

CSQ

MAGAZINE

EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKERS

ELEVATING THE PROFESSION

Everyday heroes
.....

A crisis that is disrupting
our habits
.....

Protecting children at
all costs



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Special Edition





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LET'S VALUE THEM, FINALLY!

I remember my first meeting with Laila very well. This incredibly kind and gentle woman took my 22-month old son by the hand to show him around her educational service. Immediately, she knew how to put him at ease and promised to take care of him.

Throughout their early childhood, my children (and myself!) were able to count on Laila's presence in their lives. She took care of my little ones and cared about their development almost as much as I did. For four years, she not only watched them grow, she made them grow.

It's high time that society valued early childhood workers, like Laila, who elevate the profession. This special edition of *CSQ Magazine* is a way to bring them to the forefront and highlight the work they do every day.

In the following pages, you will discover outstanding home childcare providers and early childhood educators who make a difference in the lives of children and their families. In addition, spokespersons and union representatives provide an update on collective bargaining and explain the challenges facing the early childhood community.

We hope you enjoy this special edition!

Audrey Parenteau | CHIEF EDITOR
MAGAZINE@LACSQ.ORG

Photo Jean-François Leblanc



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Photo François Beaugard

THE FIRST LINK OF OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM

It cannot be stressed often enough: the CPE (childcare centre) and educational home childcare network is the first link of Québec's education system.

While recent educational home childcare educator (HCE) negotiations have achieved important milestones toward the profession's future, preconceived notions about early childhood educators and others working in this field remain.

Years after the CPE and educational home childcare network was introduced, the "babysitting" myth endures. How long will it take before the role of the thousands of women who are there for our children each day is properly recognized? What if we finally acknowledged that early childhood is the first link of our education system in Québec?

The first of its kind around the globe, recognized for its quality, the early childhood network we now know got off the ground thanks to a strong political will to provide fair, democratic, universal and accessible services to our little ones. The objective was as crystal clear as the commitment toward a robust public network: to foster equal opportunities for each and every child. Looking back at this firm commitment, it seems clear that we now live in entirely different times. We have seen, in the past several years, blatant attempts to weaken our public early childhood network with spurious solutions to non-existent problems. Successive governments have been acting as though strengthening and increasing the number of new spaces in our CPE and home childcare network is dangerous.

Thankfully, facts are stubborn things! Educational early childhood services have reported high and consistent satisfaction levels from parents over the years. And their main criticism (with good reason!) is the shortage of spots. This is combined to evidence showing that greater access to reduced-contribution spots has a direct impact on helping women's access to the labour market.

Our early childhood network is not only enviable but profitable!

Solidarity!


Sonia Ethier | PRESIDENT

EVERYDAY HEROES

In home childcare environments, as in CPEs,
childcare providers and educators face many challenges.
The FIPEQ-CSQ is there to help workers face them.

Mathieu Morin | FIPEQ-CSQ ADVISOR

On March 13, 2020, FIPEQ-CSQ¹ president Valérie Grenon had planned on demonstrating in front of Sherbrooke's Salon Priorité-Emploi as part of progressive strikes by regulated and subsidized home care educators. Instead, she spent the day in crisis management mode when she had to suspend all pressure tactics urgently.

"At 10 a.m., we announced the suspension of our pressure tactics and at 1 p.m., we found out that the Minister of Families was closing all educational services," recalls Valérie Grenon. Forty-eight hours later, early childcare workers would finally hear that all services had to reopen to provide emergency childcare.

"We spoke daily with the Minister of Families for updates," says the president. "What was good on one day was often not good the next day. It was hard for me to keep up so I can imagine the confusion of workers." She cites the rapidly evolving guidelines for wearing personal protective equipment, which was not recommended in April but became mandatory in June. "For our part, we have always advocated for freedom of choice for educators," says Valérie Grenon.

REASON TO BE PROUD

Since March, the health crisis has brought its share of challenges to early childcare environments. "Despite everything, there is reason to be proud, especially when we think of salaries that continued to be paid to workers represented by our federation, until the gradual reopening of centres," says Valérie Grenon. "It was quite a struggle! We could tell the government was looking to the Canada Emergency Benefit, but we needed to maintain a link with the workers to be ready for the reopening."

Despite numerous requests and public interventions on the part of the FIPEQ-CSQ, the government rejected the idea of paying an additional bonus, as was the case in other activity areas. To counter the labour shortage, the minister finally had to reduce the ratio of educators trained in childcare centres. "Above all, the temporary measures concerning the training of educators must not become permanent," worries the union representative.

She adds that little is heard about the quality and importance of interactions with the little ones during the pandemic. "When we suggested having window masks to promote language comprehension, we were told they were too expensive. But what will be the cost of all of these changes in the development of our children? That, nobody knows."

¹ Fédération des intervenantes en petite enfance du Québec.



Photo Pascal Ratthé

DECISIVE NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE PROFESSION

2020 is a year of negotiations for the FIPEQ-CSQ as the two sectors it represents, the CPEs² and home childcare services, are due to renew their employment contracts.

Negotiations for regulated and subsidized home care educators ended with an agreement in principle approved by 82.4%. Although considerable gains have been made on the collective agreement's normative aspect, the battle for better salaries will continue in a compensation committee.

As for national CPE negotiations, they are still underway. Workers have made several demands to improve their employment conditions, which have deteriorated dramatically with the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Shortly after the health emergency was declared, we reached out to the Minister of Families to settle our two negotiations fast," explains Valérie Grenon. "Our proposal was ultimately rejected and each sector continued with traditional negotiations. But perhaps we would not be experiencing today's shortage if our working conditions had been improved sooner with COVID-19 bonuses at the start of the pandemic."

Despite everything, the president is delighted with the groundswell of support in the population for better salaries for professionals who care for our little ones. Several experts and civil society organizations have recently been vocal in their support.

A THREE-PART ACTION PLAN

In addition to the negotiations for the CPE sector, the Federation intends to act on three priority aspects over the next year.

First, the work begun to promote the profession will continue. In 2018, the Fédération launched the *J'élève la profession* campaign, which aims to highlight the professionalism of childcare workers. "Recognition is one of our top concerns," emphasizes Valérie Grenon. "Ultimately, we are making sure that all our actions have a positive impact on the recognition of our essential work."

Before the pandemic, the FIPEQ-CSQ had organized regional tours with pediatrician Jean-François Chicoine to offer its members and the population a different perspective on the importance of interventions with children aged 0 to 5 years. These conferences have been put on hold due to the health situation, but a committee is looking into setting up virtual activities.

² Centres de la petite enfance.

The second major component of the FIPEQ-CSQ's game plan focuses on the development of the early childhood network. Several issues risk disrupting CPEs and home childcare services in the long term. For example, think of the bills that aim to regulate non-recognized childcare services and convert unsubsidized daycare spots into subsidized ones, as well as various calls for projects to create new spots.

"For all of these upcoming projects, we need to keep our most vulnerable children in mind," says Valérie Grenon. "The early childhood network must be a vector of development for them." She also emphasizes the importance of parents' voices being heard. "We know that families in Québec are proud of their network and want more spots at \$8.35 than private spots."

Finally, the Federation will continue its development campaign as most childcare workers in Québec are non-unionized. "For the CPE sector to have a real impact on the ministry, unionization is the only solution," says Valérie Grenon. "The union should not be seen as an opponent of the CPEs, which are non-profit organizations."



