

24-7 child care 'heaven sent' for Edmonton parents ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Helping shift workers and single parents, some Edmonton child-care centres are providing a service that goes beyond the traditional work day.

Parents are increasingly turning to round-the-clock child care — facilities open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including holidays.

In Edmonton, 24-7 Childcare Canada Inc. operates two such facilities. They opened about two years ago.

The centres are run out of homes in west-end neighbourhoods. With six spaces each, they have waiting lists of about 12 families each month.

"The job right now is no longer Monday to Friday," said Jonathan Cruz, who oversees both centres that used to be part of a larger child-care company based in Vancouver.

"It's Monday to Sunday around the clock, and most people are telling me, 'Thank God we have this 24-7. It's heaven sent.' "

Clients include doctors, nurses, border services personnel, bar and restaurant staff. The service is popular among single parents and those who do shift work or out-of-town shifts.

In addition to the convenience of being able to leave their children overnight, Cruz said parents appreciate the ability offered by 24-7 to monitor their children with their cell phones.

"My home is a home away from home for the kids," said Hazel Velez, who runs one of the Edmonton homes.

"I treat them as my own. The job is easier that way and I feel that they also respond positively with that."

It's a service that's gaining popularity across Canada as well as in the United States.

The Edmonton operation is a member of the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta and by the Canadian Child Care Federation, but 24/7 is not a licensed family day home.

Call for regulation

Nicki Dublenko, who runs an accredited dayhome agency, is chair of the early childhood educators association.

She acknowledged the need for overnight child care, but said regulation is also required.

"We need to make sure that no matter where the child is, what time of the day, what time of the night — that they're accessing a high-quality child-care space," Dublenko said. It should be of a quality "that we can stand by as a province," she said.

In an email, the province's department of human services, now headed by two ministers after last month's cabinet shuffle, said it couldn't provide comment.

But in an announcement last fall, the NDP government said it would move towards \$25 a day child care by investing just under \$10 million in 18 new child care centres, largely focused on those that provide flexible hours and spaces for children with special needs.

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