

Fort McMurray faces shortage of child-care professionals, advocacy group warns ^[1]

'School starts in a week and we have a shortage of staff'

Author: Thurton, David

Source: CBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 1 Sep 2018

AVAILABILITY

[Read online](#) ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Fort McMurray can't open new early child-care centres and sufficiently staff existing ones because the city has a shortage of skilled workers, one advocacy group says.

In addition to annual child-care fees that can rival the cost of university tuition, a top concern is the lack of staff with sufficient skills, according to a recent report compiled by the Fort McMurray Early Years Coalition.

"School starts in a week and we have a shortage of staff," said Janet Huffman, an advocate for the coalition. "Centres are poaching staff away from other centres."

Half of Fort McMurray's 16 accredited child-care centres surveyed said they don't have enough qualified staff to meet demand.

Only one-quarter of the 85 daycare workers surveyed had two-year diplomas, which qualifies them to be supervisors.

Under provincial rules, facilities must have one supervisor for every four staff members.

Yet the same the study also found that Fort McMurray has a surplus of child-care spaces in some neighbourhoods. Less than half of the total 670 spaces are occupied.

In many cases, that's because empty spaces aren't in subdivisions such as Timberlea, which is filled with younger families. The report found some families aren't willing to travel more than 10 minutes for childcare.

To staff new locations in convenient neighbourhoods would require more skilled workers, and an on-going stream of graduates to counter the high turnover in existing locations, Huffman said.

Bring back child-care diploma: advocate

Huffman blamed the shortage on the high cost of living and the low wages child-care workers earn.

On average, workers receive lower benefits than staff who work for school boards, and their wages average from \$13.60 per hour (minimum wage) to about \$22 per hour, Huffman said.

Also, many child-care workers either leave town or find local employers in other fields willing to pay more.

The local Keyano College didn't help the situation, Huffman said, when it suspended its two-year early child-care diploma program in July 2015.

'Certain realities we have to work within'

The institution would like to offer the diplomas but it can't because of low enrolment, said Vincella Thompson, dean of university-studies at Keyano College.

The program had only 15 students when it was cancelled, Thompson said.

"I am committed to seeing qualified staff work with children," Thompson said. "I think all children deserve that. I've got four grandchildren, five and under. So I know the challenges that my children face."

"I am passionate about that. But there are certain realities we have to work within."

In September, Keyano College will offer a distance diploma through Northern Lakes College. If there's an uptick in enrolment, Keyano would re-introduce an on-campus diploma program, Thompson said.

But Huffman said the program wasn't well advertised and students weren't recruited as aggressively as they are for the trades.

"Keyano pushes a lot of courses people need to work at an oilsands site," Huffman said. "But we still need to support our families here in town, and families can't go to work at site if they don't have child care for their children."

Related link:

Region: Alberta ^[3]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/09/fort-mcmurray-faces-shortage-child-care-professionals-advocacy-group>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/09/fort-mcmurray-faces-shortage-child-care-professionals-advocacy-group> [2]

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/childcare-shortage-fort-mcmurray-worker-1.4802549> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7859>