

Child care demand in Nunavut lags rest of country ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Nunavummiut make the least use of early learning and child care services in the country, according to new data from Statistics Canada.

Only 36.7 per cent of Nunavummiut newborns to five year olds are dropped off at daycare, a preschool program, left with a relative or taken to a private caregiver. The next lowest jurisdiction is Manitoba at 50.5 per cent. Quebec leads the way at 78.2 per cent. The Canadian average is 59.9 per cent, according to Statistics Canada.

The primary reasons given for not using child care in Nunavut were that one parent decided to stay home (28.9 per cent) and unemployment (23.9 per cent).

For those seeking child care, difficulty finding it is not much more of an impediment in Nunavut than in Canada overall, the survey results show. In Nunavut, 39.6 per cent of respondents reported challenges finding child care while the national average was 36.4 per cent.

Affordability was only mentioned as a hurdle by approximately six per cent of Nunavummiut who participated in the survey.

In the territory, a daycare centre, preschool or childcare centre represented the most common form of child care at 57 per cent compared to 33.8 per cent who rely on a relative.

The Department of Education, which oversees child care in Nunavut, is striving to make child care more accessible by requiring new schools to have early childhood programs; increasing funding for licensed facilities while stipulating that fees charged to parents not be raised; giving more funding to the Young Parents Stay Learning Program so they can keep working towards their high school diploma while their children are in daycare; and working with community organizations to open or reopen daycares and licensed family day homes, according to Leslie Leafloor, acting director and manager of the early learning and child care with the Department of Education.

Shortage of spaces in Baker Lake

Baker Lake MLA Simeon Mikkungwak has been raising the need for more daycare spaces in the community he represents since 2017.

With just over 2,000 residents, people in the Kivalliq hamlet have only the Baker Lake Day Care Centre at their disposal. Incorporated in 1983, the daycare can accommodate 20 preschoolers and four infants.

Many people from the community work at the gold mines, meaning they're often gone for two-week stretches.

"You would think with a community like Baker Lake, with industry right in the back door, a larger daycare would be established, but nothing," said Mikkungwak.

Some residents have been on the waiting list for up to a year, said Rayla Bouska, manager of Baker Lake Day Care Centre, a non-profit society.

"The board of directors have been meeting with other organizations in town to try to get either a bigger daycare centre or expansion but it's still in the works," Bouska said. "There is demand for day care, maybe even another daycare centre in Baker Lake."

At one point, a local group formed with a goal of launching an Inuktitut daycare but it "just seemed to die off," Mikkungwak said.

"As an MLA I try and do my rounds and get out into the public, and as a grandfather also it's very evident," Mikkungwak said, referring to what he sees and hears about the shortage of local daycare spaces.

Although the Baker Lake Day Care Centre isn't on the verge of expansion yet, one new development is an extension of operations. The service had shut down seasonally in past years when schools closed, but the daycare has remained open this summer. Things have been going well over the past several weeks, but it will be up to the board of directors to assess whether remaining open for summer will become permanent, Bouska said.

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Region: Nunavut ^[3]

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