

Dad of 2 slams N.L. government's child care help as 'laughable' ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Newfoundland and Labrador government should hold off patting itself on the back for upping the income threshold for child care subsidies, according to one father with two kids in daycare.

"It doesn't really do all that much," says Michael Whittle, whose children are two and four years old.

"In the grand scheme of things, it was kind of laughable because it's such a small amount of money," he told CBC Radio's St. John's Morning Show, referencing the June 1 announcement by Education Minister Dale Kirby at a child care facility in Torbay.

The changes, which took effect on that date, mean a family earning \$32,000 a year can qualify for child care subsidies. Previously, the cutoff was \$27,500.

"I mean, technically I guess, it's a step forward ... but it really doesn't do a whole lot for many families," Whittle said.

It adds up, fast

Whittle said daycare costs close to \$1,000 per child, per month.

He said there is even more of a sticker shock for infants (under two), where rates can run upwards of \$1,500 a month.

"St. John's is just behind Toronto" for that age group, he said.

"If you took a family that has a combined income of \$50,000 or \$60,000 ... with two children, you're paying \$20,000 to \$25,000 in child care fees. That's half your income," Whittle said.

"We're not even talking about mortgage payments, we're not talking about car payments, and that doesn't even scratch the surface on extracurricular activities for your children that you have to pay for," he said.

"It's tough, it's a slog."

Whittle said the N.L. government needs to tackle the costly child care burden for more families.

"I'd like to see them lead the way for once, instead of us being a trend follower," he said, pointing to Quebec's child care system.

That province offered subsidized \$7-a-day child care for years, until changes made it more of a sliding-scale payment system. However, it is still widely considered the leader in child care affordability, albeit not without its own issues.

Whittle warns there will be long-lasting impacts unless something changes.

"We're just going to see out migration, more generations of kids that will grow up, younger families are going to leave. The younger families that are here that are trying to make it work ... it's very hard to do that and also pay for the child care costs," he said.

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