

'Childcare is a chronic issue': Iqaluit parents quitting jobs, dropping out of training programs ^[1]

Education officials looking into \$16M investment for full-day kindergarten

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EXCERPTS

The government of Nunavut is exploring rolling out full-day kindergarten across the territory to help ease a daycare shortage causing parents to quit their jobs or drop out of school to stay home with their children.

Robbie Laisa, 30, is learning how to build homes from the ground up. He's missed more than half of his work placement in the past four months to care for his spouse's four and five-year-old boys.

There's at least a two-year wait list for a licensed daycare in Iqaluit.

"There were no spaces," said Laisa. "Kind of frustrating ... I want to learn stuff but couldn't because I had to stay home with the kids. They need to make more daycares."

Another student in his placement at ilinniapaa Skills Development Centre is struggling with the same issue.

Gordie Kopalie, 22, has been pulled away from his training to become a carpenter, so he can watch family members' children after school and on holidays so they won't miss work.

"It's pretty challenging," said Kopalie. "Family's first. It's unconditional love."

Issue hasn't changed in 18 years: single mom

Helen Roos, president of the development centre, says the daycare shortage is the biggest issue holding her clients back.

It's a problem she struggled with personally in Iqaluit as a single mother more than 18 years ago. Roos' son is now an adult and she says it's disheartening that in all that time, the problem hasn't improved.

"I'm angry. I'm really frustrated and really disappointed," said Roos. "Childcare is a chronic issue." "We've had people who have had to drop out of the programs, have actually had to quit their work experience placements because they couldn't commit to the hours."

That included a mother of three who showed great potential, but even the centre couldn't help her secure daycare, said Roos.

John MacDonald, assistant deputy minister for Nunavut's Department of Education, said it's hard to hear stories like this.

"It's certainly disappointing," said MacDonald.

"It's keeping people from being able to work, from being independent, from being able to support their families."

700 people on daycare wait lists

MacDonald told CBC News that Iqaluit is one of the communities that's struggling the most with a daycare shortage.

There is no centralized list in the territory keeping track of how many people are waiting for a spot in a licensed facility.

The Department of Education did its own informal study with daycare and calculated that roughly 700 people are on wait lists for daycare in Iqaluit. That number includes all daycare facilities across the city and may contain duplicate families. "There's definitely a huge challenge there," said MacDonald. "There's a gap between the number of licensed spaces and clearly the need."

MacDonald says there is now a push underway to change that.

The new government has mandated daycare as a priority and has given the education department the power to see if full-day kindergarten in Nunavut is possible.

So far, the department has completed a feasibility study, an in-depth needs analysis, and will now spend the next year engaging with stakeholders.

Portables to free up space for kindergarten

Early estimates show it could cost the government \$16 million over multiple years to phase in full-day kindergarten in Nunavut, according to MacDonald.

The challenge now is finding the space.

Nunavut bucks the national trend. More than 30 per cent of the population is under 14 years of age — that's double the national average.

Since enrolment in schools is on the rise in Nunavut unlike the rest of Canada, it may not be as simple as retrofitting empty classrooms in some communities for full-day kindergarten.

Some grades may need to be redistributed across some schools to create space. Officials are also looking into building portables for older students to free up space at elementary schools.

MacDonald says full-day kindergarten would help give children a safe, structured place to develop early literacy skills.

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada announced last August that it plans to build a new daycare in Iqaluit by the summer of 2018. It's expected to be the largest daycare in Nunavut and will have room for 60 children. However, the demand is even greater.

The current wait list at Aakuluk Day Care, one of the largest facilities in Iqaluit, is more than 150 people.

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/05/childcare-chronic-issue-iqaluit-parents-quitting-jobs-dropping-out>

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