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NATIONAL GRADUATE CAUCUS
CAUCUS DES ÉTUDIANT·E·S DES CYCLES SUPÉRIEURS



SUPPORT STUDENT PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Toolkit

Toolkit Outline



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STUDENT PARENTS
AND CAREGIVERS**

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On-Campus Organizing



Organizing for: Space

The lack of access to child-minding and child-friendly spaces on campus creates significant barriers for student parents and caregivers to succeed in post-secondary institutions. Some of these barriers include difficulty attending lectures, inhibited studying and group work capacities, a general lack of community support, and the enhanced inability to secure safe and affordable living accommodations.

Where to Start

Integrating child-friendly spaces is not an overnight process, but there are a number of resources your students' union can either provide or lobby for as immediate support.

Within your students' union:

- Family-centred events
- Family Movie Nights
- Family Barbeques
- Drag Story Times
- Daycare bursaries
- Opportunity to request child-minding as an accessibility option to attend events or rallies

Within your campus:

- Highchair availability in cafeteria spaces
- Athletic Centre
 - Family swim times
 - Swim toys and floaties
 - Drop-in sessions
 - Parents-and-me yoga classes

Larger On-Campus Initiatives

Space is often the most challenging win to secure and requires coordinated and ongoing lobbying efforts. Encouraging Board Members to take on seats on various committees within your institution is an excellent way to ensure you stay up to date with initiatives across campus. Remember that it is easier to lobby for space that is set to become available than it is to convince your administration to build an entirely new space. We need to lobby our institutions for child-care support to ensure the success of every student.

Family Study Space

Wins do not happen overnight. It is important for your students' union to have a steady presence on campus and to convey an ongoing and unified message across spaces. In addition to lobbying within committee spaces, it can also be helpful to attend events on campus of possible allies throughout the year. For instance, if you are trying to secure family space in your library, be sure to attend and promote events that the library is hosting in order to build connections, network with key stakeholders, and ultimately gain ally support. Uniting through Campus Coalitions is another excellent lobbying strategy for achieving greater parental support. Coalition partners frequently share your goals and collectively hold a great deal of power on campus.

Example: In 2019, Association of Part-Time Undergraduate Students (APUS, Local 97) secured family study space within Robarts Library at the University of Toronto. They took upcoming library renovations to their advantage, as they pushed forward with ongoing conversations for child-friendly spaces. APUS utilized alliances made through holding seats on the Library committee, being a steady presence at Board of Governor Meetings, and new partnerships with the Family Care Office on campus. They ultimately won a sound-proof space that was subsequently redecorated to meet the needs of parents bringing their children with them to study on campus. The space now includes toys and child-friendly furniture and decorations, as well as desks and computers for parents to work.

Key partners for consideration:

- Campus Coalition
- Family Care Office
- Student Life Offices
- Library

Single Use Washrooms & Breastfeeding/Lactation Spaces

Whether it is at the athletics facility, or during a lecture or study sessions, parents need to be able to bring their children with them to the washroom. This is another reason to have gender-neutral and single-use washrooms on campus. Another closely related consideration is the right for parents to comfortably feed their children while on campus. Sometimes, feeding spaces are limited to a woman's only washroom. It is essential to ensure these spaces are equitably accessible. A

washroom map is low-cost and extremely helpful for identifying lacking campus spaces, as well as assisting student parents and other student members in finding and accessing appropriate washrooms and feeding spaces. This map can be made available online, in physical format at administrative offices and your students' union's office, as well as on campus apps if these are available.

Key partners for consideration:

- Campus Coalition
- Equity & Diversity Office
- Family Care Office
- LGBTQ2S+ Groups on campus
- Women's & Gender Resource Centres

Childcare Centres & Child Minding Spaces

A leading struggle for student parents and caregivers is balancing the responsibilities and requirements of being a student with those of being a parent. Therefore, it is necessary for parents to be able to leave their children with reliable and accessible care; with the safest and most convenient option being on campus while they study and attend classes. The easiest solution would be the expansion of on-campus daycare to permit students to enroll their children. Often, the problem with this is that these centers are already over capacity for student parents on campus to access, which is why a united campus coalition front on this matter is particularly effective in prioritizing attention to child care on campus. With the inaccessibility of child centers and minding spaces on campus, student parents are required to pay out of pocket.

