

Alberta's first licensed on-reserve daycare opens at Kapawe'no First Nation ^[1]

Author: Graney, Emma

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EXCERPTS

Last July, Kapawe'no First Nation contacted the province with a unique proposal.

The northern Alberta community of Grouard had a daycare since 2014, but Chief Frank Halcrow wanted it to become provincially licensed.

Within a week, the government was working with the First Nation to make that happen.

Licensing a daycare is a lengthy process — specific conditions need to be met, paperwork must be completed and often improvements are required.

It took about one year, but Kapawe'no finally secured its ticket this summer.

On Friday, it celebrated its opening day — and its position as the first licensed daycare on a reserve in Alberta.

The NDP is big on affordable child care. It was part of the party's 2015 election platform, and the government has established a limited program of \$25-per-day child care centres.

Children's Services Minister Danielle Larivee was at the event Friday.

As the MLA for Lesser Slave Lake it is, after all, her riding, not to mention within her portfolio.

Speaking with the Journal ahead of the celebration, Larivee said giving the daycare the official nod means parents will be able to access the same subsidies available to non-reserve Albertans.

The licence also means Kapawe'no will be eligible for top-up payments for the four daycare workers at the centre, and it will give parents piece of mind that care is being evaluated on a regular basis.

"(Chief Halcrow) was incredibly passionate about making sure the people in his community had access to licensed daycare," Larivee said.

"It had never occurred to me that had never happened before, but there have been barriers for years as to how those on First Nations can access services that the rest of us just take for granted, so obviously this is another one of those."

Once Kapawe'no's story gets out, Larivee fully expects more First Nations to get in contact about licensing their own daycares.

Kapawe'no First Nation Daycare Centre director Carol Hanlon said she is "ecstatic" about the licence and what it means for the community.

The daycare program is also close to Northern Lakes College, so students can now apply for provincial child-care subsidies to help with child-care costs.

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