

**Just Waiting: Child Care in Winnipeg**

by

**Margaret L. R. Nighswander**

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University of Manitoba

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## **Abstract**

This small sample qualitative study explores the topic of child care within the city of Winnipeg, identifying the experiences of parents who are on waiting lists for licensed child care from a feminist perspective. Fourteen people from eight different family units were involved in the interview process. Results indicate great diversity in parents' child care needs. This research concludes that current child care availability within Winnipeg's licensed and non-licensed sector, is not meeting family needs. Policy implications include the need for more accessible child care options which allow for flexibility in delivery to meet the diversity of needs. A universal child care program providing enhanced availability through longer hours, weekends, and part time care would support the great variety of employment realities of many parents. The results of this research are valuable for those concerned with child care delivery.

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**Dedication**

For my family.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Child care has been a simmering issue in Canadian politics since the 1970s. During the 2006 federal election campaign, the subject became a major election issue, giving child care and the needs of young children and their parents a heightened level of attention (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, n.d.). Yet for families with young children, the practical, daily needs of child care have been a central issue for decades. As women have become increasingly involved in the labour market, the demand for child care outside the home has increased. The topic of child care has been of interest to me for several years as I have observed friends, family and acquaintances looking to obtain child care. Particularly when faced with financial constraints as new parents often are, strategies for meeting these needs can be very creative. The original interest in understanding the nuances of this “underground economy” has slowly evolved. This introduction will outline the rationale for and significance of this study and provide a description of the research.

#### **Rationale for the Study**

The majority of research on child care within Canada has been done on regulated child care and funding to support parents. Research suggests that in Winnipeg in 2006 there were over 14,758 names of children on waiting lists for a space in a licensed child care facility (Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, 2006). This raises a question regarding from where or whom children on waiting lists are receiving child care. Currently there is no information about these children or the circumstances of their families. The gap in knowledge is due not to lack of interest, but because the information is not readily available. Whether parents rely on informal or other forms of child care, families are impacted by these experiences in various ways but details of how this



plays out are unclear. Child care which takes place outside the regulated system occurs without a paper trail; it is an “invisible economy” and therefore the effects of this economy on children and parents are largely unknown. This is an area of concern because it likely impacts thousands of families directly and therefore also impacts workplaces as parents struggle to balance work and family. This is a critical issue for further research.

### Significance of the Study

This study is important because it provides some information about the current situation of parents with young children in Winnipeg which has been previously unknown. It provides a beginning understanding of the struggles that families face when they are on waiting lists for licensed child care. This information can help parents to understand their situation better, help employers to understand the extent to which child care is an issue for their employees, inform child care centres and providers about parental waiting experiences, and also contribute to policy decisions around child care by enhancing knowledge on this issue. The results are informative for those concerned with child care delivery.

This topic is relevant to social work as the quality of child care and related policies have a direct impact on people’s development and well-being, including the education and development of children and the economic well-being of women, families, and society. As highlighted above, the topic of child care is one of the key issues currently being debated within Canadian policy and social circles (Jimenez, 2007). Child care is a highly practical issue, as families with young children will attest. Therefore, this research may contribute a small piece to the ongoing discourse around child care with the ultimate goal of making waves in policy that have significant societal implications. As the literature review highlights, because child care remains primarily the responsibility of women, any policy changes made regarding child care

will directly impact hundreds of thousands of women and their families. In this way, this topic has the potential to make practical changes that contribute to addressing inequality.

### Description of the Study

The original focus of this research study was to learn about the informal child care sector by interviewing families on waiting lists for licensed care. Through the process of developing the research and the sampling approach, it became clear that families on waiting lists were not necessarily utilizing informal child care. Thus, the focus of the study shifted to more broadly understanding the circumstances of families and parents who were on waiting lists for child care. This did not exclude parents who had arranged child care while on a waiting list, regardless of what type of care they had arranged. The research was exploratory in nature because, as outlined above, this is an area where there is an absence of knowledge. By listening to parents discuss their experiences, the issues around child care that are of particular importance to them were able to surface. This helps to improve knowledge in an area where there is currently limited information, and also highlights areas where further research on this topic may be valuable.

The following report includes six major sections: a literature review of the current knowledge on the topic of child care, methodologies used in this research, findings of the research, discussion of the findings, and lastly the implications and conclusion of this research.

The literature review describes current knowledge and gaps in knowledge on the issue of child care. Various roles and functions of child care in the lives of children, their parents and society are explained. The connection between child care research and feminism is emphasized paying particular attention to the impacts on families' economic well-being and women's connection with the labour market. A description of the Québec approach to child care is presented as a reference point for understanding child care within a Canadian context, and a

summary of the child care issues within Manitoba and Winnipeg is provided. Significant federal policies on child care are outlined, and several potential impacts on families are identified. Next is a discussion around finances and families, again highlighting the impacts of child care on women. This chapter concludes with a section on informal child care in Winnipeg, the focus for this research. Relevant statistical information is provided throughout this chapter.

The literature review is followed by a chapter describing methodological decisions for the research. The research design selected was qualitative as this provided an opportunity to engage in exploratory research. The theoretical framework selected for the research was a feminist perspective and rationale for this decision is provided. The data collection method employed was semi-structured interviewing as this allowed for exploratory research on the issues being investigated and related themes. The population under investigation was parents who have children that are on waiting lists for licensed child care. Sampling issues are addressed in this chapter as well, including criteria for selecting the sample and ethical issues. Considerations around analysis and interpretation are addressed and strategies are described. This section ends with a look at the importance of credibility and ethics within qualitative research; steps the researcher took to enhance the quality of the proposed research are outlined.

Chapter four highlights the findings of this research. After providing background information about the participants, this chapter outlines a range of themes that emerged from the interviewing and analysis process. Themes identified in this chapter are factors influencing how parents sought and chose child care. Several additional themes and findings are addressed. All participants experienced a degree of stress in attempting to balance parenting and the rest of their life. The role of child care in moderating various responsibilities is highlighted. Data about parental perceived benefits as well as concerns around child care suggests that the benefits of

child care generally outweighed parental concerns. Financial aspects of child care are also explored. While having greater available finances seemed to give parents more options and more selection around child care, all parents were frustrated and felt that they had very limited control over their options. This reflected an overriding theme that parents voiced of frustrations around having limited control over their concerns with child care and the role this played in their situations.

Chapter five provides a discussion of a number of themes identified in the findings chapter. The data collected reflects great variety in parents' waiting list experiences, yet the common experience of stress and anxiety related to ensuring good child care emerged. This chapter outlines several ways that balancing conflicting demands including how parental preferences regarding child care and external factors of gender-related dilemmas and finances around child care, contribute to this stress. These stress-contributing factors highlight the fact that despite substantial discussion within the public forums on the topic, there remain considerable barriers to obtaining child care which are highlighted by the experiences of the parents who were interviewed. These are complex barriers, and while exceedingly limited space is a key component, this research highlights that there are many other barriers that contribute to this stress. This first part of this discussion explores the themes of balancing work, life and parenting, the role of education in child care, and parental preferences in child care. The role of gender in balancing work, life and parenting, as well as finances and child care are given further attention.

Implications and conclusion, chapter six, provides an overview of this research project, reviews the intent of this project, and summarizes the results. This includes two significant findings. First, the need for child care is extensive and is pronounced. Second, this research has

highlighted that it is the particular needs around the attributes of child care which are quite diverse. This chapter explores the implications of these findings including suggestions for further research and related policy opportunities. Significant attention is also given to the topics of universal child care and the importance of supporting the parent-child relationship. This is followed by a conclusion.

### Summary

The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of the issues facing parents who are on waiting lists for licensed child care to better understand the impacts of this experience on the parents and the family unit. Through interviews, primary caregivers were invited to share their experiences shedding light on this matter which has, to date, remained largely invisible. This study focused on understanding the child care arrangements that parents make for their children when they cannot access licensed child care. Interviewing parents who had children on waiting lists for licensed child care drew out some of the issues facing these particular parents. Using a qualitative methodology allowed this research to be exploratory in nature, ultimately seeking to understand *how families who are on waiting lists for licensed child care are experiencing child care*. Related issues pertaining to the social and financial costs and benefits of these arrangements on the family added to the depth of knowledge gained. Ultimately, it is hoped that by making this information available to groups that work to further issues that effect real people's lives, the information collected will contribute towards improving policies that directly effect women and their families.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

Child care is currently a leading topic within federal and provincial politics. It is a subject of great importance for young families and women, and while they are most likely unaware of it, for children in particular. The following literature provides understanding of the current child care context within Canada with specific attention to Winnipeg, and an integrative review highlighting what is and is not known on this topic. This literature review begins by looking at the roles and functions of child care in the lives of children, their parents and society. Next, the connection between child care and feminism is described, with an explanation for why this is an appropriate approach to addressing this topic. This is followed by a general description of the Canadian context of child care, specifically with reference to the Québec model of child care and a summary of the Manitoba and Winnipeg situation of child care issues. An overview of current federal policies around child support is followed by information about the financial impacts of raising children on parents. Information and analysis about informal child care particularly within the Winnipeg context is provided, giving an explanation for why this issue is important to explore.

#### **Roles and Functions of Child Care**

Within the various circles that address child care issues – including political, research, parental and child care advocacy – there are three general categories of functions regarding the role of early learning and child care: those associated with the child, those associated with the parent, and those associated with society (Friendly, 2006). This section, therefore, looks at the role and functions of quality child care for children, parents and society.

### *The Benefits for Children of Quality Child Care*

Children have a basic right to quality care (Friendly, 2006; Social Planning Council Winnipeg policy statement, 1988). For years people have been aware that the “social and educational development of pre-school children is vitally essential to their future growth” (Williams Hogan, 1974, p.3). Various forms of research, including neurosciences, are now supporting these long-held societal beliefs and observations that the quality of nurturing and stimulation young children receive influences their lifelong abilities and well being (Beach & Bertrand, 2000).

Studies have found that regardless of their circumstances (family status, socioeconomic status, ethnic background), pre-school children’s physical, emotional, social, linguistic and intellectual growth and development are significantly enhanced through quality early childhood development services (Battle & Torjman, 2000; Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998). Benefits include preparation for life-long learning, and improving readiness for school, as well as opportunities to overcome issues that face at-risk children (Friendly, 2006). For example, researchers found a direct relationship between decreased grade repetition, increased attendance and improved academic performance in later years for children who attend good quality early childhood facilities when compared to those without (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998). These long-lasting benefits of improved cognitive performance increase for children from low-income or lone-parent families and as their risk factors increase (Battle & Torjman, 2000; Campbell & Ramey, 1994). This data is congruent with several other studies including the highly respected Perry Preschool Longitudinal Study results (Schweinhart, 2004; Schweinhart, Bares, & Weikart, 1993). In 1962 the Perry Preschool study identified 123 African American children born in poverty who were considered at-risk of school failure. Fifty-eight children were randomly

assigned to a high-quality preschool program and sixty-eight received no preschool. This thorough study has tracked the children and families over forty years and the findings strongly suggest that high-quality preschool programs for children living in poverty appear to have positive, long-term effects, including: greater educational attainment and more likely to have graduated from high school, higher adult earnings, greater employment stability, greater family stability and significantly lower involvement in crime (Schweinhart, 2004).

Empirical evidence demonstrates clearly that the benefits of quality child care can be substantial. Quality child care is not only valuable in ameliorating the negative effects of physical, psychological, social and economic challenges some children experience, but research suggests strongly the value of early childhood programs for all young children before their fifth year (Beach & Bertrand, 2000). Doherty (1996) examined twenty-one studies comparing children who did and did not attend non-parental child care before they entered school. Doherty concludes that children who experience regular, group child care tend to:

- have better ability to get along with other children at the time of school entry and in later elementary school grades;
- be rated by their teacher as having had an easier transition into elementary school and better classroom skills, for example, ability to follow directions and resist distraction, both in the first year of school and subsequent years;
- have a larger vocabulary at the time of school entry and better language skills in subsequent grades;
- have higher levels of cognitive functioning at school entry and as ten-year-olds; and
- perform better in measures of academic readiness in kindergarten and in school subjects in later grades. (Doherty, 1996, p.6)

In short, “our early experiences, for better or worse, shape the way we take in new information and react to stress, influencing how we learn and behave and how healthy we are” (Beach & Bertrand, 2000, p.10). Because these early experiences have life-long effects, it is critical to understand that the *quality* of child care is central to the benefits experienced by children.



High quality child care programs are generally play-based and are designed to support the cognitive growth and development of the child, supporting overall healthy human development (Beach & Bertrand, 2000; Doherty, 1996). The role of adults in these settings is to educate and care for the child by providing rich social and physical environments for children to explore as they both learn and actively live in this setting, including supervised interactive play with other children. Other caregiver variables that affect quality include: the day-to-day relationship between adult and child, caregiver knowledge of child development, number of children the adult is responsible for at any one time, and the size of the group of children (Doherty, 1996). Regulated childcare tends to have regular engagement, frequent and positive interactions, and nurture a higher level of language development when compared with informal care (Doherty, 1996). The small amount of Canadian research that has been done suggests that unregulated child care tends to be of lower quality than regulated care. Not only does this mean children may not experience the benefits of regulated care as outlined above, but evidence also demonstrates that poor quality child care has the potential to impede children's development (Doherty, 1996).

#### *Child Care is Important for Parents*

In addition to being important for children, early childhood education and care is important and beneficial for parents, for mothers and single-parents in particular. Child care helps support all parents both in their attempts to balance work and family, and in their role as parents (Beach & Bertrand, 2000).

Most parents, including parents of pre-schoolers and single parents, work in the labour force (Battle & Torjman, 2000; Friendly, 2006; Prentice & McCracken, 2004). Thus, supporting parents as a means to balance family and work is a critical role of child care. Battle and Torjman (2000) suggest that childcare is essential in a modern economy. Data demonstrate that the

tension between balancing work and family causes significant strains on parents; it is estimated that conflicts arising from the work-family tension costs \$2.7 billion annually to Canadian businesses due to the stress of balancing responsibilities for work and family (Prentice & McCracken, 2004). Within Manitoba it is estimated that one in two workers is a parent which means that 50% of the workforce is attempting to find this balance between work and family (Prentice & McCracken, 2004). Access to reliable child care is a substantial part of the solution to addressing this balance. The effects of not having accessible child care are seen in an article in the *Globe and Mail*. This highlights a current trend among Chinese immigrants to Canada of sending their children to their family in China to be raised to school-age, as the parents can neither afford to not work and provide child care at home, or to work and pay for child care (Jimenez, 2007). As immigrants with limited informal networks of support, this population is vulnerable to slipping through cracks within Canadian society and thus provide glaring evidence of where these gaps are. Examples such as this demonstrate how the current situation is not allowing for work/family balance. As well as supporting parents in the paid labour market, child care also allows parents the opportunity to pursue education or training (Child Care Canada, n.d.).

Providing support for parents in their parenting role is an important, though often underemphasized, function of child care. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services can support the parenting role through “parent involvement, parenting, networking, modelling and other parent support resources” (Child Care Canada, n.d., ¶4). Battle and Torjman (2000) have also found that early childhood development services “enhance parents’ child-rearing and coping skills” (Battle & Torjman, 2000, p. 3). The experience outlined above of Chinese

immigrants is an example of the resulting fallout when parents do not have adequate support for their parenting.

These benefits of child care are particularly important for mothers and single-parents. Statistics from 1980 to 2001 suggest several important trends related to this relationship. The number of mothers with young children who are becoming involved in the workplace appears to be increasing (Gabel & Kamerman, 2006; Prentice & McCracken, 2004). The numbers of children in single-parent families and the increased prevalence of single parent families with young children are also a current reality (Friendly, 2006; Gabel & Kamerman, 2006; Prentice & McCracken, 2004). This change in trend has significant implications for how children are cared for. Children in western countries are increasingly likely to live outside the traditional two-biological-parent family. These children and family scenarios mean increased vulnerability to economic, social and emotional instability. Two-earner families have the benefit of increased economic security; the current market place is volatile and decreased access to steady employment means that single-earner families are more vulnerable. Thus, families with young children are more likely to live in poverty. Poor children are disproportionately from lone parent, mother-led families, aboriginal families, or recently-immigrated families (Friendly, 2006). Single mothers tend to be in the most vulnerable employment situations in jobs with low pay and with few benefits which increases their risk of poverty (Friendly, 2006). Finding child care within this context adds additional challenges. Thus, access to reliable child care is critical as it supports employment, women's equality, and balancing work and family, all of which are known to have a direct effect on reducing poverty and improving social integration (Friendly, 2006).

### *Child Care Provides Long-term Benefits to Society*

Society also benefits from children participating in quality child care programs. There is a significant amount of “persuasive evidence that the multiple benefits of good child care are considerably larger than its costs” (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998, p.55). The benefits of this critical learning extend from childhood, throughout their youth and adult lives as well-developed children become well-developed, active citizens (Battle & Torjman, 2000; Schweinhart, 2004). From a purely economic perspective, studies demonstrate significant and broad financial benefits from child care for society which are tightly interwoven with the social benefits to children and parents. Among the sources of these benefits are various increased educational and social achievements. The 2004 Perry Preschool Study report demonstrates that approximately 40 years after the initial child care program program , “[i]n constant 2000 dollars discounted at 3%, the economic return to society of the Perry Preschool program was \$258,888 per participant on an investment of \$15,166 per participant—\$17.07 per dollar invested” (Schweinhart, 2004, p.3). These individual benefits can translate at a society level into increased productivity, higher generation of tax revenues, decreased social assistance and health costs, and generally improved citizenship (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998; Schweinhart, 2004).

The benefits to parents, such as the ability to increase their connection to the labour force, could translate into increased social benefit through increased collection of tax revenue, decreased poverty, decreased use of social assistance (particularly for women through divorce and widowhood) (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998). Other ways that child care can benefit society are through increased employment related to child care provision. According to the Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, each job in childcare within Manitoba “creates or sustains 2.15 jobs in Manitoba” (Prentice & McCracken, 2004, p.13), including enhanced support for parental

employment, jobs providing direct services within the child care sector, and supporting services such as suppliers of goods and services that are used by child care facilities and programs. A direct economic effect of this increased employment is seen through increased purchases of goods and services due to parents' and child care workers' increased spending power through greater employment (Prentice & McCracken, 2004). It is estimated that within Winnipeg alone the childcare sector directly generates over \$101 million each year (Prentice & McCracken, 2004). This number gives a sense of the degree of economic impact child care can have on a community.

Cleveland and Krashinsky's cost-benefit analysis concludes that every dollar spent on high quality child care yields approximately two dollars of benefits (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998). According to the Childcare Coalition of Manitoba, conservative estimates suggest every dollar invested in childcare returns \$1.38 to the local economy and \$1.45 to the Canadian economy (Prentice & McCracken, 2004). In 1993 the Perry Preschool study through age 27 suggested the benefits were \$7 for every \$1 spent (Schweinhart, Bares, & Weikart, 1993); in 2004 the Perry Pre-school study through age 40 suggests, as mentioned above, an incredible \$17 benefit in benefits for every \$1 spent (Schweinhart, 2004). Connected to this are the employment opportunities available as a result of child care, including child care staff or support staff, parents available for employment, employment of educators when parents are made available to take training.

There are many angles from which one can answer the question "why does child care matter?" From a developmental perspective, early childhood education can provide many benefits for children and can have positive, long-term impacts for them as individuals, which

ultimately has a positive benefit for society. This literature review and the following study consider child care from the perspective of parents' needs.

#### Child Care as a Feminist Issue.

There are many different ways to approach the subject of child care due to the variety of parties concerned in the topic. This research will address this issue from a feminist perspective. Men are certainly interested in and care about child care and an increasing numbers of men are becoming single parents, yet it is still predominantly women who are in charge of child care arrangements. Feminism is concerned about this gender imbalance and the effort to point out and rectify this inequity is what drives research within this paradigm. That said, feminism does not ignore the needs of men but rather strives to establish gender equity in roles, responsibilities and opportunities. Although it is often considered a strictly women's movement, men too will benefit from a feminist perspective as shifts in policy based on gender roles around child care will give them greater opportunities to be involved in the nurture work that has for so long been delegated to women.

