural areas, ecole maternelle classes may be located within elementary schools rather than in the free-standing ECEC buildings that tend to be the norm. In the early 2000s, France used various incentives and specific plans to encourage rural areas to develop innovative ECEC programs, some of which were multi-purpose and multi-age (bridging crèche (0 - 2.5 years) and ecole maternelle (2.5 – 5 years) age groups). These included haltes-garderies (“occasional” centres) and crèches itinérantes (mobile programs) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004). More recently, to respond to the need for services for children under three years, France launched a plan to create micro-crèches for a maximum of nine children under six years. These micro-crèches are seen as flexible and adaptable program models that can be tailored to meet the needs of rural communities (Europa, 2016).

It's of interest to note (although an explanation is not available) that child care supply in urban areas does not exceed demand in all EU countries. An EU-wide report using data from the Eurydice system and Eurostat found that "in Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Portugal and Slovenia, it is easier to find an ECEC place in rural areas than in big cities" while "in Austria, demand is greater in rural areas" (European Commission, 2014: 57).

It is also noteworthy that in the European Union, central agriculture agencies have identified women's issues generally and child care in particular as key components of successful rural development. The European Commission—Directorate of Agriculture has recognized the importance of child care in rural life, treating child care as intrinsically linked to rural development. The Directorate of Agriculture summed up how meeting families' child care needs and rural economic development are linked:

A number of rural areas have undertaken audits of the need and demand for childcare and other services, which have then been used to identify potential solutions. It can no longer be assumed that these [care] services will be provided by the unpaid labour of women or other family members. In fact, local employment can be created in the course of solving this problem" (2000: 14).

In recognition of the fact that "young families are crucial for maintaining the long-term fabric of rural communities," the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) has supported a broad range of projects including support for child care services, in the various member states (2013: 3). The EAFRD explicitly recognizes the importance of child care for children's development as well as a crucial support to parents' (mothers, in particular) participation in the labour force and may work on child care with the National Rural Networks established in each EU Member State.

Overall, while child care options for EU families in rural communities generally appears to remain more limited than for non-rural communities (in most countries), the European Commission and a number of member States appear to be exploring innovative solutions, usually within well-developed ECEC policy frameworks.

Discussion, recommendations and conclusions

This report has examined what we know about rural child care in Canada within the broader context. This section will summarize the central findings about rural child care in Canada at this time, then focus on a number of issues, challenges and opportunities for moving forward, ending with a series of recommendations to governments and non-governmental stakeholders.

What we know

The literature review, provincial/territorial scan and case studies conducted for this report indicate that the state of rural child care in Canada has been largely static since this topic was first written about in the 1980s and 1990s. Most notably, the same structural issues about funding and the market-based approach to child care provision continue to limit the development and sustainability of rural child care. The reliance on the private market to set up and maintain child care services continues to continue the lack of child care spaces for harder-to-serve populations such as those in rural communities. The contextual elements of rural communities usually make rural child care even less financially feasible to initiate and operate than most other community-based child care programs. Limited public funding and heavy reliance on parent fees to fund programs usually make it very difficult to develop and maintain rural child care services without making them unaffordable for most families.

Similarly to non-standard hours child care (non-standard hours workers are another “hard-to-serve” population of parents that often overlaps with those in rural communities), the case studies identified consistent factors that have, in these instances, help to sustain rural child care programs in Canada. These case studies show that successful child care services in rural communities seem to have at least one of two characteristics: a) they are part of a larger organization such as a large voluntary organization or a municipal/local government) that can provide mutual support and/or cross-subsidization of programs; and b) they have access to additional funding. Additionally, the people who envision and lead these programs play a significant role not only in initiating but sustaining them. As with many community-based programs, it takes commitment from the people and the organization to continually find new ways to meet the needs of their communities and keep the program operating.

The case studies conducted for this report reinforce that additional public funding and governance by an organization with some “critical mass” contribute to successful operation of rural child care services. For example, although Ontario-based Compass Child Care Services manages to operate and thrive with no special government funding, the agency,

with 24 centres and a home child care program, is able to pool the considerable resources it has as a larger organization to support individual centres. Their flexible approach to service models allows for Compass' rural child care centres to be supported by their other, more urban initiatives. At Shaunavon Children's Learning Centre, a cooperative in rural Saskatchewan, a provincial capital funding grant as well as individual, town and community donations has allowed the centre to function and flourish. In Manitoba, the province's unit funding plus the Small Centre Grant clearly sustains small rural centres like those of C-FAN. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the province's Capacity Funding established and helps sustain the Breton Harbour centre. MD of Opportunity, a local government covering a substantial geographic area, directly operates the centres and makes a number of contributions to their finances.

Leadership at all levels was another common theme reported by case study participants. The MD of Opportunity profile mentioned that municipal representatives provide outstanding leadership and that municipal operation allows for better compensation of staff. The Childcare-Family Access Network (C-FAN) also reported that leadership by their founder, Jane Wilson, and the program's coordinators has been vital to the success of their programs. The leadership at C-FAN has allowed for the financial and administrative aspects of the company to be managed effectively, giving frontline staff and individual centres the ability to focus on programming for children and families. In the case of Ontario's Compass, the agency began with the leadership and vision of the three founding women—leadership that has allowed the agency to grow and innovate.

A number of barriers to operating and providing services were also identified in the case studies. Compass Early Learning and Child Care Services commented that there is often low enrollment, not due to a lack of need but to affordability issues. A lack of reliable base funding is clearly a barrier to providing affordable care and filling spaces. The Shaunavon case study noted issues of fluctuating enrollment as a barrier to aspects of staff program planning. As well, finding qualified staff and compensating them well was an issue not only in rural Saskatchewan but in MD of Opportunity and was emphasized in some detail in the Harbour Breton, Newfoundland and Labrador case study.

The literature review on rural child care in Canada describes and illustrates a number of concerns specific to the rural context. A key recurring issue has been farm safety, identified as an area of key concern for rural families that child care can address. Prentice observed that "Farm children are exposed to greater dangers than are non-farm children. The proof is the fact that injuries and fatalities among farm children are much higher than in the general

population” (2007: 9). Rural child care, then, can then provide families and communities with safe spaces for their children while they work.

The predominance of non-standard, seasonal and/or shift work, low population density and large geographic locations were also highlighted in the literature as key issues of concern for child care in rural areas. These issues—which are not all exclusively unique to the rural experience—require a degree of flexibility that was often not available in provincial legislation, regulation and/or funding models. This poses a significant barrier to further development of rural child care services.

Rural child care needs

A 2005 report by the Canadian Rural Partnership Advisory Committee on Rural Issues, established as an advisory committee to provide advice on a broad range of issues affecting rural communities by the Government of Canada, challenged traditionalist assumptions about rural family life and the need for child care in rural communities. The group observed that

Typically, childcare has been viewed as a primarily urban phenomenon. Many have assumed that rural and remote, coastal and farm families fit a traditional model of a father working outside the home, and a mother working inside, caring for young children. But just as the labour market has changed in urban areas—with increasing numbers of women now in the workforce—the situation has also changed dramatically in rural and remote areas. Not only can few families survive on one income, but the nature of the family itself has changed, with many single-parent families having no choice but to participate in the labour market. (Canadian Rural Partnership Advisory Committee on Rural Issues, 2005: 2).

This point has been made repeatedly in Canada over the past several decades and was made in both the literature reviewed and in the case studies. That there is a need and demand for child care in rural areas has been confirmed and reconfirmed over the years and is not really contested anymore. The information reviewed for this report serves to reinforce the idea that—rather than the absence of need or want—it is the characteristics of rural communities that make providing accessible, high quality child care especially difficult in Canada’s marketized child care model.

A recent American study supports this. Choi and Wilson investigated child care’s impact on rural communities by looking at unregulated care, which Canadian families rely on

widely as well. The authors found not that families in rural areas did not want or need child care but that they are more likely to use unregulated (“informal”) child care than families in urban areas, as affordable, regulated child care is less likely to have been established in rural communities. Noting that the effect of child care on the economy is equivalent to that of a mid-range sector such as social services or the performing arts, the authors concluded that:

A sector this important certainly justifies significant public investment to assure the highest possible quality and efficiency. Policy makers may wish to address the balance between informal and formal child care. They may decide that it is in the public interest to move more of the informal childcare services into the formal sector. This may require changes in the requirements for satisfying the definition of a formal childcare provider or the removal of disincentives for meeting current requirements (2014: 31-32).