Photo Pascal Ratthé

The employer depends almost entirely on the government's budgetary rules, hence the importance of coming together as a national federation."

When asked why a worker in a childcare centre or home environment should choose the FIPEQ-CSQ rather than another union, Valérie Grenon answers without hesitation, "it is the only federation dedicated exclusively to childcare workers, and that makes all the difference!"

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UNITED, NOW MORE THAN EVER!

In the wake of a one-week full general strike, 82.4% of all FIPEQ-CSQ home care educators (HCE) voted in favour of the agreement in principle.

Alexandra Plante | FIPEQ-CSQ ADVISOR

"It took 18 months of negotiations, a host of pressure tactics, a Québec-wide rotating strike, a one-week indefinite general strike and the involvement of a mediator to reach an agreement in principle with the Minister of Families," recounted FIPEQ-CSQ¹ Vice President Mélanie Piché.

Leading up to the indefinite general strike of September 21, 2020, the HCEs first launched a 14-day rotating strike. Begun on September 1 in Québec City, it came to an end in the Montérégie and the Laurentians on the third Friday that followed. Their goal: to be properly recognized and secure working conditions which reflect both their skills and their responsibilities.

A DIFFICULT CHOICE

"This decision was not made lightheartedly, given its far-reaching consequences, stated Mélanie Piché. Members aren't paid when on strike. Furthermore, they risk losing their clientele due to the lack of services, hence the vital importance of standing in solidarity with one another."

FINDING A COMPROMISE

The HCEs did not reach their goal, namely of closing the pay gap and securing a \$16.75 hourly wage. That amount is what a Step 1 untrained educator working in a childcare centre (CPE) earns.



Photo FIPEQ-CSQ

However, they did come to an agreement with the Minister of Families as to the creation of a committee to address HCE wages. An independent expert will lead the committee and make recommendations. The findings of this committee, tasked with carrying out an income analysis, will apply as of April 1, 2022.

"It is thanks to the strength of our mobilization and the legitimacy of our demands that we were able to engage the population, explains Mélanie Piché. With their support, the Minister could not remain indifferent to our demands."

¹ Fédération des intervenantes en petite enfance du Québec.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

ESSENTIAL FOR MOVING FORWARD

In addition to ensuring fairness in the workplace, collective bargaining plays an essential role in society's democratization. This complex process gives employees a voice thanks to the support of committed and convincing spokespersons and union representatives.

Alexandra Plante | FIPEQ-CSQ ADVISOR

In the fall of 2020, 82.4% of home care educators (HCEs) approved the agreement in principle reached by the FIPEQ-CSQ¹ and the Minister of Families. The agreement having been newly accepted, the Federation now begins negotiations for CPEs².

For home care educators, as for CPEs, negotiations are led by people with heart and conviction. The following is an interview with bargaining representatives for the Syndicats des intervenantes en petite enfance (SIPE) and the Alliances des intervenantes en milieu familial (ADIM).

1 Fédération des intervenantes en petite enfance du Québec.

2 Centres de la petite enfance.

EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES (SIPE SECTOR)

CSQ LE MAGAZINE: WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE BEST QUALITIES OF A GOOD NEGOTIATOR?

Michelle L'Heureux (ML)³: Without a doubt, active listening. As a spokesperson, it's essential to listen to the members we represent and their needs. That said, we must also listen to the employer to fully understand their positions and the negotiating issues. This will help identify possible solutions to achieve our union objective.



Photo Jean-François Leblanc

Michelle L'Heureux

³ Michelle L'Heureux is a FIPEQ-CSQ advisor and spokesperson for national negotiations for the SIPE sector.

⁴ Anne-Marie Bellerose is FIPEQ-CSQ secretary-treasurer and responsible for negotiations for the SIPE.



Photo François Beaugard

Anne-Marie Bellerose

WHAT ARE THE MAIN ISSUES IN THE CURRENT NEGOTIATION?

Anne-Marie Bellerose (AMB)⁴: Workforce attraction and retention, for sure! These issues are at the heart of our priorities and definitely require better working conditions. The survival of our network depends on it. Nowadays, many of our workers are leaving. To retain them, we need conditions equal to the exceptional work they do every day with children.

During the previous negotiations, we maintained gains we had made, but did not make any new ones, particularly following budget cuts in childcare centres. Therefore, we are in a catch-up and solutions mode!

WHY SHOULD THE POPULATION SUPPORT STAFF IN CHILDCARE CENTRES?

AMB: Early childhood is the first step in education. Childcare workers play an essential role in the education of our toddlers. They work in partnership with parents to ensure the optimal development of their children. Thus, to recognize their work, it's important to support them collectively. We can't forget that an educated society is a healthy society! Every dollar invested in early childhood education brings in \$7.00 in economic benefits.

ML: It's also been shown that the quality of the regulated and subsidized early childhood education services network, a network that allows many women to access the labour market, is mostly dependent on the working conditions of its employees. Hence the importance of improving these conditions and supporting these workers in their demands.

WHAT ARE THE TANGIBLE IMPACTS OF BUDGET CUTS IN CHILDCARE CENTRES ON THE QUALITY OF SERVICES FOR OUR LITTLE ONES?

AMB: First, the cuts have contributed mainly to burning out staff who are working twice as much. It's simple, the smaller the CPE's budget, the more difficult it is to access additional human resources and educational materials. Workdays and workweeks are longer. Positions have been abolished and tasks have been redistributed, which sometimes forces workers to put pedagogy aside to focus on housekeeping responsibilities.

The impact is also felt in children with special needs. Access to resources and special educators has been drastically reduced due to budget cuts, which prevent staff hiring.



Photo FIPEQ-CSQ

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING AFFILIATED WITH THE FIPEQ-CSQ AT THE START OF NEGOTIATIONS?

AMB: Being affiliated with the FIPEQ-CSQ and the CSQ gives us access to many professional resources, as well as their expertise and knowledge, to support us in our demands and to accompany us at the negotiating table. This increases our balance of power.

Also, we can count on the solidarity of other federations at all times. That's a big plus!

HOME CARE EDUCATORS (ADIM SECTOR)

CSQ LE MAGAZINE: WHILE YOU WERE IN THE MIDST OF NEGOTIATIONS, WHAT SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU HAD TO OVERCOME?

Mélanie Piché (MP)⁵: A major challenge has undoubtedly been that of negotiating while the public sector negotiations, which concern more than 550,000 workers, are still underway. It hasn't worked in our favour. Our counterparts have been very reluctant to improve our working conditions for fear of having to grant the equivalent to government employees.

Kamel Khiari (KK)⁶: Also, as with every negotiation, the law limits the matters we can negotiate. For example, our collective agreement cannot relate to a rule established in the Educational Childcare Act or its regulations, even if they affect our members' working conditions.

⁵ Mélanie Piché is FIPEQ-CSQ vice-president and responsible for negotiations for the ADIM.

⁶ Kamel Khiari is a FIPEQ-CSQ advisor and ADIM spokesperson for negotiations.



Photo Jean-François Leblanc

Mélanie Piché

DID YOU ENCOUNTER ANY UNEXPECTED OBSTACLES?

