

Penticton mother launches support group for families scrambling to find child care ^[1]

'Some daycares have completely closed their waitlist'

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EXCERPTS

A Penticton, B.C. woman, who struggled to find child care for her baby, has formed a group to help other parents across B.C. looking for child care.

Waitlisted Project B.C., founded by Amanda Burnett, a mother of two, features stories from parents across B.C. who want access to affordable, quality child-care.

In February, Burnett was told that her then four-month-old daughter would not be able to attend the same daycare her son was already attending. She is number 75 on the wait list out of 77.

Burnett looked at other daycares, but was told there was no guarantee of a place for her child by the time she had to go back to work and her maternity leave benefits ended.

"Some daycares have completely closed their waitlist. Other daycares just say they're going to take your name," Burnett told Chris Walker, host of Daybreak South.

Desperate for childcare

Burnett says many parents who share on Waitlisted Project B.C. are resorting to other methods of child care. Many rely on their own parents to watch their children. Others turn to other parents or nannies, who can be expensive.

"They're just sort of scrambling to find any sort of child care at all," she said.

Burnett believes the root of the problem is a lack of early childhood educators in B.C.

"I think that early childhood educators just don't get paid enough. They really need more compensation for the work that they do, which will raise the whole system and encourage new caregivers to join the workforce as well," she said.

Since taking office, the NDP government has begun subsidizing child care. Burnett said child care is now more affordable, which has increased demand.

Province has strategy

Katrina Chen, B.C.'s minister of state for child care, says the province is trying to find a solution to the child-care crisis as quickly as possible.

"I'm not surprised at all," said Chen when asked about Burnett's struggles with the child-care system.

"This is the first time, really, the province is looking at the concerns and the struggles that parents have to see how we can support early learning and child care in B.C."

Chen says the province is rolling out a workforce strategy that focuses on recruitment and retention of early childhood educators, with increased support for wage enhancement, training and education.

The province has a bursary program for early childhood educators, says Chen, noting students can have most of their educational costs covered if they're eligible. The province is also working to help those already in the field to upgrade and enhance their quality of training, she said.

Testing for the NDP's \$10-a-day child-care pilot project started in November 2018, lowering bills for some parents by hundreds of dollars each month. Chen was not able to give a target date for when the program will be ready to go.

"We'll definitely be able to have more concrete solutions in the coming year or two to build a long-term plan to build finally, and hopefully, a universal child-care plan for B.C. families," Chen said.

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