Child care as an element in rural economic development

Child care in rural settings was also identified in the literature as being important to rural economic development and women’s economic security and prosperity. Specifically, Prentice’s studies in rural Manitoba found that as child care services expanded, so did economic growth and prosperity in the area (2007) while Warner’s research has addressed child care’s role in community economic development in the US (Warner and Liu, 2006).

The European Commission’s Directorate of Agriculture has taken a different approach than has typically been taken by North America governments. In the EC’s conception, child care is seen as intrinsically linked to rural development. The Directorate sums up how meeting families’ child care needs and rural economic development are tied: “It can no longer be assumed that these [care] services will be provided by the unpaid labour of women or other family members. In fact, local employment can be created in the course of solving this problem.” (European Commission – Directorate for Agriculture, 2000: 14).

Rural child care and the market model

Canada has not yet had a national child care policy or program and although each province/territory has its own child care and early childhood education policy and programs, these are fragmented and incomplete, with public funding and public policy inadequate to support the access and high quality families and children need. Communities—including rural communities –by-and-large must rely on the market of private child care providers and marketized funding to meet the demand for services. As multiple descriptions and analyses

show, for organizational and financial reasons, the Canadian child care market model mitigates against the initiation and maintenance of child care, especially for “harder-to-serve” populations such as parents working non-standard hours, those with children with disabilities and those living in rural communities. The literature review for this report and the case studies bear this out: the case studies emphasized the key role of a “leader” or leaders who was able to initiate and sustain these programs with difficulty.

However, it is the issue of the kinds of funding arrangements used in Canada, together with the rural context, that was most clearly identified as a barrier. An older report by Friendly et al. noted that “...difficulties that rural child care programs report seem to relate more to problems of accessing adequate funding under current funding arrangements than to their ability to develop programs suitable for rural families” (1994: 27). As the literature and the case studies show, both capital and operating funding issues present significant challenges both when developing and maintaining rural child care services.

Challenges

It is important to note that the challenges child care settings face often overlap and compound one another, making it even more difficult for these services to function and flourish. For example, paradoxically, low enrollment and high need may co-exist in rural child care settings. That is, while rural centres struggle with unoccupied spaces, the need for child care may be strong. As one local child care official explained in the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) report: “The problem isn’t always the lack of child care spaces. Sometimes, it’s the inability to fill all the spaces that affects the providers’ ability to stay open. But just because there are fewer children overall it doesn’t remove the needs of those families who do require services in small communities.” (Children’s Services official from eastern Ontario, quoted in OMSSA, 2011). Throughout much of Canada’s underfunded, uncoordinated child care situation, needed services may be too expensive for families or may be inappropriate to meet their needs (for example, the hours or age group might not fit or may not accept a child with a disability).

Recruitment and retention of well qualified staff is another challenge for child care in rural communities. Recruiting trained staff, providing appropriate professional development, and providing appropriate remuneration are all challenges in rural areas (Rural Voice, 2003). These workforce issues are not unique to rural communities but they seem to be compounded by the other elements of the rural context, as the case studies and literature identified.

Finally, it appears that not only are provincial policies usually not designed to address the needs of rural communities but new policies have in some instances had a negative impact

on an already fragile child care situation. OMSSA has described issues facing rural child care as “systemic challenges” (OMSSA, 2011:3). The organization’s report notes that the introduction of Ontario-wide full-day kindergarten for four and five year olds served to magnify pre-existing issues of declining child population and problems with staff recruitment and retention. A University of Guelph Master’s thesis focusing specifically on the question: “What impact did the introduction of full day kindergarten have on rural child care?” elaborated on this. Udenigwe’s research concluded that “the most pressing problems facing the rural childcare sector are insufficient funding, fluctuating enrollments, and staffing challenges...although several CMSMs (local governments) reported taking actions to aid rural communities” (2013: ii).

Further work on rural child care

In many ways, this paper raises as many questions as it may answer. While it provides cross-Canada information about rural child care in the Canadian context and surfaces the most commonly-raised issues and challenges, it is primarily basic information. Delving into the topic of rural child care raises a number of associated topics that have only been touched on here that warrant further consideration, research and analysis.

For example, the idea of conceptualizing child care as part of rural economic development is touched upon in the “beyond our borders” section. The Agriculture Directorate of the European Commission identifies the close links between families’ child care needs and rural economic development from several perspectives. While the idea that child care can play a role in rural community economic development is not entirely foreign to Canada (see Prentice, 2007), it has not been explored in sufficient detail to understand the range of possibilities.

In another example, the “absent father” phenomenon is another issue pertinent to rural child care in Canada where many rural workers may leave their home communities to work elsewhere (such as the Alberta oil sands) for long periods. While this was identified as an issue in the section of the paper exploring rural child care in the European Union, the implications of the phenomenon for family functioning, women’s employment and child care have been little explored in Canada.

As well, there is little knowledge or research on a number of practical, concrete “on-the-ground” issues linked to rural child care such as issues of transportation, ECE training challenges, the potential role of regulated home child care in rural communities and how better integration between the public education system and child care could facilitate child

care provision. Consideration of effective governance models—such as potential roles for municipal governments (such as Alberta’s MD of Opportunity) or large non-profit agencies (such as Ontario’s Compass Child Care Services) and further exploration of provincial funding applicable to rural child would be valuable in determining how best to move rural child care forward.

Finally, there are substantial gaps even in the most basic information about rural child care such as the “need” and “demand”. These are largely unknown, as the provincial scan and interviews conducted for this project indicate. Like early childhood education and child care generally, rural parents appear to need and want services for a multiple reasons—care while parents work and “education” for young children whose parents seek opportunities for socialization with other children in enriching environments.

As the federal government, provinces and territories once again considers child care issues in a 21st century Canada, careful consideration of the needs and desires of rural families will require adequate data and pertinent, detailed knowledge derived from research, analysis and discussion.

Moving forward to address rural child care issues

As the Canadian literature, case studies and analysis of rural child care issues in the European Union show, there are a number of focused strategies that might be able to help address some of the issues found again and again in rural child care. It is clear that more and better directed funding per space, as several Canadian provinces provide, can make a difference, as does capital funding to ensure that facilities can become available (as Newfoundland’s Capacity Funding provided). Flexible kinds of program models such as multi-function services, mixed age groupings or small centres (“mini-creches”) have been identified as part of the solution in Canada and elsewhere. Individual leadership, both by government officials and community members, makes a difference in identifying and tailoring selective strategies to the particular situation.

However, in and of themselves, these kinds of serendipitous, targeted strategies seem unlikely to be able to make a significant dent in the child care deficit for Canada’s rural communities—especially as they are often not sustained. As Cohen’s 1995 report about rural child care in EU countries observed “Rural areas require national child care policies which recognise the diverse range of functions which childcare serves and are able to locate childcare within a context of overall community development” (1995:3).

From all the evidence, it is apparent that in 21st century Canada, following through on the federal government’s observation in Budget 2016 that “high quality affordable child care is more than a convenience—it’s a necessity” in rural communities will require a comprehensive strategy. From the perspective of rural communities, this will need to comprise a broad-based national child care strategy that allows and supports the kinds of more flexible approaches that may be warranted to ensure that rural families, too, can access the quality child care options and choices they need and want.

Conclusions

This report has aimed at providing an overview of what we know and what we do about rural child care in Canada. It is clear that persistent challenges, many of them associated with the absence of a comprehensive child care system with sustained funding and flexible options for families hinders the development and maintenance of child care for rural Canadians. While this is also true with regard to urban and suburban Canadian families (and data are not readily available that document the relative coverage for these populations), all the information we have suggests that rural communities fall into the less-served category, even within Canada’s under-supply of affordable, high quality child care.

The additional costs of developing and maintaining rural child care is unsustainable for service providers—particularly those who are not able to subsidize these using other programs in a larger organization or who have a stable source of additional funding. Parent fees are already too costly for most families, so cannot be increased to cover high rural costs.

The limited amount of available data and research on rural child care and on the child care needs and barriers for families in rural communities is also an impediment to progress. This report has identified a number of considerations that need to be included in the further research and data collection that is greatly needed for good policy and service development.

Above all else, the research makes it quite clear that Canada needs a systemic approach to ECEC—a national, publicly funded, publicly managed system of high quality early childhood education and child care program to meet the needs of all families and children. A systemic approach to planning and developing affordable, quality services and maintaining them through reliable, adequate funding would have a profound impact on the accessibility and affordability of child care for all Canadians—including those living and/or working in rural communities. At the same time, it’s important to keep in mind the statement of the Canadian Rural Partnership Advisory Committee on Rural Issues that “national programs, if they are to be useful to rural populations, must be tailored to the peculiarities of the rural setting” (2005).