MP: Oh, yes! The pandemic has been an unknown we had to face collectively. In addition to the fear of a decree that would prohibit us from taking concerted action, we had to review our strategy because of the devastating consequences that COVID-19 has had on the Québec economy. Luckily our negotiating team was reliable and experienced, otherwise, I don't think we would have made it through!

WHAT WERE THE MAIN DEMANDS IN THIS NEGOTIATION?

KK: In short, a decent salary and better working conditions. We demanded and still demand real recognition for home care educators (HCEs), the work they do every day, and their experience. Even though we did not reach our initial objective of \$16.75 an hour, we agreed with the Minister of Families on the establishment of a compensation committee for HCEs. This committee will make recommendations and adjustments will take place during the period covered by this collective agreement.

WHAT DOES AN INDEFINITE GENERAL STRIKE LIKE THE ONE LED BY HCEs MEAN FOR THEM?

MP: This represents a considerable challenge. First, because they are not paid on days they close and second, they risk losing clients because they are self-employed. HCEs, therefore, rely on collective strength to move discussions ahead at the negotiating table.

IN WHAT WAY DID THE MOBILIZATION OF MEMBERS AND THE POPULATION'S SUPPORT MAKE A DIFFERENCE AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE?

MP: The mobilization made all the difference! It's the reason why we've made such gains. The solidarity of our members during the indefinite general strike certainly took Minister Mathieu Lacombe by surprise.

KK: I would add that, without this strong mobilization, the FIPEQ-CSQ would hardly have benefited from such a strong media presence during these negotiations. This attention has led the population to support the cause of HCEs, a cause that has become a social one. Thus, the Minister could not help but improve his offer!



Photo François Beauregard

Kamel Khiari

EMERGENCY CHILDCARE ON THE FRONTLINES IN SPITE OF THE RISKS

In emergency childcare services, the childcare providers continued to give the best of themselves during the first wave of the pandemic, a stressful experience that will stay with them forever.

Mathieu Morin
FIPEQ-CSQ ADVISOR

On March 13, 2020, the Minister of Families, Mathieu Lacombe, announced the closure of all educational services. He would change his mind two days later, asking all services to open for parents working in a service deemed essential. Myriam Chayer and Josée Lemire lived this period with a great amount of stress.

“The manager summoned all personnel to evaluate how many children we would have, recalls Myriam Chayer, educator at Le Petit Palais daycare centre (CPE) in Montréal. We eventually welcomed 19 children who were not of our CPE, because their service had closed.”

Meanwhile, Josée Lemire, home care educator (HCE) in Sherbrooke, chose to keep her service open, since the parents of eight of her nine children worked in essential services.

Even if, in the weeks that followed, the Minister of Families authorized all home childcare services who wished to do so, to close with full compensation, it was out of the question for Josée Lemire. “It was stressful, but I felt an obligation to continue. It’s like we were going to war. We had to allow parents to go take care of the sick. Nurses needed to have peace of mind,” she says.

ADAPTING TO INSTRUCTIONS AND CHANGES

As the pandemic evolved, the government’s instructions completely changed. It was the case, for example, with the instructions surrounding personal protection equipment. “It was hard to be told that, yesterday, we were not allowed to wear a mask, but today, we are required to have one. At our CPE, that’s how it happened,” recalls Myriam Chayer.

“We went to the frontlines without a mask!” insists Josée Lemire, who found the situation stressful. She states, however, that she redoubled her efforts to stay true to herself and continue her work with the children.



Photo Stéphanie Lemire

Josée Lemire

UNKNOWN PARENTS

A major difference between Josée Lemire and Myriam Chayer's experiences has been not knowing the children. While Josée Lemire's little ones remained the same, Myriam Chayer welcomed four new children in her group without having the opportunity to talk with the parents. The COVID-19 measures put in place forced the family to stay outside the CPE.

"The pedagogical aspect was a bit left aside, she recognizes. It's difficult to make observations about a child you don't know. My objective was thus to establish a connection with the child by focusing on their interests, so they would want to come back the next day."



Photo François Beaugregard

RULES TO RESPECT

In the first weeks, at the CPE, hygiene rules were at their height. Groups couldn't cross each other outside, every toy had to be disinfected after use, items made of wood and other materials that could increase spread were removed: the job became more one of monitor than educator.

The adaptation, however, was more difficult for the adults than for the children, claims Myriam Chayer. "When parents from the health network arrive with a mask and their child jumps into your arms, while you were told not to wear a mask, you have some worry," she recalls, mentioning the contradictory instructions between the networks at the beginning of the pandemic.

THE LACK OF RECOGNITION

With all these changes and adaptations, both educators were hoping for a better recognition from Minister Mathieu Lacombe and the government. "We didn't even get a little pat on the back. Parents were telling me they didn't understand how come we weren't better recognized," says Josée Lemire.

In family environments, none of all those additional duties were financially compensated. "It's outrageous, she adds. I love my profession, but at one point, I started to cry, to worry, and I decided to shut down my service. But, fortunately, I ended up reversing my decision after talking with my son."

Josée Lemire says that, despite the lack of recognition from the government, the situation has increased the parents' awareness about the essential nature of the services they provide. "All the parents of my service's children supported me, even in the more difficult moments," she concludes.



Photo iStock

COVID-19

A CRISIS THAT IS DISRUPTING OUR HABITS

The pandemic is disrupting our personal, family, and professional lives daily. How are early childcare workers handling it?

Alexandra Plante
FPIEQ-CSQ ADVISOR

In March 2020, the COVID-19 virus caused the temporary closure of early childhood educational services. Their reopening required that workers review all of their procedures - without warning. How is it going in the field?

CSQ Magazine spoke with Diane Rufh, regulated and subsidized home care educator (HCE), and Julie Mineault, an educator at the CPE La Cigale et la Fourmi, to learn more about the real consequences the pandemic has had on the ways they operate in their work environments.

CSQ MAGAZINE: WHAT NEW PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED BECAUSE OF THE PANDEMIC?

Julie Mineault (JM): For me, it was getting used to working with a mask and eye protection. Communicating with the parents was also quite a challenge, as we couldn't see them anymore. I had to share everything in writing. It's a whole new ballgame!

Also, we had to adapt our teamwork. Because of the bubble concept, we can no longer pair groups or have group meals. But all in all, I was surprised at how quickly humans adapt to change.

Diane Rufh (DR): When I reopened my home care educational service for parents working in essential services, I had to rethink what to keep and what not to keep in my centre. I had to plan and sort everything out. I removed anything difficult to wash, such as costumes, blankets, and stuffed animals. I also had to find the time to disinfect and clean everything every day. Children put their hands everywhere! Whenever possible, I also ask parents to pick their children up earlier, so I have time to do everything.

DIANE RUFH, IN YOUR OPINION, IS HAVING A HOME CARE EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AN ADVANTAGE OR DISADVANTAGE DURING A PANDEMIC?

DR: Both. There are fewer children on the plus side, so fewer parents showing up at the door and less human contact that could spread the virus. Also, as I'm self-employed, I control my environment, and I disinfect and clean my way.

The disadvantage, however, is that the children are walking around everywhere. At first, I tried to separate them to create bubbles for each child. But even with this system, they find a way to stick together. They are social beings. They practically share the same popsicle in the summer!