There are several reasons why the issue of child care is a feminist issue but four general reasons will be highlighted here. First, evidence demonstrates that women disproportionately are responsible for child care when compared to the children's father or others (Prentice & McCracken, 2004). The 1996 census survey looking at unpaid household activity, shows that comparing parents who are employed more than 30 hours per week in paid labour, 31.7% of fathers provided between five and fourteen hours of childcare per week, 29.6% of mothers provided 30-59 hours per week and an additional 25% of these mothers provide more than 60 hours per week (Turnbull, 2001). These statistics demonstrate the disproportionate responsibility of childcare by women. Prentice and McCracken (2004) say that because of this disproportional

responsibility, “work-family balance generally falls more heavily on women than men...The accommodations women make in search of work-family balance have life-long consequences...for these reasons, child care is essential for gender equity” (p.11). From a policy perspective, child care as a women’s responsibility is evident through Turnbull’s (2001) demonstration of how the tax system results in women’s economic insecurity as their economic worth is based on their attachment to men and children.

A second related reason that childcare is a feminist issues is that mothers are very active within the labour market. Statistics Canada research shows that in 1999, 67.9% of women with children under age three were employed full-time. As their children grow older, women’s employment continues to increase (Gabel & Kamerman, 2006; Prentice & McCracken, 2004). There are two main reasons for this; one is financial, the other is desire to pursue a career (Child Care Canada, n.d.). “Whatever the motivation, dependable care for young children is essential if mothers who would traditionally have been expected to provide it are in the labour force, training or education” (Child Care Canada, n.d.). These households require child care and their needs go beyond 9-5 day care options. For example, when children are sick there are few options for working parents. For children in school, there are before and after school issues as well as professional development days and summers when parents must find alternative child care. The workplace is not set up to accommodate parents. Usually mothers make the necessary sacrifices. Difficulties in balancing responsibilities “contributes to family stress and most of the burden for juggling these falls on women” (Child Care Canada, n.d., ¶3). And as was pointed out above, although mothers are working for pay outside the home, they are bearing the brunt of the additional “double shift” hours doing child care.

A third reason why child care is a feminist issue is based on the costs associated with child rearing. Children are costly in many ways. D'Addio and d'Ercole (2005) look at the direct and indirect costs of childrearing. They make it clear that the costs of childrearing are gendered:

Direct costs are the additional costs incurred by households when children are present (e.g. food, clothing, childcare)... Indirect costs refer to the loss of income incurred by parents as a consequence of the presence of children, for example when the mother drops out of employment or reduces working hours to care for children, or when her career prospects decline following the birth of a child... if direct costs may be shared among parents, indirect costs fall almost exclusively on mothers. (pp.48-9)

The indirect costs, as demonstrated by d'Addio & d'Ercole (2005), are mostly born by women. Turnbull (2001) does an excellent job of explaining how Canadian tax law neither supports women as mothers, nor accurately reflects the real economics, including direct and indirect costs of childrearing. She gives an example of a self-employed lawyer who was unable, at the Supreme Court level, to successfully challenge what are considered legitimate business expenses. Traditional business expenses include club dues, meals, and boat expenses. Child care costs were not eligible for such a deduction as a business expense as it could not be proved that women disproportionately pay childcare financial costs. The outcome from this case was that "social costs, although very real, exist outside of the Income Tax Act" (R. v. Symes, 1993). Turnbull quotes Madam Justice L'Heureux-Dubé's statement that "all women suffer severe social and financial costs associated with child bearing and rearing... all women, as a consequence of their gender, suffer disadvantages associated with caring for children" (Turnbull, 2001, p. 134). Again, this explanation speaks directly to feminist concerns around gender inequality with regards to work and the ramifications of child rearing.

A fourth reason for why childcare is a feminist issues is that the majority of child care providers, paid and unpaid, regulated and informal, are women. According to a 1998 study, 95%



of child care workers were women (Tougas, 2002). It is very clear that within the labour force, child care providers are undervalued; employment status, standards and benefits are not guaranteed, and remuneration does not reflect the role or responsibilities required of employees (Cox, 2005). This is connected to the wider problem of the income gender-gap. An example which Kittay (2001) cites comes from Glenn (1992) who states that “at current wages, childcare work will not suffice to bring the welfare mother out of poverty, and if wages are raised, the middle-class woman will not be able to afford the less-advantaged women’s services” (Kittay, 2001, p.58). Baker states that feminist researchers “have argued in favour of policies that respect differences in the social and economic experiences of women and men” (Baker, 1995, p.369). These are issues that cut to the heart of feminist interests, which is concerned with equality of genders. This report will not discuss the economy of giving value to domestic and care-giving work, generally women’s work, although it is a subject I find fascinating. It is however, an important point that needs to be acknowledged within the discussion of childcare, and an important point for why child care is a feminist issue.

Most writing on the topic of child care is around quality of care and based on a strong tension of an “either/or” sense, that is advocating for licensed versus informal child care. This tension is decidedly felt within the feminist community. In general, the purpose of this research is to provide evidence of the need for increased child care options. The purpose of the research presented here was not initiated to demonstrate the benefits of universal childcare. Yet it is hard to conclude otherwise because many of the issues raised by child care advocates would be addressed through the establishment of universal child care. For example, Turnbull (2001) states that the costs of care present “a barrier to women’s participation in paid work and this disincentive should be removed” (Turnbull, 2001, p.139). Turnbull goes on to state that a

national, state sponsored childcare system would help remove one barrier to this. Other writing on this subject supports Turnbull's conclusion. The purpose of this research was to gather further information about an aspect of child care within Winnipeg of which there is little current knowledge, that is, to learn more about the experiences of parents who are on waiting lists to receive licensed child care. This information is critical for understanding community child care needs. This conversation around community needs will be significantly strengthened and better positioned with this information.

### Child Care within the Canadian Context

Within Canada, the federal government provides support that contributes to the delivery of programs related to child care but child care is ultimately a matter of provincial jurisdiction. While all provinces have developed user-pay models, each province has developed different features of child care delivery (Prentice, 2004). Manitoba has some distinct feature compared to the rest of Canada however the province of Québec is categorically unique in its approach to child care delivery. Because it represents one particular method of child care delivery the following section will give a brief overview of Québec's approach as a reference point for comparing the Manitoba and Winnipeg child care situation.

#### *Child Care in Québec*

Québec has moved in a different direction from other provinces in the area of family-support policies, including child care. It is undeniable that Québec has invested substantially in making child care available to the majority of its children. Within North America, Québec has demonstrated leadership in the area of family-supporting policies in the form of a package called Family Policy (*la politique familiale*) (Le Bourdais & Marcil-Gratton, 1994; Mirabelli, 1996; Nett, 1993). The crown jewel of this impressive set of policies is universal child care. Because

Québec's system is so unique, wide-ranging and inclusive, it is often looked at as a measuring stick for determining how other jurisdictions address their child care needs. In 1993 the Conseil de la famille (Advisory Council on the Family) presented recommendations around accessibility and quality day care services for the province of Québec (Le Bourdais & Marcil-Gratton, 1994). As of September 1997, full-day kindergarten was offered to all 5-year-olds, half-day kindergarten combined with half-day free early childhood education and care for 4-year-olds from disadvantaged areas, and five dollar per day child care for all 4-year-olds. (Mirabelli, 1996, p.10). This milestone is considered the true beginning of Québec's envied child care system. By 1998 the demand for spaces was not being met and services were unaffordable to middle-income families so the government responded by introducing five dollar per day programs for 3-year-olds and school-age programs (Tougas, 2002). By 2000 the program expanded to include children from 0-12 along with the option for children from low-income families to attend free of charge for 23 hours a week. There were also several pilot projects underway to extend the operating hours of child care to accommodate parents who work shifts and evenings or weekends (Tougas, 2002). In 2004 costs to parents increased from five to seven dollars per child per day and before and after school programs were also offered at the seven dollar rate (Canadian Labour Congress, 2004, p.2-3). As of 2002, 98% of Québec's 5-year-olds were enrolled in full-day kindergarten – clear evidence of smashing success and popularity with parents. According to the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) based on 2001 census information, 41.1% of Québec's children ages six months to five years used daycare centres as their main child care arrangement. This is significantly higher than the national average of 25%.

## *Child Care in Manitoba and Winnipeg*

Manitoba has taken a different approach to child care provision than Québec. By national standards Manitoba's child care provision it is still considered to be progressive, yet compared to the Québec model there are many gaps and needs. For example, according to the NLSCY from 2001 data, whereas 22.3% of children in Manitoba used day care as their main child care arrangement in 2001, the rate in Québec was 41.1% (Statistics Canada, 2005). In fact, Manitoba's rate is even lower than the national average (22.3% vs. 25.0%). Manitoba is similar to Québec in that they have mandated maximum fees and maximum surcharges (Prentice, 2004). While the Québec model now provides financial assistance for all children, within Manitoba about half of all parents using licensed child care receive financial assistance but are required pay a surcharge which is regulated by the Community Child Care Standards Act which prescribes "maximum fees chargeable by licensees of various classes for child care provided" (Community Child Care Standards Act, 2006, Section 34 (m)). Manitoba offers child care in group centers and family homes which are provincially regulated but not directly government-operated. The government of Québec ensures access and flat fees for children across the province. The government of Manitoba has some involvement in child care through legislation and fee restrictions but is not involved to the same extent as the government of Québec (Prentice, 2004). While Québec offers full-day kindergarten to all children aged 5, half-day kindergarten is available for all children in Manitoba aged 5 and two school divisions offer half-day<sup>1</sup> pre-school for 4-year-old children (Prentice & McCracken, 2004).

Within Winnipeg there have been serious issues around child care availability for over thirty-three years. In the summer of 1973, the Women's Bureau and the Planning Committee of Cabinet Secretariat of the Manitoba Government undertook a study of child care arrangements

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<sup>1</sup> "Half-day" pre-school in Winnipeg School Division Number 1 is 2.5 hours.

for mothers in the labour force. One of the results of this study was that facilities were generally unavailable for children 0-2 and 6-14. When they were available, the costs were prohibitive (Williams Hogan, 1974). Ten years later in 1984, the Social Planning Counsel of Winnipeg (SPCW) did a study on child care arrangements and discovered that day care options particularly for school aged children were in short supply. And now in 2008, Winnipeg parents are still struggling to find childcare for their children, particularly for infants and school-aged children. Parents also find challenges when seeking the following: care for mildly ill children, culturally appropriate care, care for special needs, evening or weekend care, care for school-aged children during school-related closures (Prentice & McCracken, 2004). The distribution of childcare throughout the city is also an issue for many parents: “In neighbourhoods high in social capital, childcare provision is better; in neighbourhoods lower in social capital, childcare provision is worse” (Prentice & McCracken, 2004, p.6).

As of 2004, there were 16,749 licensed childcare spaces in Winnipeg. The 2001 Census data indicates Winnipeg’s child population age 0-12 was 100,537. Using this data, about 1 in 6 children in Winnipeg who might need childcare have access to a spot (Prentice & McCracken, 2004).<sup>2</sup> Based on these figures, there are approximately 83,780 children who do not have access to licensed childcare. This raises the critical question - where are these children? While a portion of these children may be at home with a parent by choice, with approximately 70% of mothers with young children in the work force full-time there is still clearly a significant gap between spaces available and number of children who require child care spaces (Prentice & McCracken, 2004). Also taken into consideration must be the number of parents who require part time child care, about which there is very limited information . According to the *Time for Action* study, “[b]ecause of a shortage of licensed childcare spaces in Winnipeg, most children who need care

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<sup>2</sup> Occasionally, parents who need part time care share one spot for two children.

are in ‘informal’ – unlicensed and unregulated – arrangements” (Prentice & McCracken, 2004, p.10). To better understand the various factors affecting families with young children in making child care decisions, it is helpful to have an understanding of various policies and funding that affect their lives.

### Child Support and Federal Policy

The costs of child rearing are enormous. While the costs are both social as well as economic, this section primarily addresses the financial issues around child care. Over the years the federal government of Canada has developed various policies to support families. This section will look briefly at what some of the current policies are, paying particular attention to recent significant changes by the Conservative party under Stephen Harper. This is followed by an examination of financial considerations and the economic impacts on women and their families. To understand the financial implications of Canadian policy around child rearing, some understanding of Canadian government policies and the tax system is necessary.

Canada’s taxation system is an individual filing system and is therefore not based on combined family income. This means that families of different types (i.e., single parent families, two-parent families with one earning parent and two-parent families with both parents earning) are treated differently and arguably, as will become evident below, inequitably (Zuker, 2006).

There are several key terms to be clear about when wading into the waters of the tax system.

Turnbull (2001) gives an excellent explanation for two central terms:

A **deduction** is the portion of income, or an item of expense, that a taxpayer may subtract from income for purposes of calculating tax payable. A **credit** is also a reduction in the tax payable but this amount is taken off the amount payable after income tax owed has been calculated. These two forms of tax reduction have different effects. In the case of a deduction, because it comes off the total income figure, its value is graduated, depending on how much money one earns. The higher the income, the more valuable the deduction becomes. In contrast, a credit is worth the same amount to each person who qualifies to receive it. (p.209).

**Net income** is also a key concept. It is the amount of actual income flowing into the household before benefits and additional taxes – not including the automatic taxes that are taken. It is an important concept because “[a]s net family income increases, payments from income-tested programs decrease” (Battle et al., 2006, p.2).

Two important policies concerning federal support for families are the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) and National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS). The CCTB “is a tax-free monthly payment made to eligible families to help them with the cost of raising children under age 18” (Canada Revenue Agency, 2008, ¶1). This tax benefit comes in the form of a refundable tax credit and is income-tested. It is helpful to note that “[i]ncome-tested child tax credits in Canada are determined based on combined (net) income of parents, and this is generally accepted as an equitable basis of treatment” (Zuker, 2006, p.2). As of 2007, the income threshold at which point benefits started being reduced was \$37,178 (Canada Revenue Agency brochure, 2007, p. 14). Current benefits are calculated taking into account: province or territory or residence, marital status of the primary parent, the number and ages of the children in the household, a child’s eligibility for disability amount, net income of each parent or guardian, and previously claimed Universal Child Care Benefits (Canada Revenue Agency, 2006). The NCBS is a monthly benefit for low-income families with young children and is reduced by a percentage of family net income that is more than \$20,883 based on the number of children in a family (Canada Revenue Agency brochure, 2007, p.14).

Another significant policy is the Child Care Expense Deduction (CCED). This is intended to assist parents who pay for child care by allowing the parent with a lower income to deduct, from their taxable income, up to \$7,000 for children under 7 and \$4,000 for children aged 7 to 16 when the family can produce receipts for their child care expenses (Friendly, 2004,

p.90; Turnbull, 2001; Tyyska, 2001). The CCED is highly regressive because as a deduction (not a tax credit) it is subtracted from income before taxes owed is calculated (Zuker, 2006, p.5). This is important to point out because the value is graduated based on how much money the individual earns; therefore, individuals with higher income get a greater relative deduction (Turnbull, 2001). This policy is of particular importance to the following discussion on informal child care.

When the Conservative Party won the 2006 Federal election they introduced significant changes to federal financial support for families with young children. Specifically, this government introduced the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) and eliminated the Canada Child Tax Benefit's *Young Child Supplement*. Prior to July 2006, the Young Child Supplement gave up to \$249 annually for each child under 7 for whom no CCED was claimed (Battle et al., 2006, p.1). Therefore, the young child supplement primarily benefited low- and modest-income families, including single-earner two-parent families, because they did not use the Child Care Expense Deduction. This is because the CCED must be taken by the parent with the lower income unless that parent's income is too low in which case they cannot deduct it. Thus, the young child supplement contributed to greater equity between parents with young children (Turnbull, 2001; Zuker, 2006, p.3). The Conservative government decided to end this supplement June 2006 as they introduced the UCCB.

The UCCB, introduced in July 2006, is a significant shift in federal policy which claims to offer families \$100 per month for each child under six, theoretically paying out \$1200 per year. As it will become clear, no family will end up with this amount in total as all families will pay some of it back to the government in tax. It should be pointed out that the UCCB is restricted to children under six and the previous Young Child Supplement was for children under seven.



This means that the federal government has removed one year's worth of financial support in a child's life. There are several other important points to be aware of regarding the specifics of the UCCB.

The UCCB is not included in the federal government definition of "net income." This is important because net family income is used to measure whether eligibility for an income tested program and its benefits, such as NCBC. If net family income increases, including government sources, this results in a reduction of payments from income-tested government programs (Battle et al., 2006; Zuker, 2006). But UCCB is a taxable benefit meaning that no family will keep \$1200 as some of it will be paid back in taxes. This tax will be levied on the lower-income parent in two-parent families or on the only parent in single-parent families. Because of this, families with the same income will receive different after-tax benefits because of the different types of families (Battle et al., 2006; Zuker, 2006). For example, at any family income level, a two-parent family with one earner would receive a higher net benefit than a single-parent family. Similarly, comparing two-parent families with one earner and two earners, the single-earner family would retain a higher net benefit at any given family income level (Zuker, 2006).

Battle et al., (2006) examines federal and Ontario taxes payable on the UCCB comparing different types of households with an income of \$50,000. He finds: "taxes payable ... range from \$213 for one-earner couples to \$265 for two-earner couples and \$374 for single parents, resulting in after-tax benefits of \$987, \$935 and \$826, respectively" (Battle et al., 2006, p.2). The result of the way this benefit has been introduced is to create horizontal inequalities, yet at the same time, benefits to families appear to be somewhat random in their distribution (Zuker, 2006, p.1). While most families will receive more than they did before, families who previously benefited from the young child supplement are more likely to benefit marginally or not at all. Battle's (2006)

estimate suggests that single parents earning \$30,000 in Ontario will receive \$301 while two-earner couples in the same context will receive \$199. The highest benefit is to two parent families with one earner who keep \$432. While these families would most likely receive the Young Child Supplement of \$249, the first situation yields a marginal benefit of \$52, and the second is receiving \$50 less in government support in the end. The two parent single earner family receives \$183 more. Again, it should be kept in mind that families receiving the Young Child Supplement will also have one less year in which to be receiving government support.<sup>3</sup>

### Finances and Families

When thinking about the micro level economic impacts of raising children, one must consider the impacts on individual women as well as families. Anti-poverty activists have for many years stated that what is good for the mother is good for the children. When a mother can be employed and earn an income, she has money to provide for her children. Child Care Canada (n.d.) highlights this link between poverty and child care:

Without the availability of affordable reliable ECEC [Early Childhood Education and Care], women may be forced to stay out of the paid labour force, to work at poorly paid part-time employment, or not to take advancement. Some women - especially single mothers - are forced to depend on social assistance and into poverty. In this way, the absence of adequate child care contributes to exclusion from the labour force and to marginalization through poverty and unemployment. Thus, ECEC services are essential for reducing family poverty by permitting parents to participate in training, education and employment. Without adequate care for their children, poor families may never be able to escape poverty through education and employment. (¶2-3)

Turnbull demonstrates ways that the tax system does not recognize the social and financial costs for families and women associated with child bearing and rearing which create disadvantages for women (Turnbull, 2001). A poignant example comes from a comparison between two couples with children when both have an income of \$60,000. When this couple is a

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<sup>3</sup> Please note that these are estimates.

one-income couple they have a take-home pay of \$40,731 after child care deductions and tax benefits. A two-income family earning \$60,000 has a take-home pay of \$36,317 after the same tax deductions. This difference is primarily due to the additional child care expenses incurred by the second couple where both parents are working (McCarthy as cited in Turnbull, 2001, p.198). When thinking about the financial implications of raising children, it is necessary to consider the financial costs of child care. Fees vary by age of child, length of day and type of care. Within licensed facilities in Winnipeg, costs are \$28.80 per day or \$7,280 per year for infants, \$18.80 per day or \$4,888 per year for preschoolers, and costs for school-aged children range from \$10.91 per day to \$12.07 per day, or \$2,836 to \$3,138 per year (Prentice & McCracken, 2004, p.12). These are direct costs carried by families.

In addition to the very real issue of take-home pay impacting women and families is the various ways that a mother's continuing involvement in the labour force can have long term benefits for her and therefore also her children (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998). For example, due to the highly volatile labour market, the chance that the father in a traditional two parent family could lose his job is real. Thus, the mother's employment would be essential to the family's well-being. Secondly, with the high rate of marriage break-downs, a mother's continuing involvement in the labour market protects her (and therefore her children too) from the negative effects women and children tend to experience from single-parent households. (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998). Clearly, availability of child care has significant implications for women's connection with the labour force.

Reliable day care is critical for supporting parents in employment and training. Within the Winnipeg context, over 70% of mothers with young children have full-time jobs (Prentice & McCracken, 2004). Thus, the economic impact of having access to child care gives parents and

mothers the opportunity to have an income to support their family. Yet for these mothers who remain in paid employment with children, “there are limitations on their earnings and advancement created by their responsibilities for their children” (Turnbull, 2001, p.53). By having children, women experience prolonged interruptions in their connection to the labour force, and thus are often shunted into low wage jobs (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998). These authors include in their cost-benefit analysis wage losses absorbed by mothers, not only for work lost but also for raises lost due to lost years of labour force experience.

