



The Momentum Project Phase II: Child Care Initiative

The State of Child Care in Portage la Prairie: Past, Present and Future

Executive Summary

Portage Community Revitalization Corporation

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The State of Child Care in
Portage la Prairie

An Executive Summary

Introduction:

Women in Portage la Prairie named access to reliable quality child care as one of the most common obstacles they face as they attempt to go to work or to school.ⁱ In order to better determine effective ways to help the community address this issue, The Momentum Project has completed an in-depth review “*The State of Child Care in Portage la Prairie: Past Present and Future*”. As well as a literature review, the paper draws on a combination of research, survey questionnaire, and key informant interviews to develop a detailed picture of child care in Portage la Prairie, including the historical “what worked to develop programs in the past”, as well as why growth of the child care system in Portage la Prairie in the past 20 plus years has been so limited as to be almost non-existent. Building on the lessons learned are specific recommendations to strengthen the local child care system and to support women’s economic security.

Background:

- Portage la Prairie has not seen any real growth in licensed child care in over 30 years.
- 302 full time child care centre spaces and another 42 family child care home spaces exist in Portage and area, for a total of 344 full time child care spaces
 - Enough for **only 10% of children** under 12 years of age.
- 301 children are listed on the centre waiting lists
 - Program capacity in Portage would have to double simply to meet the confirmed demand.

What Portage Child Care Directors report:

- *“Infants will probably never get a spot until they turn two”*
- *“Some will never get to the top of the list before they age out.”*
- *“Our program currently has a waiting list of 2-3 years depending on the age of the child.”*

Who is having difficulty finding child care in Portage?

Finding quality appropriate child care impacts families from across all demographics. Respondents to PCRC's Community Consultation survey (2013) give more detail:

- 32% of respondents with children at home (0 – 17) indicated they had difficulties finding suitable child care over the past year
- All income groups up to a household income of \$100,000 per year indicated roughly equal difficulties (39 - 45%)
- Both single parents and married or common-law families had roughly equal difficulties (36% and 34% respectively)
- Aboriginal / Metis (57%) and visible minorities (50%) had more difficulties than Caucasian respondents (25%).ⁱⁱ

Why invest in child care?

Child care is a community resource that provides multiple benefits. Access to early learning and child care:

- allows parents to go to work or to school,
- supports young children's early learning and development,
- strengthens the local economy, and
- supports women's economic security.

Child care allows parents to work or go to school.

Child care is one of the supports that women with children need in order to go to work or further their education. The Momentum Phase 1 report notes: 'Even with local education and training, limited child care and transportation is holding women back from pursuing educational opportunities' (p. vii).ⁱⁱⁱ Access is an issue first in terms of simply finding a space for their child that matches the hours of care a family needs. Location and transportation to and from child care and work / school are often the next challenges.

Quality child care pays dividends as early learning.

Much research has demonstrated the remarkable power of quality early childhood education and care programs to improve a vast range of social outcomes, particularly for socio-economically disadvantaged children. These improvements include:

- reduced grade retention,
- higher reading and mathematics scores,
- increased IQ,
- higher levels of social competence,
- higher graduations rates,
- lower teen pregnancy rates,
- less smoking and drug use,
- higher employment and income levels, and
- lower crime rates.^{iv}

With stronger cognitive, language and numeracy skills, as well as better social and attention skills, children are better equipped for success in their school years.

How are Portage children doing?

Overall, Portage la Prairie's kindergarten children are **less ready** for school than the Provincial average **in each and every one of the 5 key developmental areas**, measured by the Healthy Child Manitoba, Early Development Instrument. **Emotional Maturity and Language and Thinking Skills** are areas of development that **show significant concern**. **42% of Portage children were not ready in 1 or more domains.**

Licensed child care follows a rich play based curriculum shown to build all areas of children's development.

Child care enables people to work, and strengthens the local economy

Child care enables growth in the city's labour pool. If we estimate 1.5 children per family using the 344 full time child care spots, that means that at least 229 adults are able to work or study as a result of these child care spaces being available. As we know many parents are waiting to go back to work once they find child care, additional child care spaces would increase the number of potential employees available to fill job vacancies in Portage and area.

Child care as a local industry

Examining child care as local industry shows that the Portage child care system generates almost \$3 Million dollars of revenue every year. A significant portion of this, just over \$1¼ Million dollars, comes from the Manitoba government through operating and support grants. Of the \$3 Million dollars of revenue, 82% goes to wages.