Diane Rufh

Photo Jean-François Leblanc

HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN COVID-19 TO CHILDREN?

DR: Some of the parents are essential workers. Their little ones already know that a virus is circulating. Otherwise, it's very difficult to explain. At one point, I took hair and told them that the virus is even smaller. They used magnifying glasses to understand better.

JM: I explained it as a very contagious virus, like a cold, but more dangerous for some people. This is why it's essential to wash your hands and respect everyone's bubble. Fortunately, parents are also doing their part.

WHAT TIPS AND ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE A NEW HCE OR EDUCATOR JOINING THE NETWORK AT THIS TIME?

DR: First, start the morning with a delicious cappuccino, and second, know where to set your limits. At the end of the day, I'm exhausted! I've made it a point of finishing no later than 6:30 p.m. I stop everything and put aside what I haven't completed until the next day, so I have time for my personal activities.

JM: I would advise them not to downplay the importance of being organized! We need to plan cleaning and disinfecting tasks ahead of time because this new responsibility is on top of what we already have to do. Also, don't hesitate to ask your team for help.

HOW ARE YOUR LITTLE ONES EXPERIENCING THIS DIFFICULT TIME?

DR: This health context isn't easy for children. They can no longer use musical instruments. They know they won't be able to wear the costumes. They miss some of the toys.

It's even more difficult for children between the ages of one and three who are developing their language skills. When I wear a mask, they are no longer able to read my lips. They observe everything at this age.

But they don't seem too bothered. Children adapt better than we think.

JM: I take care of the 4-year-old group at the CPE. I must say that they understand the instructions well. The changes were, therefore, easily incorporated into their usual routine. I would also agree that it's more complex with the younger children who sometimes have difficulty respecting the concept of a bubble and the division of spaces.

WHAT DID YOU TAKE FOR GRANTED BEFORE THE PANDEMIC THAT YOU WILL APPRECIATE MORE ONCE IT IS OVER?

DR: Going to the park and playing outside! We now avoid the park because we know the playground installations aren't systematically disinfected. Educational outings, such as going to the sugar shack, or picking apples and pumpkins! I can't wait not to be afraid to touch someone, a cat, a dog, and, most of all, to give hugs!

JM: Without question, communicating and exchanging with parents! This is an essential part of adequately preparing their children for primary school.

WILL YOU KEEP CERTAIN SANITARY PRACTICES AS PART OF YOUR ROUTINE ONCE THE PANDEMIC IS OVER?

DR: Absolutely. In the past, when I changed a diaper, I changed my gloves between each child. Today, not only do I change my gloves, but I also wash my hands. The children and parents have gotten into the habit of washing their hands when they arrive. This is a habit I want to keep because it can only be beneficial.

JM: The children are learning the importance of washing their hands and maintaining good hygiene, which can only help reduce the transmission of colds and the flu.

CAN YOU SHARE A FUNNY ANECDOTE ABOUT AN EXPERIENCE WITH THE CHILDREN SINCE THE START OF THE PANDEMIC?

DR: After using the mattresses, the children put their bedding away in their lockers. For my part, I spray the beds to disinfect them before putting them away. I've forgotten a few times, and let's just say - the kids are quick to remind me! I try to make sure this doesn't happen too often!

JM: A child arrived one day and said to me, "Julie, you're going to be mad. I broke a toy by accident!" I told them I was disappointed but that these things happen. The little one then said, "Julie, with your mask on, I can't see, are you angry, yes or no?"

Photo Mathieu Girard



PROTECTING CHILDREN AT ALL COSTS

The death in April 2019 of the little girl from Granby, victim of neglect, has left an indelible mark on Québec's history. How can we make sure it never happens again?

Alexandra Plante | FIPEQ-CSQ ADVISOR

Within three months of this tragedy, a grim reminder of the days of Aurore Gagnon, the child martyr, the Québec Government created the Special Commission on the Rights of the Child and Youth Protection. Its objective is to identify how to reform the Director of Youth Protection (DYP) and improve its services, and report back to the Legault government.

ACTION NOW

"When the creation of this commission and its objectives were announced, we felt duty bound to act and make our recommendations," explains FIPEQ-CSQ¹ president Valérie Grenon, adding that the Federation is committed to the health, safety and development of our little ones.

The FIPEQ-CSQ believes that the early childhood network is a key player where the safety and development of young children are concerned. "However, there is substantial room for improvement in our network in order to ensure, across the board, the safety and protection of all children so they can develop to their best potential," adds Valérie Grenon.

REGULATING AND SUBSIDIZING THE NETWORK

Among the many recommendations made in the brief it submitted to the Commission, the FIPEQ-CSQ stressed the importance of regulating and subsidizing non-recognized service providers offering private childcare

so that educational home childcare throughout Québec be at least regulated by a coordinating office and, in doing so, subject to control measures such as unscheduled visits.

The Federation recommends that private daycares join the regulated and subsidized network so as to be subject to the same regulations as with CPEs.² This would allow them to sign protocols with a CISSS³ and/or CIUSSS⁴ so as to provide 'protocol spots. These spots are set aside to provide better accessibility to educational services for children whose situation falls under the responsibility of a CLSC due to their vulnerable personal or family situation.

CPEs with this type of agreement receive a compensation allowance to better meet the child's needs. Currently, CPEs can set aside up to 5% of their establishment's annualized spots for CISSS and CIUSSS needs.

1 Fédération des intervenantes en petite enfance du Québec.

2 Centre de la petite enfance.

3 Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux.

4 Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux.

DEVELOPING AGREEMENTS FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN

The FIPEQ-CSQ would also like to see the type of protocols signed between CPEs and a CIUSSS or CIUSSS expanded, allowing CPEs to sign protocols with other organizations, such as pediatric centres.

HCEs should also be able to sign protocols with a CIUSSS or CIUSSS as well as other partners such as women's shelters. At present, HCEs can sign this type of agreement if their coordinating office (CO) affiliated with the CPE agrees and sets spots aside for this purpose. That being said, COs who for many years have had little or no interest in the program prevent interested providers from getting access to these spots.

"Each educational service must be regulated and subsidized in order for all children with special needs to benefit from the allowance earmarked for them. This helps to ensure they are given equal opportunities as they develop," says Valérie Grenon. These allowances are only offered to educational services with subsidized spots, i.e. a CPE, subsidized childcare and subsidized home childcare.

"Hence the importance of providing a spot with a subsidized educational provider for all children," says Valérie Grenon.



Photo iStock

CPE - RECOMMENDATIONS

The Human Rights and Youth Commission conducted its own investigation regarding the death of the 7-year-old girl from Granby. It made a number of recommendations, some of which relate directly to childcare centres:

1. The Commission recommends that the Minister of Higher Education review the specific training program for childcare educators so as to include a module on youth protection.
2. It asks that CPE certification criteria be amended so as to include requirements related to the *Youth Protection Act* (YPA). The Commission believes that a CPE should receive training pertaining to the YPA as well as the obligation to report problematic situations to the authorities.

TO LEARN MORE

You can read the full FIPEQ-CSQ brief on the Federation website.

fipeq.org

› Centre de documentation › Comité valo › Mémoire pour CSDEPJ (5 février 2020)

“WE NEED TO CREATE WINNING CONDITIONS”

Regulating private home childcare educational services is a good idea.
But why do they also need to be subsidized?