Additionally, there is the impact of the informal sector on parent costs. Cleveland and Krashinsky (1998) describe how the informal child care sector operates within an invisible economy. Care providers work for cash, do not provide receipts and do not pay tax on their earnings. The loss of tax revenue implicit in this arrangement represents a hidden cost to the government of parental use of informal care. Evidence suggests that about 65% of informal paid arrangements generate no tax receipts and are thus unreported on the income side (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998). In addition to the significant financial implications for the government on lost tax revenue, the informal sector potentially has a very direct effect on parent’s financial situation. Because tax receipts are not provided, parents are not able to claim this cost against their taxable income.

The issues around families and finances are both vast and complicated. How the dynamics of family structure, child care costs, income and government policies related to income including taxes and benefits play out for each family are different. In understanding family circumstances around child care, discussion must include the role of finances.

## Summary

The topic of child care is complex; there are numerous angles from which to look at this topic and many related issues. This literature review identifies a number of reasons why it is important to continue research on the topic of child care and suggests aspects of child care that require further investigation. The quality of care a child receives is very important. Children's early life experiences have a dramatic effect on multiple aspects of their development which affect them throughout their lives; issues of child care quality have long-term effects. Child care is also important for parents as it helps support all parents both in their attempts to balance work and family and in their role as parents. Access to reliable child care is part of the solution to addressing these issues. Federal programs offer some financial support for families, yet the ways that these programs and benefits affect families particularly concerning child care choices is unknown. We know that within Manitoba some subsidies are available for parents who use licensed child care and that some parents are able to claim child care expenses against their taxable income when they can produce receipts that show the costs of their childcare. Yet informal paid arrangements are unlikely to generate tax receipts. Other affects of informal such as quality of care, are also unknown. Clearly there are many aspects of child care and the effects on families that remain unknown and would benefit from further research.

The literature review also points out a number of ways that child care is an issue that disproportionately affects women. For this reason, it is appropriate to look at the nature of the issues surrounding child care from a feminist perspective. Feminism strives to establish gender equity in roles, responsibilities and opportunities. The literature review has outlined that roles and responsibilities of child care are inequitably distributed between the genders, and opportunities and choices available to women are significantly affected by having children. Child

care is essential for gender equity. In view of gender inequality and the role that child care can play in mediating some of these inequalities, investigating child care from a feminist perspective attempts to address these issues.

By national standards, Manitoban child care provision it is considered to be progressive, yet compared to the Québec model there are many gaps and needs. Within Winnipeg there have been serious problems with child care availability for over thirty three years. The Child Care Coalition of Manitoba reported in March 3, 2006 that there were over 14,758 names on the waiting lists for Winnipeg Child Care Centres.<sup>4</sup> There are approximately 83,780 children in Winnipeg, therefore, that do not have access to licensed childcare. This has raised the critical question - where are these children? It is a critical issue to investigate further.

As mentioned above, there are numerous areas and angles which require further research regarding the general topic of child care, including within Winnipeg. This research has identified one piece of this puzzle to further explore. Within Winnipeg there is limited availability for licensed child care, limiting parents in their child care options. The initial purpose of this research was to gather information about informal child care within Winnipeg by contacting parents on waiting lists for licensed child care. Yet through the process of developing the research and the sampling approach, it became clear that families on waiting lists were not necessarily utilizing informal child care, which meant that the original intent was two studies. Thus, the scope of the research was modified so the issue being explored was *the experiences of families who are on waiting lists for licensed child care*. Related issues raised through the literature review pertaining to the social and financial costs and benefits of their circumstances on the family add to the depth of knowledge gained through this exploratory research.

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<sup>4</sup> This number did not include licensed family child care homes or data from 27 facilities who did not reply to the researchers, which means that the number of names on waiting lists for a licensed space is likely significantly larger.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

It is known that there are long waiting lists for licensed childcare facilities throughout Winnipeg. What is unknown is what parents do for child care when they are on waiting lists for licensed childcare. The primary objective of this study was to understand the child care arrangements that parents make for their children when they are on waiting lists for licensed child care, and the social and financial costs and benefits of these arrangements on the family. The hope was that this would shed some light on the informal child care situation in the city. This research was primarily exploratory in nature, ultimately seeking to understand *how families who are on waiting lists for licensed child care are experiencing child care*. Through interviews, parents were invited to share their experiences around the related topics, including the following: their current child care situation, work/family balance, reasons behind seeking licensed child care, and finances around child care including their experiences with the Universal Child Care Benefit.

This chapter outlines the research design and theoretical framework selected for the research, the data collection methods, details around sampling issues, strategies for analysis and interpretation, and considerations for credibility and ethics of the research.

#### Research Design

In general, research can be categorized as either qualitative or quantitative research. While there has been a significant degree of debate regarding the strengths and weaknesses of both types of research over the years, each type contributes to collective knowledge. Decisions about what type of research to use are based on a variety of factors but a critical motive is the nature of the research question (Creswell, 1998). The following section gives a brief description

regarding what qualitative research is and why it was selected for this particular research project.

One difference between qualitative and quantitative research approaches is their purpose. While the purpose of quantitative research is to gather general information about a population and universalize these variables to a wider population, the purpose of qualitative research is to deeply understand a smaller, focused population (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative research is rooted in and can reflect values of both interpretive social sciences (ISS) and critical social science (CSS). ISS explores subjective reality based on peoples' lived experiences and "is concerned with how ordinary people manage their practical affairs in everyday life, or how they get things done" (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003, p.78). The goal of social work research within ISS is to develop an understanding of the participants' perspectives of how individuals experience something in daily life, and then share these perspectives (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). The goal of social work research within CSS is, in short, to change the world by revealing truths about social relations. CSS, like critical theory to which it is closely allied, engages in current social trends with a focus on confronting injustice, challenges the status quo as it assumes an evolving social order, is action-oriented, seeks to uncover lived experiences of ordinary events, and encourages reflexivity of both the researcher and the participant (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; Neuman and Kreuger, 2003). Qualitative research explores a social or human problem and does so by gathering information from the people who are experiencing the problem, and considering their perspectives, develops a holistic picture of the scenario (Creswell, 1998).

For a number of reasons, this research used qualitative research as the primary research method. First and significantly, the nature of the research question was compatible with qualitative research (Creswell, 1998). The question is intentionally exploratory in nature. This is because there has been limited knowledge about waiting list experiences, meaning the topic



needed to be explored (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative research elicits subjective and holistic understandings in an area where little research has been done to date. This exploratory research was designed to provide a beginning understanding of some pressing issues pertaining to child care and the experiences of parents related to these issues, providing groundwork for further research.

Second, this research fits the various elements of qualitative research as outlined above. The topic under examination sought to uncover the ordinary, everyday and practical issue of child care, looking to parents to define and describe their subjective experiences, challenges and benefits of various child care arrangements. By asking questions of a small number of parents, a deeper understanding of these issues has been developed. Related to this was a third reason for using qualitative research, which was that this research also fit the goals of qualitative-compatible research as outlined above: it sought to develop an understanding of and share participants' perspectives of the daily life experience of child care, and it sought to reveal truths about the social impacts of the social problem of limited access to licensed child care (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003).

Finally, qualitative research "seeks to explore where and why policy and local knowledge and practice are at odds" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.53). While some understandings of policies around child care have been described in the literature review, it is evident that the families' experiences with these policies are noticeably absent from the literature so it is unknown if the needs of families are being met by these policies. Because much remains unknown about how current policies pertaining to child care are playing out in practice, an exploratory study using qualitative methods allowed an initial understanding to be developed. The realities of peoples' lives matters to this subject, and qualitative research captured this

dimension of their experience in a way that quantitative research could not. Exploring context, setting and participants' frame of reference was important to this research, all of which was well-suited to qualitative methods.

### Theoretical Framework

A feminist framework was applied to this study and the following discussion clarifies why a feminist framework was compatible with the research, and how feminism and qualitative research methods are a good fit.

Feminism builds on interpretive and critical social science, and while there are many forms of feminism, they are unified in accountability towards working toward changing the injustices caused through gender inequality (DeVault, 1999; Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). This research was compatible with a feminist framework because it sought to uncover the lived experiences of parents in finding child care for their children, with the hope that this information could contribute towards addressing related issues of inequality. Feminism, like other forms of critical theory, seeks to incorporate groups excluded by the dominant narrative based on gender, race, and class (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). The dominant western cultural narrative of child care is that it is a woman's role and in the private domain of family. This has been made clear through Canadian policy on the subject – government and community support for children's development begins at age five when children enter the public school system. What parents do for child care before this age is left to the private domain. As the literature review has highlighted, parents of young children, including mothers, are heavily involved in the paid workforce. The work/family tensions experienced by many families with young children are in part due to the tensions between sets of values and practices. One set of values is based on the traditional assumption that young children will be taken care of privately, the responsibility of

which generally falls to the mother; this conflicts with another set of values based on the relatively new phenomenon of women in the paid labour force, that women contribute to the household income through the paid workforce. The introduction of this second set of values introduces a tension based on changing or expanding roles – roles that were once based on gender are no longer. Anyone who is the primary caregiver of children is pulled between competing expectations and attention required of employment in the marketplace and child care in the private domain. Because feminism is “a movement, and a set of beliefs, that problematize gender inequality” (DeVault, 1999, p.27), this research highlights the issues that exist, in part due to this cultural shift. And to be clear, while this is a problem that is distinctly felt by mothers with young children, it is not exclusive to women. Men are also affected by these assumed roles based on gender.

According to Neuman and Kreuger (2003), feminist social work researchers often use qualitative research methods, characteristics of which include: “advocacy of a feminist value position and perspective...creation of empathic connections between the researcher and those he or she studies... [and] recognition of the emotional and mutual-dependence dimensions in human experience” (p.90). DeVault (1999) highlights the feminist epistemology of finding ways of doing research that allows for subjectivity and the diversity of women’s experiences guiding research. This form of research allows the researcher to engage in conversation with participants; feminist methods that include direct interaction with participants are often used by feminist researchers. The active participatory aspect of qualitative research allows the research to become richer by drawing from bases of knowledge and authority that are alternative to “male-oriented perspective that has dominated in the development of social science” (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003, p.90). As well, through contributing to the research through sharing their knowledge, participants

can experience empowerment through consciousness raising which is important in feminist research (DeVault, 1999; Olesen, 1994). All of these characteristics of feminist research are compatible with qualitative research. Because this is a topic that we know little about, feminist, qualitative exploratory research can help to highlight new information which will hopefully contribute towards challenging one aspect of inequality.

### Data Collection

As a data collection method, interviewing is utilized by many forms of qualitative research and is among the most popular forms of data collection (Creswell, 1998; Esterberg, 2002). This section describes the various types of interviewing, identifies the type selected for this research, and describes how interviews were conducted.

Interviewing can take a variety of forms and be done one-on-one or involve a group of people. In general, interviews are one of three types: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Esterberg, 2002; Tutty, Rothery & Grinnell, 1996). Structured interviews use a set of questions pre-determined by the researcher, giving the researcher control over the interview. Structured interviews require participants to answer the same questions in the same order; however, these are questions which the researcher has identified as important. At the other end of the spectrum are unstructured interviews which allow the participant to identify the significant areas to discuss. These are often called open-ended interview as the interviewer does not have questions set out ahead of time but rather asks very general, open questions. Further questions are developed based on the conversation and therefore follow what the participant highlights as important, ultimately to help the interviewer better understand the participant's world and perceptions. This interview format gives the participant more control of the process. The elements of semi-structured interviews lie between the other two types as there are some

predetermined questions or themes to be explored, but the order and manner in which these topics are explored remains somewhat flexible. It also allows for the participants to raise issues that the researcher might have overlooked or be unaware of, but still ensures that the major themes the researcher is looking at are addressed in all interviews (Esterberg, 2002; Tutty et al., 1996).

For this research I chose a semi-structured interview model for several reasons. First, a semi-structured model fits well within the feminist approach to research. A feminist epistemology endorses ways of doing research that allows for subjectivity and diversity of women's experiences to guide the research, as well as methods that include direct interaction with participants and building of empathetic connections (DeVault, 1999; Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). Feminist qualitative researchers tend to assume to some degree, mutual creation of data between researcher and participant (Olsen, 1994). A semi-structured approach allowed for these characteristics to be central in data gathering, making it a suitable fit with the proposed research.

Second, while flexible enough to follow issues of concern or interest to the participants, a semi-structured approach still ensured that a set of topics were covered with all participants. It also helped in providing a framework for analysis. As described by Tutty et al. (1996), "semi-structured interviews are particularly appropriate when you want to compare information between and among people while at the same time you wish to more fully understand each person's experience" (p.56). Semi-structured interviews permitted gathering of information from parents in their own words.

To facilitate the interview, I developed an interview guide which can be found in Appendix A. Based on the literature review, I highlighted topics and themes that I wanted to further explore within the interview setting. While it was my intent to pre-test the questionnaire,

I was unable to find someone informally who was on a waiting list and who was able to be interviewed. However, the benefit of having semi-structured interviews allowed me to learn from each interview and modify how I asked questions for each consecutive interview, maintaining the interview guide as a core set of information which I was seeking. Because I wanted to learn more about specific themes, a semi-structured interview approach allowed me to explore these topics while still being flexible to follow the participant's line of thinking. Sample questions that were used on occasion to prompt participants are listed on the interview guide. The interview guide was also structured in such a way as to begin with the more factual information to allow for time to build rapport with the participants, and then move into the more sensitive topics. Questions were phrased in a way that allowed for enough flexibility to understand the real experiences of these parents but also with enough structure that the variety of responses was easily comparable to locate themes.

Many writers on the topic of research interviews highlight the need to develop a rapport with the interviewee, with the idea that this will improve the overall interview including the depth of information the participant is comfortable sharing. Esterberg's (2002) chapter on interviewing begins with building rapport, which is presented as the starting point from which good interviewing flows. Rapport can be built through the researcher sharing something of themselves with the participant, which ideally helps the participant become more comfortable with the researcher through the building of this relationship. As a result, the participant may be more comfortable sharing information with the researcher. From a data gathering perspective this is helpful for the research. From a feminist perspective this is also considered necessary for ethical interviewing. For Esterberg, interviewing suggests data gathering in a way that learning can happen both ways, between researcher and participant, through relationship. This fit with my

approach, and so before the interview began I shared with the participants a little about me, my background and interests and reasons for doing this research. Questions were organized in such a way to allow for the building of rapport throughout the interview, with more basic questions being asked first and more sensitive questions asked later.

While the major question being explored was what the experiences were for families who are on waiting lists for licensed child care, supplementary themes were explored around the nature of the family's and primary caregiver's experience of child care. These themes included: current child care situation, including current arrangements and how well it is working for the family; work/family balance, including how the family is or is not feeling tensions and what they are; licensed child care, including reasons why the family has selected this form of child care and foreseeable benefits; finances, including what their current arrangements are and how the family uses government support such as the Universal Child Care Benefit. By gathering contact information from participants I developed a method to share the results of my research with participants as well as informing them where the final report can be found. This information sharing will take place upon completion of this report. Thus, in keeping with a feminist approach to research, learning will happen both ways.

### Sampling

Sampling is central to qualitative research, directly affecting the quality of the work as it is the data source for the research. The following section begins with a general description of sampling types and sampling types chosen for this research. This is followed by an outline of sampling considerations and decisions for the research, including: population, criteria, ethics in sampling, remuneration, and threats to findings.

### *About Sampling Types*

Quantitative research uses random sampling methods as their data source, drawing random cases from a large population. This approach is consistent with the purpose of quantitative research which is to generalize the results of the research to the greater population (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research, however, does not have the same goal of generalization. Because the purpose of qualitative research is different from quantitative research, qualitative researchers use different techniques when drawing their sample for data collection. A common approach is to use purposeful sampling, selecting fewer information-rich cases that allow for an in-depth study. Because these cases will provide information central to the *purpose* of the research it is called purposeful sampling research (Patton, 2002).

In her discussion on *external validity*, Merriam (2002) suggests that generalizability needs to be thought of differently in qualitative research than in quantitative research, as qualitative research is working from the concept of situation-specific conditions. While quantitative research gathers general information from a large group of people, qualitative research gathers detailed information from a small group of people. Therefore, qualitative research allows for in-depth analysis that can allow for transferability of knowledge, which is a different form of generalization. Patton (2002) addresses external validity within qualitative research as context-bound extrapolations, meaning that transferability of knowledge is possible when the contexts are similar. The most common form of generalizability is a reader or user applying findings to their own context. Thus, qualitative research uses small, non-random samples selected for in-depth information. This is what social work does using case-to-case (user) generalizability. This gives power to the user to determine when transfer of knowledge to another situation is appropriate. Therefore, the type of research done for this project fits well



within the social work concept of context-specific research.

### *Sampling Types for this Research*

Purposeful sampling, primarily snowballing or chain sampling was used in this research. Although the population being studied is plentiful as described in the *population* section below, it proved to be difficult to access because potential participants were on waiting lists which are confidential. Sampling was first done systematically through licensed child care centres. Directors of child care centres were provided with a letter explaining the research (see Appendix B). From here, accessing names for potential participants occurred through the cooperation of an administrator in one child care facility in particular. A second child care facility director was willing to distribute letters but this contact did not result in any interviews.<sup>5</sup> Initial contacts were developed with two child care centres using personal and professional contacts (such as child centre directors who have been involved in other research on child care). Contacting administrators through snowball sample selection likely increased the likelihood that facility administrators were in agreement to participate, as the connections were made through personal and professional contacts, thereby enhancing the likelihood of developing rapport and cooperation with the agencies. The researcher contacted directors of two child care centres from different areas of the city in an attempt to gather a cross-section of family types. A second, supplementary type of sampling that was used was convenience sampling. This resulted in two participants who fit the criteria outlined above, being referred to me informally through word of mouth. The benefit to using this type of sampling was that it enhanced my ability to access interested participants.

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<sup>5</sup> This child care centre was located in an area where the population is transient, therefore the administrator did not have a mailing waiting list. I gave her ten letters regarding the research and she offered to hand them out to parents who came to register their children to the waiting list. I contacted her several weeks after giving her the letters. She said she had handed several out but that interest appeared to be limited. None of the parents who received the letter from her contacted me.

### *Population*

The focus of this study was a particular population which had in common a life situation; parents who have a child/ren on waiting lists for licensed child care. The researcher held eight interviews, five with one parent present and three with two parents present. According to a news release by the Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, as of March 3, 2006 there were 14,758 names on the waiting lists for Winnipeg Child Care Centres. This number did not include licensed family child care homes or data from 27 facilities who did not reply to the researchers, which means that the number of names on waiting lists for a licensed space is likely significantly larger. While some children may be listed on more than one list, there are doubtless thousands of families who have children waiting to be admitted to licensed care. With this knowledge, accessing the original plan of 8-12 parents or sets of parents, was a realistic and viable sample size. As described above, the purpose of this research was to provide in-depth, context-specific data. Although the sample size allowed for this, it prevents generalization to the wider population, as described above. This is a limitation of this type of research, however, the purpose of the research is not to generalize in this way.

### *Criteria*

There were several criteria which determined who was able to participate. The main criterion was parents with children on waiting lists. I specifically sought to interview the primary caregiver in a household, or in households where this role was shared, I sought to interview both. Additional parents who wish to be involved were welcome. In an effort to have some variety in parents interviewed, I also had several additional criteria. First, because single-parent households likely experience child care differently than two-parent households, I sought to have a minimum of three single parents in the sample to be interviewed. A second criterion for interviewing was

to cap the number of fathers interviewed as primary caregivers at four to ensure that more than half of the participants were women. This was important because, as described in the literature review, gender is a significant factor in balancing the work/family tension. A parent who would be a single-parent father would count in both these categories. A third criterion to ensure a mix of participants was that no more than four families could have an income greater than \$40,000. This number was reached as a tipping point through experimenting with the Province of Manitoba's form for receiving child care subsidies, it was discovered that \$40,000 was essentially the cut-off point for receiving any subsidy. Because subsidy availability was something to be considered through this experience, this criterion was established. Beyond these criteria, participants were selected on a first-come-first-served basis, and those who were available to meet within four weeks of their response.