This year, with the 2015 federal election, renewed possibilities for Canadian child care are once again on the political and policy table. How rural child care will fare in this environment depends on—as always—whether governments will “get the architecture right” when developing the National Framework to which it has committed. Today’s families need a planned, publicly-financed, high quality ECEC system that works for everybody. As Prentice, White and Friendly observed, it will be “by moving beyond baby steps to planning a national child care system that the government of Canada can help lead the development of a child care system that works for all of us” (2016).

Recommendations based on the study

To the federal government

1. Lead in working with provinces/territories/Indigenous communities to develop a comprehensive national ECEC policy framework⁹ based on the best evidence leading to access to high quality services for all Canadians including those living in rural communities. This will mean:
 - Moving away from the market-based system that makes it so difficult to develop and sustain child care in rural, remote and Northern Canada;
 - Committing to a plan for long-term sustained federal ECEC funding, transferred to provinces/territories/Indigenous communities that agree to implement comprehensive policy frameworks and plans;
 - Recognizing that Indigenous communities have an immediate need for remedies to long-standing inequities, and that culturally-sensitive ELCC could play a valuable role in truth and reconciliation;
 - Working with provinces/territories/Indigenous communities to establish a research, data and evaluation agenda that includes the issue of child care in rural communities.

To provincial/territorial governments

2. Each province/territory should commit to a plan aimed at meeting rural communities' needs for early childhood education and care. This should include:
 - Reviewing and analyzing its approach to rural child care;
 - Developing ways to identify need and demand for ECEC in rural communities;
 - Developing a policy approach that uses the best available evidence about facilitation and maintenance of accessible, high quality ECEC services in rural communities where there is local need or demand;
 - Developing an approach to providing public funding that recognizes the actual cost of operating accessible high quality child care in rural communities;
 - Developing new approaches to ELCC workforce issues such as low wages, career opportunities and recognition that limit the possibilities for quality services in rural communities;
 - Providing informative materials online and in print for parents about regulated child care services in rural communities.

⁹ [A Shared Framework for building an early childhood education and care system for all](#) has been put forward to national and provincial/territorial politicians by the national ECEC community.

To the union

3. Convene a national working group comprised of provincial/territorial/Indigenous community representatives and policy makers, researchers, employers and unions to examine the situation of families living and/or working in rural communities and to make recommendations for a variety of options for better ECEC and workplace support for rural families;
4. With stakeholder partners, develop research and analysis that would be useful in understanding rural child care better and to contribute to moving it forward;
5. Provide support for pilot and other special initiatives in the area of rural child care both to meet the needs of members and to provide illustrations of successful rural child care;
6. Continue to advocate with governments on the issue of access to child care generally and rural child care in particular;
7. Ensure that issues and concerns specific to Indigenous ELCC are recognized by all levels of government with the goal of developing remedies consistent with the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission;
8. Develop, support and provide resources for member parents (such as the Finding Quality Child Care website and other educational resources) to help them understand and address the issue of rural child care.

To parents in rural communities

9. Join with others such as unions, employers, social justice groups, child care advocates and other community partners to advocate for a universal national child care program to meet the needs of all families including those living and/or working in rural communities;
10. Be as well informed about your child care options as you can be, although they may be limited, so as to maximize the possibility of securing suitable, affordable, high quality child care.

To human rights specialists

11. Explore rights-based legal and other remedies to Canada's current child care situation that fails to support rural parents who need and want early childhood education and child care. This work could be supported by such documents as the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

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Appendix A . Literature review summary table

LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY TABLE			
Citation and access	Type of study	Purpose	Findings / highlights
Albanese, P. (2006). Small town, big benefits: The ripple effect of \$7/day child care. <i>Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology</i> , 43 (2), 125-140. Only available through university library.	Qualitative - interviews with parents and providers.	"My specific research objectives were to assess the economic and social impact of \$7/day child care on the community and on domestic relations, particularly as they are seen by individuals affected by the program" (p. 131).	-Mothers felt that their children benefitted cognitively and socially from attending child care. -It was easier to work part time/ low wage work for mothers. As well, 35 women were now employed in child care -Some mothers felt that domestic relations had improved as a result of dual income -the child care program contributed to the community by allowing more families to stay and build up the community.
Albanese, P. & Farr, T. (2012). "I'm lucky"... to have found child care: Evoking luck while managing child care needs in a changing economy. <i>International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies</i> 1, 83–111. Available at: http://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ijcyfs/article/view/10475/3108	Journal article		
Asthana, S., & Halliday, J. (2004). What can rural agencies do to address the additional costs of rural services? A typology of rural service innovation. <i>Health & Social Care in the Community</i> , 12 (6), 457–465.			

LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY TABLE

Citation and access	Type of study	Purpose	Findings / highlights
<p>Ball, J. (2005). Early childhood care and development programs as hook and hub for inter-sectoral service delivery in First Nations communities. <i>Journal of Aboriginal Health</i> 2 (1), 36–50. Online at http://www.fnpp.org/documents/Ball_DevelPrograms_Hookand-Hub.pdf</p>	<p>“Multimethod, multicomponent program of research to document, evaluate, provide feedback to community members, and share information about their explorations in ECCD as a hook and hub for promoting population health” (p. 44).</p>	<p>“The goal of this research was to add to the understandings about the potential for positively influencing the health and development of Aboriginal children through training and funding strategies that strengthen Aboriginal community capacity to deliver ECCD. Another goal is to identify ways in which institutions and individuals outside of First Nations communities can support and serve as allies as First Nations communities develop capacity and move forward with their community development strategies” (p. 44).</p>	<p>The communities involved in this project used a number of strategies to improve ECCD services – the three broad strategies were: pooling resources in and between communities, integrated multiple services for children and families, and creating an “ECCD as hub in an inter-sectoral service multiplex”.</p>
<p>Bollman, R.D. & Clemenson, H.A. (2008). Structure and change in Canada’s rural demography: An update to 2006. <i>Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin</i>, 7 (7), catalogue number 21-006-X. Available at: http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/21-006-x/2007007/figures/6000448-eng.htm</p>			

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Citation and access	Type of study	Purpose	Findings / highlights
<p>Brownell, B. (2000). Task force on rural child care & early childhood education. Guelph, ON: Rural Child Care Task Force Report. Available at: http://www.ofa.on.ca/issues/additional-information/Rural-Child-Care-Report</p> <p>See also: Rural child care needs (2002) http://www.ofa.on.ca/issues/additional-information/Rural-Child-Care-Needs-</p>	Task force report	<p>“Purpose: To provide the information and networks required by stakeholders to better understand and advocate for Ontario rural child care services and early childhood education programmes. Objectives: To identify rural child care issues arising from ongoing changes in the Ontario child care system, and to understand how these issues can be addressed by public and community agencies and rural stakeholders.” (p. 7)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Child care issues are consistent despite some successful pilot projects. -New role for municipalities is an opportunity for change. - “The four pillars of affordable, accessible, flexible, quality, child care should be incorporated into planning models”. -Rural child care needs more flexible models, including regulation, funding, enrollment, space etc.
<p>Calhoun, S., Olfet, R, M., & Testo, K. (2005). Canada’s new national childcare program: Ensuring the rural message is heard. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Rural Partnership. Available at: http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED503428.pdf</p>	Brief from the Canadian Rural Partnership Advisory Committee on Rural Issues	<p>Written at the time of the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Childcare, this brief aims to explain why child care is important to rural communities and the challenges of provision and makes recommendations to policy makers on how rural to address rural needs. Brief descriptions of three programs are provided.</p>	<p>Recommendations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognize that rural and remote childcare may be more expensive. Develop funding formulas accordingly. 2. Ensure mechanisms are in place to consult locally (e.g. Rural Voices Network). 3. Make explicit to rural and remote citizens “what’s in it for them” when the national childcare program is announced. 4. Government should continue to support research on rural and remote childcare. 5. Monitoring of implementation of the national childcare program should ensure that rural and remote can be distinguished from urban right from the beginning.
<p>Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting (CAIR) (2011). <i>Agricultural fatalities in Canada 1990-2008</i>. Edmonton, Alberta: Author. Available at: http://www.cair-sbac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/National-Report-1990-2008-FULL-REPORT-FINAL-EN.pdf</p>	Research report	<p>To detail the numbers, seasonal incidence and causes of agricultural fatalities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From 1990 to 2008, there were 248 agricultural fatalities among children under 15 years of age - Average of 13 child fatalities a year.

