

Pay for child care or quit work? Calgary families forced to choose ^[1]

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Source: Metro News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 4 Mar 2015

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EXCERPTS

When Luke David began kindergarten last fall, his mother Tabitha wasn't just worried about him shedding tears, she was worried about where he would go at noon.

Tabitha has been struggling to find care for her four children for almost 10 years. While she worked, three of her children were safe at school, but Luke's kindergarten class only lasted the morning.

She looked for local child care options, but the rates proved to be too much.

This week, Metro contacted 13 daycares across Calgary to inquire about full-time daycare costs for a two-year-old. Prices ranged from \$815 to \$1,700 per month, with an average of \$1,263.

Of those 13 day cares contacted, only four had space available for a toddler.

Two weeks ago, Tabitha opted to quit her construction and cleaning job to care for Luke after her babysitter moved away. She was making about \$80 per day and couldn't afford the \$75 daily rate at the daycare nearby.

"I'd only be left with \$5 for that whole day," she said. "For someone with no stable job or income, it's not easy to find child care you can afford. It's been very difficult for me, but I'm trying."

Julie Hrdlicka with Public Interest Alberta (PIA) has been advocating for affordable child care for years. After having children of her own, she encountered wait list after wait list and said she saw a flaw in the system.

"I've had child care providers say, 'As soon as you're trying to have a baby, get your name on the wait list,' even if you're not pregnant," she said.

PIA surveyed the child care providers in Alberta last November and found 63 per cent of Alberta operations have a wait list. The wait-list rate stood at 71 per cent in Calgary.

Hrdlicka and David joined a panel this week called Let's Talk Calgary Childcare with the Women's Centre to discuss the issue. Hrdlicka said the province needs a comprehensive strategy and wants "all national parties to make affordable child care a platform issue" in the next election.

"We don't have a child-care system, we have a market in child care," she said. "It's becoming more and more about making a profit than about taking care of the needs of our children."

Region: Alberta ^[3]

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