Véronique Brouillette | CSQ ADVISOR

The Minister of Families, Mathieu Lacombe, has recently made a number of public statements in favour of better oversight with respect to private home childcare centres. As they are not regulated by the Ministry, there is no structure to assess the quality of the services they provide.

According to the FIPEQ-CSQ¹, regulating private home childcare educational services would be a step in the right direction.

“However, we ask that the Minister guarantee that these childcare

centres would also be subsidized.

Parents have made their position very clear: they want subsidized spaces,” states Valérie Grenon, president of the FIPEQ-CSQ.

She believes that we must take advantage of a legislative change to review the law and its regulations as a whole. Since 2014, many home care educators (HCEs) have left the regulated and subsidized network for the private sector as a result of stifling regulations and the additional contribution for childcare expenses.



Photo Pascal Rathé

Valérie Grenon

“We need to create winning conditions to have private home-based service providers return to the regulated and subsidized network,” sums up Valérie Grenon.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PRIVATE, AND REGULATED AND SUBSIDIZED?

The first thing that sets the two types of service apart is their rates. Only regulated and subsidized home childcare centres are allowed to offer spaces for a single reduced daily rate of \$8.25. Private home childcare centres determine their own rates. They charge the parents who may then get a tax credit.

Among other differences, only regulated and subsidized childcare services:

- fall under coordinating offices²
- are subject to at least three compliance visits per year
- may benefit from educational and technical support from the coordinating office
- may receive certain allowances for infants and children with special needs

¹ Fédération des intervenantes en petite enfance du Québec.

² There exist a few regulated, but non-subsidized, home childcare centres. They fall under coordinating offices which however do not receive any additional subsidies.

MIXED-AGE GROUPS

BENEFITS FOR YOUNG AND OLD

Taking care of a group of kids of different ages makes the childcare workers' job easier. It benefits them but also the little ones.

Mathieu Morin | FIPEQ-CSQ ADVISOR

Working with a mixed-age group of kids was a true revelation for Mélanie Gonneville, especially after working with homogeneous groups for 17 years. "It's so much easier to manage than a group of all the same age. When changing diapers, for example, I only have two little ones to change instead of seven!", says the educator in a CPE¹.



Photo François Beauregard

She feels that with her mixed-age group, she has more time to devote to her observations, since she does fewer interventions. This is something consultant in early childhood Pierre Latendresse noted as well: "Four- or five-year-olds are very egocentric and often will forget the younger ones. Mixed-age groups foster democratic interventions between the kids."

UNDENIABLE BENEFITS FOR THE CHILDREN

Not only are mixed-age groups beneficial for childcare workers, but it also contributes to the global development of the children, according to home care educator Sylvie Becquereau. "Kids have a lot of fun together, no matter their age, and every day they learn values like respect, sharing and helping," she explains.

"Be it in a family daycare or CPE, the group composition allows the younger ones to have models and the older ones to develop more of their social abilities. The children learn to take care of one another," adds Pierre Latendresse.

CONVINCING THE PARENTS

Many parents are worried that the group composition might have a negative effect on the older kids' learning. However, according to Pierre Latendresse, this model is beneficial for academic transition: "Once in school, it's rarely in class that a child has problems. It's usually in the playground with older kids,



Photo LesMaximes

where they are confronted to that mixed-age dynamic."

"One shouldn't think that in a mixed-age context, four- or five-year-olds don't have specific activities for their age, continues Sylvie Becquereau. For my part, my educational service is designed by stages, with some reserved for the oldest."

BENEFITS TO DOCUMENT

For now, Pierre Latendresse thinks the childcare worker's academic training should quickly integrate mixed-age notions, especially for those wishing to work in family daycare. "It really deserves to be taught!"

¹ Centre de la petite enfance.

EVERYBODY OUT!

The early childhood network is chock-full of initiatives to help children acquire a taste for playing outside. Portrait of two innovative educational services.

Mathieu Morin | FIPEQ-CSQ ADVISOR

When visiting their grandmother, Nancy Racine's children were awestruck by her chickens. Their fascination inspired this educational home childcare provider: she decided to build a chicken coop to entertain her little ones.

"At first, one or two kids were scared, but that quickly subsided," remembers Nancy Racine. The chicken coop is now quite an attraction for the children, regardless of their age. "The first thing they do when they get here is go in the backyard!"

Chickens and ducks wander around outside while the children play in the yard. "It reinforces unstructured, free play, which results in a great number of activities. The kids really look forward to going outside, even in bad weather!" In fact, the coop is now well insulated so that the experience can be extended during the winter months.

THE FULL EXPERIENCE

The experience would not be complete or as rewarding if there weren't a few eggs to collect for lunch! With their parent's permission, the children get to enjoy a great meal, whose main ingredient they collected. The initiative is well regarded by the coordination office overseeing Nancy Racine's educational service.

PLAYING BY THE RULES

Naturally, this type of project has to comply with municipal by-laws. For instance, the city of Alma, where Nancy Racine lives, has decided that each home can have up to three chickens. Other municipalities – such as Montréal – have rolled out a few pilot projects to assess the possibility of allowing citizens to raise chickens in urban areas.



Photo Gratien Tremblay

Nancy Racine



Anny Portelance

Photo Jean-François Leblanc

BUDDING MARATHON RUNNERS

Not to be outdone, CPEs¹ are also introducing initiatives to kindle the love of playing outside. At CPE La Grosse Maison in Montréal, Anny Portelance and her group spend the better part of their day walking in the woods. The 2- to 4-kilometre walk turns into a run for some of the children. A sure way to keep any educator in great shape!

GETTING USED TO NATURE

Though they might not have chickens, the three- and four-year-olds in Anny Portelance's group get to see deer and discover nature and other animals. "The kids can spend hours simply watching squirrels, hares or woodpeckers and picking out leaves," she explains.

Between two games of hide and seek out in the woods, children explore and climb on tree stumps under their educator's watchful eye. This past Halloween, they had to find objects left by a witch throughout the forest. This one-a-of-kind treasure hunt was a great success.

LETTING KIDS BE KIDS

Anny Portelance believes that we should avoid overprotecting children. "Yes, there is some potential for danger when climbing a rock, but we always keep an eye on what the children are doing. Clearly, they prefer to spend time in the woods rather than in a park."

The home childcare educator (HCE) says that children quickly lose interest in crafts, but they never tire of the forest. Parents regularly share that discussions with their little ones often focus on their latest outdoors adventure.

A TYPICAL DAY

Anny Portelance greets the children sometimes inside, sometimes outside. Rain or shine, they spend two hours in the forest together. Once in a while, the person overseeing food preparation at the CPE fixes sandwiches for a snack outside.

Then, time for a nap... outdoors! A deck with a roof that protects the children from the bad weather makes outside naps possible.

The kids finish the day outdoors, in the yard, where they wait for their parents to pick them up.

EDUCATING PARENTS

Anny Portelance thinks that there is still much to teach her kids' parents. "We want to help parents understand our way of seeing things, she explains. We play outside, in the rain and in the mud. Obviously, children are going to get their hands dirty. And that's okay."

¹ Centres de la petite enfance.

FOR THE LOVE OF CHILDREN

We clearly love our children in Québec. But are we doing everything we can to foster their development?