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Citation and access	Type of study	Purpose	Findings / highlights
Children in Scotland (2010) Inclusive workforce models for rural and remote areas. Edinburgh: Children in Scotland. Online at http://www.childreninScotland.org.uk/docs/Norway_Rural_discpaper-Jan2010.pdf	Discussion paper	Part of <i>Working for inclusion</i> project that is a cross-European program to examine how improving the qualifications and skills of those working with our youngest children can help reduce poverty and improve social inclusion. Explore the specific characteristics and needs of rural and remote areas in relation to the larger project.	There are examples from around Europe that may be helpful to increasing and improving ECEC in rural and remote areas.
Choi, E-Y. & Johnson, T. G. (2014). Economic impact of the informal childcare sector in Kansas. <i>Journal of Regional Analysis and Policy</i> , 44(1), 20-35. Available at: http://www.jrap-journal.org/pastvolumes/2010/v44/v44_n1_a2_choi_johnson.pdf	Journal article	This study set out to examine the size and economic impact 'informal' (unregulated) child care in Kansas, looking at both metropolitan and rural regions of the state.	The study found that families in rural areas are more likely to use informal childcare than those in metro areas, and that its effect on the economy is equivalent to that of a mid-range sector such as social services, or the performing arts. The authors conclude that "a sector this important certainly justifies significant public investment to assure the highest possible quality and efficiency. Policy makers may wish to address the balance between informal and formal child care. They may decide that it is in the public interest to move more of the informal childcare services into the formal sector. This may require changes in the requirements for satisfying the definition of a formal childcare provider or the removal of disincentives for meeting current requirements." (pp. 31-32).

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Cohen, B. (1995) Childcare services for rural families: Improving provision in the European Union. Brussels: European Commission Network on Childcare. Online at: http://aei.pitt.edu/41112/1/A5213.pdf	EU Childcare Network report.	This report examined rural childcare services in the (then) twelve EU Member States. It describes issues and trends in service delivery. It includes a review of the situation in each Member State and provides recommendations for Member States and the European Commission.	<p>Challenges posed by rural characteristics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - scattered communities - low demand linked to sparse population density - distance and poor transport - lack of suitable buildings, - difficulty finding trained staff <p>Challenges posed by existing structures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fragmented services - Inflexibility and lack of awareness of rural needs / policies developed in an urban environment that fail to take into account rural needs - Lack of funding <p>Recommendations for Member States</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policy to ensure access for rural children to good quality services and facilitate piloting models and funding strategies - collect and analyze comparative data for rural and urban areas - Collaboration between all relevant government departments, including those responsible for welfare, education, recreation, agricultural and rural development.
County of Wellington Child Care Services (2012). <i>The economic value of child care</i> . County of Wellington. Online at http://www.wellington.ca/en/socialservices/resources/The_Economic_Value_of_Child_Care_January2012_Final1.pdf	Discussion paper	This report is intended to stimulate discussion. Child care services supports the notion that there is a need for a broad range of services for supporting children's healthy development and family well-being and licensed child care is an essential part of those services.	<p>Child care is a crucial piece of infrastructure that needs to be developed to support the local economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -quality matters in how effective child care is (long-term impacts) -Wellington county should strengthen and support their role as CMSM for child care

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Citation and access	Type of study	Purpose	Findings / highlights
Crane, J. (2008). The well-being of women and children in rural and northern British Columbia: Accessibility to regulated childcare. Master's Thesis. Simon Fraser University. Online at http://summit.sfu.ca/item/8764	Master's thesis. Mixed methods – interviews, focus groups	Investigate women's access to child care in rural B.C.	most significant “barriers affecting their ability to access childcare in their communities... included cost and affordability, social stigma, isolation, subsidy eligibility, and a lack of available programs and services” (from abstract)
Curto, J. & Rothwell, N. (2003). The gender balance of employment in rural and small town Canada. <i>Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin</i> , 4(3). Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Online at: http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/Statcan/21-006-X/21-006-XIE2002003.pdf	Statistics Canada report.		
Doherty, G. (1994). Rural child care in Ontario. A background paper for a conference on rural child care co-sponsored by: Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services. Occasional Paper 4. Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit. Available online at: http://www.childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/op4.pdf	Background paper for conference	To provide an overview of the issues related to the provision of child care in rural areas and information about what has been learned from experience in rural child care provision, and to assist participants at conference.	As a result of these specific characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rural communities require a variety of kinds of child care including: a) child care on a year-round, full-time basis; b) seasonal child care; c) childcare offered outside usual working hours of 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.; and d) child care on a periodic basis (for example, to cover an emergency); • communities can only sustain small child care programs; and • child care programs must be able to identify and respond to changes in need quickly.

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Citation and access	Type of study	Purpose	Findings / highlights
<p>du Plessis V., Beshiri, R., Bollman, R.D. & Clemenson, H. (2002). <i>Definitions of "rural". Agriculture and Rural Working Paper Series, Working Paper No. 61.</i> Ottawa, Ontario: Statistics Canada, Agricultural Division. Available at: http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/28031/1/wp020061.pdf</p>			
<p>European Commission – Directorate for Agriculture. (2000). <i>Women active in rural development: Assuring the future of rural Europe.</i> Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/publi/women/broch_en.pdf</p>			
<p>Friendly, M., Cleveland, G., and Willis, T. (1994). <i>Flexible childcare in Canada: A report on child care for evenings, overnight and weekends, emergencies and ill children, and in rural areas.</i> Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit. Available online at http://www.childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/flex.pdf</p>	<p>Mixed methods – Literature reviews-overview and analysis of policies and programs, key informant interviews, Questionnaires</p>	<p>“This report examines policy and program options to meet these atypical child care needs. It is intended to provide an overview of current services and policies, program models and issues for those with an interest in service delivery and policy development”.</p>	<p>Examination of these services indicates that they appear to be as adaptable to rural areas as they are to urban communities, especially if hours and other conditions of attendance are flexible. The difficulties that rural child care programs report seem to relate more to problems of accessing adequate funding under current funding arrangements than to their ability to develop programs suitable for rural families.</p>

LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY TABLE

Citation and access	Type of study	Purpose	Findings / highlights
<p>Gott, C. & Wilson, J. (2004). <i>Rural Voices For Early Childhood Education and Care Final Report Project #12281 4791 RP0001</i>. Langruth, MB. Online at http://ruralteammanitoba.cimnet.ca/cim/dbf/Rural_Voices_Final_Report.pdf?im_id=289&si_id=170</p>			
<p>Graham, K. & Underwood, K. (2012). The reality of rurality: Rural parents' experiences of early years services. <i>Health & Place</i> 18, 1231–1239.</p> <p>Only available through university library</p>	<p>Qualitative – focus groups and interviews with parents</p>	<p>“This research was intended to clarify how rural parents perceive early childhood services and supports, and to investigate whether parents' experiences with Best Start were affected by their rural context”.</p>	<p>Rural parents' experiences with Best Start services are affected by a complex interplay of factors related to rural life and location. Accessibility is a fundamentally important issue in rural communities, but it is a complex and multi-faceted concept that involves more than the distance to a given programme or service. Availability must be considered in relation to the social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of living in rural areas. The proximity of services is an important starting point, especially in consideration of service reduction trends, but the answer is not as simple as providing services close to home. Outcomes are connected to the design of service delivery, and appropriate services are as important as available services.</p>
<p>Halliday, J. & Little, J. (2001). Amongst women: Exploring the reality of rural childcare. <i>Sociologia Ruralis</i>, 41(4), 423–437. Library access only.</p>	<p>Secondary data analysis /discussion</p>	<p>The paper goes beyond existing discussions of childcare in rural areas in attempting to place patterns of use in the broader context of household gender relations and the cultural construction of rurality</p>	<p>“We argue that decisions around child care by rural families need to be considered in relation not only to the availability of different sorts of service but also to the employment aspirations and choices of men and women and the assumptions of the primacy of women's mothering role. Such issues are underpinned, we contest, by idyllic constructions of rural family life and social relations”</p>

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Citation and access	Type of study	Purpose	Findings / highlights
Hall, M. (2009). Child care in rural and remote communities: Thoughts from a daycare-dependant mom. <i>Our School/Our Selves</i> , Spring 2009, 213-218. Available at: http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2009/04/Child%20Care%20in%20Rural%20and%20Remote%20Communities.pdf	Personal narrative	Describe her personal experience accessing child care as a single mother in a rural setting in Northwest Territories	Child care is absolutely necessary for single women but what she experienced does not meet most people's needs. She describes the barriers to accessing the care she needs and being unable to find lucrative work because she is unable to find suitable care.
Manicom, A., Rhymes, J., Armour, N & Parsons, D. (2005). Public policy and the participation of rural Nova Scotia women in the new economy. <i>The Women's Economic Equality (WEE) Society in Partnership with the Hypatia Project</i> . Online at http://www.rwmc.uoguelph.ca/cms/documents/45/Manicom_1-134.pdf	Mixed methods (literature review, documentary analysis, interviews and statistical analysis)	Research project addressed two main questions: How can rural women take advantage of new economy opportunities, particularly those linked to new technologies? And, what kind of policies do rural women need to facilitate their full participation in the new economy?	Social policy that supports women's access to the new economy must address such issues as quality early childhood education and care, income assistance inequities, quality job creation, employment benefits and lifelong learning. The Government of Canada must fully implement and fund a universal, high-quality, flexible early childhood education and care system, without which rural women will continue to be excluded from access to education and work in the new economy.

LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY TABLE

Citation and access	Type of study	Purpose	Findings / highlights
<p>Martz, D. & Bauer, R. (2005). <i>Growing minds: Building quality childcare options in rural communities</i>. Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Unit. Online at http://www.spheru.ca/research/projects/projects/growing-minds.php</p>	<p>Mixed methods - literature review, a review of government policies and practices, interviews with child care workers, community mapping of variables that affect early childhood development and learning, focus groups and community discussions.</p>	<p>“The main objectives included exploring the barriers and issues for rural families in accessing child care and early learning opportunities for children under the age of 6 years; learning from evidence-based practice how to foster and strengthen child care options and transmit this knowledge to rural communities; working with community groups to develop action plans that will impact factors such as affordability and availability of quality child care; and seeking means by which to assist rural communities in the development and support of quality child care options”.</p>	<p>“Most parents stated a preference for licensed child care as they felt it provided an assurance of quality and safety. Parents also noted the need for flexibility in child care services, observing that parents working shift work and farm families were poorly served by child care which is only available during business hours”.</p> <p>“The very diverse needs in rural child care are a challenge for the provision of service where there may not be large numbers requiring any one model of child care service and speaks to the need for innovation and flexibility” (p.2)</p>
<p>Models of Child Development Hubs Outside Vancouver (2005) http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/child-hubs.pdf</p>			
<p>Ontario Municipal Social Services Association. (2011). <i>On the teeter-totter: The challenges and opportunities for licensed child care in rural, northern, and remote Ontario</i>. Toronto: Author. Available online at: http://ruralontarioinstitute.ca/file.aspx?id=ef367635-4b3f-4d42-abf4-2cfc45f02f29 (Supporting document) Report of the forum on rural, remote and Northern child care (2011) http://ruralontarioinstitute.ca/file.aspx?id=ebf726fc-5a68-4c1c-8f15-84c76dbf14b1</p>	<p>Research report</p>	<p>“This report examines the challenges facing Ontario’s rural, northern, and remote child care system and provides a series of concrete solutions to strengthen licensed child care and to help families and communities across rural, northern, and remote areas of the province.” (p. 1)</p>	<p>“Licensed child care in rural, northern, and remote communities requires a comprehensive solution that does not base its funding solely on the numbers of children in the system. The declining child population in these areas makes a population-based funding solution entirely inappropriate.” (p. 8)</p>

LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY TABLE

Citation and access	Type of study	Purpose	Findings / highlights
Prentice, S. (2007). <i>Northern childcare: Childcare as economic and social development in Thompson</i> . Winnipeg, MB: Child Care Coalition of Manitoba. Online (full report and summary): http://childcaremanitoba.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=34&Itemid=42	Research report	“The report outlines the multiple benefits of childcare, providing detailed information on Thompson’s families and children, its childcare services and early educators, and the economic effects of the childcare sector and its labour force. This report reviews the special contribution childcare can make in supporting Aboriginal children and families.”	“Even at its current small size, the childcare sector is valuable. Childcare contributes \$2.1 million directly to the Thompson economy. As childcare revenue “ripples” through the economy, it brings total direct and indirect benefits of nearly \$3.4 million. Every \$1 spent on childcare returns \$1.58 to the Thompson economy; in the long-term, the payback is even higher.”
Prentice, S. (2007). <i>Rural childcare: Childcare as economic development in Parkland</i> . Winnipeg, MB: Child Care Coalition of Manitoba. Available online at: http://childcaremanitoba.org/images/stories/docs/cccmpublications/parkland_report.pdf Related article online http://www.amm.mb.ca/PDF/Magazine/Spring2008/RuralChildcare.pdf	Research report	“The report provides detailed information on Parkland’s childcare services and childcare labour force, and the economic effects of the childcare sector”	“Every \$1 spent on childcare in Parkland generates \$1.58 of benefits. The childcare sector is directly worth \$1.73 million to the Parkland economy. As this money “ripples” through the local economy, it is estimated to produce economic benefits of \$2.74 million, accounting for direct and indirect effects. Childcare enables parents to work, and we calculate the annual earnings of parents who use full-time childcare in Parkland to be over \$12.3 million.”
Reimer, B. & Bollman, J.D. (2010). Understanding rural Canada: Implications for rural development policy and rural planning policy. In D.J.A. Douglas (Ed.) <i>Rural Planning and Development in Canada</i> , 10-52. Toronto: Nelson Education Ltd.			

LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY TABLE

Citation and access	Type of study	Purpose	Findings / highlights
Rural Voices (2003). <i>Help or hindrance: A Policy review of early childhood education and care In rural Manitoba and Saskatchewan</i> . Langruth, MB: Rural Voices. Online at: http://ruralvoices.cimnet.ca/cim/86C179_268T21781.dhtm	Qualitative. Eight community focus groups (four per province). Twenty key informant interviews - range of participants involved in the field of early childhood education and care.	Review policy, issues and possible solutions for rural child care in Manitoba and Saskatchewan	-ongoing issues with training and recruitment of program staff -subsidy system not working for families or programs -funding is inadequate and supervisors and providers do not have resources and knowledge of extra grants and funding -lack of integration with schools and other services is a problem
Rural Voices (2005). <i>New Brunswick rural child care strategy sessions summary report</i> . Online by searching document title in Google (no hyperlink available).	Discussion paper	Summary of participant discussions at the strategy sessions.	-Issues of poverty and poor statistical results for children, families and services makes quality measures critical in ensuring the best start for rural New Brunswick children -Community needs to understand the resources presently in their community and how to partner and work together with government to create positive changes and increase access to services for rural children and their families. -Flexible delivery models and extended care are necessary to meet the needs of rural New Brunswick's working parents as well as stay at home parents who are often isolated and in need of supports. -School age children are lost in the struggle to access child care options, often becoming caregivers themselves for their younger siblings.

LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY TABLE

Citation and access	Type of study	Purpose	Findings / highlights
Rural Voices and Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. (2005). <i>Rural Child Care – We're worth it: Strategic directions for moving ahead on a national child care strategy for rural, remote and northern communities: Discussion paper</i> . Online by searching document title in Google (no hyperlink available).	Discussion paper	Consultation document meant to engage the voice and participation of citizens living in rural, remote and northern communities in the development of a national child care strategy.	-Rural communities have very diverse needs - Community members should actively participate in policy development and program design of childcare options for children and families living in rural, remote and northern communities across Canada so that their childcare needs will be met in the development of a national childcare strategy.
Smith, K. (2006). <i>Rural families choose home-based child care for their preschool-aged children</i> (US) Carsey Institute, Policy brief no. 3 (spring 2006). Online at: http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Topics/Education/Early%20Childhood%20and%20School%20Readiness/CarseyInstituteNo32006RuralFamiliesChoose-Home/EC3622H1122.pdf	Policy brief	To determine types of child care used by rural mothers	Despite the overall national trend of a declining use of relative care over the past 30 years, 10 relative care remains a prominent choice for both rural and urban employed mothers, especially among single mothers and those with low incomes. However, employed rural mothers are less likely than urban mothers to pay for relative care if they use it, and pay the lowest amount for child care if their primary child care arrangement is a relative. Although less prevalent than relative care, the use of informal non-related care providers for preschoolers is more common in rural communities than in urban areas. In sum, rural families choose home-based child care in the form of relatives or informal non-related care providers to care for their preschoolers more often than organized care facilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY TABLE

Citation and access	Type of study	Purpose	Findings / highlights
Smith, L.K. (2010). Child care in rural areas: Top challenges (US). National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies. Online at http://www.naccrra.org/sites/default/files/default_site_pages/2012/rural_top_concerns_070910.pdf	Survey, data and analysis (responses from 42 states)	To identify the top challenges facing parents and child care providers in rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Top challenges are availability, accessibility, affordability and quality -Culturally, child care is viewed and used very differently in rural areas. -Parents often prefer family, friend or neighbor care for several reasons, including trust, culture, cost and proximity. Parents do not like the idea of having to send their child to a “city” center where their rural culture and values may not be represented in the program.
Statistics Canada (2012). <i>Canada's rural population since 1851. Population and dwelling counts, 2011 Census</i> . Catalogue no. 98-310-X2011003. Available from: http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-310-x/98-310-x2011003_2-eng.pdf			

LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY TABLE

Citation and access	Type of study	Purpose	Findings / highlights
<p>Swenson, K. (2006). <i>Child care arrangements in urban and rural areas</i>. Office of the Assistance Secretary for Planning and Evaluation U.S. Department of Health and Human Services . Online at http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/cc-urban-rural/report.pdf See also: De Marco, A., Crouter, A.C., Vernon-Feagan, L. (2009). The relationship of maternal work characteristics to childcare type and quality in rural communities. <i>Community, Work & Family</i>,12 (4), 369-387. Only available through university library.</p>	Qualitative – national survey	This paper compares non-parental care arrangements of pre-school age children in urban and rural areas of the United States using data from the 2005 National household Education Survey (NHES), Early Childhood Program Participation Survey (ECP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - among preschool-age children, those in rural areas are about as likely as those in urban areas to receive care from someone other than their parents on a weekly basis. - when rural children participate in non-parental care they are more likely than urban children to receive this care from relatives and are less likely to receive care in center programs. - rural children are in families that, on average, made fewer out-of-pocket contributions toward the cost of their care.
<p>Udenigwe, O. (2013). <i>Managing the impacts of full day kindergarten on rural childcare centres in Ontario</i>. Master's Thesis. Guelph, Ontario: University of Guelph. Available online at: https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10214/7779/Udenigwe_Ogochukwu_201312_Msc.pdf?sequence=5</p>	Master's thesis	Explores the impact of full-day kindergarten on child care in rural communities through key informant interviews with CMSM officials.	
<p>Warner, M. &Liu, Z. (2006). The importance of child care in economic development: A comparative analysis of regional economic linkage. <i>Economic Development Quarterly</i>,20(1), 97–103.</p>	Journal article		

LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY TABLE

Citation and access	Type of study	Purpose	Findings / highlights
Watson, G. (2001). The current state of rural childcare in Canada Canadian Agricultural Safety Association. Online at http://casa-acsa.ca/content/rural-child-care-report	Review of provincial policies and barriers	Identify main issues and barriers for rural child care	Safety was a top priority for rural child care providers and users. Other barriers identified were: retaining trained staff, ratios, age groupings, extended hours, subsidy allocation, funding models etc.
Wehner, J., Kelly, B. & Prentice, S. (2008). Rural and northern child care: A summary of economic and social evidence from Manitoba. Rural Team Manitoba Working Group. Online at http://ruralteammanitoba.cimnet.ca/cim/dbf/RTM_Childcare_Report_January_2008_-_FinalE.indd.pdf?im_id=208&si_id=170	Literature review	Review of above reports by Susan Prentice (2007) and <i>Changing Needs of Rural and Northern Women in Manitoba: A Research Report 2005</i> – summary and symposium proceedings	
Wilson, J. (2012). Rural Child Care: Supporting Farm Families and Their Children. <i>Transition</i> , 201, 42, (1), 7-9. Vanier Institute of the Family. Online at: http://www.vanierinstitute.ca/include/get.php?nodeid=1934	Magazine article	Overview of current trends and child care needs for rural families and farm families.	“There are many reasons for the challenge that providing rural child care services presents. The two most common ones are declining enrolment and staff recruitment.”

Appendix B. Rural Child Care – questions for provinces and territories

- Review purpose of the project as outlined in the email
 - Discuss PTs particular definition of rural/remote and northern for purposes of rural child care
1. Do you currently have any specific regulations, policies, funding mechanisms or practices that are intended to support the establishment or sustainability of rural child care? If yes:
 - 1a. Can you elaborate?
 - 1b. Are the details available on your website/can you send us a copy of relevant documents?
 - 1c. How have these been effective?
 2. Have there been any previous initiatives in (PT) aimed at the development of rural child care? If yes:
 - 2a. Can you elaborate? Are these still in operation? If not, why not?
 - 2b. Are there any available reports or documents that describe the initiative or its impact?
 3. Are there any general regulations, policies, funding mechanisms or practices that, in your opinion, have facilitated the establishment or sustainability of rural child care (that may have been more general or intended for another purpose)? If yes:
 - 3a. Can you elaborate?
 - 3b. In what way have these been effective?
 4. Do you know if there is a greater unmet demand for rural child care than for urban child care? (please elaborate)
 5. What do you think have been the main challenges with the development of rural child care in (PT)?
- We are planning on doing a selected number of case studies on rural child care programs that are well established and are meeting community need. Can you suggest a rural child care program (or organization that operates more than one program), that you think is particularly successful?

Appendix C. Letter to case study participants

Dear NAME

The Childcare Resource and Research Unit (CRRU) is working with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) on a project to provide an overview of the current state of child care in rural areas. We have conducted a review of Canadian and other relevant research and policies. One component of our research is to conduct several case studies of service providers who successfully offer this form of child care.

Using information available in other sources (other research, “key informants”, your website, news articles), we have identified your program as one we’d like to include. Thus, I am writing to ask whether you would be willing to have a telephone interview with us so that we can develop a good description of the program and try to answer some common questions across all the case studies.

The semi-structured, pre-scheduled telephone interview should take about an hour on the phone. If you are willing to participate, we will send you a document with information we’ve been able to put together about your organization from other sources; if you could confirm or correct this information (for example, the number and type of child care spaces, the year the program started, and so on), it would simplify the telephone interview somewhat. We can fill in missing information from the interview (or you may want to send it to us). In addition, we’ll send you in advance the broader questions we’d like to cover, for example, what you see as the biggest challenges and what policies/circumstances you attribute the success of your program to before scheduling a time for the phone interview. We will then write up the information in a case study for a public report on this research, sending the case study back to you for your approval. We cannot promise anonymity, as the programs will be identified by name and province.

If you could let me know if you are interested in being part of this research or if you have further questions, I can be reached at 416 926 9264 or shalfon@childcarecanada.org

Thank you.

Shani Halfon Research officer, Childcare Resource and Research Unit

Appendix D. Case Study summaries

1. Kawartha Child Care Services

Kawartha Lakes, Ontario (Now Compass Child Care Services)

Kawartha Child Care Services (KCCS) is a non-profit, charitable corporation that operates approximately 24 centre-based programs and a home child care agency in small townships and rural areas in or around Peterborough, Ontario (population 79,000) which is located about 135 km. northeast of Toronto. These licensed programs operate Monday through Friday during traditional program hours (7:00 am – 6:00 pm) and have the capacity to provide approximately 1,182 spaces for children 0 – 12 years. All but one of the centre-based programs is located in a school. Initiated in 1981 by a group of three women who were partly inspired by the rural setting and were also interested in supporting a home-based child care model based on the objectives of parent involvement, high quality child development, flexible options and responsive services. At the time, this was a new approach to home child care.

What services are provided?

KCCS's programs – centre-based and home child care - vary according to community need and available resources. They place a priority on flexibility and on pedagogy. Because rural programs are often not fully enrolled to capacity, they may offer part-time, on-call and emergency services. To ensure that centre supervisors are able to focus on the children's learning and development and what is happening in the classroom, central administration provides financial, human resources, public reporting and similar administrative functions for each program. The City of Kawartha Lakes provides pedagogical support in the form of weekly visits to programs to offer side by side mentoring and to engage in reflective practice.

Regulated home child care services are provided in many Ontario communities under an agency model. Recruiting and retaining home child care providers is more difficult in rural areas, in some communities in part because fees in regulated home child care are higher than in unregulated care.

The general policy is to enroll families on a first come, first served basis but special consideration can be made for family circumstances. Availability of fee subsidies (through the local government) to defray parent fees is a very important factor. Affordability – or the

lack of affordability – means that families may use the program on a part time basis. As Executive Director Sheila Olan-Maclean explained, if child care services were affordable, most parents would choose to bring their children on a regular basis. Thus, there is a need for child care that may not translate into the demand for services. Another key factor is the building of trust among parents and child care service providers. Olan-Maclean added that rural programs may need to prove that they are not going to “institutionalize your child.”

The range of families who uses the programs is wide. In Apsley, a small town that is quite isolated, seasonal workers (spring, summer and fall) and some vacationers may use the program in addition to local residents. In contrast, programs located closer to urban centres like Bowmanville, Peterborough or Toronto attract families who commute to those urban centres daily. CCCS usually plans on a five-year basis and does surveys to determine demand.

