

The future of child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A number of local organizations came together last Wednesday to provide input to the Minister of Children Services Danielle Larivee on what the future of child care should look like.

Larivee plans to meet with organizations across the province to determine what actions should be taken for child care, and the local discussion provided an opportunity for organizations within Strathcona County to voice their feedback.

"I always think it is incredibly valuable to talk to Albertans who are living and breathing an issue every single day to make sure we are moving in the right direction," Larivee said, adding: "It was wonderful to hear a lot of constructive suggestions around what needs to happen and where we need to go, and the fact that everyone is on the same page, we need to provide that quality care and we need to provide it at a rate that is not bankrupting families."

She added through the first round of the sessions, the No. 1 issue that came up was affordability.

"Obviously, the \$25-per-day piece is a huge advance for the affordability," Larivee said.

"We also heard the importance of equality. We know now, there is tons of evidence that says that those early years are important in our child's early development.

"Families also want the need for more flexible child care... shift workers who need hours outside of 6 a.m. till 6 p.m. through our pilot project, we encourage programs to do some innovation around that."

Local child care professional Cheryl Roberts said the session went really well.

"I didn't know what to expect, we were invited to the meeting... It was a really really good conversation," said Roberts, who works with the local BriarPatch Family Life Education Centre.

She said the future of child care should entail quality education and care for families that meet their needs.

"We do have families that are struggling each month; even though pre-school fees are much smaller than daycare, it can still be a struggle," Roberts said.

"Sometimes, we have families that the fee isn't affordable, so we have to find innovative ways to help them stay within the program.

"We want them to receive that education and care. We don't want them to have to walk away because it is not in their budget."

One of the questions Roberts asked was related to providing accreditation.

"Accreditation has been provided to daycares and then after-school care, and then pre-schools was next on the list," she said, adding: "But that program kind of stalled, and so we are hoping that some of these conversations will help bring that back because that brings dollars into our centre to pay our staff.

"I'm glad the government is interested in supporting families and through these conversations... I trust this will be a helpful stepping stone."

Larivee said the government will be doing extensive evaluations as the sessions are being conducted, with the goal of forming a bi-lateral agreement with the federal government on what action the province wants to take in terms of child care.

-reprinted from Sherwood Parknews

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