Example: In 2020, APUS (Local 97) collaborated with the Family Care Office at the University of Toronto and was able to secure a pilot project for free child-minding for student parents on the weekends leading up to exam periods. The employees of the on-campus daycare were shared with the family study space in the library, so parents were able to drop their children and go study or work on group projects on campus while knowing their children were safe. The pilot was a success, and administrators are currently exploring the possibility of making this service permanent.

Key partners for consideration:

- Campus Coalition
- Family Care Office
- Equity & Diversity Office
- Student Experience Offices

Family Housing

Due to strict exclusionary policies, student residences typically do not allow for family stay. In addition, Residence Offices tend to be very competitive in nature and not proactive in finding alternate non-residence living accommodations for students. This leads to complications for out of area student parents, as they are unfamiliar with the surrounding area or other housing options available. One solution would be to lobby

your Residence Offices to create family priority wings in existing residence buildings. Due to the common residence experience of over capacitation across campuses, this may be easier to do upon hearing plans for a new residence building. Off campus allies can be particularly helpful in this situation, as neighbors tend to have preference for more mature students in an effort to preserve a quieter neighborhood. In the meantime, lobby your Residence Office to connect with community groups to support student parents in finding external resources to secure local, safe, and affordable housing.

Key partners for consideration:

- Campus Coalition
- Off-campus allies
- Neighborhoods around your institution
- Community Liaison Committees
- Community Organizations
- Residence Office

Organizing for: Accommodations

“Family status,” meaning the status of being in a parent-child relationship, is included as a protected ground in human rights codes federally and in every province and territory except Quebec (civil status). The courts have determined that providing care to a family member is covered under the protected ground of family status, therefore, institutions have a legal obligation to take steps to adjust rules, policies or practices that have a negative impact on individuals, or groups of individuals. This is called the duty to accommodate. There are some limits to the duty to accommodate – sometimes accommodation is not possible because it would cause an organization “undue hardship.” However, just as for students with other protected characteristics, eg. disabilities, there are many types of accommodations that can and should be offered to student parents and caregivers when needed.

Examples of types of accommodations include:

- Accessible parking
- Alternate formatting
- Class recordings
- Deferred exams/deadline extensions
- Note-taking
- Private space for breastfeeding/lactation
- Residence accommodations
- Flexibility in class scheduling and attendance

Make sure to check with your university’s Student Support Centre (or similar office) to determine accommodations provided to student parents and caregivers. If they deny you an accommodation, reach out to your provincial or territorial human rights commission for support. This is also an important lobbying point to bring to your university administration or Senate.

Other Organizing Considerations

Graduate Student Representation

Graduate student voices need to be heard. At Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador (MUNL), for example, there is a Board of Directors responsible for making decisions about child care facilities on campus - this is a key lobbying target and opportunity for graduate student voices to be heard on MUNL campus. To ensure graduate student experiences are considered in decisions about on-campus child care, check in with your university's child care director.

Queer and Trans Parent and Caregiver Inclusion

It is important when organizing for student parent and caregiver support on campus to use inclusive language and advocate for policies inclusive of 2SLGBTQIA+ parents and families. This looks like using the language of “parents”, “birthing parent”, and “chestfeeding/lactation” rather than using gendered language which can exclude trans and queer parents. It can also look like advocating for changing stations in all washrooms and feeding spaces open to parents of all genders.

Off-Campus Organizing



Organizing for: Universal, public child care

The shortage of available spaces at child care centers and the high cost of child care fees are burdens parents and caregivers across the country face, both on and off campus. In addition to organizing for on-campus child care and child-minding options, you may wish to join in the national movement for universal, public child care. This movement, being led by parents, caregivers, Early Childhood Educator unions, anti-poverty and women's rights activists, and others, has seen important wins recently with the commitment from the Federal government to work toward \$10-a-day child care. However, the reality of meeting that goal is still in question and requires further work from advocates to hold the government accountable. Aside from the issue of affordable child care fees, advocates are also fighting for a universal, public child care system to ensure adequate spaces at public or non-profit child care centers for all young children. An important aspect of achieving this goal is working in solidarity with Early Childhood Educator unions and advocacy groups, as workers at child care centers are very often underpaid and receive inadequate support to do their crucial work, making recruiting and retaining child care center staff a significant problem across the country.

