

Port McNeill in focus: Childcare availability crisis a good news/bad news story ^[1]

Opinion

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On average, childcare across the country is unavailable, unaffordable, and the quality varies. Second, Port McNeill has one of the youngest populations on the island with an average age of just 39 so it's no surprise there are lots of children around (and as young people get priced out of homes down island, it won't be surprising to see even more young people move up).

The real good news is our new provincial government is taking steps towards implementing a universal childcare program to address affordability.

Universal child care programs have found to be largely self-funding as it allows increased numbers of caregivers (primarily women) to re-enter the workforce, significantly increase GDP, and reduce the number of families who live in poverty.

So, the question is – while the provincial government address the issue of affordability, how can child care availability be improved in Port McNeill? Surely, we can do better. We need to have the services and amenities that will keep young people working and living here.

Not having childcare availability in a small town is a big deal. Since moving to town last summer Kelcey Ayers and her partner have been utilizing informal childcare in absence of having a spot in one of our day care facilities. “Figuring out how one can go to work and ensure childcare has been taken care of has been an ongoing source of grief and stress... so much so there is ongoing talk of one of us just staying home and not working or moving back down island where we have more supports.” The town can't afford to lose yet another young family.

This could be a great opportunity for a new childcare business to develop. Both daycares in town state they have no further room for expansion and agree more options would be beneficial to the community.

David Mitchell, at Community Futures, states that entrepreneurs could “definitely contact us to get some support” such as with developing a business plan or help with accessing funding.

Intriguingly, the provincial government is planning “prototype projects” throughout the province – for both urban and rural settings. More information about what those will look like will be available in a few months. Who knows, perhaps if we mobilize now we could become a project site with some advocacy.

Childcare is rewarding work – as MacEachern states, “what other job do you have where [the customer] tells you they love you every day?” A universal childcare program would benefit everyone– it's time to get serious about working collaboratively to help address the availability crisis in town.

Matt Martin is the president of the Port McNeill Kids in Motion non-profit and is interested in social issues such as child care, housing, transportation, education, food security, and local politics.

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