Véronique Brouillette
CSQ ADVISOR



Photo Shutterstock

Dr. Jean-François Chicoine¹ raises the question, noting a degree of indifference on the part of parents who spend increasing amounts of time on their electronic devices, are less physically active, spend less time outdoors, meditating, having dinner with family or volunteering.

It's no wonder kids are glued to their screens! These devices are everywhere. Young people who watch television fall into a state of passivity. Those who abuse it or who are often in the presence of screens are more likely to develop delays in language and self-regulation.

Many children therefore start kindergarten with some delays. According to Dr. Chicoine, even though we are able to detect a lot of these cases, unfortunately, there are no professional services available.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Dr. Chicoine emphasizes the importance for children of attending a quality educational service. Since babies first attach to one person, then to four or five others, it is crucial that the presence of the workers remains stable. Educational services with high staff turnover create insecurity, especially in children aged 9 months to 2 years.

PLAY-BASED LEARNING

To grow well, children must be physically active at least two to three hours a day, according to Dr. Chicoine. They must also play freely, as this gives them space to invent, create and ask questions. Moreover, learning through play is the method by which children learn best.

Ideally, one third of the time spent in an educational service should be devoted to free play, one third to solitary play, and the last third to interaction with the educator. Children love to play and educational services do a good job!

¹ Dr. Jean-François Chicoine is a pediatrician and author of several books on child development.



IT'S NOT ALL IN YOUR HEAD!

Increase in workload, loss of professional autonomy,
lack of recognition—such is the reality of
several early childhood educators.

Pierre Lefebvre | COLLABORATION
Véronique Brouillette | CSQ ADVISOR

During meetings with the CSQ in the Fall of 2019 as part of focus groups, several early childhood educators representing CPEs¹ or family home childcare educational service shared their actual experiences in the field.

AN EVER-INCREASING WORKLOAD

The increase in workload is notably attributable to administrative requirements that are progressively monopolizing early childhood educators' time. Evaluations, accountability, reports and other bureaucratic procedures are being multiplied to a point where many forgo their meal time or complete these tasks on their personal time.

Furthermore, childcare educational service are admitting more children with special needs. As per several other public services, specific support for these children is often lacking as a result of budgetary decisions.

"This workload escalation is the result of a requirement to meet competitive, productivity and profitability objectives. The worker is struggling with an increase in workload and greater demands on her physical, intellectual and psychological capabilities," states Mélanie Baril, CSQ occupational health and safety advisor.

A DECLINE IN AUTONOMY

For many, work is a way to be fulfilled and prosper in society—and autonomy is key to achieving this. It refers to the concepts of self-control and self-fulfilment. Early childhood educators are no exception to this fundamental need.

"In the family setting, this loss of autonomy primarily stems from the coordinating offices—to which the managers of educational services report—that exercise increased power over the educators. Additionally, in CPEs, more and more educational activities and approaches are being imposed," reports Valérie Grenon, president of the Fédération des intervenantes en petite enfance du Québec (FIPEQ-CSQ).



For Dr. Michel Vézina, occupational psychological health advisor at the Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ), "low decision-making autonomy results in task-related monotony, the lack of freedom and consultation on how to accomplish tasks, and scarce opportunities to use and develop one's abilities or to show initiative and creativity at work."

INSUFFICIENT RECOGNITION

"The image of the simple child daycare has increased with the debate surrounding the instauration of 4-year-old preschool for all children, as if the education network held the monopoly on educational services for toddlers," adds Valérie Grenon. This has worsened with the COVID-19 health crisis. It seems that child care services serve no other purpose than to enable 'guardian angels' to fulfill their duties."

¹ Centres de la petite enfance.

Yet, according to Dr. Vézina, “employee recognition refers to the various ways in which efforts and achievements are properly recognized, whether it be compensation, esteem, respect, job security or promotion opportunities.”

For his part, retired professor and founder of the Chair in Occupational Health and Safety Management at Université Laval, Jean-Pierre Brun, speaks more and more about consideration: “It is about being considered as a citizen at work: have information, do meaningful work, take part in decision-making, etc.”



Photo Stéphane Lemire

Dr Michel Vézina



Photo Courtesy

Jean-Pierre Brun

HEALTH EFFECTS

Psychosocial risks at work such as a lack of autonomy and poor recognition can lead to physical and psychological health issues ranging from cardiovascular problems to depression and anxiety.

“Although, according to CNESST² data, early childhood educators are more prone to developing musculoskeletal disorders, it is proven that stress at work can also cause these issues. Therefore, posture and lifting are not the only factors to blame,” says Mélanie Baril.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS EXIST

Among protective factors, foremost is social support. “Whether it stems from colleagues or management, social support positively impacts the climate and quality of life at work. It provides a protective and reassuring affect that helps decrease the harmful effects of stress,” explains Mélanie Baril. More so, it creates a sense of belonging and solidarity among colleagues that is crucial in battling the increases in risk. For those responsible for family education services—who work alone—this support may be obtained from their union, according to Valérie Grenon.

Professional recognition is another protective factor that is easy to reinforce. “Saying ‘Hello’ and ‘Thank you’ shows good manners. Recognition is having the opportunity to share your experiences and your competencies, to know that they are appreciated. It’s also having a place to exchange that allows us to understand the current reality and share it, both with colleagues and managers,” explains Jean-Pierre Brun.

Like Dr. Vézina, Jean-Pierre Brun affirms that, first and foremost, people want to be empowered to do quality work. “What hurts is not so much the work that you do, it is more the work that you cannot do!” says, quoting Yves Clot, author of *Le travail à cœur. Pour en finir avec les risques psychosociaux*.

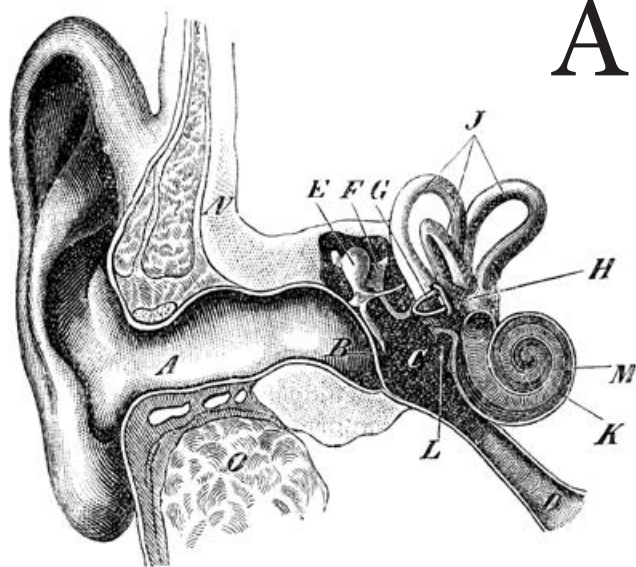
The health crisis has exacerbated the desire among many early childhood workers to leave the early childhood environment because of the increase in workload in the educational services that remained open, the lack of recognition and the sense of injustice arising from the poor compensation for this essential contribution.

If nothing is done to improve working conditions, difficult days lie ahead for the early childhood education and school daycare network that is already dealing with retention and recruitment issues, evokes Valérie Grenon.

² Commission des normes, de l’équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail.

