

Island voices: Capital region has a child-care crisis ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Not a day goes by that there isn't a story about the capital region's housing crisis in the news, on social media or discussed over coffee in the lunch room. The housing crisis is real, relevant and urgent. But it is not the only crisis that is taking place in the region — the child-care crisis is just as urgent for many families.

The Cridge Centre for the Family has been providing child care for Greater Victoria for the past 145 years. We are uniquely positioned in our community to speak to the crisis that we see happening.

And a crisis it is. We receive up to 10 calls a day from parents who are desperate to find child care. We have received calls from families who are preparing to move to Victoria for employment opportunities — they are desperately trying to find child care before they even start to look for housing.

We recently had an immigrated Syrian family in tears in our office — they can't take English classes and recertify in their chosen professions because they can't find child care for their young children. The family is living with five people in a one-bedroom apartment. They are ready and motivated to work and become taxpayers, but are held back by child care alone.

These stories are heartbreaking and extremely common. What is even more frustrating for us is that we have an empty classroom, ready to be filled with children from our wait list, but we can't find qualified professionals to staff them, even though we pay union wages.

The real crisis behind the lack of child-care spaces is a crisis of staffing. In order to meet B.C. licensing requirements, classrooms must have one qualified early childhood educator for every eight children (with an even lower ratio for infants and toddlers). Early childhood educators are in extremely short supply.

And why is that? After studying for two years and potentially accruing \$20,000 worth of student loans, these professionals have low salaries and a lack of respect to look forward to. Many child-care centres pay only slightly higher than minimum wage, and benefits are often not available. Added to that the lack of respect and esteem given to them — they are often seen as babysitters rather than educators — and it is no surprise that few students choose this profession. The few who do choose it, often don't stay in the profession longer than five years — they can't afford to if they want to have a family of their own or live above the poverty line.

The astounding truth is that the people who are caring and educating our future leaders are among the most undervalued professionals across Canada.

There is most certainly a housing crisis in the Capital Regional District, but the child-care crisis is just as extreme and urgent. Until we value and adequately compensate our child-care professionals, it doesn't matter how much money the government spends on child-care spaces — because there won't be the professionals to staff them.

What can we do? First of all, thank a child-care worker for their incredible sacrifice and commitment to our children. Second, learn more about the issue and potential solutions — www.10aday.ca is ^[3] a great place to start. Last, be a voice in your community and with policy-makers to advocate for change.

Until we all speak up and demand better child-care options, our children, families and community will continue to struggle.

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Related link:

Region: British Columbia ^[4]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/09/island-voices-capital-region-has-child-care-crisis>
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