"No Small Matter": Child Policy Research

March 23, 2001 – It might seem surprising to some that a leading Canadian researcher should feel the need to make the case for the importance of child policy research. Didn't Parliament swear to end child poverty? Haven't the federal, provincial and territorial governments just pumped hundreds of millions of dollars into the National Childrens' Agenda (NCA)? Don't politicians continue to pay lip service to the importance of investing in children?

All true, agrees Rianne Mahon, in the 18th annual Davidson Dunton Research lecture she delivered earlier this week at Carleton University. Nevertheless, Mahon says it is also clear that "not enough of the right sort is being done to enable the full development of all of Canada's children."

In fact, Mahon argues that greater investment in children is critical to Canada's ability to meet three key challenges:

- The "care crisis" resulting from the decline of the male breadwinner norm - the foundation of Canada's post-war social policies.
- The looming "population replacement" issue - who is to support the aging baby boom generation?, and,
- Responding to the demands of the so-called "knowledge-based economy"(KBE).

Mahon calls for a system of universally accessible child services that will both support time-pressed dual-earner and single parent-earner families, and play a role in a good "KBE" employment strategy.

Finally, she speaks of the need to re-ignite our "social imaginations", to allow ourselves to be moved and guided by a vision of a better, more equitable, world that integrates our wage-earning lives with our care-giving and active community lives.

Rianne Mahon teaches in the School of Public Administration and in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University. She is the author, most recently, of the CPRN Family Network Study, "School-Aged Children Across Canada: A Patchwork of Public Policies".

You can download the full text of her Davidson Dunton address by clicking here.

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