NOISE

MORE THAN JUST A NUISANCE



Do you often suffer from headaches, extreme fatigue, voice loss, irritability or hearing impairments? Noise pollution in your workplace could very well be the cause.

François Beauregard
COLLABORATION

The early childhood sector is a noisy workplace. It's no surprise that personnel are more vulnerable to hearing loss than workers in other professions. Since the effects of noise pollution are cumulative and hearing loss can become irreversible, it's best to address it before it's too late.

According to Health Canada, the extent of the phenomenon is generally underestimated. In Québec, the Institut national de santé publique (INSPQ) is troubled by increasing occupational deafness when means exist to prevent it.

SOUND OR NOISE: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Just like sound, noise is an auditory sensation created by acoustic waves of varying frequencies (high or low), intensities (loud or weak), and length. What's the difference? "Noise is any kind of unwanted sound that interferes with our auditory perception of what we want to hear. Therefore, noise depends on our own subjective perception, which changes with age, gender or personal experience," explains Ingrid Verduyck, speech-language pathologist and professor at the School of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology of the Université de Montréal.

BEWARE OF EXCESS NOISE

The risks to auditory health therefore depend on noise levels, and the duration and accumulation of exposure to noise. In fact, Health Canada recommends taking into account all of the noise we're exposed to daily. If it regularly exceeds the limit, the amount of noise we experience every day may represent a danger to our hearing.

Besides auditory fatigue (a temporary decrease in hearing), prolonged overexposure to noise levels that exceed recommended limits may cause progressive hearing loss, tinnitus, and hyperacusis (intolerance for normal sounds), and more.

And that's not all: noise can also have negative effects on heart rate, stress, and sleep, in addition to causing headaches, increased fatigue, irritability and impatience, voice disorders, decreased concentration, and job dissatisfaction.

OUTDATED REGULATIONS

In Québec, the Regulation respecting occupational health and safety has set 90 dB and 8 hours as the maximum values for exposure to continuous noise to prevent occupational deafness, compared to 85 dB in most other provinces.

"It has been generally accepted by both science and the Québec courts that the risk of impairment is possible when exposed for extended periods of time to noise levels lower than the standards set in Québec," warns Mélanie Baril, CSQ occupational health and safety advisor.

Studies in Québec and elsewhere have shown that the noise level in home childcare settings and early childhood centres ranges between 56 and 71 dB, with peaks as high as 80 to 95 dB.

PERSONNEL AT RISK

Noisy early childcare environments (home-based and in centres) also increase the stress felt by workers. In addition to vocal fatigue, educators are more vulnerable to extreme fatigue, may find it more difficult to tolerate noise at home, and may develop sleep problems.



Ingrid Verduyckt

Photo François Beuregard

"The ideal sound level should not surpass 65 dB. Yet, this threshold is often exceeded."

— Ingrid Verduyckt, speech-language pathologist and professor at the School of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology of the Université de Montréal.

**56 to
71 dB**
**NOISE LEVEL IN
HOME CHILDCARE
SERVICES AND
EARLY CHILDHOOD
CENTRES. THIS
LEVEL CAN REACH
95 dB IN SOME
CIRCUMSTANCES.**

NEGLECTED ACOUSTIC QUALITY

To promote ease of comprehension, Ingrid Verduyckt is categorical: “The ideal sound level should not surpass 65 dB. Yet, this threshold is often exceeded.”

She adds that “there is a lot of focus on energy conservation, for example, when building or renovating schools. It’s good, but the acoustic quality of the environment also needs to be considered as it affects workers’ auditory and vocal health.”

The researcher reminds us that beyond the words spoken, tone has a significant effect on the listener’s perception. For example, a person speaking loudly in a noisy environment may unwillingly provoke reactions to shut down, which is the opposite of their intention.

INCREASING AWARENESS

Ingrid Verduyckt says that when asked about it, many persons exposed to noise in the workplace assume it’s just one of the inconveniences of the job. “The problem with overexposure to noise is that it’s largely underestimated, by both the public authorities and the victims themselves,” worries the speech-language pathologist.

And yet, the Act respecting occupational health and safety is clear: the employer must control the risks to the safety or health of the workers. “When the standards set by the occupational health and safety regulation are not met, the employer must work to reduce the source of the noise, isolate the work station, or soundproof the installations. If these are impossible, the employer must provide ear protectors,” specifies Mélanie Baril.

A PUBLIC HEALTH RISK

Putting tennis balls under desks and chairs is useful, but it is not enough to create healthy environments. Raising awareness with public authorities is perhaps the first step. But it’s also important to keep in mind that overexposure to noise is not inevitable, and that there are things that can be done to reduce it and prevent hearing damage.

In fact, this issue is affecting a growing proportion of the population. For this reason, in a notice from the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the INSPQ recommends that Québec adopt a public policy to reduce the effects of environmental noise. This position inspired by the work of the World Health Organization confirms that exposure to noise pollution is without a doubt a significant public health issue that can no longer be ignored.

TEN WAYS TO PAMPER YOUR EARS

When it comes to noise, prevention is essential. Read tips for protecting your hearing.

magazine.lacsq.org

› Magazine › English › Health and safety › 10 ways to pamper your ears



Photo iStock

IS YOUR VOICE FAILING YOU?

Did you know that early childhood workers are at greater risk of developing a voice disorder? Far from trivial, the situation can have numerous consequences, making it important to act as soon as the first symptoms appear.

CSQ Communications Services

"In early childhood care, we use our voices a great deal for several hours a day, often in conditions that are far from optimal. Noise, stress, and other factors, such as poor ventilation or air quality, are significant irritants that may lead to voice disorders," says Ingrid Verduyckt, speech-language pathologist and professor at the School of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology of the Université de Montréal.

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

"Contrary to stage actors, for example, future early childhood educators are not taught to project their voices. Vocal hygiene is rarely discussed. Yet, future graduates will be required to use their voices continually. Awareness prior to practice is not only essential, but it is also a highly effective preventive measure," adds Ingrid Verduyckt.

Speech-language pathologist and member of the Syndicat du personnel professionnel des commissions scolaires de la région de Québec (SPPRÉQ-CSQ) Claudine Blouin concurs: "Students seeking a career in education or early childhood care must be aware, early in their training, that their voices are their main work tool and will require care throughout their careers. They must learn the principles of proper vocal hygiene and voice projection techniques, be aware of the acoustic conditions of their work environments, and understand the importance of consulting a physician as soon as the first symptoms appear." According to her, it would be wise to offer workshops on voice projection and vocal hygiene to early childhood educators.

"A half-day workshop bringing together a speech-language pathologist and 10 people, for example, would be very effective. It would allow to sensitize educators about the importance of proper breathing, synchronizing their breathing with their voices and posture, teaching best practices to protect their voices, and learning what to avoid."

ARE WOMEN MORE AT RISK?

Though early childhood workers in the early stages of their careers are at significant risk, given their lack of professional experience, the prevalence of voice disorders increases with age, peaking between the ages of 50 and 59.

In general, women are more susceptible to these problems because of the structure of their larynx and the speed at which their vocal cords vibrate.

"Our vocal cords resemble small membranes that open and close at an incredible speed when we talk. Women's vocal cords collide an average of 220 times per second, whereas men's vibrate 100 times per second. As a result, microtraumas occur and the mucous membrane gets damaged," explains Ingrid Verduyckt.