### *Ethics in Sampling*

In consideration of privacy laws and confidentiality, the researcher provided the directors with letters to be sent to parents on the waiting lists (see Appendix C). The letters were sealed in stamped envelopes with a return address. Directors were asked to place the addresses of the parents on the envelopes and mail them. For the first child care centre the director mailed 50 letters to the first 50 parents on their list. The second director did not have addresses for the parents on their waiting list as the population that used that facility was highly transient. In this case, the director was given 10 letters to hand deliver to parents who were on the waiting list. In the case of convenience sampling, when a name of a potential interviewee was passed on to me, I sent them my contact information and a letter of information inviting their participation and reiterated that involvement in the study was completely voluntary. Prior to the interview, participants were also provided with two copies of a consent form (see Appendix D) which

outlined what they can expect from the researcher and what is requested of them. Each participant signed one consent form which was taken by the researcher, and the second one stayed with the participant.

### *Remuneration*

Participants were provided with a small honorarium of \$25 for their participation. As well as providing a bit of an incentive for participants, it provided a token of appreciation for sharing their time and knowledge.

### *Threats to Findings*

The researcher identified two factors that had the potential to threaten findings. The first potential threat was not getting enough participants. The researcher felt this was not an issue because as mentioned previously, there was a very large pool from which to draw. Using snowball or chain sampling as well as convenience sampling also mediated this threat. Because it is qualitative research, there are no issues around the random nature of the sampling. A second potential threat to the research was that parents may have felt they were equally sharing as primary caregivers and therefore could not identify one person in this role. In this situation the researcher was able to interview both parents.

While there may be some concerns around the sample size, this should not be an issue as the purpose is not to gather information about every possible scenario or information that reflects all families, rather, it is to understand several situations in depth. Because the primary interest of this research is exploratory, this method will not only provide adequate information for a basic understanding, but also provide a starting point for future research.

## Analysis and Interpretation

Analysis was not restricted to one stage of research but took place throughout the research process. After the data was gathered it was necessary to devote a considerable amount of time to sifting through the data gathered and making sense of it, analysis and interpretation. Patton (2002) suggests that the purpose of inquiry guides its analysis. The purpose of qualitative research, as identified by Tutty et al. (1996), is to understand and communicate the human experience. In the case of this research, the purpose was to explore a topic for which there is currently limited knowledge. Therefore, the analysis was identifying the central themes and issues that parents raised concerning their experiences with being on a waiting list for licensed child care. Analysis and interpretation are related to hermeneutics as researchers seek to uncover meaning embedded in text: “true meaning is rarely simple or obvious on the surface; one reaches it only through a detailed study of the text, contemplating its many messages and seeking the connections among its parts” (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003, p.77). This section describes the steps taken in analysis to uncover the connections in the data and communicate a small slice of human experience.

Writers agree that the step prior to data analysis is organizing the data, and authors on the subject are fairly consistent in recommending how to go about doing so (Tutty et al., 1996; Patton, 2002). The first step in analysis was completing an inventory of the information collected to ensure nothing was missing. Because the interviews were taped, this data was prepared in transcript form. The researched did the transcribing. To address ethical considerations with transcript preparation, specifically around confidentiality, there was one list of original names and contacts which also indicated pseudonyms. This list was kept in a locked cabinet and all names on transcripts were pseudonyms. The actual transcription of raw data was verbatim and

indicated context and nonverbal expression. After each transcript was developed, the transcript was reviewed in its entirety while listening to the tape to ensure nothing was missed.

While authors on the subject agree that one needs a framework for organizing and managing data, there are different ideas about how to go about organizing the data to begin analysis. Tutty et al. (1996) suggest that a common approach to data analysis is looking for major themes and patterns and breaking these down into smaller sub themes and categories. Their preferred method of analysis is starting with the smaller units; this is similar to Patton's (2002) recommendation, and the one which was followed. Thus, the next step was coding, identifying segments of information or meaning units. This was done using a line-by-line approach, reading each line and looking for potential meaning units. Note were kept of the method used and coding decisions made (Padgett, 1998; Tutty et al. 1996). Themes, patterns and categories emerged through this initial coding, or, *inductive analysis*. *Deductive analysis* was applied by going back over the data ensuring that the coding done fit with the themes identified (Padgett, 1998; Patton, 2002). This process of coding and classifying stopped as repetition became evident (Padgett, 1998; Tutty et al., 1996). After meaning units were retrieved into categories, categories were compared to discover relationships between them and look for themes and sub-themes. Core meanings were then identified as patterns and themes which Patton identifies as the "fruit" of qualitative inquiry, and Tutty et al. (1996) describe as "more abstract and involves interpreting the meaning underlying the more obvious ideas portrayed in the data" (p.100). This process was not completely linear.

Interpretation is attaching significance to findings. The "hermeneutic circle" of interpretation is "an analytical process aimed at enhancing understanding... namely, relating parts to wholes and wholes to parts" (Patton, 2002, p. 497). My interpretation primarily followed

Patton's (2002) advice, whereby the analyst attempts to make sense of the data by reading through everything asking what it means in regard to the phenomenon of interest, in this case understanding families' experiences of being on a waiting list for licensed child care. I also had the questions from the interview as a beginning guide to organizing the data. Hypothesizing or interpreting causes, consequences, and relationships was done tentatively while seeking to portray a holistic picture where data was placed in context and inter-relationship of the data was addressed.

The last part of analysis and interpretation was reporting the findings. This meant being selective of how the themes and relationships identified were best be communicated, and using examples from the data to support these findings. In reporting findings attempts were made to find a balance between description and analysis and interpretation. Patton (2002) says that researchers have a social responsibility to present findings in ways that are understandable and useful which the researcher attempted to do. Consistent with the recommendations of Tutty et al. (1996), the last step of the analysis and interpretation stage involved assessment of the trustworthiness of the results.

There are several important points that were kept in mind throughout interpretation and reporting. As Potts and Brown (2005) state: "there are at least three voices in interpreting data: the participant...the writer/researcher...and the reader" (p.270). From a feminist perspective, it is important to find a way to be clear about whose voice is speaking in the interpretation and being reflexive about the voices involved in a study, including self-reflexivity, reflexivity about those studied, and reflexivity about the audience (Patton, 2002). Connected to this is keeping in mind the biases one brings to the research, and identifying places where biases could be effecting interpretation, are important. Attempts have been made to ensure that interpretations of material

are clearly labelled as interpretation of the researcher versus descriptions offered by the participants. Olesen (1994) highlights challenges with finding ways to present, in an honest way, accounts presented by individuals who may feel marginalized. How the voices of the marginalized are analyzed or interpreted is an important piece to consider. Keeping these points in mind enhanced the trustworthiness of the research and was also in keeping with the spirit of feminist research.

### Credibility and Ethics

Good research is credible and ethical. Within qualitative research, a number of steps can be taken to increase the strength of the research and enhance its trustworthiness. This section discusses steps this researcher took to ensure this research is of a high quality.

Establishing the credibility of the researcher lays the groundwork for credible research. But what constitutes credibility of a researcher? Research that is allied with critical theory, as is feminist research, suggests this includes presentation of self, including personal connections with the area being studied as it affects the researcher's perspective on research. Potts and Brown (2005) describe that this includes the need for self-reflection, being open about who they are and how their background may influence and bias their work. Because everyone brings a bias, the recognition of this bias can enhance one's trustworthiness. Feminism highlights the importance of bias recognition (Olesen, 1994), and it is also important within qualitative research. Called positionality or standpoint (Lincoln, 1995; Potts & Brown, 2005), personal self-reflection is particularly important from a feminist perspective as it calls attention to those aspects of the researcher which naturally influence attempts at objectivity (Heineman Pieper, 1994). In the spirit of these concerns, I highlight here pieces of myself which may or may not have had an effect on this research. Beyond casual babysitting as a teenager, I have not learned about child



care first hand. I have seen friends and family raise children using a variety of child care types, and have, from a slightly removed perspective, seen both benefits and drawbacks to these different approaches. When I began and completed the research aspect of this report I was not a parent and felt I did not have strong personal biases about child care. This may have helped me through the research as my naivety forced me to ask questions of clarification and detail for things that a parent might be assumed to know. Being a non-parent may have led to challenges for developing a rapport with some participants, however, it was never an issue that came up in any of my interviews. Being a young woman may have helped connect with parents with young children, as I am in situated in the middle of the demographic of mothers with young children. At the point of finishing the writing of this project I am an expectant parent. This shift in perspective may have influenced the analysis of the data, yet I attempted to remain a reporter and analyst of the information that was gathered.

A researcher can also establish credibility for their work by articulating the criteria which have guided their work. Readers can then judge the criteria and use the criteria to judge the work to see how well the researcher followed the criteria they laid out. Patton (2002) presents criteria used by critical theory and feminist inquiry as they seek “to critique society, raise consciousness, and change the balance of power” (Patton, 2002, p. 548). As empowerment orientations they take an activist stance, which their criteria reflect. For example, DeVault highlights several criteria of what feminist methodology seeks to be: a research process which minimizes harm and control, and a methodology that leads to real action and change that will benefit women. Concerning “real action and change that will benefit women,” it is hoped that this research will provide an opportunity to reveal the groundwork for future research on this topic. Uncovering this new information will reveal the effects of current policy on women and families’ daily lives.

Concerning a “process which minimizes harm and control,” Olesen (1994) too raises some concerns around ethical issues of using participants for their knowledge and experience for an ends that is of little or no benefit to them directly, and giving them little control over the research. As the purpose of this research is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my Master of Social Work degree, there were some limits to the creativity available in giving respondents control over the report. In the interview session the researcher checked to ensure that general themes of what the participants were sharing was understood (see Appendix A for details). Beyond this, the participants did not have access to the research material after the interview. Therefore, several steps are being taken to reduce the likelihood that the participants do not feel exploited. Information gathered through this report will be shared with the respondents by developing a summary of the data and analysis and providing this to those participants who indicated on the consent form that they wished to receive it (see Appendix D). Part of this is in the interest of producing feminist research for non-academic audience (Olesen, 1994). Participants will also be informed of where they can access the final thesis. As well, offering an honorarium was a way of acknowledging that their information is "worth something" and that the researcher and research process are not trying to take advantage of them and using their experience to meet our ends.

There are several others steps that were taken to enhance the credibility of my research. A method employed to enhance the reliability of the coding was requesting the use of another coder. The second coder, Dr. Brad McKenzie, was provided with a blank coding sheet from one interview. His coding decisions were compared to the coding done by the primary researcher. This process identified that the primary researcher was consistent in identifying units of analysis. This determined a reliability co-efficient and enhanced the reliability of the coding. As well, the

analysis section describes reasons for decisions made and thought processes used to allow the reader to evaluate the research. According to Tutty et al. (1996) and Merriam (2002), including this information enhances research credibility.

### Summary

This chapter has attempted to outline the specifics of how the research was done, the principles behind the choices made, and connections to feminist inquiry. By applying a feminist lens to qualitative interviewing and a small sample size, this research identifies a beginning understanding of the experiences of parents who are on waiting lists for licensed child care. The research presented here begins to address some of these pressing issues demonstrating why and how research on this topic must continue.

## Chapter Four

### Findings

This research has explored the experiences of parents who have children on waiting lists for licensed child care. Representatives from eight sets of parents were interviewed over a three month period, from April to June 2007, including three single parents (two mothers, one father), two mothers from two-parent families, and three sets of mothers and fathers jointly interviewed. All families with more than one parent were in heterosexual relationships. Regardless of whether one or two parents were interviewed, each interview will be described as a respondent from this point on when describing family situations; parent's individual opinions are presented in parent's own words throughout this section. While the interviewer asked a number of direct questions regarding their experiences through a semi-structured interview, the parents were encouraged to speak about what was important to them and the interviewer attempted to follow their lead regarding issues of importance. Throughout each interview, the context of each parent's life, the role of paid employment, the importance of parenting within their lives, and commonalities and differences between these parents became clear. After providing further background about the participants, this chapter outlines the range of themes that emerged from the interviewing and analysis process.

### Participants

Three single parents volunteered to participate in this research. Valerie<sup>6</sup> is a mother of one boy, and she is a new Canadian. They lived in the West Central neighbourhood of Winnipeg. I interviewed Valerie while her son played in the room. At the time of the interview, Valerie was still on maternity leave from her job as an associate manager at a retail store in a mall and her son was 11 months old. She was on the waiting list for as many day care centres as she could

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<sup>6</sup> All names given are randomly generated pseudonyms.

find across the city. Her annual income is approximately \$12,000. Judith is a mother of one son also. They lived in the North End of Winnipeg. I interviewed Judith while her son played in the room. At the time of the interview, her son was three and a half years old and Judith had just pulled him out of day care for two reasons. First, her subsidy called a *Seeking Employment Subsidy* had expired, and secondly she had just made the decision to return to British Columbia and was in the process of preparing to move. These two events coincided within days of each other. Her annual income is between \$10,000 and \$20,000. Willie is a single father of two, having arrived in Canada from Sierra Leone in December 2006. His older daughter was 15-years-old and his younger daughter was 4-years-old. They lived in Osborne Village area of the city. I interviewed Willie while his daughters were at child care and school and before he went to work. At the time of the interview, the younger daughter had been in day care as well as pre-school for approximately two months. Willie works a variety of jobs, some regular and some occasional, and has an annual income of under \$40,000.

Five two-parent families were interviewed including two mothers and three sets of parents interviewed jointly. Janet and Gregory have three children, Devin who is almost three-years-old, Nicole who is two-years-old and Bobby who is six-months-old. They lived in West Broadway neighbourhood. I interviewed Janet while Gregory was with the children. At the time of the interview, Janet was on maternity leave from her job as an early childhood educator. Gregory worked full time. The bottleneck for this family is finding care for the infant as the older two children are able to attend the day care centre where Janet works. With Janet on maternity leave, the family has an annual income of approximately \$20,000-\$30,000. Karina and Nic had two daughters, Maria age seven years and Emily age three years. They lived in the Corydon area. I interviewed Karina while Nic was at work, Maria was in school and Emily was playing in the

other room. Karina works mornings at Montessori and Emily attends the program while her mother works. Nic works full time. Emily is on the waiting list for the day care centre that is connected to Maria's school. The annual household income is slightly over \$40,000.

Genevieve and John have one son, Matteus, who was three-years-old and at the time of the interview Genevieve was seven months pregnant. They lived in the West Central area of the city. I interviewed both of them together while Matteus slept. John works full time during business hours and Genevieve works as a swimming coach mornings, evenings and weekends. They had been sharing child care responsibilities while the other parent worked, and receive additional child care support from Julia, Genevieve's sister who lived with them. Matteus is on waiting lists for two child care centres. Their annual household income is approximately \$53,000. Lisa and Chris have two children, Rebecca who is two-years-old and Tomas who is five months old. They live in the Wolesley area. I interviewed both of them at their home during Chris's lunch break while Lisa's sister played with Rebecca and Tomas slept. At the time of the interview, Lisa was on maternity leave from her job as a nurse where she works .8 of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) on weekday mornings. Chris works full-time during normal business hours. Both children are on waiting lists for one day care centre and one home-based centre. The family's annual income is approximately \$90,000. The last family interviewed was Stephanie and Richard who have one daughter, Casey, age 13 months. They live in St. Boniface. I interviewed them during their day off while Casey slept. Richard works full time retail business hours and Stephanie works part time as a nurse. Casey is in a home-based day care two days a week and she is on the waiting lists for two child care centres. The family's annual income is approximately \$90,000. A visual summary of these parent and family situations is provided in the Family Index Chart in Appendix E.

The great diversity in family situations among this small sample struck me throughout the analysis process. Both two parent, and single parent families were represented, there was significant variation in household incomes, the neighbourhoods in which they resided, the number and ages of the children and two participants were recent immigrants to Canada. This diversity was both beneficial to the research as it provided a breadth of information from many different family contexts, but also provided challenges through the analysis process.

### Parental Choices around Child Care

This section summarizes the family circumstances leading to being on waiting lists for licensed child care, the reason they were eligible to be involved in this research. Two sub-themes emerged out of this analysis: the reasons why each parent had their child on a waiting list for child care, and the reasons why the parent had their child on a waiting list for *licensed* child care. But parent's decisions around child care are not made in a vacuum, so two other related themes are explored here alongside these two major sub-themes. These include what these parents' previous experiences were with child care, as well as their preferred forms of child care.

#### *Reasons for Being on a Waiting List*

The first sub-theme addressed is the reasons for why a parent has their child on a waiting list for child care. All parents were seeking child care as a way to balance parenting and other responsibilities in life; in general, child care was critical for the parent(s) to work outside the home. Yet two main reasons emerged for wanting this care, and suggested two different types of parental approaches. A potentially over-simplified but helpful way of understanding these two types of parents is: a) how can I get child care so that I can work, or b) how can I get money so that I can parent. In the latter scenario the answer almost always moved the parent to the prior situation, that is, needing child care to work. While the mothers in three families were on

maternity leave (Judith, Lisa and Valerie) had children on waiting lists for the basic reason of needing child care so they could return to work, the remaining five families had slightly different reasons for being on waiting lists.

Genevieve and John, who share parenting responsibilities while the other works, had Matteus on two lists for licensed child care centres for precautionary reasons; if one of them needs to change jobs or loses a job they may not be able to maintain their current situation of parents as primary care givers and will need to have access to day care. Stephanie and Richard were both working, part-time and full-time respectively, and Casey was in unlicensed home-based child care seven days a month. They were on two waiting lists for licensed, centre-based care because the location would simplify family scheduling around child care compared to their current situation. Karina and Nic have an older child in school and their younger child is 3-years-old. While they could have managed with just Nic working full time, Karina was feeling the need to get back to work full time as they had significant student loans to pay off. That is why Emily was on a waiting list. And to my surprise, two parents indicated their children were on waiting lists although they no longer needed to be there. Willie was on a waiting list for his daughter although he recently obtained care and had not yet taken her name off the waiting list. Judith was still a waiting list for her son because she had not yet cancelled his name from a waiting list as one week before the interview she had decided to move out of the province and had her son at home with her. These two individuals remained in the research for several reasons. First, their experience of being on a waiting list was very recent, so they were able to provide accurate information about their experiences on the waiting list. Second, the reason behind the parameters laid out for participation were put in place to get an understanding about parental experiences with and needs for child care; these two parents were able to provide valuable information to this



underlying interest and research focus. Their experiences were unique and the parents provided complementary information to this study that was considered valuable. Third, that they were still on waiting lists even though they no longer needed to be was an interesting fact to consider when thinking about child care waiting lists as it demonstrates the very limited information available if one simply looks at numbers without additional background, qualitative information. Lastly, because this research sample was limited in size, the researcher was striving to have as diverse a population as possible within this group and these two individuals provided a healthy balance to the sample. Their participation demonstrates how varied families situations are and how quickly this can change.

The population under investigation was parents who have children on waiting lists for licensed care. Another sub-theme addresses the reasons behind why a parent has their child on a waiting list for *licensed* child care. Before moving to this sub-theme it is helpful to first look at the two other related sub-themes, the previous experiences of these parents with child care, and then what were these parents' preferred choices in child care and why.

#### *Previous Experiences with Child Care*

This section speaks generally about child care experiences beyond parental care. Looking at previous experiences of parents and children helps understand how their history with child care may have affected what type of child care parents are seeking for their children now. The purpose of this section is to understand from the parent's perspective, their experiences with child care prior to the time of the interview. Parental experiences are not necessarily, in their mind, related to the licensing status of the care providers but often have more to do with other factors such as the parent's comfort with the care provider. Specifics regarding licensing are identified for each case as it arises.

Two of the parents did not have previous experience with care givers other than parents, including Valerie who was still on maternity leave with her only child, and Stephanie and Richard whose only daughter Casey was in her first day care situation. The remaining six families had a range of experiences with some form of child care beyond direct parental care.

Two families appeared to have primarily negative experiences with child care beyond parental care. Willie's daughter had been in child care in Africa before they came to Canada. It was a very negative experience for her. Willie said, "*when I go leave her in school<sup>7</sup> she would scream she wanted to go back with me...I'd have to say okay, today if you stay in school I'm gonna buy you ice cream.*" In Canada when she was receiving care in an extended family member's home it was also difficult. Willie described the situation as follows:

*my uncle has a boy who was six and he was like most of the time bullying her... bullying my little daughter... And so most of the time she was crying and I didn't like it at all.*

Judith used licensed child care once at an earlier time when Samuel was two-and-a-half years old. It was a very difficult experience for both of them. Judith said, "*he didn't like it all ...he wasn't comfortable being away from me.*"

Three other families appeared to have primarily positive experiences with child care. Both of Karina and Nic's daughters attended Montessori for part days while their mom was also working there. Their older daughter also spent several months in a church-run licensed child care centre which was in general a positive experience with several reasonably minor concerns. Lisa and Chris had only positive experiences in the three child care experiences they had with their oldest child. First, Rebecca was going to a private unlicensed home for two months with someone they knew (since they were using the day care provider, she has since become licensed). Over the summer they had Lisa's sister coming into the house and providing care. In

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<sup>7</sup> Unclear if this was a school or a day care setting. Regardless, the parent and child's experiences of being under the care of another person was what they were reacting to.

