

Group identifies barriers to getting child care in New Brunswick

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Single parents, children with disabilities, shift workers may face more barriers finding affordable child care

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EXCERPTS

A Saint John group is holding a focus group to find out if a government child-care program established by the former government is working.

Brooke Cheeks, project manager for the Saint John Women's Empowerment Network, said the general impression is that it's working well but may be leaving single parents, children with disabilities and shift workers by the wayside.

"People are still paying up to \$145 per month per child even when they do qualify," she told Information Morning Saint John.

"And even more on school closure days, PD days anything like that. So it really is a big financial strain on families, especially single-parent families who maybe are working minimum wage jobs, shift work and so on."

In January, the newly elected Progressive Conservative government announced it will be keeping the designated centre parent-subsidy program, which was set up by the former Liberal government.

The program allows non-profit and for-profit daycares to be designated as early learning centres, making them eligible for increased funding.

Money from a federal-provincial agreement would subsidize families using the centres based on their income. People with household incomes of less than \$37,500 would not pay anything.

"Being affordable is huge," Cheeks said. "But we actually want to make sure people can access the daycare and get there and be able to go to work during those hours and so on. So there's a couple of things that are still at play."

She said the designated centres may not be equipped to take care of children with disabilities, and the nine-to-five schedule that most daycare operate by may not work for single parents who work nights.

The Saint John Women's Empowerment Network is holding a focus group Tuesday evening to hear people's thoughts.

"We want to hear from people who are actually using the program," Cheeks said. "And also if there's anything else that we can help them address, if there are still barriers that exist for them even when they are accessing the program."

She said people can register online at "Tackling Childcare Barriers focus group," on Eventbrite.

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