What contributes to the success of the program?

The organizational culture at CCCS is an important factor in the success of the program. When there’s a need, CCCS pulls together its resources to meet the challenge. Value based decision making and pedagogy guide CCCS. That could mean developing flexible services when enrollments decrease and/or submitting an application to operate a centre in a new school because smaller organizations could not afford to take the initiative. Willingness to operate urban programs and to increase the number of school- age programs has helped financially to support the continuance of some rural programs. At least one rural program does not break even or contribute the central administrative costs even with the new provincial funding stream for rural programs. Nevertheless, CCCS makes sure that each program receives professional development and pedagogical support.

The new policy direction of the province (the early years framework and pedagogical approach) aid and enhance the direction that CCCS has been pursuing. With regard to funding, Sheila Olan-Maclean adds that “a policy direction that would really support rural child care would be one that base funds it.”

What are the challenges for the program?

Low enrollment in existing services is an on-going challenge in most of the programs. Olan-Maclean stressed that there is not a lack of need for child care services but that affordability is a major barrier. In a culture in which neighbours care for many children informal-

ly at a lower cost to parents than fees for regulated care, the lack of sufficient base funding is a serious problem.

As well, building trust (that a child care centre is a good experience for children) with parents remains a key issue. Attracting and retaining full-time staff is not a major problem but there are challenges, especially a certain times of the year, in finding suitable supply staff.

Additional administrative and financial challenges include the need to deal with many municipal health and building units across the broad geographic area CCCS serves. Some are restrictive; for example, some townships in Peterborough do not allow regulated home child care. One municipality determined that United Way could not fund child care services and this resulted in a significant loss of funds for one quite isolated centre.

As CCCS has grown to include a large staff or more than 150 (full-time/short-term/supply staff), the success of the organization has begun to work against it. In some situations, CCCS has not received its fair share of funding because the perception is that they do not need the support.

2. Shaunavon Children's Learning Centre (SCLC)

Shaunavon, Saskatchewan

Shaunavon Children's Learning Centre (SCLC) is a non-profit, charitable organization started in 1995 by a group of Shaunavon locals who identified the need for an early learning and care centre. The group consisted of a few parents, concerned citizens (one of which would later become mayor), a reporter, and a business owner – not all of whom were parents. SCLC has the capacity to offer full day, full year centre based child care for 54 children 0-6 years of age who may live in Shaunavon (population approximately 1,800), located in southwest Saskatchewan near the Alberta border, or the surrounding area. Since 2003, SCLC has been located in a retrofitted building that was a residential home sold by the City to SCLC at the nominal fee (\$1). The centre features a sprawling backyard the size of three typical lots which allows for excellent outdoor play and exploration. There is strong support from the community in the form of donations, in kind services and fundraising.

What services are provided?

SCLC offers full day, full year centre based child care for children 0-6 years of age. Staff plan play and learning experiences based on the observed interests of the children (individual/group), and they follow the play and exploration provincial curriculum guide. The programs are separated by age groups and all curriculum plans are developmentally appropriate. The way the program is set up allows for multi-age grouping and which often occurs in the morning and is one strategy that can assist in addressing low or fluctuating enrollment. Delana Floberg, Executive Director, expressed her professional appreciation for multi-age grouping and said, “I think it’s beneficial for the children to be together at different times in the day.”

A complement of full time staff is employed throughout the year. The ECEs are well trained and many of them have continued to study part time in order to advance their credentials from ECE I to ECE II. All of the ECEs who are currently studying are completing their courses through distance education and are eligible to receive up to \$500 from the provincial government. Floberg noted that “most of our ECEs would not be able to increase their training if the government did not pitch in to cover some of their costs.”

Who uses the program?

SCLC serves rural families who may live in town or travel as far as 75 km away each day. Enrolment policies follow a basic first come first served principle; SCLC does not have specific priority groups, However, parents looking for a full time space would be prioritized over those looking for a part time space. The flexible spaces within the licensed capacity of 54 spaces (9 infant, 10 toddler, 20 preschool, 8 school-age, 7 flexible) specifically enable the program to offer drop off care or increase the spaces in other age groups, except infants, as the need arises. There is fluctuation in enrollment with fewer children in the summer months when families take holidays and older siblings may provide child care. To hold a space when it is not being used, families must pay a fee,

It is important to note that SCLC once offered both child care on a 24 hour/7day/wk basis and “on farm” child care in which the children were transported to a central farm from several homes and cared for by an early childhood educator. SCLC may have been the first program (or one of the first) to offer child care on the family farm. Both programs were popular but the demand was not always high enough for financial viability so the project funding was cut and the programs were discontinued.

What contributes to the success of the program?

Financial and other support from governments and from the community are key to the success of SCLC. A capital funding grant in addition to an in-kind donation of materials and labour were crucial to retrofitting the house where SCLC is located. Parents and the community continue to provide some donations, fundraising assistance as well as a toy and art drive for SCLC. As the only centre in Shaunavon, “. . . we are well supported because people know about us and what we do,” commented Delana Floberg. She added that the provincial Early Childhood Services Grant is crucial to maintaining the services – most of the money goes to staff wages. “We wouldn’t be here without it.”

At the same time, the nature of the project funding for the 24hour/7 day/wk service in the centre did not make it possible to continue this program when enrollment was reduced and funding was ended.

The support of Shaunavon Town Council which provides tax breaks and promotes the centre on its website is very helpful.

What are the challenges for the program?

The related challenges of fluctuating enrollment and staffing are the major challenges for the SCLC. “If we could be full, that would be great,” commented Floberg. That would clearly facilitate easier planning for staffing.

At the same time, finding staff when the centre is full can be difficult. “If it wasn’t for the immigrant population, we wouldn’t have staff . . . we can’t afford to pay the wages that they deserve,” Floberg explained. In order for potential staff whose first language is not English to enroll in the child care training, they now need to take an English course in order to qualify. There is a fee for the test which also requires travel to Regina or Saskatoon where it is administered. For some this is a potential financial barrier to seeking training.

Regulations are viewed as an important aid to providing high quality child care. In fact, SCLC would welcome lower ratios in which more staff cared for preschool children; this would help to maintain a high quality program.

3. MD. Of Opportunity #17

Wabasca, Alberta¹

Families with young children across the Municipal District of Opportunity, known as MD of Opportunity No. 17, located 375 kilometres north of Edmonton, benefit from the proactive leadership of the municipality in developing and operating early learning and child care services. Formally constituted as a municipal district in 1995, MD of Opportunity has a population of about 5,000 residents including 2,000 people living on the Bigstone Cree Nation reserves. In 2009 the first centre was opened in Wabasca-Desmarais, the largest town which is home to about 3,300 people including members of Bigstone Cree Nation. The Wabasca centre serving pre-school children was initially located within Northern Lakes College in a purpose-built child care space that had not been operating for some years. Services for school-age children were also provided. In 2010, MD of Opportunity announced expansion of its child care programs to some of the smaller surrounding communities.

Currently, two programs are operating in Wabasca and one in Red Earth Creek. To meet more needs for child care services and to provide more choices for parents, MD of Opportunity also created a regulated home child care agency that worked with home child care providers that cared for approximately 30 children².

What services are provided?

At the programs in both Wabasca and Red Earth Creek, child care services for infants through school-age are provided. In Wabasca, there are spaces for approximately 50 children; the Red Earth Creek program serves about half that number.

The programs place a high priority on quality and view high quality child care as essential to the healthy development of children, families and communities. The programs in Wabasca and Red Earth Creek are accredited by the Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services. As well, Child Development Supervisors who are trained and certified are in each of the program rooms. The majority of the staff are pursuing their Child Development Assistant degree/certificate to ensure certification. Professional development opportunities are made available to staff, and as possible, specific training sessions are held within the community.

1 This case study was based on publicly available sources, primarily a Muttart Foundation report, *Municipal child care: An alternative approach*.

2 This program is no longer operating.

The majority of the families using the programs are led by lone parents and most are Indigenous Canadians. The curriculum aims to meet the physical, social intellectual, creative and emotional needs of the children while supporting Indigenous culture and language. Children with special needs can be ably included and early intervention supports and services, as needed, are made available. Links to local health and educational services are also provided for parents.

