

Local daycare workers see early minimum wage increase ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Whitecourt Early Learning and Child Care Centre is giving its employees a raise to a \$15 per hour minimum wage 16 months earlier than required.

The Board of the Day Care (sic) Society, located in Edson, voted to increase the lowest paid early child care workers' wages as of April 1.

The provincial NDP government mandated in 2016 that the minimum wage be gradually increased to \$15 per hour by October 1, 2018. It will increase to \$13.60 per hour on October 1, 2017.

The goal of the early increase was "to provide our hard-working staff with a liveable wage," said Crystal McGeough, director of the Whitecourt daycare.

"There's different levels of education in the early childhood field. With that comes a pay grade. Lots of our staff who had the minimum education, which is a child development assistant, would make just above minimum wage," said McGeough.

Since they're an accredited daycare, the Whitecourt centre gets a \$2.14 per hour top up from the government, which in practice means that most of their workers were already making near \$15 per hour, she said.

"So now they've gone from making \$15 an hour, or just over \$15 an hour, to making over \$17 an hour," McGeough said.

The daycare centre is a non-profit charity, so it doesn't receive government funding beyond the pay top up. Its operations depend on a combination of fundraising, donations and fees paid by parents, she said.

The daycare is able to function thanks to the generosity of the community, McGeough said.

"We've been very, very lucky that the community and the businesses in the community have supported us for the last two years on that," she said.

They also participate in the annual Community Clean Up, in both Whitecourt and Woodlands County, where community groups receive \$10,000 each to clean up public spaces. They also participated in a fundraiser selling Purdys chocolates.

McGeough said the daycare is working on coming up with new fundraisers to avoid raising fees to fund the wage increase.

"We have been talking about doing a silent auction and that is something that the staff is excited about, something new that might bring in more money," she said, adding that these would take place at the local No Frills or IGA stores.

The daycare is also soliciting donations from Air Canada, as well as other airlines, so they can raffle off flights, which McGeough said is a common practice among non-profits.

The next upcoming fundraiser is their annual community garage sale and barbecue, slated for June.

If anyone has any items they want to donate to the garage sale, they can drop them off at the Carlan Centre, where the daycare is located.

-reprinted from Whitecourt Star

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