Try reaching out to an existing organizational chapter in your area, or if there isn't one, connect with advocacy groups, unions, and interested individuals to form a coalition and start your own group.

National Child Care Advocacy Organizations:

- **Child Care Now** - *A membership-based and regionally representative non-profit advocating for a publicly funded, inclusive, quality, non-profit child care system.*
- **The Canadian Child Care Federation** - *An advocacy group made up of educators, policy makers, and families advocating for better quality early learning and child care services.*
- **Childminding Monitoring Advisory & Support** - *Supports the settlement of young immigrant and refugee children.*
- **First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada** - *Provides reconciliation-based public education, research and support to promote the safety and wellbeing of First Nations children, young people, families and Nations.*

Organizing for: Financial support for student parents and caregivers

We know students are struggling with the rising cost of living and tuition, and on top of this, student parents and caregivers have the additional stress of providing for their children or taking care of someone other than themselves. There are many avenues to take in organizing for financial support for student parents and caregivers, and different strategies depending on the appropriate target. Advocating for policy changes like tuition fee reductions and affordable, accessible child care are important larger goals. However, organizing and mobilizing people to stock campus food banks and give out back-to-school supplies are also important ways to ensure the needs of student parents/caregivers and their families are met.

Support from within your students' union:

- Offer child care bursaries
- Offer emergency bursaries for students struggling to afford groceries, rent, and other necessities
- Establish student parent and caregivers support groups
- Run food drives to ensure your local or campus food bank is well stocked
- Organize a back-to-school backpack program to provide student parents and caregivers with backpacks and school supplies for their children

Example: At Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador (MUNL), the undergraduate students' union supports several resource centers including a Student Parents Assistance and Resource Centre (SPARC). Almost every year, SPARC initiates a back to school backpack program in September that helps student parents access school supplies for their children without financial burden.

Support from your university/college administration:

- Use the template (see Appendix) to create a petition to suit your campus needs; table on campus to get students to sign the petition.
- Organize lunch and learn events, panels, or teach-ins to educate students and faculty on the issues.
- Organize rallies, creative petition deliveries, or other forms of mobilization to put pressure on the administration.
- Advocate for:
 - No tuition fee hikes
 - Bursaries for student parents
 - Affordable child care options for student parents and caregivers
 -

Support from your municipal, provincial, or the federal government:

- Have students sign petitions (see Appendix) or write letters to their City Councillor, provincial MLA/MPP, or federal MP.
- Organize rallies, creative petition deliveries, or other forms of mobilization at City Hall, the Provincial Legislature, or your MP's office.

- Advocate for:
 - Affordable child care options (All government levels)
 - Tuition relief (Provincial)
 - Increased graduate student funding (Federal)
 - Investments in the Canada Child Benefit and expanding the program to include international students and all migrants (Federal)
 - More funding options for international students and increased dedicated funding for Indigenous students (Federal)

Lobbying Strategies

Any lobbying initiative takes time, but with ongoing effort and patience they can be achieved. Although it can be overwhelming to start, a good place is knowing your statistics. If these are not readily publicly available on your campus, ask your administration the statistics on how many student parents attend your institution. In addition, review the clubs on campus and connect with any relevant groups. Lastly, if your administration is not cooperative in understanding your membership population, consider sending out a survey and collecting your own demographic information; but be sure to have privacy provisions in place. Remember that you are not in this alone. Utilize your on- and off-campus allies and organize student coalitions to share in the responsibility of lobbying initiatives. A more equitable and inclusive campus is a win for all!

Appendices:

- National petition for universal, public child care and financial aid for student parents and caregivers
- Customizable local petition
- Printable poster, factsheet
- Link to google folder for social media graphics
- Contact information for ordering stickers and buttons

Contact us:

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