

LIFESTYLES

Spend money, time, effort on early childhood: report

TORONTO (CP) — Nurturing children during the first six years of life is as fundamental to society's welfare as clean water and modern vaccines, says a report on early childhood.

Spending money now to foster early development could lead to savings later on everything from health care to law enforcement, says the final report of the Early Years study.

The study was led by researcher Fraser Mustard, the former dean of health studies at McMaster University, and former New Brunswick Lieutenant-Governor Margaret Norrie McCain.

The report says the early years — particularly the first three — are vital to establishing competence and coping skills that can affect learning, health and behaviour later in life.

It urges the Ontario government to take steps to

foster positive early childhood growth with everything from new programs and increased funding to convincing Ottawa to relax restrictions on maternity benefits.

"It will require more money; the amount is not clear," Mustard told a news conference.

"But the commitment of society to the early years becomes important in terms of how much we are all prepared to commit to this."

Premier Mike Harris promised Tuesday to "guarantee" funding for junior and senior kindergarten in Ontario but said nothing about increasing funding levels.

"Right now what we're talking about is maintaining what we have," Harris said.

All school boards in Ontario currently offer some variety of senior kindergarten, he said,

while there are "about two or three" that have opted out of junior kindergarten to offer alternative programs.

A provincial election campaign is expected next month, which critics believe is why Harris — assailed in past years for cutting education funding and money for early childhood programs — has suddenly changed his tune.

Harris can easily guarantee funding for kindergarten, said Liberal children's issues critic Sandra Pupatello, since it's up to school boards to decide whether they can afford the program.

The governing Tories have already slashed junior kindergarten funding and cut child care subsidies, resource centres and special needs programs, said Pupatello.

"School boards overall want to provide junior

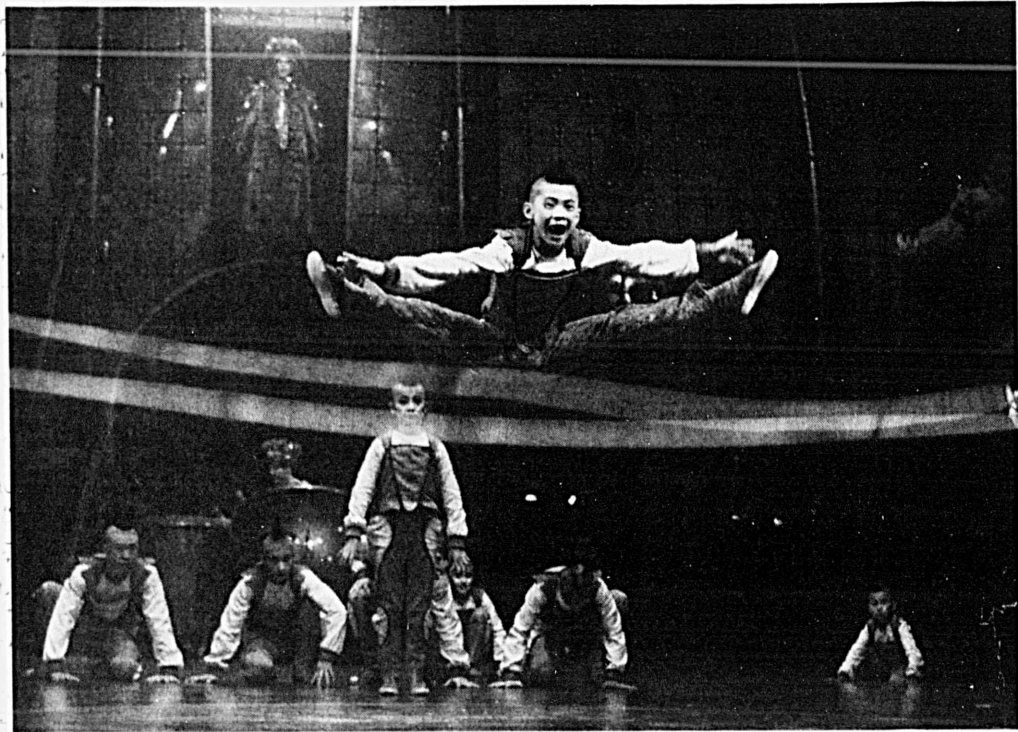
kindergarten; they've simply not been able to because of the choices they're forced to make given the level of funding that's there," she said.

"He's giving you the sleeves out of your vest, basically."

But implementing the report's ideas is not just the government's job, Harris said. It will require the help of communities, businesses and families to give children a proper start.

At least four "demonstration projects" will be set up to evaluate how best to foster early learning, with a task force to oversee the implementation of the projects, Harris said.

All existing pre-school programs will be combined and expanded with increased funding, said Harris, who refused to disclose dollar amounts until the provincial budget expected in May.



MEMBERS OF THE CIRQUE DU SOLEIL perform a skipping rope act in Montreal as part of the new Cirque du Soleil production Dralion. The production premieres Friday and will run until mid June in Montreal before going on tour in North America.

Kidney goes from trash to patient

VALHALLA, N.Y. (AP) — The transplant team was just about to put the patient under when the operation had to be postponed. The healthy new kidney, it seemed, was missing.

Someone, it turns out, had thrown it in a recycling bin.

The organ was found there within 90 minutes, and the operation went forward.

Two days after the initial surgery, the organ was removed because it was "not working properly," Westchester Medical Center said in a statement. But Kristine Smith, spokeswoman for the state Health Department, said the malfunction had nothing to do with the mixup.

"The outcome for the patient depends on a number of factors that have nothing to do with this," Smith said.

Dr. Khalid Butt, who performed the operation, said the 67-year-old patient "will be fine." Hospital officials refused to elaborate.

The organ had been in the operating room, on ice, wrapped in four layers of plastic inside a polystyrene box, ready to help save the life of a victim of kidney failure.

But the operating room had been cleaned and the kidney was gone and the minutes were ticking away. A kidney from a cadaver, like this one, can be preserved on ice for about 48 hours, and 36 hours had already passed.

The patient, a New York City man who spent the last year on dialysis, was told there would be a delay. He wasn't told why.

"There was no reason to at that point," said Carin Grossman, a hospital spokeswoman.

An hour and a half went by as the hospital was searched. Finally, the kidney was found.

The container "was thought to be simply an empty corrugated box and therefore placed in the recycling receptacle for clean cardboard," the hospital said.

Celebrex deaths 'aren't worrisome'

WASHINGTON (Reuters) — The U.S. Food and Drug Administration says there is no need to worry about a new painkiller despite reports of 10 deaths among people who took the drug.

The Wall Street Journal reported that Celebrex has been linked to 10 deaths and 11 cases of gastrointestinal hemorrhage. More than 2.5 million prescriptions have been written for the drug in the three months it has been on the U.S. market.

But an FDA adviser said such numbers were meaningless. "Ten cases is absolutely uninterpretable," said Dr. Steven Abramson, chairman of

rheumatology and medicine at the Hospital for Joint Diseases in New York.

Celebrex, made by Monsanto subsidiary G.D. Searle and Co., is one of a new class of painkillers called COX-2 inhibitors. They were designed to battle pain and inflammation without the side-effects of ASA and related drugs such as ibuprofen, which can cause internal bleeding.

The FDA keeps tabs on as many adverse reactions as it can. Just because a death has been reported in a person taking a drug does not necessarily mean the drug caused that death.

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