A DISASTROUS MARATHON

She goes on to explain that the higher we speak, the faster our vocal cords vibrate and the more they collide. Similarly, the louder we speak, the wider the vibration and the greater the force of the impact, resulting in more injuries.

"Added to this is the fact that the longer we talk, the more distance our vocal cords travel. It's important to know that by measuring and adding every vibration in millimetres, science has determined that the daily recommended vocal distance is 500 metres. Yet, studies have shown that, on average, the vocal cords of educators travel more than four kilometres a day!" says the researcher.

This significant amount of mechanical stress can produce a series of symptoms: throat clearing, hoarseness, neck tension, feelings of dryness or pain in the throat, higher pitched or huskier voice, difficulty being heard or speaking loudly, vocal fatigue, voice loss, etc.

If left untreated, inflammation of the vocal cords can lead to swelling, nodules, or polyps, for example. It is best to be vigilant, avoid forcing your voice, and more importantly, consult a physician right away.

MAXIMUM SOUND LEVELS

Not surprisingly, home childcare providers and early childhood centres are noisy environments (see article *Noise: more than just a nuisance* on page 30). On average, sound levels vary between 56 and 71 dB, with peaks as high as 80 to 95 dB.

Can these sound levels affect one's voice? Ingrid Verduyck is categorical: "The more noise there is in a room, the more we are apt to raise our voices and increase our pitch, leading to numerous negative consequences on our vocal cords. Beyond 60 dB, our well-being is also affected. We become more irritable, anxious, and tired."

WHEN TO WORRY

Consulting a physician as soon as voice loss lasts more than a few days is critical. "A typical case involves a person who, during their first year of teaching, observes that their voice is tired at night. Over time, they find that they require periods of rest to get their voice back: a night's sleep, a weekend, a week's vacation...until nothing works anymore. Unfortunately, once this stage is reached, their condition becomes harder to treat," warns Ingrid Verduyck.

Claudine Blouin adds that if vocal fatigue persists and is accompanied by voice loss or raspiness, it is important to consult an otorhinolaryngologist. "This step is crucial to get a proper diagnosis. It is essential to receive speech therapy to treat a voice disorder permanently. One should not hesitate to ask a physician."

CNESST: A NECESSARY CLAIM

Once it has been determined that overusing one's voice at work is the cause of the voice impairment, the latter becomes a work-related injury. CSQ occupational health and safety advisor Mélanie Baril insists on the importance of obtaining written confirmation from the attending physician, consulting your union before completing the *Réclamation du travailleur de la CNESST*¹ and proceeding with your union to ensure adequate representation.

"The Regulation respecting medical aid states that, during their period of disability, victims of a work-related injury have the right to attend sessions with a speech therapist paid by the CNESST and can obtain technical communication assistance with prior authorization from the Commission. A worker who suffers from permanent damage because of their injury may also obtain



specialized equipment, such as a voice amplifier, as a tool for rehabilitation," she says.

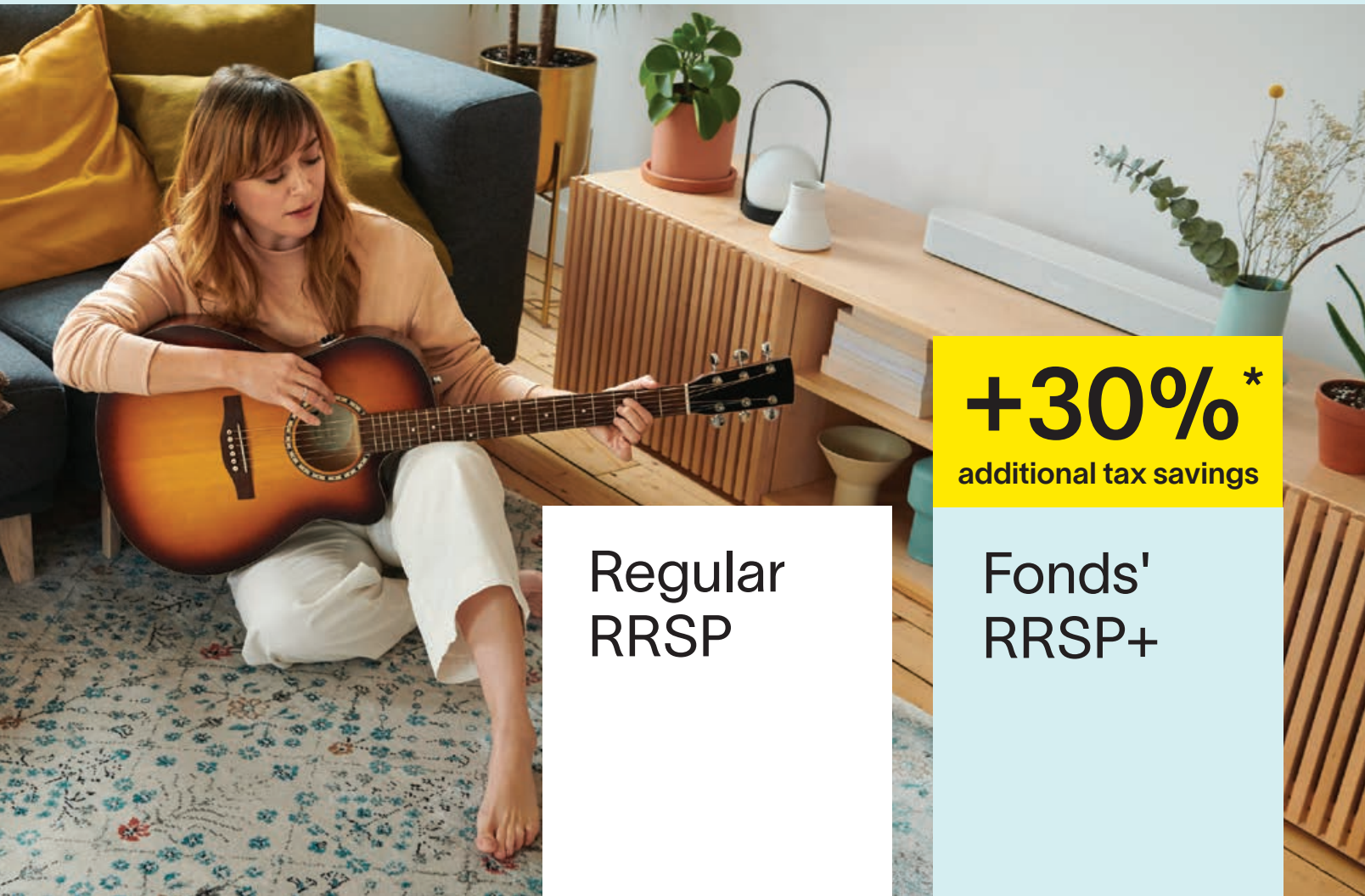
IS THE DAMAGE IRREPARABLE?

What happens if your voice has been damaged for a long time? Is it too late to consult a specialist? Claudine Blouin answers without hesitation: "You have nothing to lose by consulting. You may not regain the voice you had 20 years ago, but your life will definitely improve. In the case of an old nodule, therapy might not be enough to correct the problem. However, in the case of a more recent nodule or poor vocal projection, therapy can significantly improve the quality of your voice. And that's priceless."

¹ Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail.

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