# Day care extends into the evenings [1]

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EXCERPTS:

The province expects to see more and more child care providers offering extended-hours after a High River child care centre launched its evening program this week, becoming the second facility in Alberta to open its doors late into the night.

"Generally, we're seeing a small trend toward offering extended hours care," said Leann Wagner, senior manager of the child care branch at Alberta Children and Youth Services.

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Daydreams and Sunbeams Child Care Centre in High River now offers a late program that runs from 6 p.m. to 11: 45 p.m. after receiving an overwhelming demand for the service from parents.

"There are a lot of people who work shifts," said Julia Gwyn-Morris, who owns and operates the facility with her partner Eddy Marshall.

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Most other child care centres are open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., and some charge "hefty late fees" when parents pick up their children after hours, she said.

Gwyn-Morris said she opened her first extended hours child care centre, Grandma Marie's, in Winnipeg in 1984.

At the time, she was single, pregnant with her second child and working days and nights as a nurse. Finding no suitable child care options, she took matters into her own hands and opened her own facility, which earned her an entrepreneur award.

She said the evening program at Daydreams and Sunbeams is only a few days old, but she already has three children enrolled and expects more to join. She's hired extra staff to work the night shift and will be bringing in nanny cams so she can keep an eye on the centre while she's offsite. The day program will continue to operate from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Daydreams and Sunbeams joins the Funflex Playcare in Calgary, which started offering extended hours in September 2010, said Marc St-Germain, who owns and operates the centre with his wife Jenny Morgenstern.

The day care is open until 8 p.m. Monday to Thursday, and until 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. It mainly operates on a drop-in basis, charging hourly rates for parents who need to slip away for a few hours for a dental appointment, a grocery run, or a date.

St-Germain said neither he nor his wife has family in Alberta, so whenever they wanted to go out to catch a movie or a bite to eat, it was always a challenge to find child care at the last minute.

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Sharon Reib, executive director of the Churchill Park Family Care Society in Calgary, said the society had considered offering later hours for its facilities a few years ago, but staffing issues got in the way.

However, it's something she might re-examine, calling it an "innovative and responsive thing to do for working parents."

"My initial surprise was that children would be picked up so late at night, but then I think about the number of working moms, single parents, people working shifts and, in many ways, those children are safer than they would otherwise," Reib said.

Wagner assured that whether child care providers are operating during the day or at night, they are still held to the same regulations and standards, adding inspectors will check to ensure they are in compliance.

-reprinted from the Calgary Herald

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