



November 9, 2005

Dear Deputy Minister,

On behalf of disability and inclusive child care advocates across Canada, **Specialink**, the National Centre for Child Care Inclusion, has marked with concern that the child care agreements and action plans published to date have not necessarily been explicit as to how respective governments will ensure full inclusion of children with disabilities and special support needs within high quality, community based programs. We recommend that all Moving Forward on Early Learning and Child Care Agreements-In-Principle recognize the principle of ‘universally inclusive’ by committing to public reporting through specific indicators and measures for inclusion of children with disabilities. We believe that your government must explicitly identify and implement a range of specific and meaningful mechanisms such as designated spaces, investments in leadership capacity, measuring and monitoring of inclusion and capital investments for accessible programs in your action plans.

As you may already know, Specialink's goal is to expand the quality and quantity of opportunities for inclusion in child care, recreation, education, and other community settings, to young children with special needs and their families. We believe that we must prioritize investments in building an inclusive children's public policy agenda in order to meet the social development needs and aspirations of children with disabilities and their families. While we absolutely support the responsibility of the provinces and territories in the implementation of a pan-Canadian child care plan, and agree that a one-size-fits-all strategy will not work; the reality remains that disability crosscuts all income groups and is life-long. Our research shows that children with disabilities remain the one group of marginalized children and their families who are often turned away from community based early childhood programs, based on their label or disability. Unfortunately, families and their children with disabilities know firsthand where policies and principles of inclusion, when not grounded in practice, still result in exclusion and outright discrimination. Turning children away based on ‘disability’ still appears to be one of the accepted forms of discrimination. In order to assure that this no longer happens, we offer the following concrete recommendations.

1. Designate 10% of licensed child care spaces in your province or territory.

Canadian research shows that an estimated 10% of children have special needs that require some level of additional supports and/or consultation and training to assure their full participation in community based, “regular” child care programs. As such, a higher level of funding is required. So, for example, the dollars recommended by the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada¹ suggests an average operating cost of \$10,000/space for full-year service. Of these, 10% of spaces are designated for children with disabilities @ \$20,000 per space.

¹ www.childcareadvocacy.ca/resources/pdf/framework_cc.pdf

2. Leadership Capacity. We encourage your government's prioritization of pre-service training in early childhood inclusion at community colleges and universities, funding of professional development workshops, and post service training at the specialist level, to help the child care field to better understand the relationship between quality and inclusion, and our legal and moral obligation to ensure inclusive environments for our children and their families. We support the development of career ladders with graduated salaries, which help to assure a continuing infrastructure to support high quality, inclusive programs. College and university programs in ECE must incorporate inclusive practice in their curricula and in post-diploma and graduate courses. Provincial and territorial governments must ensure that there is a variety of courses, conferences and workshops on inclusion that are accessible, affordable, and available to staff and directors on an ongoing basis.²

3. Measuring and monitoring for inclusion. We stress the need for an accountability framework for measuring, monitoring and reporting on inclusion within your action plans, and can share useful tools to do so. The **SPECIALINK CHILD CARE INCLUSION QUALITY PRINCIPLES SCALE** and the **SPECIALINK CHILD CARE INCLUSION QUALITY PRACTICES PROFILE** are rapidly becoming key tools for measuring inclusion quality in child care in Canada. We are pleased to offer training in the use of these tools with the cooperation of various governments, child care and disability organizations. We further point you to **Inclusivity of the Child Care Policy Environment in Canada: Much Work to be Done** (July 2003).³ This report examines child care policies in Canada and constructs and tests a methodology for benchmarking the extent to which policy environments support the inclusion of children with disabilities in child care programs.

4. Capital investments for accessible programs. Since accessibility and physical structure are so closely related to both inclusion quality and global quality, all new centres must be purpose-built to meet current standards, and older centres must be eligible for capital grants to increase accessibility

The inclusion of children with disabilities in a national child-care strategy must be meaningful and contribute to lasting, life-long patterns of inclusion. Please call upon us and our resources as you work towards the signing of your agreements and the detailing of your action plans. We look forward to seeing real benchmarks for inclusion within your government documents.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sharon Hope Irwin
Director

Debra Mayer
Project Manager

c.c. provincial/territorial child care organization, community living organization, child care licensing branch, CACL, CCAAC

² Highlights From Inclusion: The Next Generation In Child Care In Canada

www.specialinkcanada.org/books/ING_highlights.pdf

³ www.cacl.ca/english/priorityresources/childyouth/Docs/Much%20Work%20rev_sed%20Sep1_041.pdf