

Fort McMurray daycares struggle to find staff, but new college program could help ^[1]

Kedra Abdurahman says she's hiring new staff every month or two

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EXCERPTS

There aren't enough qualified child-care workers in Fort McMurray, but a newly reinstated program at Keyano College may help fill that gap, according to a local child-care advocacy group in Fort McMurray.

Last year the Fort McMurray Early Years Coalition surveyed the community's 16 accredited child-care centres. Half didn't have enough qualified staff to meet demand.

The coalition said the situation hasn't improved in the last year. It hasn't conducted another survey, but the members meet every month to talk about issues within the industry. Staffing is cited as a constant struggle for many.

Coalition member Kedra Abdurahman, supervisor at Children First: Eagle Ridge Daycare, said she's always fighting to find and keep qualified staff.

"I have a posting up there every month, or once every other month, stating that we're hiring. Even in my emails to parents I ask them if they know anyone," Abdurahman said in an interview.

The pool of candidates is small, many workers get poached by other daycares, and some leave after getting work experience, Abdurahman said.

Abdurahman thinks Keyano's program could help fill the worker gap.

She graduated from Keyano's diploma program in 2015, the last year it ran before being cancelled due to low enrolment. That year there were 15 students in the program.

In the last year, the coalition, stakeholders and Keyano have worked together to revamp the program and reintroduce it.

One of the big issues identified in the meetings was the timing of the course. Many people said they couldn't take time off work to go to school.

Now the program's courses are offered evenings and weekends to make it possible for students to attend school and work a full-time job.

"Before they would have to be in school during the day," said Stephanie Brake, chair of human services at the college.

"We couldn't keep that sustainable for them with their work life and their personal lives."

As well, the course doesn't follow the traditional semester schedule. There are five semesters — September, November, January, March and May.

Four students are in the program this semester. Brake said the low enrolment is concerning, but she's optimistic.

"Whenever any institution implements a new program, it is typically low enrolment," she said.

She said she's also talked to all the students, and they've told her many other child-care workers are interested in the program, but are cautious about the workload.

"We've added new courses, we've totally changed some to be more in line with current-day trends and best practices," Brake said.

And she said there are benefits to the newly redesigned program.

"We're not running on curriculum that's even a couple years old. We're running on curriculum that's at the forefront of ... issues within child care."

Brake said she doesn't have a specific time frame in which she has to increase enrolment, but she said she has full support from the

college's president and vice-president.

In the meantime, Abdurahman said she is still looking for staff and is encouraging any qualified child-care workers to send in an application.

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