A study of the economic impacts of child care in the Parkland region found that for every dollar spent on child care, \$1.58 returns to the local economy.^v If we apply the Parkland multiplier to Portage, we can estimate that every year **\$4,477,706 flows through the Portage economy in direct and indirect spending.**

**Child Care adds almost
\$4.5 Million
to the local Portage economy
every year.**

**Government contributions
coming into Portage la Prairie
last year via child care operating
and support grants totaled over
\$1.2 Million**

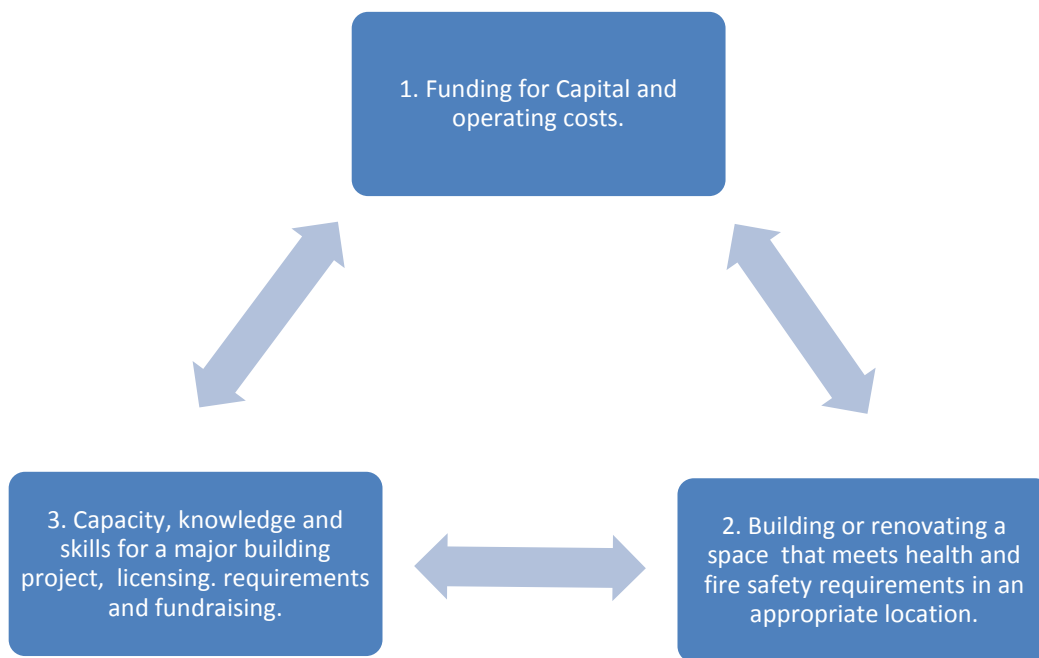
Child care supports women's economic security:

Child care is an important piece of the economic security puzzle for many families. Some neighbourhoods and families are experiencing significant economic security challenges and child care can be linked with other resources to help address these issues. In one school more than 20 % of the children transition in or out of the school during the course of the school year. 70% are estimated to live below the poverty line. Children's lives mirror that of their family. During the first phase of the Momentum project, women talked of facing a number of barriers to economic security including: child care, low incomes, transportation, access to education, racism and stigma, mental health, lack of social supports and isolation^{vi}. These families and their children are facing large challenges. Barriers to economic security are interconnected as women's challenges are directly linked to one another. No one issue should be seen as the full solution. Research shows that women and the neighbourhood benefit from access to child care that acts as a family support hub connecting a range of social services.^{vii}

Growing the System:

Given the multiple benefits of early learning and child care why is the system not growing? Directors in Portage and area identified three primary and inter-related organizational capacity requirements for growth: 1) sufficient capital and operating dollars, 2) an affordable, and appropriate physical setting, i.e. a building, and 3) the human capacity, energy and skills to take on the development and management functions.

Figure 2: Organizational Requirements for Child Care Growth



Organizational Capacity: The child care program legislation requires a not-for-profit governance structure with at least 20% parent involvement. Parent volunteers are expected to be the driving force to develop new not-for-profit organizations and start new child care centres. Is this realistic? How can their capacity and skills be developed and supported? This structure has worked to develop Portage's and the province's child care system to the current level, that is of having enough spaces available for 10% - 16% of the children. But as the local situation shows, there is little new growth in the system.

Developing any new enterprise requires a strong package of resources and skills – child care is no different. Except these expectations fall on the shoulders of working parents and community volunteers. Parents with young children are hugely busy people.

- A 2010 research report “Strengthening Communities by Strengthening Social Service Boards” found that over 90% of child care board members in rural Manitoba are women and **most** are mothers who use the service.^{viii}
- This same report spoke about the challenges facing child care and social service boards in rural communities.

