

Yukon College to expand early learning and childcare programs ^[1]

College officials pledge more focus on communities and more 'flexible' courses

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EXCERPTS

Officials at Yukon College says they plan on hiring more staff to work in communities as the college tries to boost graduation rates in the early learning and childcare program.

Brooke Alsbury, an instructor and program advisor with the college, says new territorial funding will allow it to expand its presence outside Whitehorse.

"I think primarily what you will see is more happening in communities," she said.

The college is pledging community consultations after the territorial budget earmarked \$270,000 in new funding.

The territorial government wants to address a shortage of workers in Yukon who have degrees in early childhood care.

It has also announced \$100,000 worth of bursaries to help early childhood education students.

'Level threes' hard to find in Yukon

Certification for early childhood development in Yukon is divided into different levels. Level one requires a 60-hour course, level two requires the completion of a year of studies and level three requires a diploma.

The diploma can be earned at Yukon College in two years by a full-time student but most people take longer to obtain all the required credits.

Workers with a level three diploma tend to earn more than \$20 an hour.

Joy Agus, owner of the Grow With Joy daycare in Whitehorse says there is a shortage of people with this degree.

Workers with diplomas are especially sought by employers because their salaries are partially subsidized by the Yukon government, Agus said. The subsidy provides more for level three workers to encourage daycares to hire them despite their higher per-hour wage.

'Funding will allow us to be more creative'

Some community programs might be offered at new times of the year or in new formats, Alsbury said.

A recent example is a two-week intensive course in Old Crow. This year, the college offered courses in Pelly Crossing and Mayo with the two communities served by a travelling instructor.

"Generally we work on a semester basis but this funding will allow us to be more creative," Alsbury said. "We can find ways of delivering content that is more relevant to the community."

The Yukon Childcare Association is welcoming the news. Yukon daycares are looking for staff, especially those with a level three certification, said Cindy Desharnais, the association's chair, .

"There are actually a lot of programs looking for trained early-childhood educators," she said. "That goes from level one right up to level three. There's a lot of job vacancies."

The association hopes more people will be able to study without leaving home and work in local daycares, Desharnais said.

"It's great to see money finally going into childcare," Desharnais said. "Hopefully this does help get people back into the field because it's basically a recruitment and retention issue."

Enrolment in childcare programs is increasing.

Yukon College currently has about 100 students enrolled in early learning and childcare program across the territory.

The course can be accessed from any community campus, but there aren't any students enrolled in Watson Lake, Ross River or Faro this year. All three communities do not have daycares.

Andrew Richardson, the college's dean of applied arts, says some new staff will be hired to create a more personal connection in communities.

He says the college will first study the issue and then determine what's needed.

"Students in communities outside of Whitehorse won't have web-conferencing as their only option for joining courses," he said. "We're hoping that will increase retention rates, graduation rates. There's a huge potential upside in having this money to work with over the next few years."

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