All efforts are made to ensure that child care services remain affordable. Since these child care programs are directly operated by MD of Opportunity, the Council establishes the child care fees as part of its annual budget cycle. With the goal of keeping fees affordable for all families, the Council has set a maximum fee for each child enrolled in child care. This maximum takes into account the provincial subsidy and the parent portion of the fee and those families who are not receiving a subsidy. As a result, fees in MD of Opportunity are lower than in similar programs and in neighboring regions. As the manager of the child care services, MD of Opportunity employs child care staff directly and pays them within the municipal wage scale. MD also ensures that municipal funds are available to cover the difference between parent fees and the full cost of the services. The child care programs are not expected to fund raise to make up for unrecovered revenue.

What contributes to the success of the program?

It is noteworthy that the website clearly states that “The M.D. of Opportunity No. 17 believes it has a role in ensuring quality child care is available to their communities” (<http://www.mdopportunity.ab.ca/content/childcare-0>), as local governments do not have a specified role in Alberta child care. The active, continuous role of the MD of Opportunity in the creation, supervision and on-going management of the child care programs is a key contributor to the success of the programs. From the initial conceptualization of these municipally operated child care programs, both staff and elected municipal representatives have exercised outstanding leadership as they strive to provide high quality child care services in this northern, sparsely populated region. They recognized at an early stage that their leadership was necessary if the rapidly growing number of young families in the area were to have access to regulated, high quality early childhood education and care services. As the employer of the child care staff, MD of Opportunity offers salaries and benefits on the municipal wage scale that are greater than the average across the province. The commitment to a high quality program which embraces children with special needs and which highlights the inclusion of Aboriginal culture and language are other key contributors to the success of the program.

It is important to note as well that provincial child care Space Creation Grants helped MD of Opportunity to open these child care programs.

4. Childcare – Family Access Network/Lakeview Children’s Centre ³

Langruth, Manitoba

Childcare – Family Access Network (C-FAN)’s integrated hub model is a successful approach to developing and sustaining regulated child care services in a rural setting. Lakeview Children’s Centre in Langruth, a tiny village located about 155 km northwest of Winnipeg, is the base for the network of six centres and a range of other services in rural communities within a 75 km range of Langruth.

Two factors are key to integrating and sustaining these child care programs: one is the centralized administrative function that provides services to each program and reduces the overhead and other costs and enables the sharing of resources including program materials and professional development. The other factor is the support provided by the Manitoba government. By accommodating the special circumstances of small child care centres in rural communities through the licensing process and modifications to the funding model, the province has made it possible to operate these programs effectively. This public policy support is critical for sustaining the flexible care arrangements (including multi-age groups and seasonal arrangements) provided by C-FAN, thereby allowing the organization to cope with the realities of rural communities.

Partnerships with other community organizations and local business are also central to providing a range of child and family programs. Since 1990, the network has expanded from one location to six programs in different rural communities.

What services are provided?

C-FAN operates a range of child care and family support programs within an integrated rural hub in the six small communities of Plumas, Langruth, Amaranth, Alonsa, McCrea-ry and Laurier, Manitoba, covering, a geographic area of approximately 5200 square kilometres. Services include full- or part-time centre-based care, support to home child care (which is individually licensed in Manitoba), inclusion of special needs children and extended hours for farming or shift work. These allow parents flexibility to use the services

³ This case study was based on information from publicly available sources as well as personal communication with the group’s founding ED, Jane Wilson.

that they need. Programs for parents may vary from community to community but include parenting workshops, nutrition and cooking. As needs of community change, the team continually adapts and adjusts the programs.

Programs share a common philosophy and provide age-appropriate activities in a mixed-age setting, a necessity for small rural communities. Curriculum and play centres are always respectful of parental occupation, and conversations with the children often cover such topics as farm safety, gardening, farm chores, birth of baby sheep or calves.

Farm safety is a regular theme at C-FAN. “We also seize the ‘teachable moments’ when they come along,” adds Tammy Gingras, director of the Laurier Play Zone daycare and the Parkside Children’s Centre in McCreary. “For example, one day a child told us, ‘Daddy got a broken arm when a cow kicked him!’ Well, that gave us the opportunity to talk about staying out of fields and pens with large animals such as cows and pigs in them.” Rosemarie Klein, who is the coordinator of both the Lakeview Children’s Centre and the Plumas Preschool Playtime, a nursery school program, adds that “It’s difficult for children to grasp the dangers. We just have to go over and over safety issues, especially in the spring and fall.” Staff members use stories (with illustrations on a flannel board), pictures, posters and demonstrations of safe practices to reinforce the safety message for the children.

What contributes to the success of the program?

In addition to successful program longevity, the centralized administrative function that provides cost-efficient services to each program in the network and enables the sharing of program and professional development resources, together with the support provided by the Manitoba government in the licensing and funding processes are key. The programs have stable funding provided through Manitoba’s Unit Funding and the Small Centre Grant that provides 100% of the revenue for centres under 40 spaces. C-FAN also had the unique leadership of its founder, Jane Wilson, over a long period of time. Both Tammy Gingras, one of the program directors at C-FAN and Rhonda Buchanan, a teacher and parent who was active in starting one of the network programs credit Jane Wilson as the driving force who shared her advice and experience. Her commitment to establishing high quality child care services to meet the needs of rural and farm families is legendary in the child care sector. “If Jane wasn’t around, it would have been a very hard struggle,” Buchanan said. “She made our job a lot easier and a lot faster.”

Gingras emphasizes that the core administrative services, part of the original approach to network building, are an essential part of the successful operation. Without those supports,

the programs probably would not still be there, she explained. Because the financial and administrative side of the organization is in good order, the staff can direct most of their attention to the programs for children and families.

5. Building Blocks Quality Child Care Center

Harbour Breton, NL

Harbour Breton, NL is a historic town located on the Connaigre Peninsula on Newfoundland's south coast where the community of 1,700 is the largest population centre. A traditional fishery, aquaculture and—most recently—ecotourism are the mainstays of its economy. Since a fish plant that had closed reopened in 2006, many families relocated to Harbour Breton.

What services are provided?

Originally opened in 2008, Building Blocks Quality Child Care Centre now has two locations and is licensed for 42 children 2 years—school-age.

The first child care centre, which opened in 2008 licensed for 14 children, was initiated when a health care specialist approached community members who established it as a non-profit organization through the Harbour Breton Community Youth Network, which was one of the few organizations in the community. An initial advisory committee found identifying a facility to be a significant challenge but were able to secure one classroom at St. Joseph's School through a partnership with the school board. The school board made other school facilities—gym, janitorial, library—available to the centre. The centre paid no rent or services—only telephone charges.

When demand outpaced the centre's capacity and funding from the province became a possibility, the advisory committee approached the town about other premises. A child care centre in the heritage restored town-owned facility called "Elliot Premises" opened in 2014, licensed for 28 children aged two to five years. Although the St. Joseph's School location was initially closed when the new facility opened, the group was able to maintain its partnership with the school board. It eventually (in 2015) reopened a school-aged program licensed for 14 children in grades K-6 at the school. The two centres serve fully subsidized and non subsidized families and (were) not yet at full capacity in 2015.

Provincial funds were made available through the Capacity Initiative for the initial school-based location. According to Marie Bungay, funds were needed for “everything—renovations to the classroom, equipment—everything connected to setting up a day care centre”. Beginning in 2012, another submission was made to the Capacity Initiative to support the new Elliot Premises location; this included a needs assessment, professional plans and retrofitting the facility.

The two centres have nine staff including an administrative “operator” who also works on the floor in the school-age program and Marie Bungay, the Executive Director of the Harbour Breton Community Youth Network and one of the child care centre’s founders, who manages the finances and other matters. The provincial government also funds an additional “ratio enhancement” staff position for 40 hours a week who can play a number of roles including supporting inclusion of a child with special needs. There is also a kitchen staff person who works 30 hours a week providing morning snack, lunch and afternoon snack

What are the challenges?

A major challenge is hiring qualified staff. Marie Bungay noted that “in a small rural community, recruiting staff has been a major challenge since the very beginning... We don’t have a lot of people that are entering the ECE program, therefore we don’t have staff who are qualified with that type of education. Our staff have entry level; we have a couple of our staff now that are enrolled in the ECE program online, so they’re working towards achieving a level one or a level two. But we don’t have any staff currently that have level one or level two besides our operator”. The program does not have the financial capacity to provide funding for staff to upgrade their training. Another major staffing challenge is paying the staff more than \$12/hr, a feature that make recruiting that much more difficult.

What contributes to the success of the program?

The parent organization—the Harbour Breton Community Youth Network—had a good reputation in the community and with the provincial government. As well, establishing strong partnerships with the town and the school board strengthened its place in the community, as well as providing in-kind financial support. Transparency with parents, teamwork and recognizing the staff in multiple ways also have contributes to the centre’s success.