

# Daycare dilemma in rural areas: Plans underway to close childcare gaps in Baddeck, Port Hood <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Grassroots organizations are working to create licensed daycares in rural Cape Breton.

A group of parents has banded together in Inverness County to create a childcare space inside an existing school.

Project proponents say there is a gap in licensed and regulated daycare services in Mabou and Port Hood.

"Stories of people driving so far to get childcare or I see people on Facebook saying, 'Can someone take my kids today?' — this is not a good situation," said Thom Oommen, a member of the newly formed Bayview Child Development Association.

Oommen said his group is spearheading an after-school program and daycare for children as young as 18 months inside the Bayview Education Centre in Port Hood.

Oommen believes there are developmental benefits to having young children attend classes within the same complex as Primary to Grade 8 students.

"A lot of kids ... they never had any experience with a school and then you come in and you're just this one kid in a class of 16 or 20 kids, and it can be pretty scary," Oommen said.

"My daughter goes to daycare in Whycocomagh, where the older kids at (Whycocomagh Education Centre) will often read to kids at the daycare."

According to the 2016 Nova Scotia Review of Regulated Child Care, the availability of childcare increases an area's workforce participation.

Access to childcare services is also cited as an expectation when young families are deciding whether to live and work within Nova Scotia.

"It's such a great model that I think a lot of people don't know about." — Thom Oommen

Oommen said there are many practical reasons why daycares should be placed inside schools.

For starters, he said, the properties are properly maintained for snow removal, heat and lights and janitorial services.

He said gaps in daycare exists alongside the province's pre-primary program, which offers early childhood development within a short span of time. Due to its time constraints, Oommen said it is not always a viable childcare solution for many working parents.

"My motivation was well if it works in Whycocomagh, right in the school, why can't we try to do it at other schools because we have schools that might have a little bit of extra space," he said.

"It's such a great model that I think a lot of people don't know about."

Oommen said officials with Strait Regional Centre for Education have been supportive of the daycare project, which has already received \$100,000 from the federal and provincial governments to support renovations.

The group launched a GoFundMe page last month to help support costs not covered by government programs. A fundraising goal of \$10,000 has been set.

Members of the Bayview Child Development Association are now hoping to open the daycare by September or earlier.

Inverness County parents are not the only Cape Breton group attempting to create their own daycare space.

Victoria County residents are also moving ahead with plans to create a daycare in Baddeck, where no such facility currently exists.

Board members of the Baddeck Nursery School were disappointed by the province's decision to introduce a pre-primary program last September as it meant closing their not-for-profit centre.

The nursery held its final graduation ceremony in June 2018, saying there simply weren't enough three-year-olds for their program.

**Related link:**

**Region:** Nova Scotia <sup>[3]</sup>

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