September Rebecca went to a second home-based care, this one licensed, with someone else they knew who was at the end of their street. All three of these experiences were very positive both for the parents and the child. Genevieve and John, whose oldest son Matteus had primarily been at home with his parents also received regular child care from his aunt Julia, Genevieve's sister who lived with the family. This was a positive experience for everyone as it allowed Matteus to remain in the home with only shifts in care providers, and worked well for both parents, and it appeared for Julia as well.

The remaining family had a mix of positive and negative experiences with child care. Janet and Greg's oldest child, Devin, has been in child care centres throughout his life in the centres where his mother worked, although he was at home while Janet is on maternity leave at the time of the interview. His experiences in licensed care facilities have been very positive both for the parents and the child. Nicole, who is the second oldest child in this family, went to two home-based care givers starting when she was a few months old; one was licensed and one was unlicensed (the unlicensed care provider was trained as an Early Childhood Educator [ECE] as a level II). Janet and Greg had a number of very difficult and negative experiences with both these caregivers, which resulted in Janet taking an early maternity leave when the third child Bobby, was to be born. This allowed the couple to remove Nicole from the home based care setting. Janet made a comment that captured their experience with both home-based caregivers: "*it was just a dreadful time... I didn't know from one day to the next what was going to happen.*" This family's mixed experiences were further informed by Janet's experiences working as an ECE.

The families' experiences with child care beyond parental care were greatly varied from either no previous experience to experiencing a range of forms of child care. The licensing status of the type of child care was not raised as an issue for parents and they did not speak of it as a

factor in how they experienced child care. It appears that there were three main factors affecting these parent's experiences. First was what kind of experience their child had as the child's happiness played a significant role in how happy the parent was with the care. The second element was how much control the parent had over the child care situation. And third, parents' sense they could trust the care their child was receiving, and that it was reliable led to a positive experience for the parents. Based on these families' experiences, these three factors appeared to be more significant than the type of care the child was receiving. Regardless of their history with child care, each parent interviewed had a clear idea of what their preferred form of child care was.

#### *Parental Preferences in Care*

The interview guide did not ask questions specifically around what parent's preferred child care was, however, each participant highlighted what they were working towards establishing for their family's child care. In other words, given their current situation, what the best child care scenario was for them, described here as preferred care. Thus, this section reflects the thoughts raised independently by the participants.

For half, or four of the parents interviewed, their preferred child care would be the parents, themselves, as primary caregivers for the child. The reasons for why this was their preferred form of child care were varied. Judith, who is representative of this group, saw herself as the preferred child care provider because it was a role she wanted for herself:

*I don't want to have him in day care or with a babysitter. I want him with me! The reason why I had a child was so that I could raise him, right?*

For Karina and Nic, a parent as the primary caregiver is the preferred child care option, particularly with younger children. This is because, according to Karina, they believe it is better for the child's development to receive that close attention in a smaller setting, as opposed to the

larger day care group setting. While she would still prefer to stay at home, Karina felt okay about Emily at 3-years-old entering day care now because Emily had been with her mom for the first three years of her life. Emily has also spent mornings with her mother at Montessori so she's had some experience in a day care.

Genevieve and John originally had planned to work and have child care before Matteus was born. As time went on, they realized they preferred adjusting their schedules so that they could be his care givers. This was both because they enjoyed it, and because of the financial costs of day care, they were able to save money by not hiring paid day care services:

*the more we figured it out ourselves the more we loved it and the more we were like "God it's so great to be home with Matteus," and the more we just, I'm just speaking for myself I guess but the more I was just like I feel so good about this.*

Willie felt that his situation with his younger daughter in day care and his older daughter (age 15) picking her up and taking care of her in the evenings before Willie came home from work, was quite good, particularly compared to before when the younger daughter was being cared for by relatives. However, he felt that many work options were not available to him because of his need for child care so his preferred situation was that his wife is able to move to Canada and help with child care as this would give him more flexibility in this area. So his reason behind preferring a parent as a primary care giver is for the way it might ease family scheduling and to allow for more flexibility and therefore opportunities with work.

The other half of respondents in this study expressed a different view. For them, a child care provider was preferred, at least to provide some child care (i.e. not necessarily full time). For this second group, there was a significant amount of variation in who they preferred this caregiver to be. Two sets of parents had similar thoughts. Lisa and Chris expressed a preference for their children to be cared for by someone they know, specifically their friend who runs a

licensed home-based day care just down the street from their home. There were three major reasons for this. First, they previously used this friend with their first child and it was a positive experience for everyone. As Chris said:

*your kids are being taught values...and all that stuff happens all the time and... for us, you know it's someone from our church, it's a friend of ours, and we know...what they're about... Day care would be a good safe environment, like regular day care, but um you don't know necessarily know what's really ...being taught, I mean it's a pretty young, age two, but those are the things that you think about...and that's what makes you trust one more than the other... I know [participant's emphasis] I trust these people.*

Second, this care option was quite flexible as the care givers tend to be flexible on pick-up times which was important to them. Lisa and Chris would be very happy if they could have a similar experience as they had previously and have mornings-only child care allowing their children to spend some time at home with their mother in the afternoons. Third, the location was very close to their home. Similarly, Stephanie and Richard were very happy with their situation of part time care, two days a week, in an unlicensed home-based setting. They both had time alone with Casey and time together as a family and they trusted their care provider and liked the setting. The only thing they wished was a bit different was that their care provider would be closer to their home as it was several kilometres away. For both these sets of parents, care givers were desired on a part time basis to allow for some parental care as well as paid care.

The last two parents preferred licensed child care, and in both cases, and in both cases they were specifically looking at centre-based care. Ideally, Valerie wanted to find a subsidized, licensed care spot somewhere between where she lived and where she worked. She felt that licensed care would place Robert in a good setting from a child development and educational perspective. Janet expressed a clear preference for licensed child care in a centre setting, both due to their previous difficult experiences with home based care givers and from a

developmental and social perspective. Janet's comment "*it makes such a big difference in the children,*" reflects these thoughts.

#### *Reasons for Selecting Licensed Child Care*

The fact that only two of eight respondents (where two parents were interviewed they had the same reasons for being on a licensed child care list) suggested licensed care as their preferred child care option, raises the question of why parents were opting to have their child/ren on lists for *licensed* care. In general, it seemed that it had less to do with the fact that they were licensed and more to do with factors such as convenience/location and cost, of which the latter was most significant.

Other factors that were important to parents in identifying a care provider also came out in the course of this discussion. For example, the two highest income families did not discuss price as a factor in determining which care provider they wanted their child/ren to attend. Instead, quality of the care provided and knowing and trusting the care provider were primary reasons for both families. In both cases, proximity of the child care was important to them too. Both these families were also seeking part time care which they found in the home-based care environment. Lisa and Chris were on a list for a home-based (licensed) care provider that met these criteria and were on this waiting list as well as a licensed care facility. Stephanie and Richard had Cody in a home-based care setting that met most of their criteria but that was some distance from their home and work. Thus, they were on lists for two licensed child care centres as they were both in a preferred geographic location – one close their home and one beside Stephanie's work. We did not discuss how they would address their need for part time care should a space open. In both cases, the families had made arrangements for part time care as it fit their schedules. Yet interestingly, Genevieve and John found that getting flexible part time care

in any setting, including smaller home settings, was very hard to find. They were on a waiting list for a child care centre in the event that they do need to put their son in child care if they cannot continue to share work and parenting (e.g., if one of them would need to change jobs that would not permit them to continue to share parenting). The two lists they are on were also selected based on location, as they are between home and where John works. Karina also preferred only one specific child care centre which is licensed, again, not because it is licensed but for other reasons; convenience is the major factor that has led her to this decision because this child care centre is connected to the public school where her older child goes. Other factors that play a role in the choice of this particular care centre include the lower cost compared to Montessori where they are now attending, and the greater number hours of child care available which would make working full time more feasible. It should be pointed out that while she was not looking for a care facility that was specifically licensed, the hours of operation and relative costs which are favourable to her are the result of the centre being licensed.

All three single parents interviewed and one two-parent family required access to subsidized child care spots, so this automatically restricted their searching to licensed care facilities. All four of these families also discussed the strong need for suitable locations for child care, specifically, close to where they live or work as they do not have vehicles and must rely on the bus or other alternative methods of transportation.

One family emphasized several negative experiences they had with both licensed and unlicensed home based care options which they did not wish to repeat. Therefore, they were restricting themselves to licensed care centres. Janet, the mother, is also a child care worker and wanted her children to attend the same centre where she worked.



This section has set the context of the reasons behind the various child care choices and preferences of the participants. The three sub-themes have identified some of the major underlying issues of each family including those that are shared between families and those that are unique to different family situations. The one thing they all shared in common was that they were on a waiting list for licensed child care. All the families interviewed had preschool children. Looking at the theme of *parental choices around child care* it is evident that each family's decisions around child care are very complex and affected by a number of factors that play into their life situation. Another major theme that arose from this research then was what parents current arrangements were for child care.

### Seeking Child Care

The process of seeking child care was quite different for every family. The process always began with identifying potential care givers.

Valerie did not realize the complexities of obtaining child care before it was “too late”:

*I don't have any idea that you have to, that they're still in your tummy you have to call them already and get on the waiting list so that when he come out he already has day care. I don't know that. ...Some of them are two years before you get into their daycare... I don't have any idea because that is my only son, my first time.*

Valerie had a print-out of several pages listing child care centres in the city. She said that Robert is on the lists for half of them – the other half were no longer accepting names for their waiting lists. Her aunt is willing to provide interim child care, but a phrase Valerie used quite often when describing her situation was, “the only option” or “I don't have a choice.” The process of navigating the child care system has been quite stressful for her.

What complicates Janet and Greg's situation is that Janet works in the field of child care and would like to find a centre where she could work and have her kids there with her. Their bottle-neck is finding care for the infant as the older two can come with Janet to work. They have

been on waiting lists for care since Bobby was born in October 2006. In the past, this couple has had difficulties obtaining infant child care. Their situation at the time of the interview was simply waiting and wondering if they could get a spot for their youngest, Bobby in time for Janet to return to work. If not, Janet says:

*I think what will end up happening is that I'll stay home until he's 18 months [the age when more spots become available as the child-care giver ratio increases]. And if work can't keep my position open I'll just have to go job hunting all over again and hope that wherever I get hired that they've got spots for three preschoolers.*

For this couple had it been extremely stressful waiting and not knowing.

At the time of the interview, Lisa and Chris were not too stressed about child care as they still had about seven months before Lisa returned to work. A question they wrestled with was that if a spot opened whether or not they would pay for it until they need it in order to hold it. Their stresses also came from wanting their children to be in a specific (licensed) home-based, care down the street run by a friend. They were also seeking part time child care, and would like to have *both* their children in the same location; these two factors added a level of complexity to their search. Lisa and Chris had their children on waiting lists for about two months at the time of the interview when their youngest was two-months-old. They were on lists for two home based care options both of which are licensed, one of which they hope will work out because they know the care providers, and they are on two child care centre lists just in case their preferred care does not materialize

Genevieve and John have spent about three years on waiting lists for licensed care in a child care facility. In that time they have received about two calls with openings for a space, however, at those times they both felt good about the way their current system was working (off-shifting) and the centres could not offer them the flexible care they were needing to

accommodate their different work schedules. Their experience of seeking care has been flavoured by their desire to find flexible, part time care, which they have not been able to find:

*Nobody was willing to do part time. I called all the local places in our area here like day homes and nobody was willing to do one or two twice a week or even two mornings... so I called like 10, 15 of them...And every single one of them was like no.*

Genevieve and John started off with anticipating that Matteus would be in a home care (licensing status unknown) scenario that everyone in the neighbourhood had used, however that fell through when the care provider retired, at which time they got their names on waiting lists at three child care centres in their area. At the time of the interview, Matteus was on waiting lists for two licensed care centres, both located between where they live and where his father works.

Willie received help navigating the child care system from a staff member at the Family Centre which he describes as having been very helpful. He describes himself as being very lucky that he found a spot so quickly (they arrived in Canada in December and by April his daughter had child care) and so close to home; he needed to work and felt he had no other choice but to use the family-based care although it caused a lot of stress for him and his daughter. Willie had his daughter on approximately four lists, but only ones that were in his area so he could access them fairly easily from where he lived.

Stephanie and Richard had a very difficult and stressful experience finding child care. They had made arrangements with one woman in the neighbourhood to provide care (licensing status unknown), but she pulled out five days before they were to return to work from parental leave. They looked at a number of options, including child care centres and home based licensed and unlicensed options, eventually settling on an unlicensed home based care with which they are quite happy. Stephanie and Richard have had Casey on two waiting lists since she was 11 months old.

Judith did not anticipate the need to find child care when she moved to Manitoba to work in the organic food industry as the plan was to take Samuel to work with her. When her original employment plan fell through, she needed to put him in a child care centre she was uncomfortable with in order to find alternate employment. This was a very stressful experience both for Judith and Samuel. Prior to being in a licensed child care facility, Samuel was not on a waiting list for very long. Judith explains why:

*M: and then so, you didn't have to wait at all to get into... Child Care Centre?*

*J: no actually it was recommended to me ... by uh, EI...they said there's one really close here just go and uh call give them a call. Because they wanted me to get a job, right? So they came over one day and said give them a call, so I did and they had a spot open.*

Karina's experience in obtaining care for Emily was quite limited as she was very specific about where she wanted Emily to go. When looking for care while she was working part time at a child care centre, Karina said "*the program was full but they said that they could squeeze her in because she doesn't have any behavioural problems.*" Emily is only on one list for the centre connected to her older sister Maria's school. She has been on this list since approximately January 2007. Karina said "*I'm kind of waiting for an ideal situation to happen so I'm not putting her on just any daycare [list].*"

The process of obtaining child care was quite different for every family, yet what they share in common is generally a high level of stress, particularly when the parent's employment is dependent on it. The process always began with identifying potential care givers, which was further complicated in each situation by the family's particular needs and limits. Examples of the criteria which guided their experience of seeking child care included: cost – identified as a significant factor for six of the eight parent sets; hours that the care centre was open and/or flexibility of hours available – important to all parents; part time availability – specified as important by three respondents; quality of the care providers – discussed by half the parent sets;

and geographic proximity of the provider – identified as important for each participant. It is important to note that while each participant had experience seeking child care, due to the factors that played a role in their child care needs, participants were at all stages of in fact *obtaining* care. Some had care and were unhappy with it, others had care and were happy with it but thought they could still improve their situation and so continued to seek care, and others had not yet found care.

### Current Child Care Arrangements

Asking parents questions around current child care arrangements were important in order to better understand a key issue that this research set out to address, that is, if there are so many children on waiting lists for child care, where are they now?

Answers to questions around the families' current child care arrangements were as varied as the families themselves. However, mothers/parents and to a lesser extent extended family as the primary care givers was a frequent scenario. Seven of the eight families interviewed used the child's parents themselves (i.e. not grandparents) either full time or part time. Two families (Stephanie and Richard from St.Boniface and Karina and Nic from Corydon), used paid care on a part time basis, and only one family had a child in care full time, balanced between licensed day care and pre-school, though they still relied heavily on family outside the parent to provide additional care outside of day care hours. It should be noted that reference to full time or part time care is related the number of hours required for child care and is in relationship to employment. So full time care is care a parent would require to maintain a full time job, approximately 37 hours a week, which currently is primarily available during business hours. Part time care is anything less than full time. It is important to identify the amount of time parents need child care because anything that is outside the standard availability of child care

(full time, Monday to Friday, business hours) makes access highly complicated. Further discussion around parental employment patterns and child care is explored in the Discussion section under *Balancing Work, Life and Parenting*.

Three of the mothers interviewed, Janet, Lisa and Valerie were on maternity leave at the time of the interview and were therefore the primary caregivers of their child/ren. Two other families had parents as primary caregivers for their three year old children. Judith was with Samuel as they prepared to move out of the province. Genevieve and John had work schedules that did not conflict so they switched off between parenting and working. Genevieve's sister Julia who also lives with them, helped provide interim care (i.e., the cross over time between when Genevieve leaves and John is home) and occasionally took over for longer periods of time. It should be noted that while Julia was not paid directly, there were "in kind" arrangements as a form of compensation for this help. Genevieve and John felt very good about these arrangements.

Three families used some form of paid child care (not including Genevieve and John's arrangement with Julia), however, in each of these cases they still rely heavily on parental or family to pick up a significant part of child care. Karina has been the primary caregiver since her daughter was born, for three years, and she was remaining at home with Emily until other child care arrangements could be figured out. This situation was slightly complicated as Karina works mornings at Montessori and Emily attended the facility as a service user while Karina was working. So while in one way Karina does use part time child care, she only has that access because she is working at the facility. Emily is still either with or near her mother all day. Casey was in a home based care setting on a part time basis, two days a week. The remaining time she is at home a parent three days a week – with her mother three days one week and the next week

at home with her mother for two days and with her father for the third day. Stephanie and Richard were very happy with these arrangements and with the care provider and Casey appeared to enjoy the experience, however, geographically it is a bit out of their way. Willie's daughter Jesse had recently received a spot in a day care centre, but Willie's 15-year-old daughter Karla still played a significant role in Jesse's care as Karla picked Jesse up and was with her into the evening until Willie returned home from work. So family care is still critical for this family's functioning because "full time" child care hours is not sufficient to meet his child care needs.

The responses to the question of who is currently caring for the children of the participants suggested that it was primarily parents (and generally mothers), along with some paid care. Of the eight families interviewed, five families exclusively used family-based care as their primary child care. Two families at that time had a balance between part time paid care and the remaining time parental care, and the one family who used full time day care also relied heavily on child care by family members other than parent.

#### Work, Life and Parenting Balance

Parenting adds to the variety of stresses into a parent's life. Each family discussed or alluded to various stressors in their lives, and the range of factors causing stress was great. Identifying some of these stress causes is important when preparing to look at how parents are addressing these stresses in an attempt to balance their work, school, life and parenting. Several sub-themes were apparent within this, one being factors that help to moderate the stresses of work, life and parenting, and a second critical theme of the role of child care in addressing this stress. Both sub-themes are explored after looking at the causes of stress for parents.

The number of stressors parents described experiencing were numerous. Several will be discussed here. The experience of having Samuel in day care was a significant stressor on Judith. She said, “*every day he was saying ‘I miss you’ ...it was a stress on our relationship.*” Judith also articulated that there had been significant stresses to her being a single parent and related difficult positions:

*it would be nice to be able to make a little bit of extra money before I go back [to British Columbia] but I can't because that's just going to cost me money, more than I make [because of child care costs].*

Janet spoke about stresses around previous experiences with child care when the providers were inconsistent and unreliable, and the related stress this caused the parents, including the impact on their employment. Valerie repeated used phrases like “*I don't have a choice*” and “*only option*” to describe her situation. Although it was not her preference, she needed to get temporary child care from family. This reflected the stresses around having limited control over her circumstances. Stephanie and Richard discussed the major stresses around finding child care in a crunch when their original care provider backed out. Not having extended family in the city was identified as a contributing factor as having family around may have lessened the stress. Lisa spoke of the stresses of parenting and needing to find ways for her to get out of the house both with the children (it was early spring at the time of the interview) as well as without the children. Genevieve and John identified stressors primarily around finances:

*G: especially with my little you know my little part time jobs, I need to know. That's a little more stressful than knowing you can count on that steady income from a job right.*  
and

*J: Our stress is just because we're so close to hand to mouth kind of thing*

Willie identified the stresses of single-parenting and the challenges of providing parenting and paying the bills.



*I find it's tough, single parents it's very tough; it's very tough... particularly um for immigrants... in settling down with their kids in Canadian society*

Karina identified stresses around scheduling children's activities:

*for the past 2 years we did have about 2 or more things to go to every week and we just thought that it's much more agitating to do all that...much more calming to choose to stay and play at the playground...we don't have to have a full schedule after a full day of school.*

Judith identified significant stressors around moving to Winnipeg for a job that then fell through:

*So then I was forced to find my own apartment and then start looking for a job at the same time...and I had to go on social services... that wasn't my plan.*

The range of stressors identified by parents included finances, child care issues, family scheduling, stresses of parenting, employment-related issues, issues around single parenting and simply having limited options. Methods for moderating the tensions of balancing parenting and life are described next.

#### *Role of Child Care in Moderating Parenting and Life Responsibilities*

There were a number of methods and factors that parents identified which helped moderate some of the stresses at outlined above. Most of these methods pertained to accessing formal and informal methods of child care.

