

New Indigenous child care opening in Clearwater ^[1]

Eagle's Nest plans to give strong attention to the children's ancestors and connection to the land.

Author: Polmateer, Jaime

Source: Clearwater Times

Format: Article

Publication Date: 14 Sep 2018

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

A new childcare program will open in Clearwater next month for families identifying as First Nations, Metis or Inuit, operating in collaboration with the parents and the various cultures they come from.

The program, which starts Oct. 1 and has been dubbed the Eagle's Nest, was created by Yellowhead Community Services (YCS) and will offer care to children from birth to aged five.

The Eagle's Nest plans to give strong attention to the children's ancestors and connection to the land.

"The focus will be mental, emotional, physical and spiritual—the balance from the medicine wheel," said Sheila Nyman, elder for the program, who identifies as Syilx Metis.

"It's home-like and the children will eat together—it's also multi-aged and the parents will be involved, those that can."

Parents have the option to volunteer with cooking traditional meals, teaching bead work, and sharing specific knowledge in any capacity they feel comfortable.

There will also be a parent council, giving a hands-on opportunity in the program and insight to their children's care.

"The parents are always welcome to bring their own knowledge and participate as much or as little as they want to, because we really want to look to the parents as the people with the knowledge of their own children," said Susanne Butcher, manager of Early Childhood Development Services at YCS.

The Eagle's Nest will have eight spaces available for families who'd like to join, but there are plans to expand based on the program's success.

The starting hours for the program will be Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m., and as management meets with families and assess the need, hours will be adjusted accordingly.

Georgina Leppky, who has deep roots with the Nisga'a Nation and is the early childhood educator and manager for the Eagle's Nest, said there's a big need locally for such a program and looks forward to its start.

"We really wanted to provide a safe environment for Indigenous people who aren't on their traditional territory," Leppky added.

"So we can honour where we are and still bring our own cultures and keep them alive."

Butcher agrees there's no other childcare program specifically meeting the needs of the Indigenous population, and though there are several other licensed programs in the community, they're quite western in terms of philosophy and care.

The creation of the Eagle's Nest not only celebrates and recognizes Indigenous people, but is a commitment from YCS to help those families and honor the land and community shared by all, she said.

"In this program we're also going to provide all the food for the families—so the nurturing, feeding, healthiness and connectedness to the land—we want to follow that through from planting, harvesting, preparing and eating together," said Butcher.

"With Georgina, that will be part of the program, to plant seeds and harvest them, cook and eat together as a family unit; that will be included in the price of the daycare."

She added the new B.C. childcare benefit supporting parents with paying childcare fees will also help eligible families attend the Eagle's Nest program.

Nyman said, "The Eagle's Nest and YCS wish to thank the ancestors of the Simpcw First Nation for welcoming us and holding this territory in such a sustainable way for thousands of years; they have taken care of all the creation we see surrounding us and the daycare is a way to help the children and have them nurtured into that awareness of the environment of the earth of creation."

Those looking to register for the program can contact Leppky at 250-674-1828.

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