Edmonton daycare aims to teach cultural acceptance to children

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The 1,000 Women Child Care Centre works with children to create and share stories about their unique cultures

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EXCERPTS

Anastasia Hennigar is studying to become a hospital unit clerk at NorQuest College while her two-year-old daughter is learning about different cultures at a daycare downstairs.

Inside the playroom are cultural symbols from around the world. In one corner, Indigenous drums line a bookshelf, waiting to be played. Rugs from all four corners of the globe line the floor. In a basket near the door is an assortment of dolls of every shape, size and colour.

"Being in class and knowing that she's just downstairs ... it's nice knowing I can get to her fast," the 27-year-old Cree woman said.

Hennigar sends her daughter to the 1,000 Women Child Care Centre at NorQuest College that aims to teach children cultural competence and understanding.

Although the program has been open to the children of NorQuest students for three weeks, it's now opening its doors to the general public for the first time.

The program focuses on letting children learn through play, Jasvinder Heran, the centre's executive director, said.

'Chip away at those barriers'

The children work with educators to create stories they can share with their peers.

For example, a young boy came into one of the rooms, pulled out a rug and started to pray, Heran said. From there, the child worked with an educator to explain in writing what they were doing.

The child's story is then put in a binder and used by educators to teach other children about different cultural practices.

"We really want to chip away at those barriers," Heran said. "Hopefully we can change the way we look at somebody [who is] different or speaks a different language."

To teach cultural tolerance, a staff member from the centre sits down with each family and works with them to find a learning objective for their child.

From there, the centre hires staff with knowledge of specific cultural practices and languages to work with the children.

Sixty-four per cent of NorQuest's students are born outside of Canada and speak a combined 103 languages, the college said in a news release Wednesday.

Heran said the daycare is looking to reflect the diverse population of the college in its staff.

"Parents are able to come in, they feel welcome, they become part of this extended family," she said.

In Hennigar's case, her daughter is working one-on-one with a Cree educator to learn the language. Hennigar said she never understood Cree growing up, so she is grateful her daughter will be able to learn it.

Hennigar said the exposure to children of different cultural backgrounds is a good way for her daughter to learn tolerance.

"She's never going to grow up thinking about racism or anything because it'll just be normal to her," she said.

The program is open to children between the ages of 12 months to five years.

The cost of the daycare is a flat fee of $1,195 per month per child for full-time care. Part-time spaces are not currently available.

For some students, the college offers up to $500 in subsidies and grants to make the program more affordable.

Hennigar said the program is worth the cost when she sees that her daughter is healthy and happy.

"When I come to pick her up, instead of trying to get home, she's trying to pull my hand so I can go play with her. It's just a beautiful environment."

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