“The respondents recognize that their boards and staff need improved orientations and ongoing resource support. The image of the sector at this individual organizational level is of **a system stretched beyond its capacity, trying hard to hold up under the accumulated load of expectations from service participants, staff, funders and the larger community.**”^{ix}

Initiatives to increase the number of child care spaces in Portage la Prairie must address these organizational issues as well as the capital start up challenges. A key recommendation in the 2010 report calls for regional board governance consultants to support new and existing child care and social service boards.^x

As well as addressing financial and organizational development capacity, where the services are located and how they are structured have been shown to make a difference in how effectively the child care program meets families’ inter-related needs.^{xi}

Given these challenges and lack of growth in the traditional child care system in Portage la Prairie, perhaps it is time to try something new.

Integrated Hub models are working in both child care and school settings:

The provincial child care program and the provincial education system both have integrated services pilot programs that build on demonstration projects happening elsewhere. The Integrated Early Learning and Child Care Hubs and Community School Partnerships both integrate child care with other programs to support families’ and neighbourhood’s overall health, well-being and economic security. The research shows that this integrated community-based approach works. As well as the previously described benefits for children and families realized by access to child care, demonstration projects in Toronto, Saskatchewan and Australia found that the whole neighbourhood benefits. **“Children in neighbourhoods with integrated children’s services showed better social development, more positive social behaviour and greater independence/self-regulation** compared with children living in similar areas without an integrated program”.^{xii}

Integrated Early Learning & Child Care Hubs ^{xiii}	Community Schools Partnership Initiative ^{xiv}
<p>Integrated delivery system of early years programming, including child care, nursery school and kindergarten, parent resource <u>and</u> social service programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridges the gap between parental leave and kindergarten • Located in the local community area, ideally the school • Open to all children and families, not just working parents or those with ‘needs’ • Whole child/whole family approach to learning: families play and important lead role • Connects all the stakeholders, including child care, school staff, parents and social service staff through natural daily interactions • Models collaboration to integrate various policy requirements 	<p>Health, recreational, cultural and social services that students need are available in the school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and community partners provide direction to the school and support its activities • The school is a resource for the whole community • Parent and community partnership • Integrated services may include child care & nursery school, Roots of Empathy, nutritional programs, Family and Students Together (FAST) program. • “The school, as the centre of the community, draws on resources and supports from the community, and gives back by opening its resources and facilities to the wider community^{xv}”

Portage is ready for an integrated pilot project:

Given the shared in-community work that has happened already in Portage, and with the conceptual model of an integrated service hub so clearly demonstrated and proven successful elsewhere;^{xvi} there should be no question that Portage la Prairie is ready for, and could pilot a similar program. Whether it is called an Integrated Hub or a Community School, a pilot program incorporating multiple services, including child care would be a great benefit to one of Portage la Prairie’s challenged socio-economic community areas.

What about Family Child Care: How to strengthen and grow the family child care program:

The number of licensed family child care homes has steadily declined. Program statistics show that ten years ago Central Region (the larger Portage/ Morden/ Winkler area) had 24 licensed family and group child care home for a total of 169 licensed spaces. In 2013 that regional number had dropped over 60% to 9 homes and 63 spaces, with 3 of those homes and 19 spaces located in Portage. A similar

decrease in licensed family child care numbers is occurring across the province. Local providers identified factors that make licensing more difficult and less appealing, such as:

- 1. Limited amount of income that a provider can earn.** The funding package of operating grant and parent fees needs to be increased to a level that providers again see family child care as an attractive career choice.
- 2. Licensing requirements have increased to the point that it requires applicants to have a higher level of academic skills and education.** Pilot projects in Winnipeg and Brandon, through “Jobs and the Economy” are currently focussing on helping women strengthen their pre-employment and ‘readiness-for-licensing’ skills.
- 3. Being a ‘stay-at-home mom’ is no longer seen as a respected career choice.** It is important to increase both the public’s and the provider’s recognition of family child care as an important and professional occupation.
- 4. Providers talk of the lack of resource support and feelings of isolation.** A local family child care network would address these issues in Portage la Prairie, and there are various models of family child care resource networks established in other jurisdictions, such as Winnipeg, Edmonton and Vancouver that could be considered.

It is time to give Manitoba’s family child care system a complete refresh and once again make licensing a credible and desirable career option.

Recommendations:

Recommendations regarding the best ways to expand both the child care centre and the family child care systems in Portage la Prairie and in Manitoba must also consider ways to maintain and strengthen program quality. The research is very clear that the quality of children’s early experiences matter. In order to develop a set of recommendations that address both of these basic criteria **1) growth and 2) quality**, we looked first to the local child care and social service community, the local subject matter experts. We also completed a thorough literature review to determine what is working in other communities and other provinces. These questions are not unique, but rather almost universal. The resulting recommendations are developed to guide community initiatives including the ongoing work of Momentum and Portage Community Revitalization Corporation. They are also developed to inform and influence both local and provincial policy makers.

