

\$25-a-day child care program is life-changing, parents say ^[1]

Red Deer families and staff share how the new pilot project makes all the difference

Author: Falk, Michelle

Source: Red Deer Express

Format: Article

Publication Date: 3 May 2018

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Parents of children enrolled in Early Learning and Child Care centres selected for the Province's new \$25-a-day pilot program are thrilled to be paying reduced fees starting in June.

"It's literally life changing for us—it's huge," said Leanne Johnson, parent of three-year-old twins Piper and Grady at Pines Day Care.

She added, "When we heard about this \$25-max-a-day we were absolutely elated. I may have shed a tear or two in the school."

Pines Day Care in Red Deer and Kids 3 Day Care & OSC in Blackfalds were among the local facilities accepted for the pilot, as well as Le Pays Des Jeux, which will open in September.

"I am excited because we didn't qualify for a subsidy—my husband and I are just at that perfect place in the middle class where we still have no money," Johnson said. She added, "It's almost a mortgage payment that we're saving each month."

Candice Jacobsen, program director at Pines Day Care said it was a real privilege to tell families about the subsidy and in many cases an emotional experience.

Upon hearing the news, Savannah, a single mother of two, told Jacobsen that this meant she could now afford to buy her children bikes for their birthdays.

"The quality of care is not going to change, we have really good educators here and the centre is going to go on and thrive because of this," Jacobsen said.

Johnson said that having Piper and Grady at Pines Day Care has done wonders for her twin's development. Born prematurely they have often fallen behind the mark, especially with language skills, now they chat with her in full sentences.

"Since coming here it's been leaps and bounds and we're so happy that we're here," she said. Johnson said they had been willing to make sacrifices to keep their kids at Pines because of the benefits they saw but that the new subsidy will make all the difference.

The application process for the \$25-a-day pilot focused on affordability, accessibility and quality. Individual centres were asked to identify ways they could meet particular community needs, whether through language or culture, flexible hours, or connections to local service organizations, according to the Provincial office of Children's Services.

Erin Tibble and Jennifer Winters, directors at Red Deer Child Care, said this year's application emphasized the need to add more spots for kids, which is why they knew Pines Day Care was a great fit for the program.

Pines Day Care hopes to expand to add 60 children.

Pines Day Care partners with the WHS Aboriginal Head Start program as well as with CARE (the Central Alberta Refugee Effort).

"The expansion of \$25-a-day child care will add 13 more locations in 11 communities in Central Alberta. In addition, five of these child care centres will be brand new. Giving parents of nearly 800 children affordable child care options is not only going to make life better for everyday working families, it is going to have huge benefits for these communities as well," said Hon. Danielle Larivee, minister of children's services.

The pilot project does not affect the existing subsidies that low-income households already receive. This means some parents of children under 19 months will pay zero dollars and those with older children may pay as little as \$4 a month for high quality full-time day care.

"Like a lot of families in this province, we don't have the family dynamic that is just the Monday to Friday, 9-5, we have to use day care because both of us need to work," Johnson said.

"It's not our parent's generation where the mom stays at home and raises the kids anymore."

Region: Alberta ^[3]

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