The role of informal supports, including friends and extended family in providing supportive child care was discussed by each participant. Five of the participants spoke of ways that their informal network provided them with support that was critical in helping balance the parent's lives, and three spoke of the impact that the lack of such supports had on them.

One two-parent family identified the need for child care as key to balancing their lives as it would allow the mother, Janet, to return to work after her maternity leave. This was important both because it is something she loves to do and because the income would be beneficial. For all

three single parents interviewed, accessing child care was critical for the parents to balance their life. The inability to access reliable child care was creating a lot of stress for Valerie, as her ability to return to work depended on it. She described the foreseeable challenges of using child care that was far away from her home and work, particularly the anxiety of using the bus in the winter for this. Tied to this is the struggle that Valerie has an irregular work schedule which does not fit with the hours when child care centres are open:

*I work one to nine and in the day all the daycare they close five thirty so...I'm just gonna bring him to the daycare from 1 until five so I'm just gonna get off at 5:00, I'm not gonna get one to nine, I don't have a choice, they don't have a daycare open.*

For Judith, accessing child care was critical for balancing her life. She needed to

*put him in day care and get a job. Look for a job, because I can't look for a job while he's with me. I had, I had to do a resume you know I had to go on a computer.*

Having Samuel in child care was also important for Judith's emotional health as she did not have many informal supports:

*I received a huge break [participant's emphasis] which I really needed okay because it's very, it was hard taking care of him all by myself... there was a lot of problems at first and I needed to mentally recover from it emotionally recover from it, it was hard... for both of us.*

Willie was receiving significant child care support from his older daughter who was 15 as she picked up her sister from day care and was with her until Willie came home from work in the evening. He also drew on some support from extended family if he needed additional care. Child care not only allowed Willie to work but it also gave him the freedom to do other things during the day that may otherwise be challenging to do, like shopping.

Two of the two-parent families had chosen to have themselves as primary care givers as a way of reducing stress in their households. Genevieve and John said that employer flexibility was critical in allowing this to happen; John said, "*because we had that choice of moving my*

hours around [so he was home a half hour earlier], it made almost the choice of and the need for child care disappear.” Genevieve and John found that not needing to negotiate their work schedules with day care providers’ schedules has been a good way to avoid stress:

*G: We make these decisions to slow down to live a slower pace – so we don't have the money...and I mean yes we're stressed from time to time but it's quite interesting...*

*J: Our stress [financial stress], it's not real stress...and actually it shows in our health too because we're never sick*

*G: There's so many people who I know who have kids who have chosen to continue to teach, continue to do the child care and I've just decided 'forget it, I'm not gonna look like them!' They're not happy...they never see their kids.*

Karina and Nic had also found creative ways to be the primary care givers and to balance parenting, working and school. When their oldest daughter was ten months old, Karina returned to work part time.

*Nic's work schedule was flexible enough that he could take those days off [that she worked] and then work other days in replacement of that, um, so he would stay at home, so we had this ...whole crazy feeding schedule... he would put her in the sling and walk her over to the bakery and I would feed her at the bakery and then they would walk home together...when she was two...Nic and I both went back to university full time and...we didn't arrange any day care we just switched off our schedules so he would be in a class, I would be with her and then we'd switch off.*

From this arrangement they moved to Karina being the primary caregiver with both their children. In planning for the future, accessing child care for the younger daughter will allow Karina to work to help pay off their student debts, which are starting to create some financial stress on the family.

Two of the five two-parent families used child care to allow them greater opportunities to spend time with their children. In both cases, the mothers worked part time as nurses. Stephanie and Richard use child care to reduce the likelihood of stress in their lives:

*R: We could have arranged to have no day care at all but then we would have had*

*S: We'd get burnt out, definitely been burnt out, and that's why we chose to like we could have functioned without day care but we just said then Casey's never going to be able to see Richard and I together*

Lisa and Chris's previous child care arrangements had allowed for child care on a part-time basis, mornings only, allowing Lisa to be the primary caregiver in the afternoons. They were attempting to make similar arrangements now with two children. This has been a conscious choice. One is that work helps balance the child-care responsibilities:

*C: it is good in some ways, yeah, when you get so bogged down or just overwhelmed with just you and the kids all day like it's good to be with adults for some of the time*

*L: it's just it's just different work*

*C: you were glad to get back to work after Rebecca, and you said it was kind of nice break*

*L: yeah...it's different*

Lisa also described how her work schedule has been chosen to help balance the well-being of their family:

*Like a lot of people, a lot of nurses take weekends and then evenings so that they wouldn't need child care. I've never really liked that idea like if he'd [Chris] work during the day and we'd like basically see each other as we'd pass and I'd work evenings. The kids would like see both their parents at separate [times], to me that's not so ideal for us...it's not so ideal for a marriage.*

Clearly the number of factors that have the potential to create stress for parents are numerous. In looking at elements which parents identified as helpful and critical to maintaining balance in their lives, those factors that supported them as parents, in particular formal and informal types of child care, were crucial to this. As the above section has indicated, there remains a great variety in the underlying rationale for and ways that child care arrangements can moderate parental stresses, depending on the life circumstances of each family.

### Benefits of Child Care

Questions around the benefits of child care, specifically licensed child care were asked of each parent, but some raised the topic without prompting. In general, parents were fairly consistent in describing the benefits of child care. Parents did not distinguish between the type of

care (licensed and unlicensed, home-based and centre-based) rather spoke of child care in more general terms, i.e. not parental care, not in the family home.

In addition to the benefit of providing the parent(s) with time to do a variety of things, there were a number of identified benefits to children. Most of these were related to opportunities for the child's growth and development that were available through the day care. The two most commonly cited benefits were educational elements that the children would experience in a day care setting (including licensed and unlicensed, home-based and centre-based), and the opportunity to interact with other children, both for fun and play purposes and for socialization.

Looking to the future, Valerie, who specifically wanted Robert in a licensed child care centre, anticipated "*I think they will teach something, like an education kind of, like the ABCDE...you know playing with the educational toys.*" Based on their most recent experience in a licensed child care centre, Judith said Samuel "*enjoyed having friends to play with.*" Based on her experience working in day care centres and in watching her older two children have several different experiences with day care, including a licensed centre, licensed home (where her daughter was alone) and unlicensed home (where her daughter was alone), Janet spoke about the benefits of being in a licensed centre: "*Educational and he'll [the youngest child, Bobby] learn how to get along with others, other than his brother and sister [laughter].*" In thinking about being in a child care setting outside the family home, Genevieve said "*I think for Matteus it would be nice for him to have the experience with a group of kids, because that's where he loves it.*" She also identified socialization and learning how to share as a benefit of child care.

Thinking about the current experience at Montessori, Karina said

*it's a very positive learning experience, completely...It's exciting for her because she hadn't been in any kind of program before, so yeah she's getting to, learning how to relate to others, other children that age.*

Related to the advantages around education and interaction were the programming and structure that are part of many day care programs. Stephanie identified this as a very important element of Casey's day care experience in an unlicensed home:

*I think one of the biggest advantages is that she [the care provider] does a lot of activities with them...they're always outside and I'll go and pick them up, Cody's outside waiting for us sort of thing. And she has a fairly, like a relatively structured program even though they're only young she kind of often picks a letter for that week and teaches them stuff about that particular letter. They sing, they dance.*

Lisa had comments to regarding structure of being in day care that was outside the family home:

*interaction I guess and they get to share and they get to play I mean you can get that too when you have play dates or all that but it's just more... structured getting prepared for preschool, kindergarten... different toys and books and just learning more and learning from other kids*

Three other separate points came up around the benefits of child care. Genevieve commented on the benefit of exposing their child to illnesses as a benefit of child care as it would help strengthen the child's immunity – she was the only parent to mention this. Willie also had an observation that was unique, “*one very big advantage to the day care is ...helping her settling down to maybe Canadian society very well and like she's speaking English to me now.*”

Chris made a comment regarding the benefit of children being with trained staff in a licensed child care centre:

*I had always been sceptical about any kind of day care at all, home based or not...once we got that tour [of a licensed child care centre] I was like, wow, there's a bunch of things that are, that we probably couldn't provide...like interaction with other kids is one, but even just that these are professional people who do work with kids all the time and know like how to relate to them and um teach them in a way that...they really know, stuff that we don't know.*

All participants highlighted benefits that their children could experience through a child care setting that they would not necessarily experience in the family home. Seven of the eight parents spoke very positively about both the potential they saw or benefits they had seen through

previous experiences their children had with child care. While the benefits were described in many ways by participants, the role of educating a child was highlighted by all parents, either from an educational angle (learning the alphabet) and from a socialization perspective (learning to get along with others).

### Concerns with Child Care

I was surprised with the variety of specific frustrations and concerns parents had with child care. That said, problems that parents identified were for most parents fewer than the benefits suggested. In general, concerns seemed to fall into three major categories: interaction with other children, the general environment of the day care, and drawbacks specific to home based care setting, including licensed and unlicensed.

While interaction with other children was considered a benefit of child care for the most part, this was also viewed as a problem in a couple of cases. Judith was uncomfortable with the negative impact that the other children at the day care centre had on Samuel “*he was allowed to, the children are allowed to run around wild... So I was uncomfortable with that kind, of you know, atmosphere.*” Willie also had some concerns around his daughter’s interaction with other children due to communication issues:

*I had a call some time ago from her teacher there’s a problem maybe with hitting or maybe sometime she tries to play with the other kids there...she wants to play with it but they did not like it and they go and complain and because of the communication gap they could not understand exactly what was going on.*

Several parents commented on concerns around the general environment their children were in. Janet discussed two of her daughter’s experiences. In the first location, licensed home-based care “*all the woman did was have her sit in front of TV in her car seat all day,*” and at the second location, unlicensed home-based care where the care provider and Nicole were “*at the mall every day, it’s like, I don’t like that idea.*” Judith was quite concerned about

*the food that they provide for the children is not, like they provide stuff like pizza pops...it just wasn't the kind of food I would normally feed him. So I ended up having to buy the food and send him to school<sup>8</sup>...I feed him organic food.*

In reflecting on her first experience with day care for her older daughter, Karina described a situation in a licensed day care centre where “*we came to get her once and she wasn't there, and the teachers didn't realize that she wasn't there.*”

The two families that used home based care had similar concerns around the drawbacks of being in a more informal setting. Richard and Stephanie using unlicensed home-based care said:

*R: one of the disadvantages of her being there is that occasionally when we go there there's other people there who are in her house who are say visiting her and we don't know if they're around Casey, so that's always...*

*S: we're a little nervous sometimes.*

Chris's comments based on their previous experience of licensed home-based care were related:

*there's sometimes that I think that because it's in someone's home and there's business and there's phone calls and whatever, like I know they may in some cases receive less attention, than they would at a day care, and I've thought about that, like that I think, that has happened sometimes when I've been there and [laughter] so uh, it's not like it's all just like a rosy picture.*

Feedback outlining three concerns that parents expressed— interaction with other children, the general environment of the day care, and drawbacks specific to home based care – were often described by the parents without specific questioning, as well as in response to questions specifically about drawbacks to child care they had experienced or observed. These concerns were generally highlighted about one situation specifically, whereas the benefits that participants outlined tended to pertain to child care in a more general sense.

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<sup>8</sup> The child care centre Samuel attended was connected to a school.



## Finances

The theme of finances came out in several different ways in each interview. Questions were asked specifically about costs of child care, but a number of parents volunteered information such as financial difficulties in paying for child care. Feedback from these comments is presented here under the sub-theme of *family finances and child care costs*. Specific information about what parents paid for child care is outlined under *costs of child care*. Questions were also asked on the related theme of the Universal Child Care Benefit.

### *Family Finances and Child Care Costs*

Based on this small sample, it appears that the lower a family's income, the greater their financial situation played in the parent's child care choices and decisions. For six of the eight families interviewed, finances were a major factor in child care choices and decisions. Families who require a subsidy were limited to licensed care options, and the subsidies were significant for their situations, as each family's income is significantly less than \$40,000 (approximate cut-off for accessing a child care subsidy). If Valerie gets into licensed care she anticipates it will cost \$4-\$8/day, "*I'm hoping for a subsidy because I can't afford \$20 a day... the rate at the mall, is only \$8 [per hour], I can't afford it! Working just for the day care! No I can't afford it.*" In another example, Janet and Greg anticipate paying \$350-\$400 per month in total for all three children if they are approved for a subsidy, as compared to about \$1400/month without a subsidy. Willie is receiving a subsidy. His costs have fluctuated. It started at \$82 per month and now it is \$62 per month (\$48+a fee for snacks). Judith was on a Seeking Employment Subsidy that lasted for 40 days. Her child care costs after the subsidy were \$48 per month. When the subsidy came to an end, so did her ability to send her son to child care.

For the two families with incomes of around \$50,000, the costs of child care played a major role in their choices. Genevieve and John found that paying for child care would not move them ahead further financially, even if they worked more hours. In thinking about finances and in planning, Genevieve and John had learned that it was about \$600 per month for full time child care and they were unable to find part time care. In considering their options, Genevieve said “*we had thought about hiring a baby sitter ...I mean they were 12/13 [years old] and that’s what we could afford at the time.*” Cost of child care was one of the main motivators for Genevieve and John to work out a shared parenting and work arrangement. Karina was waiting for a child care space in a centre where she was confident that the costs of care still allow her to earn a significant amount of income through full-time employment, relative to her current situation where half her income from her part-time job was paying for child care. She estimated that licensed care was \$18/day (approx. \$360) versus Montessori which is \$10 for 2.5 hours (\$200/month); home day care could be up to \$35/day (approximately \$700/month). The school-based daycare hours also run longer, from 7:30-5:30. This extended amount of time available for child care is beneficial as it allows for more time for paid work and getting to and from work.

The two families with the highest incomes did not include finances as a factor in their decisions regarding child care. The only exception to this was a comment made by Lisa that the Montessori school that would have had space for her older child did cost more than other options they were considering.

#### *Costs of Child Care*

Costs for home-based care, both unlicensed and licensed appear to be fairly consistent between care providers with variations of around \$5 per day. Janet and Greg had paid \$30 per day for both home-based care providers they had used, including licensed and unlicensed

(approximately \$600 per month). Stephanie and Richard were paying \$25 per day 2 days a week (approximately \$200 per month) for unlicensed home-based care. Lisa and Chris had used two home-based care facilities, one licensed one unlicensed, both of which were \$25, however, that was for half-days (approximately 4 hours) plus \$5 if it went a bit later (approximately \$500 per month).

Several parents had experiences of or were anticipating working out remuneration on their own. Lisa and Chris paid Lisa's sister \$8 per hour (\$32 per for a half-day, approximately \$640 per month). Valerie was planning to give her aunt \$50/week (\$200 per month) or \$10 per day to look after Robert. Genevieve and John had an arrangement with Genevieve's sister Julia who lived with them and provided occasional as-needed child care. In return, she did not pay any household bills.

#### *Perceptions of the Universal Child Care Benefit*

Parents' reaction to the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) were mixed, with a general, "well it's sort of helpful, but it's really not that much" tone.

Judith, a single mom with an annual income of \$10,000-\$20,000, said that UCCB has been very important income for her. Over the 40 days of subsidized child care she had she still had to pay \$48/month so she did use the UCCB for it. During the election she thought she would prefer the money but now that she is in the position where she has to work she thinks that having accessible child care (both in terms of space and cost) might be more important. She suggested that the government should have more provisions to support children and their parents. For her this meant affordable child care or giving real money to support parents (i.e., \$100/month is not real support). In addition to financial support she suggested that supports by way of support

networks and more social workers to help parents deal with stress and low energy would be very beneficial, especially for single parents.

When asked about the UCCB, Valerie, a single mom with an annual income of \$12,000 said that *“there’s no effect [laugh] ... no, it helps, it helps ... I bought him an RESP for his education ...for \$100, so when he’s grown up, I don’t have any problems.”* Because her child was not yet in child care she did not know whether or not she would be using the UCCB to pay for some of the child care costs.

Karina, who comes from a two parent family with an income of just over \$40,000, said the following about the UCCB:

*K: ooooh! [laughter] how sweet it is! (said sarcastically)...I mean, it’s nice...I don’t know how it affects people who are on social assistance or if they just get that...I just think of it as a little gift every month, \$100 ... it’s okay, I don’t think it would cover anything...it just goes into all the regular things in our life...into the empty pot!*

When asked about how the UCCB was affecting her child care choices, she said *“I don’t think it’s enough to have any effect.”* And comparing the UCCB to universal child care (i.e. universally available and accessible child care), she said: *“I think that would have been more helpful to many families than \$100... like what good is it doing?”* Karina was the only parent who also had a child over 6, Maria aged 7 years, who was therefore not receiving the UCCB. Maria was involved in the lunch program at her school and Karina did not work in the afternoon she was home with Maria and Emily after school hours.

Genevieve and John, who have a joint income of approximately \$53,000, use the UCCB to pay down their debts. They also spoke significantly more than any other family about income and financial planning.

Stephanie and Richard, who have a joint income of approximately \$90,000, noted the following in our discussion of the topic:

*Richard: We don't use it for child care*

*Maggie: Okay, what do you use it for?*

*Stephanie: We put it in the bank for Casey*

*Richard: For her education ...*

*Stephanie: Casey has more money in the bank right now than we do! If you're going full time, it's not much really, but*

*Richard: Better than \$0 though*

*Stephanie: ...young families now come out with, I mean if you have any education most people come out with student loans and then, you have you want to buy a house and so you have your mortgage and then you end up having a child and it is it's tough so a little bit extra I mean it's not much but a little extra does help um, but I think they do also need to um, get more spots.*

Janet, who along with Gregory has a joint income of approximately \$20,000-\$30,000,

said that she is using the UCCB to pay for her tuition in studying early childhood education:

*J: So the \$100 per child under the age of six that we're getting from the government is absolutely ... nothing...it's helpful in some ways but part of me is thinking how much is this like uh extra \$300 a month, how much of a pain is going to end up being because subsidy is going to look at your income, well you've gotta claim that on income tax as income... So that right there, there's an increase in what you're making ... so that might have some effect on subsidy ... it affects people if they're applying for subsidy, if they're applying to student loans, ...*

*M: ...have you been using it for anything specific...*

*J: my schooling at the moment... 'cause that way, when I am done, when I go back to work we're not having to fork out money for my schooling still ... it means a pay raise, which will benefit all of them... I can end up being able to support these guys better then.*

Willie, a lone father who is on a low income, said he is not using the UCCB for his daughter's day care costs; rather, "What I use it, I use it for her, maybe to get stuff for her from the stores, maybe she likes toys or something like that."

Lisa and Chris earn approximately \$90,000 together. They want to use the UCCB for RESPs but...

*... I mean it's into the big pot right now but it's very nice to have it...yeah, it definitely helps, I mean we'd be having child care regardless if we had that money or not, right so we're not at that point where that would have been a like a tipping point, like okay we just need a couple hundred bucks more a month more and we can, you know, or whether we'd go to a more expensive day care or not, but obviously it still is very helpful.*

When asked if it is having any effect on your child care decisions, both Chris and Lisa agreed that *“that money isn’t linked to any of those decisions.”*

When asked, each parent had a lot to say about the UCCB and the role it plays or does not play in their family. While some parents used their UCCB for specific things (i.e., children’s savings or education) others absorbed it as part of their income and used it for general household expenses. Two things were became apparent through this conversation. One was that while it played an important role, for all but one family the income was not used specifically for child care, which was the intent behind the Harper government’s decision to implement this program. Second, while most parents considered it a nice addition to the family income, the overall impact of the UCCB on their family income as a result of its taxable status was unknown at the time of the interview.

#### Summary

Responses from participants reflect the great variety of factors in the lives of families that make how they feel about and interact with their child care arrangements and options, unique. While several themes emerged from this information, it is clear that there are challenges in identifying patterns between the families due to the uniqueness of each situation. Yet patterns do emerge.

Looking at the range of significant factors influencing how families and parents use child care, five major points arise. First, the number of parents or adults in a household to help with child care greatly affect the choices these families were making. Specifically, four of the five families who had two parents used some combination that included parental care as a significant form of child care. Second, the type of relationship that the parents have with the labour market affected their use of child care. Jobs with more flexibility, the openness of supervisors to work

with the parent to modify work schedules and hours worked (i.e., if the parent worked during the time when child care was available), played a significant role in how well they were able to balance work and child care. The parent's professional interest or commitment to a particular job also played a role in how important it was for the parents to secure child care. Third, the degree of informal supports through family and friends played a role in how reliant families were on paid child care. Fourth, family income plays a major role in child care choices and decisions. Fifth, parents had ideals or preferences in child care – often influenced by their previous experiences with child care – which affected their search for child care as they sought child care that met these ideals as closely as possible.

