

Child care shortage in Timmins most critical for infants ^[1]

'Some moms call when they've only just had their baby, looking ahead to going back to work after 12 months. We don't even take infants,' says daycare director

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EXCERPTS

If you asked a few local parents if they think there is a shortage of child care spaces in Timmins, you'd likely hear a resounding, "Yes."

The question is: how much of that is perception, and how much is reality?

TimminsToday contacted several local childcare centres to find out how many had wait lists. The majority did not accept infants (children 0 to 18 months) at all, and most had wait lists for school aged children. Toddler spots (children 18 to 30 months) and pre-school spots (children 31 to 68 months) were often available, but child care providers warned they could fill up at any moment as parents on the wait list were called.

Some wait lists had more than 20 names on them, TimminsToday found.

Cynthia Gubbels, director of Bambi's Castle Day Care Centre, says wait lists alone are not an accurate reflection of childcare shortages.

"I don't put a lot of faith in wait lists," says Gubbels. "The same person on my wait list is also on the wait list at the YMCA and other places. Most people when I call them back are not interested anymore and have made other arrangements."

Gubbels says the majority of calls she receives are for infants.

"Some moms call when they've only just had their baby, looking ahead to going back to work after 12 months," says Gubbels. "We don't even take infants."

Shannon Costello, program manager, Children's Services at the Cochrane District Social Services and Administration Board (CDSSAB), says infant care is hard to find due to the costs of running infant programs.

"Licensed infant child care spaces are very expensive to operate and operators have frowned upon investing into them in the past," says Costello.

Costello says the shortage of childcare spots is also caused by a shortage of Registered Early Childhood Educators.

"The Provincial government has provided funding to assist child care operators to help improve wages and make them competitive to other positions within the Ministry of Education," says Costello. "Post-secondary institutions that offer programs for Early Childhood Education are starting to see a small increase in their enrollment."

Parents looking for childcare spots, including for their infants, will have more opportunities this fall.

Both District School Board Ontario North East and the Northeastern Catholic District School Board have received government funding to create childcare spaces at Schumacher Public School and St. Joseph School respectively. Collectively, this will create 20 infant spaces, 30 toddler spaces, and 48 pre-school spaces.

The YMCA of Timmins will also be opening two childcare centres soon, one at Pope Francis School and another on Moore Street in South Porcupine.

Despite new child care centres on the horizon, Costello says the CDSSAB is looking to expand Northern Treasures, its licensed Home Child Care Program that allows home child care providers to act as independent contractors under the CDSSAB's license.

"We are looking to recruit more home providers," says Costello. "In recent months our call volume has increased and there is a need for home child care in all age groups."

"Becoming a home child care operator is a great opportunity for the stay at home mom or dad to make money in their home while raising their child," Costello adds. "It's very rewarding to be able to provide quality care for a small group of children in your home."

Joanne Lacombe-McColeman has been a home daycare provider through Northern Treasures for 12 years.

"I absolutely love my job," Lacombe-McColeman says. "We have fun with crafts, songs, stories, dancing, outings and picnics at the park among many other activities."

"Having a home daycare is so rewarding. We share so much love and happiness and I enjoy seeing the children grow."

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