1. Develop an **Integrated Early Learning and Child Care / Family Resource and Social Service Hub / Community School pilot project** and solicit input and support from foundations, government, local business and all community stake holders.
2. Create a **mechanism to receive and administer major corporate and foundation donations** directed towards Early Learning and Child Care in the community.
3. Strengthen the **child care centre network to build collaboration and partnerships** with all existing and prospective child care programs in the community to support
 - **development of a satellite child care centre to create additional spaces,**
 - **consistent messages** about the importance of all child care services,
 - **shared fundraising initiatives vs competition** for limited fundraising and grant dollars.
4. Create or expand a **Child Care Governance and Resource position** to support boards and executive directors through the initial licensing process and ongoing program development.
 - *Note: a similar position was recently created in Central Region by MB Family Services, and would be available to support the development of any new initiatives.*
5. **Increased Family Child Care Income:** Advocate with government for an increase in Family Child Care operating grants and daily fee structure to increase provider income.
6. **Pilot a multi-home Family Child Care Network model,** focussed on sharing administrative and resource sharing responsibilities for the individual home providers.
7. Develop an **network of family child care providers and early childhood educators** that could
 - initiate a pre-employment skill development course for potential providers and child care assistants.
 - develop combined public relations activities and be a support group to one another.

Conclusion:

It is well documented that child care is good for children’s development and future success, that child care supports families and also helps address socio-economic disparity. We know that child care is good for the economy and pays back more than it costs. It is also well documented that there is a shortage of quality licensed child care spaces in Portage la Prairie, and in the province. Not only are there not enough spaces, access is an issue for many families, first in terms of location and transportation, but also in terms of a sense of trust and an inclusive relationship. These recommendations give concrete ways to increase child care capacity and build women’s economic security in Portage and area. Implementing these recommendations in this community provides an opportunity to evaluate their effectiveness and usefulness in other communities. Finally, these recommendations are shared with the knowledge that most important of all is the realization that this is indeed a community issue. Child care not only impacts women’s economic security but quality child care is an important contributor to early learning. **These are all our children and yes, the children are our future.**

ⁱ The Momentum Project: Reducing Barriers to Women’s Economic Security. (May, 2013) *Report on Phase 1 Results: Gathering Community Input to Create a Community Plan*. Portage la Prairie, MB: Portage Community Revitalization Corporation

ⁱⁱ Portage Community Revitalization Corporation, Community Consultation Survey (2013), accessed at <http://www.portagecrc.com/PDF/PCRC%20Community%20Input%20Survey%20Results.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ The Momentum Project: Reducing Barriers to Women’s Economic Security. (May, 2013) *Report on Phase 1 Results: Gathering Community Input to Create a Community Plan*. Portage la Prairie, MB: Portage Community Revitalization Corporation

^{iv} Brownell, M., N. Roos, and R. Fransoo, ‘Is the Class Half Empty? A Population-Based Perspective on Socio-Economic Status and Educational Outcomes’, IRPP choices, 2006. 12(5)

^v Prentice, S. (2007) *Rural ChildCare: Childcare as Economic and Social Development in Parkland*. Winnipeg, MB: Child Care Coalition of Manitoba

^{vi} The Momentum Project: Reducing Barriers to Women’s Economic Security. (May, 2013) *Report on Phase 1 Results: Gathering Community Input to Create a Community Plan*. Portage la Prairie, MB: Portage Community Revitalization Corporation

^{vii} McCain, M.N., Mustard, J.F, and McCuaig, K. (2011) *“Early Years Study 3: Making Decisions, Taking Action”*. Toronto: Margaret & Wallace McCain Family Foundation.

^{viii} Kelly, B. (2010) *Strengthening Communities by Strengthening Social Service Boards; A study of third sector governance in rural Manitoba*. Brandon, MB

^{ix} Ibid

^x Ibid

^{xi} McCain, M.N., Mustard, J.F, and McCuaig, K. (2011) *Early Years Study 3: Making Decisions, Taking Action*. Toronto: Margaret & Wallace McCain Family Foundation.

^{xii} Ibid

^{xiii} Ibid

^{xiv} Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, Community Schools Partnership Initiative Winnipeg, MB. Accessed at <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/cspi/>

^{xv} Ibid

^{xvi} McCain, M.N., Mustard, J.F, and McCuaig, K. (2011) *Early Years Study 3: Making Decisions, Taking Action*. Toronto: Margaret & Wallace McCain Family Foundation.