All participants wanted to have a balance between parenting and the rest of their life and finding ways to balance the stresses out was important in this. How parents were able to balance the stresses were dependent on a number of factors as outlined above. Yet why this was important to them came out through the course of conversation; relationships were a key reason for seeking this balance. Although parents were not asked direct questions about this, six out of eight families described the importance of their relationships with their children and finding a way to nurture these as important in striking this balance. All five families who had two parent families also identified the importance of their relationship with their partner and nurturing this relationship as part of this balance.

In addressing parental thoughts on the benefits as well as the concerns around child care, the benefits and families needs for child care, in general, outweighed their concerns.

While having more available finances seemed to give parents more options and more selection around child care, all parents were frustrated and felt that they had very limited control

over their options. This reflected an over riding theme that parents voiced frustrations of having limited control over their concerns with child care and the role this played in their situations.



## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion**

This research set out to gain a better understanding of the experiences of parents who have children on waiting lists for licensed child care. The questions that were asked to draw out these experiences focused primarily on three main topics: questions around their current child care arrangements, questions around licensed child care, and questions around balancing family and the rest of their life. Questions around the financial aspect of child care were also addressed. Because of the open-ended nature of the interview process, participants also had many opportunities to highlight other issues around child care that were important to them. Through interviewing eight families with diverse backgrounds and experiences the intent was to capture a small picture of what is currently going on in the city of Winnipeg. While only eight families participated in this research, the experiences each family had with accessing child care, as well as their needs and hopes for child care were broad and added significant depth to the research. In considering the families' combined experiences, including past, current and future plans for child care, the variety of child care experiences these eight families spoke about totalled over twenty-four. This variety of experiences as well as the variety of the family situations represented in the sample created a special challenge; because of the variety it was difficult to identify common themes between families, yet the diversity of this information provided a rich breadth of information for this research. What became clear through these interviews is that each family's situation was unique, and there were many different ways they responded to their child care needs.

So what were the experiences of the parents who were interviewed and what do these say about their waiting list experience? The answer is complex and a variety of angles which offer

pieces to this answer were examined in the previous chapter on findings. However, there were some overarching themes that connect these smaller pieces. Parental stress was a central theme. This appeared to be the result of three factors: the struggle to balance their work with the rest of their life, in particular parenting; an inability to fulfill their desire to provide fully for their child's development; and challenges to accessing their preferred care. These three factors were of central importance and concern to all parents interviewed. The inability to address these factors led to parental stress, and not having access to child care exacerbated these factors and the related stress. This chapter will explore each of these factors as well as address two other key issues within this topic, the role of gender in balancing work, life and parenting, and finances.

### Balancing Work, Life and Parenting

A number of experts in the child care field have suggested that reliable child care is a critical piece to the puzzle of managing work and family life. Reliable child care supports parents to balance their scheduling, and also provides additional supports for parents such as emotional support and parenting ideas and suggestions (Battle & Torjman, 2000; Beach & Bertrand, 2000; Friendly, 2006). Work-life balance was a major theme in this small sample study. Parental needs pertaining to child care were identified in Chapter 5, however it is helpful to specifically identify the range of needs that parents expressed as these needs were quite diverse. No family interviewed simply needed a child care "spot." The spot they needed was always qualified by additional criteria: cost was a significant factor for six of the eight parent sets; hours that the care centre was open and/or flexibility of hours available was important to all parents; part time availability was specified as important by three parent sets; the quality of the care providers was discussed by half the parent sets; and geographic proximity of the provider was important for everyone. These were the significant and recurring themes that emerged about child care needs

beyond simply getting a space – parents want and need options and choices that fit their lives if the care is to indeed support parents in balancing their various demands.

To help draw a more complete picture of what these options could look like, one can look at the great diversity of hours and types of work parents do. The employment patterns described by participants included full-time work during normal business hours (9am-5pm), part-time during normal business hours, full-time irregular hours, part-time irregular hours. The types of work that participants identified for their employment included: weekly work schedule, bi-weekly work schedule, irregular work schedule, self-employment, seasonal work, contract work, temporary work, and casual/on-call. In order for child care to truly assist these parents in balancing their many roles, the availability of child care clearly must be more responsive to the diversity of work patterns.

The challenges of balancing work and life were present for all participants, yet the literature review suggests strongly that child care is an issue that disproportionately affects women. This is discussed in further detail below.

#### Role of Education in Child Care

Among the benefits of child care discussed by participants, the role of educating a child was highlighted by all parents, either from an educational angle (learning the alphabet) or from a socialization perspective (learning to get along with others). All participants raised this issue as part of their desire to ensure their child's full development. The literature certainly supports the possibilities for positive child development through child care experiences (Beach & Bertrand, 2000; Doherty, 1996). For this to occur, the care providers must have the knowledge and ability to connect with the child. Parental experiences with child care providers reflect this. Parents were comfortable with care providers who provided a loving and supportive atmosphere and who

provided a setting that promoted the child's development. If their child seemed to have a positive experience with their care givers, this also suggested to the parents that the atmosphere was pleasant for them. Parents were uncomfortable or less comfortable with caregivers who did not provide this type of care or setting.

Research suggests that high quality, regulated child care tends to nurture higher level of child development when compared with informal care. For example, the small amount of Canadian research that has been done suggests that unregulated child care tends to be of lower quality than regulated care (Doherty, 1996). The priority concern for parents interviewed was whether or not the child care provided a nurturing environment as well as the amount of education or stimulation their child received from the caregiver. These two qualities were most important to parents in looking for child care providers. Interestingly, these factors that parents highlighted were similar to what Doherty refers to as "high quality" child care:

that which goes beyond simply protecting the child's health and safety to also support and assist the child's physical, emotional, social, language, and cognitive development ... caregiver support and encouragement of children's exploration, caregiver responsibility for only a few children rather than a large group, and the availability of a variety of age-appropriate toys and activities. (p.40)

Doherty suggests that licensed care facilities tend to be of a higher quality than unlicensed care providers. For the parents interviewed, whether or not the child care was licensed was secondary to the environment and stimulation available for their child. This is evident in several experiences of these participants; two families were very concerned about the quality of care their child had received from licensed care providers, and two families that were very happy with the quality of care their children received in an unlicensed environment. Janet was concerned about Nicole's experience in a licensed home-based setting where the care provider had Nicole in a car seat in front of a TV all day. Nicole was also the only child in that child care setting.

Both these factors suggested to Janet that there was both a lack of nurture and stimulating environment. In a second scenario, Judith felt that the licensed care facility Samuel had been in did not provide him with the type of educational experiences Judith preferred, and she felt that the environment was not nurturing both due to behavioural issues of other children and the way the care providers reacted to these behaviours. On the other hand, two parents were very happy with unlicensed care their children had received. Stephanie and Richard were very happy with the unlicensed home-based care that Casey was receiving, and both trusted the care provider for providing both a nurturing and educational environment. Likewise, Lisa and Chris had been happy with Rebecca's first child care experience which was in an unlicensed home also, feeling good about it as a nurturing and stimulating environment.

These families' experiences do not suggest that Doherty's (1996) suggestion that unregulated child care tends to be of lower quality than regulated care is wrong, but the experiences of these eight participants were that quality of child care arrangements varied *despite* the child care facility's licensing status. Ultimately, parents are seeking exactly what Doherty suggests in high quality care for their children. The way child care adds to, or occasionally detracts from, a child's development (i.e. the way values they learn in child care may be different from those taught at home) causes stress for parents especially when they feel they have limited choices for child care and therefore lack control over who is caring for their child. Seven parents made comments to this effect.

#### Parental Preferences in Child Care

Parents' preferred child care type or scenario played a role in the stress they experienced around accessing child care. Specifically, if their preferred type of care was believed to be easier to access, it seemed that the parental stress was a bit lower than if the parent felt they needed to

somehow “settle” for a form of child care with which they felt less comfortable. Valerie, who was returning to work within several weeks of the interview, was experiencing stress around where her son would go for child care. While she preferred for him to be in a child care centre, she was anticipating the she would not receive a spot in a facility in time and would therefore need to take him to stay with her aunt, which she did not want to do but felt she had no other alternative. This sense of limited child care options added to her anxieties about how the shift back to working would go for the family. It should be noted that parents were not directly asked about their ideal child care arrangements, but rather this information came out naturally through the conversation and was raised by the participant in each interview. It is of particular interest that for six of the participants, the child’s parent(s) as primary care provider, either full or part time, was defined as ideal.

Preferences in child care were shaped by a combination of several factors. First, the family’s previous experiences with child care greatly affected the type of child care they currently wanted for their children. For example, Janet had experiences with her children in both licensed care facilities as well as home-based child care. Because of the negative experiences around home-based care, her clear preference for all three children was a child care centre. Alternatively, because Lisa and Chris had several positive home-based experiences, this was their preferred care option. Secondly, ideologies around child rearing played a major role in parental child care preferences. Several participants, including Judith and Karina, specifically identified that they believed children should be cared for by the child’s parents, particularly in their early years. Others, such as Chris, suggested that the learning opportunities available to their children in a child care setting were rich; these parents wanted their children to benefit in some way from that setting. A third factor defined as the current circumstances in the family’s

life, such as employment restrictions and opportunities, also shaped what parents considered their ideal child care arrangement. For example, for Genevieve and John, access to irregular hours of child care would give them more flexibility in terms of Genevieve's working options, but would still allow them to be primary care givers.

This third factor raises an important issue in the wider discussion of child care as some may suggest that like other things in life, what people want and what they need are two separate issues. Indeed, there is a fine line between parental *preferences* in child care and their child care *needs*. If a parent wishes to have child care that is in close proximity to their paid employment, is this a preference or is it something they need in order to make child care work in relation to the rest of their life? Likewise, if they prefer a mixed approach to child care with a combination of paid and parental care, is this something that is simply an ideal or does it reflect a part-time employment situation? I suggest that parental preferences in child care not be considered as extraneous wants but rather should be looked at as part of the package of what parents need to make child care work with the rest of their life.

Thus it becomes clear that while a number of factors affect what child care parents ultimately prefer for their own children, the relationship of their preference is intimately related to issues raised in the above section on balancing work and other life issues.

#### The Role of Gender in Balancing Work, Life and Parenting

Considering the child care arrangements and needs at the time of the interview, it is clear that for the participating families, mothers in particular were critical in providing child care. Of eight families interviewed, all relied heavily on women, particularly mothers but also other female family members (Willie's daughter Karla, Genevieve's sister Julia), to provide significant child care. Even if one pulls out the three mothers who are primary caregivers as they are on

maternity leave, four of the families relied heavily on the mother to provide significant child care. In Willie's case, although his younger daughter was at day care during the day, he relied heavily on his elder daughter to provide after-hours child care, meaning there is still a young woman being relied upon for child care. Even in the case where Genevieve and John shared parenting and work, this family still relied on Genevieve's sister Julia to provide interim child care to allow this arrangement to work.

In view of gender inequality concerning responsibility for child care, good quality and affordable child care can play a role in mediating some of these inequalities (Friendly, 2006). Without a doubt, child care is critical for single mothers and parents in balancing work, other life issues, and parenting, but even four of the five two-parent families, paid child care was critical in allowing these mothers to work. Again, the one exception to relying on paid child care may be Genevieve and John, yet they too had remuneration agreements with Julia which could be considered a form of paid child care.

Another important angle to address particularly for women in the work-life balance, is balancing their parenting with other aspects of their life, not just balancing life with parenting. As the Child Care Canada website (n.d.) points out, women are involved in the paid workforce for two main reasons, one is financial and the other is the desire to pursue a career. Women wish to participate in the paid labour force as an important part of their identity. Four mothers specifically identified the role of work in helping them balance their life – Lisa, Janet, Genevieve, and Karina. Stephanie too suggested that her work is important to her self identity. Interestingly, this came from all the mothers with partners, four of whom enjoyed their work and one of whom was looking forward to finding employment. For four of these mothers, their ability to work was dependent solely on whether or not they had child care which at the time of



the interview, was uncertain for three of them. While the importance of work in a mother's life may appear to be contradictory to the parental preferences mentioned earlier that primary child care (either full or part time) be provided by the child's parent/s, these are simply two different sets of values. For some women, they are not opposing values but simply require additional efforts to allow these two values to be adequately integrated within their life choices. Of the six parents whose preference was that a child's primary care come from their parent, four of these came from women who also indicated their work was important to them. Stephanie and Lisa were working half time and at home providing child care the other half time. Genevieve, along with John, had found a way to share employment and parenting, and Karina felt comfortable with her daughter going to paid day care now that she was older at age three. Karina's clear preference for her children when they were younger was parental primary care. The other two were Judith and Willie. The potential tension between parents as primary care givers and the importance of employment to mothers are not necessarily conflicting desires, although they may, and in most cases did, create conflicting scheduling challenges to allow both criteria to be met.

While each of the parents was coping with their current situation, of the six parents who remained waiting for accessible spaces, three were reasonably comfortable with their interim solutions, and three were highly stressed. The three stressed parents were the mothers on maternity leave. Two mothers, one of whom was returning to work within the month and one within five months, had fall-back plans (an aunt to provide child care and not returning to work, respectively) with which they were notably unhappy. The third mother who was approximately seven months away from returning to work had not yet developed a fall back plan, possibly because it was a number of months away. D'Addio and d'Ercole (2005) highlight a critical point in the discussion about gender, parenting and paid employment, specifically that the indirect

costs resulting from the presence of children, such as dropping out of employment or reducing working hours to provide care to the children, “fall almost exclusively on mothers” (d’Addio & d’Ercole, 2005, p.49). The information shared by participants suggests that in these cases, indeed mothers did bear a significant portion of the indirect costs that resulted from the presence of children. While several families had significant involvement of the fathers in sharing child care, in particular Willie, John and Richard, in each of these cases the involvement of women as significant care providers was substantial.

### Finances and Child Care

The participants indicated that their child care costs were consistent with those suggested by Prentice and McCracken (2004). These authors note that within licensed facilities in Winnipeg, costs are \$28.80 per day or \$7,280 per year for infants, \$18.80 per day or \$4,888 per year for preschoolers, and costs for school-aged children range from \$10.91 per day to \$12.07 per day, or \$2,836 to \$3,138 per year (p.12). The experiences of these participants were also consistent with Prentice and McCracken’s point that a major gap in the child care system is a lack of infant care. The four parents with children under 18 months had all experienced significant challenges accessing this type of care. This was also reflected, as mentioned above, in the high degree of stress parents with children under 18 months experienced as they struggled to find infant child care options.

The Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) offers parents \$100 per month for each child under six, theoretically paying out \$1200 per year. When asked about the UCCB and its effect on their taxes, none of the parents interviewed were aware of the specific impact of the UCCB on their taxes, although in general most were aware that it would impact them in some way. As the literature review pointed out, after taxes, no family ends up with \$1200, making the UCCB

payouts even less significant or trivial than parents were in general suggesting they were. Parents that were asked were quite clear that while somewhat nice to have, the UCCB was essentially insignificant, particularly when compared with the very pressing need for a child care space. UCCB did nothing to alleviate the stress related to the experience of needing to wait for child care. According to the Government of Canada website on the Universal Child Care Plan, “The Universal Child Care Benefit is a new form of direct financial assistance that provides parents with resources to support the child care choices that help them balance work and family as they see fit” (Government of Canada, 2008, ¶1). Yet the participants in this research were clear that the support and resources they needed to balance work and family were accessible *and affordable* child care spaces. Six of the families mentioned finances as an important consideration and in several cases impediment for accessing care. Yet the UCCB neither provided enough financial support to assist these parents *unless* they had additional financial support through a subsidized space, nor did it help parents to access child care spaces. In general, the consensus was that the nominal income provided by the UCCB did not satisfy parental needs for access to child care.

### Summary

The participants’ comments reflected great variety about the circumstances of families who are on waiting lists for child care, yet they were united by the common experience of stress and anxiety related to ensuring good child care situations for their children. The stress of waiting for child care, identified in different ways by each parent, makes sense considering data presented earlier suggesting that the strains on parents of balancing the demands of work and family cost approximately \$2.7 billion annually to Canadian businesses (Prentice & McCracken, 2004). This chapter has outlined several ways that balancing conflicting demands including

parental thoughts and preferences regarding child care and external factors of gender-related dilemmas and finances around child care, contribute to this stress.

These stress-contributing factors highlight the fact that despite substantial discussion within the public forums on the topic, there remain considerable barriers to obtaining child care which are highlighted by the experiences of parents who sit in the gap of waiting for child care. These are complex barriers, and while highly limited space is a key component, this research has highlighted that indeed there are many other barriers that contribute to this stress.

## Chapter Six

### Implications and Conclusion

The journey of this research project began with the goal of gathering information from parents on waiting lists for licensed child care with the expectation that this would provide information about informal and/or unregulated child care within Winnipeg. This expectation was based on the assumption that if parents were on a waiting list they must only have access to unregulated care while they waited. What became clear was that parents' reasons for being on a list were quite varied, and learning about unregulated child care was only a small piece of the findings, which more generally identified that parents had mixed reactions to all forms of child care. The conversations that evolved suggested that parents who need care are open to whatever form of child care will meet their particular needs and is affordable for them. Significantly, parents are open to child care which *includes but is not limited to* licensed, regulated care. This is significant because while all parents interviewed were on waiting lists for licensed child care centres, this option was not necessarily considered the arrangement that would meet all their needs. Two significant findings came out of this research.

First, the need for child care is extensive and is pronounced. This became evident in this research through the degree of stress the lack of child care caused for parents. A second related finding is that while data such as numbers of people on waiting lists indicates the degree to which there is a need for child care, this research has highlighted that it is the particular needs around the attributes of child care which are quite diverse. For example, Valerie indicated that she desperately needed a child care spot, but a spot that was geographically distant from her work and home would not meet her needs. She required a spot that was reasonably accessible to

her by bus, that is, close enough to her work or home that it would be feasible to use that child care space.

There are several implications which flow from the findings of this research which this concluding section looks at, including suggestions for further research and related policy opportunities.

### Research Implications

This research set out to address the question of what parents are doing for child care when they are on waiting lists for licensed child care in Winnipeg. Though a small sample, this research learned about the lives of twelve children and thirteen parents in eight households. Because there was such diversity within this small sample size, there are likely numerous different situations across the city. Thus, this research has begun to identify the needs of parents on waiting lists, demonstrating that in addition to needing more care, there are diverse needs. It would be highly beneficial to continue this research on a larger scale as this would give a more thorough picture of what is going on within the community, identifying more specifically what the community needs are. This report has identified some needs based on this exploratory study. These findings could provide a basis for some of the focus of a study which would involve a larger sample study. This research could be done using both a quantitative approach as well as qualitative; gathering further details regarding family experiences with child care would provide further depth, and information that could be generalized to the wider population would help to provide a more complete picture of trends throughout the community, including needs. In addition to learning about diversity of needs, more research into child well being within the child care system, as well as parent satisfaction would also be beneficial. Specific questions regarding

how the child care system could be more responsive to families' needs and the nature of what that system would look like would contribute significantly to this knowledge base.

Not only is further research on this topic important, but the perspective from which this research takes place is also important. The philosophical perspective from which the research takes place as well as the discipline from which the research stems are important aspects to keep in mind when considering future research. Through a feminist lens, the issues around child care are essential to provide equal opportunities to all – women and men. Thus, as this research has done, approaching further research through a feminist lens would be a beneficial perspective to continue child care research. This research has demonstrated that the needs of all people who are responsible for the care of young children, and the children themselves, are great. While several disciplines provide a logical perspective to continue research on child care, approaching this research from the field of social work is a particularly suitable perspective for this subject. The interest of improving the welfare of children and their parents, with the resulting benefits to the economy and to the short and long-term health of the community, must be addressed. For social work, working towards healthy and flourishing individuals and communities is a matter of social justice and is central to the identity and purpose of this research-based and practice-based discipline. Continuing this research from a social work perspective sends two messages; first, that people matter, and second, that because people matter we are willing to put resources toward opportunities and strategies that promote healthy change.

#### Policy Implications

The policy implications of the research through this project, as well as the suggestions for further research suggested above, are many. First, a significant policy implication from this research is that government must take an active leadership role in overseeing the development of

accessible, quality child care. This specifically includes universal child care – which is discussed in further detail below – but is not strictly limited to this. Government must develop ways to ensure that basic expectations around the delivery of child care programs are established and met. Government must provide sufficient resources so child care centres are able to meet their operating costs and staff members are paid a reasonable wage. Government needs to take a leadership position to establish guidelines around all programming, guidelines that reflect the needs of the community, specifically parents and children. The Québec model, as outlined in chapter two, provides one example of a child care model which has sought to address community needs in child care. They have done so through active government involvement in policy and resources, resulting in significant availability of child care space as well as accessibility of child care through the provision of subsidized care for all. It is clear that this program has responded to at least some needs of families by the overwhelming involvement of children in this program.

This research suggests that parent's struggle to find suitable child care to meet their needs is a source of considerable stress in their attempts to balance work with the rest of their lives. Thus, employers can play a role in this by shifting their thinking about flexibility of the workplace to meet parents' needs, such as accommodating for sick children. With the high rates of employed parents of young children and the financial costs to the workforce that result in the stress of these seemingly incompatible worlds, employers as well as employees and their families can benefit considerably from such changes. If employers are not willing to make these changes on their own, government may be called upon here too, to develop policies requiring employers to support employees in this balancing act.



## Universal Child Care

The most common understanding within popular imagination of child care is that which provides centre-based care and has children on a full time basis during normal business hours. This research demonstrates that the variety of forms and hours of child care that parents are either seeking or using is much broader than this narrow definition. The variety of forms of child care that parents described in the interviews also demonstrates the diversity of parents' needs. Types of child care that parents were using at the time of the interview or anticipated using shortly included: full time care by a parent (usually mother but some shared between mother and father), licensed child care centre, unlicensed home-based care, care in the family home by family that is unpaid, care in the family home by family using other forms of remuneration, care provided in a family members home that is paid, child care through schools such as a lunch program. Child care type parents were seeking included both licensed child care centre and licensed home-based care. Hours of child care that parents were seeking included: full-time (business hours), part-time (business hours), irregular full-time hours, regular full-time non-business hours, regular part-time non business hours, irregular part-time hours. Clearly parents' needs are much greater and more diverse than the current child care structure permits. This raises the question of how this system can be restructured to be more responsive to the needs.

Advocates for many different population groups and social issues have proposed that a government supported universal child care program is an obvious solution to the dilemmas of child care and support for young families. This solution seems so clear in light of the research presented, including this research project. Providing affordable and reliable child care would be a remarkable starting place, yet sadly even this monumental social policy change would not be sufficient to meet the complex needs of families. Families' needs are immensely varied, and to

be truly accessible, child care options must reflect these vastly divergent needs. Ensuring that child care is universally accessible to all families who need it means creating enough spaces for children and making them affordable for parents. But this research supports the idea that equally important is ensuring that universality includes *flexibility* of care and *choice* in care.

Flexibility requires the accommodation of the divergent needs of parents as they have been described through this research. It means that child care centres must accommodate parents who work shifts or non-traditional business hours by being open longer days and weekends, part time use, schedules that are irregular. The issue of choice has a number of dimensions as parents need for choice includes who the care provider is, what the setting is, where it is located, and what the costs are. Choices and flexibility makes child care more accessible to parents and also help parents feel supported in their parenting because they are able to balance both their own needs and demands with their children's wellbeing. This helps parents be more balanced both as parents and as individuals. For example, if parents have choice when selecting child care they do not feel limited to a provider or setting they are uncomfortable with. This research has demonstrated that limited flexibility and choices add to parental stress. Ensuring that reliable day care is accessible to all parents not only means that children will benefit directly from this experience, but also that the present lives of mothers and fathers will be improved. This too will have a direct impact on children as their parents will experience fewer stresses around child care and will have more energy to develop their relationships with their children, an issue all parents raised through the interview process.

### Supporting the Parent-Child Relationship

In looking at the needs of parents and children, it is important to look at the barriers to care and the ways that child care limits and does not support these lives. One cannot lose the

very real, human element in this cerebral, academic approach to child care. Parents and children are human and social creatures, and as such their needs go beyond the strictly physical and include issues of the heart. Without being asked, all participants raised the issue of their relationship with their child as being very important to them. This was often phrased within the context of finding a way to balance their work with other aspects of their life, including ensuring time to build their relationships with their children. For some parents, this was central to why they wanted to be the primary care providers for their child. Other parents wanted to work part time as this would allow them more time to spend with their children. If a parent's part time work followed an irregular work schedule, they needed to find child care that was flexible to accommodate this. An example of this was Stephanie and Richard's arrangement of flexible part time care. The role of child care is not simply to watch children so that parents can be contributing members of the economy. While this is an essential role, supporting parents in their parenting is also an important function of child care (Child Care Canada, n.d.). In addition to providing education or other resources for parents in their parenting, this can and should also mean providing parents with ways to enrich their relationships with their children. From meeting eleven parents through this project, I would suggest that fear of not having the opportunity to continue developing their relationship with their children contributes to their anxiety around finding child care that fits their needs. Their needs move beyond the practical daily grind of moving children to day care, themselves to work and everyone home again, into the emotional desire to connect with and be involved with children. This relationship is important. As Doherty (1996) suggests, the role of adults in children's lives in providing positive, daily, one-on-one interaction with the child supports their development on all levels. The importance of this

emotional relationship gets lost in child care policy discussions to what are deemed more pressing concerns, but it cannot be lost.

### Conclusion

This project has been entitled “Just Waiting: Child Care in Winnipeg.” This title was chosen as the play on the word “just” is particularly poignant for this subject. Parents are tired and feel powerless to do anything but simply wait in the hope that a child care option they feel comfortable with will become available. They feel like they are *just* waiting. From a *justice* perspective, this research further supports what many other researchers have articulated – that accessible child care is critical in creating a thriving society. Child care is a social, political, and economic issue. Disregard for or minimizing the importance of this issue is unreasonable and negligent, and changes with results that are felt by families is the only suitable response. The emotional effects on families of waiting must bring about change for it to be just. Action on child care is our collective responsibility if Canada is to continue making steps that reflect Pierre Elliot Trudeau’s vision of “a just society.”

The frequently-quoted African proverb says that it takes a village to raise a child. The traditional concept of a village that provides such support is rare in our increasingly urban and independent North American lifestyle. While cultural shifts change the roles and expectations of people, the needs of children everywhere remain consistent, and as a result, parents are dependent on the wider community to meet both their children’s needs and their own, despite pressures towards independence. The philosophy of this proverb continues, but it must be reinterpreted to fit lifestyles and expectations of life in Canada in the 21st century. How do we in Winnipeg create the community atmosphere needed for raising children? How do we support parents to balance the pressures and stresses of life in the urban, western 21<sup>st</sup> century with the

demanding needs of children? This research has identified a number of ways that the current system is not supporting parents and children. Policy makers, front line workers, academics, and advocates from many disciplines who work for social change are familiar with these gaps both from their working and personal lives. Finding ways to promote such change is the work of social workers and others who, through research and practice, give voice to these daily experiences of women, men and children across this country and city. Available, accessible child care resources in Winnipeg have been limited since 1973 (Williams Hogan, 1974). Thirty-five years later, Winnipeg's children participate in many types of child care as parents continue to wait for child care that fits their needs. The collective voice of these individuals must be raised and as promoters of social justice it is our job to play an active role and see this through. By continuing to demand social policy changes that will benefit hundreds of thousands of people, the village can be rebuilt to support children and families, allowing society to thrive today and flourish tomorrow.

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## Appendix A Interview Guide

### Introduction

Thank you for your willingness to take the time to speak with me. It is my intent that this meeting will not take more than an hour and a half. As I mentioned in my letter and on the phone, the research I am doing is to understand family experiences with child care when they can't access licensed child care. Right now, there are thousands of children across Winnipeg who are on waiting lists to be in licensed child care, but in the mean time while they're waiting, their parents are needing to make alternative arrangements. No one knows very much about this which is why I am starting to look into it. The results of this research will help in making sure that the voices of parents are heard, and I plan to provide copies of my research to policy makers within the field of child care. As well, it is important for you to know that this research is also being used as part of my requirements in completing my Master's degree in social work. A copy of research results will be provided to you

Before we move into the interview there are a few things I would like to do. First, let me tell you a bit about me...[will describe a bit about me, my program, why I'm doing this]

I have a consent form that I need to review with you which will also provide you with a little more information about this project. Please know that your presence in this interview is completely voluntary; you are welcome to end this meeting at any time. [Consent form will be read to participants to ensure that participants know what it says (in case of literacy issues), and to allow for conversation around any points on the form, thus helping to ensure that consent is informed.]

So I have several questions to ask you about your family's experience, but there will be time at the end for you to bring up parts of your experience that are really important for you but maybe didn't come up in my questions. Do you have any questions before we get started?

[The following interview guide lists example questions intended to help flush out, is, *how are families who wish to be using licensed child care, experiencing informal child care?* Questions may not be asked in this exact order.]

## Interview

### General Questions

I would like to begin by learning a bit about you and your family.

- What is the makeup of the household?
- Kids names, ages.
- Other involvements or responsibilities the family has, including roles of the parent(s) outside the home, work/study/other?
- You are currently on a waiting list for what type of child care? For how many/which children?
- How long have you been on the list?

### Conversation Opener:

*Tell me how it is going with your kids and your child care.*

### Topics and related question/probes to be drawn out as conversation unfolds

#### Current Child Care

1. *What type of child care arrangements do you currently have for your children?*
  - a) How long have you been using these arrangements?
  - b) How many days per week do you use out of home child care?
  - c) Did you have any other care providers for your children before your present one? If yes, please specify.
  - d) Thinking about your current arrangements, can you tell me about some of the advantages? Probe (i.e. flexibility)
  - e) Are there any disadvantages? Probe.
  - f) Overall, how satisfied are you with these arrangements?
  - g) How much do you pay for child care on a daily basis? Do you get receipts?
  - h) If you had previous child care arrangements before the current one, how does your present arrangement compare?
  - i) Are your current child care needs being met?

#### Licensed Child Care

2. *Can you tell me why you have chosen this form of child care?*
  - a) What are your reasons behind selecting licensed child care?
  - b) Have you ever used licensed child care before?
  - c) What are you hoping will be different for your children/your family/your situation when your child/ren is/are in licensed care?
  - d) What will be gained by participating in licensed care?
  - e) As the primary care giver/single parent, how important is it to you to access licensed child care?
  - f) Do you know how much licensed care will cost for you?
  - g) Do you have a sense what the differences would be financially for your family between what your current arrangements are now and what you are hoping they will be with licensed care?

### **Life/Family Balance**

3. A lot of parents with young children find that they have a lot of demands on their time. *Can you tell me a bit about your experiences tensions between your family responsibilities and your other responsibilities and how child care fits into this mix?*

- a) Is your current child care provider able to accommodate your child care/other life needs (i.e. need to work a longer day)?
- b) Do you think it will be different using licensed child care?

4. As the primary care giver/single parent, *how are your work choices or opportunities affected by the current child care options available to you (i.e. job choice, advancement or personal development opportunities, personal sacrifices, “double shift”)?*

- How does child care fit into this/support this/not support this?

### **Universal Child Care Benefit – to be asked if there are children under 6 in the house.**

5. The Universal Child Care Benefit just started being paid out last July to parents with children under 6. *How has the Universal child Care Benefit affected you and your family?*

- a) What have you used it for?
- b) Has it had any affect on your child care decisions?
- c) Do you know yet how your taxes may be affected by the UCCB? Or how much you will actually be getting?

### **Things I might have missed**

We have talked a lot about child care and your family. I am wondering if there are any issues that we didn't talk about that are important to you when it comes to how your family experiences child care.

### **Sensitive General Data:**

- Parent(s):
  - Employment – if applicable
  - Level of education/training
- Family Income

### **Summary and Exit**

- Summary of what I've heard...
- Reiterate when final information will become available. Establish how I'll get that to them (email, post or other).
- Again, thank you so much for meeting with me.
- Give cheque.

Appendix B  
Letter to Administrator  
On University of Manitoba Letterhead

Maggie R. Nighswander  
Address  
Winnipeg, MB Postal Code  
Date

Administrator  
Name of Child Care Facility  
Address  
Winnipeg, MB Postal code

Dear Child Centre Administrator,

My name is Maggie R. Nighswander and I am student in the Master of Social Work program at the University of Manitoba. As part of my program I am completing research for my thesis entitled **Just Waiting: Parental Experiences with Informal Child Care.**

The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences that parents and families have when they cannot access licensed child care but wish to do so. This research will provide new information on an issue about which there is currently limited knowledge. A summary of the findings including non-identifying information, will be provided to policy makers within the field of child care. A copy of research results will be provided to you.

As you know, access to spaces in licensed child care facilities is at a premium right now. I am seeking to interview 8-12 parents or sets of parents with children on waiting lists. Please see the attached sheet with further information regarding the details of this study.

To do this research I am asking for your help. Specifically, this would involve you mailing a letter to the first 50 people on your waiting list. I will provide you with 50 letters in stamped envelopes (please see example enclosed). You would write the names and addresses of these parents on the envelope and then mail them.

You are also invited to share this information with staff at your centre in the event that they, or you, are aware any individuals who may be eligible to participate in this research. In the event that this may be the case, I will provide you with several more letters to give to these parents.

I realize that you are likely very busy! Your help in this research is important in ensuring that the voices of parents are heard. I will phone you in the next week to ensure you have received this letter, to answer any questions you might have, and to see if you are able to assist me. Please also feel free to contact me. Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,  
Maggie R. Nighswander  
Email: 1  
Phone:  
Attachments (1)  
Enclosures (1)

## Description of Research

I am seeking to interview 8-12 parents or sets of parents with children on waiting lists. Interested parties will be selected primarily on a first-come-first-served basis, however there are several additional selection criteria to ensure that the sample includes a variety of different parental experiences. For example, I hope to speak with some single parents as well as two parent families and some fathers as well as mothers. To ensure this, interested people will be asked a few questions before confirming their participation. This initial brief conversation will also give you an opportunity to ask any questions about the study to confirm that you wish to participate.

The interview will consist of a range of questions, covering topics such as: current child care situation and experiences with it, how child care affects life/family balance, reasons for wanting to access licensed child care, and several questions around personal finances, including the costs of child care and impact of government financial support for child care. Identifying information will be kept confidential, excluded from written material, and destroyed at the end of the project.

Please note that the researcher is legally obligated to report any knowledge of child abuse to Child and Family Services.

Appendix C  
Letter to Parents  
On University of Manitoba Letterhead

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Maggie R. Nighswander and I am student in the Master of Social Work program at the University of Manitoba. As part of my program I am completing research for my thesis entitled **Just Waiting: Parental Experiences with Informal Child Care**.

As you know, access to spaces in licensed child care facilities is at a premium right now. The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences that parents and families have when they cannot access licensed child care but wish to do so. This research will provide new information on an issue about which there is currently limited knowledge. A summary of the findings including non-identifying information, will be provided to policy makers within the field of child care.

In order to complete this research I am asking for your help. Specifically this includes participating in a 1.5 hour interview. In return for sharing your knowledge, experiences and time, an **honorarium of \$25** will be offered. Interview times and locations are flexible. A summary of research results will be provided to participants.

**Your help in this research is important in ensuring that the voices off parents are heard.** Please see the attached sheet which will provide further details about this research.

Please contact me through email or phone if you are interested in participating in the study. If you know of another parent who may also be interested in participating, feel free to pass this information on to them.

Thank you again for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Maggie R. Nighswander

Email:

Phone:

Attachments (1)



## Description of Research

I am seeking to interview 8-12 parents or sets of parents with children on waiting lists. Interested parties will be selected primarily on a first-come-first-served basis, however there are several additional selection criteria to ensure that the sample includes a variety of different parental experiences. For example, I hope to speak with some single parents as well as two parent families and some fathers as well as mothers. To ensure this, interested people will be asked a few questions before confirming their participation. This initial brief conversation will also give you an opportunity to ask any questions about the study to confirm that you wish to participate.

The interview will consist of a range of questions, covering topics such as: current child care situation and experiences with it, how child care affects life/family balance, reasons for wanting to access licensed child care, and several questions around personal finances, including the costs of child care and impact of government financial support for child care. Identifying information will be kept confidential, excluded from written material, and destroyed at the end of the project.

Please note that the researcher is legally obligated to report any knowledge of child abuse to Child and Family Services.

Appendix D  
Consent Form  
Typed on Institutional Letterhead

Research Project Title: *Just Waiting: Parental Experiences with Informal Child Care in Winnipeg*

Researcher: Maggie R. Nighswander, MSW student,

Research Supervisor: Dr. Brad McKenzie, Advisor, 474-8767

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

1. In addition to completing the requirements for the Masters of Social Work program at the University of Manitoba, the purpose of this research is to better understand the experiences of parents who would prefer for their children to be in licensed child care but whose children are using informal child care. This interview will include a series of questions which will help the researcher to better understand your family's specific situation with informal child care. Questions asked in the interview will include: general information about family situation, current child care situation and your experiences with it, how the parents feel child care affects their life/family balance, questions around reasons for wanting to access licensed child care and what that experience has been like, several questions around personal finances including the costs of child care and impact of government financial support for child care in your family.
2. Your participation is limited to one interview which will be approximately 1.5 hours long.
3. A tape recorder will be used to record the interview. The researcher will tell you when the recorder is being turned on and off.
4. All names, including yours and your children's, will remain only on the tapes and in the researcher's contact log for the duration of this research. They will be excluded from all additional written material, including transcripts, using alternative names instead. After this research project has been completed, the tapes will be erased and my contact list destroyed. The only other person who will have to be aware of the information collected and to your identity is Brad McKenzie, research supervisor, who is committed to maintaining confidentiality.
5. As this project is in partial fulfillment of an academic program, information from this research will become available for public knowledge. Any information shared which could identify you, including names, will not be included in the final report or any printed material. The researcher will share the information with you by developing a summary of the results and mailing this to you either by post or email, if you are interested. You will also be informed of where you can access the final thesis.

6. Anything with identifying information, including tapes, transcripts or notes, will kept in a locked cabinet. There will be a file identifying peoples' real names and contact information and pseudonyms used, also kept in the locked cabinet. Pseudonyms will be used for all written work. Only me as the primary researcher will have access to the locked cabinet. Data, including tapes, transcripts or notes with identifying information will be destroyed after the study is concluded with is anticipated to be February 28, 2008.
7. The researcher is legally obligated to report any knowledge of child abuse to local authorities.
8. Remuneration of \$25 will be provided in cash at the end of the interview, which is expected to take approximately 1.5 hours.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Maggie R. Nighswander, Researcher,  
Dr. Brad McKenzie, Supervisor, 474-8767

**This research has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail [margaret\\_bowman@umanitoba.ca](mailto:margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.**

---

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

---

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to receive a copy of the results of this research? Please check one:

- yes
- no

If "yes" please provide one of the following:

Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

OR

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix E  
Family Index Chart

Name of Participant(s)	Other Adults in the Home	Ages of Children	Approximate Household Income	Area of Residence	Previous experiences with child care outside parental care	Current Child Care
Valerie	None	Robert, 11 months, son	\$12,000	West Central	None	At home with mother (maternity leave)
Judith	None	Samuel, 3.5 years, son	\$10-20,000	North End	-Licensed, centre-based day care in British Columbia -Licensed, centre-based day care in Winnipeg	At home with mother
Willie	None	-Jesse, 4 years -Karla, 15 years	Under \$40,000 (vague)	Osborn	-Day care/school in Africa -Care in extended family home.	Licensed day care, preschool, picked up at 4:30 by older sister who cares for her until Willie is home from work.
Janet	Greg, husband	-Devin, almost 3 years -Nicole, 2 years -Bobby, 6 months	\$20-\$30,000	West Broadway	-Licensed, centre-based day care for Devin -Licensed, home-based day care for Nicole -Unlicensed, home-based day care for Nicole	At home with mother (maternity leave)
Genevieve and John	Julia (sister)	-Matteus, 3 years -expecting child	\$53,000	West Central	Family, primarily in child's home	-At home with mother during the day, at home with father evenings, weekends -Family (Julia), in child's home
Karina	Nic, husband	-Maria, 7 years - Emily, 3 years	\$40,000+	Corydon	-Two licensed, centre-based day cares for Maria	-Maria in school -Emily in licensed, centre-based care mornings (while mom works there)
Lisa and Chris	None	-Rebecca, 2 years -Tomas, 5 months	\$90,000	Wolesley	-Unlicensed, home-based care for Naomi -Family, in child's home care for Naomi -Licensed, home-based care for Naomi	At home with mother (maternity leave)
Stephanie and Richard	None	Casey, 13 months	\$90,000	St.Boniface	None	At home with parents part time (primarily mother but bi-weekly with father one day), part time unlicensed home-based care.