

# NS: Rural child-care centre cuts hours after losing staff to pre-primary<sup>[1]</sup>

Operators say very few qualified staff available in rural areas

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTED

Thomas Oommen says he'll have to find ways to entertain his four-year-old daughter at work each afternoon for the foreseeable future.

The after-school program she attends at the Whycocomagh Child Development Centre in rural Cape Breton has cut its hours, after yet another staff member left last week to work for Nova Scotia's pre-primary program.

"It's a real challenge," said Oommen.

Day care owners have complained they can't compete with the wages and benefits offered by the government-run pre-primary program, which was launched in 2017 and has been quickly expanded.

The problem is particularly severe in small communities such as Whycocomagh, where there are few trained early child educators.

The Whycocomagh Child Development Centre has lost three of its six trained staff to the pre-primary program, said director Monica Boyd, and they have not been able to hire trained replacements. Provincial regulations require that two-thirds of the staff have early childhood education qualifications.

"We've been posting since June 2018, consistently, and no qualified people have applied," Boyd told CBC Cape Breton's Information Morning.

## Lack of qualified people

Oommen's daughter has been attending a pre-primary program at the Whycocomagh Education Centre, and would then move over to the after-school program at the day care until his work day finished.

But now, Oommen said his daughter will have to take the school bus to his work and stay with him for the remainder of the day, where he'll likely have to "stick her in front of a screen."

"I'm really hoping the government can work with Monica and figure out a solution to this," he said.

Oommen said that solution might include allowing temporary staff who do not have the full early childhood education qualifications.

Boyd said centres are allowed to hire temporary staff, but the conditions are restrictive and dictate that those staff be willing to work towards getting their qualifications.

In a rural area, Boyd said, that can be challenging.

Both Oommen and Boyd said they're aware of other rural day care centres that are having trouble recruiting or keeping staff.

In Port Hood, the new Bayside Day Care Centre, which has yet to open, received "surprisingly" few applications for the director's position, said Oommen, who is on the new centre's board.

Education Minister Zach Churchill has acknowledged the challenges faced by the daycares, and said training and recruitment are key.

He has agreed to meet with daycare operators and early childhood educators Thursday in Halifax.

**Related link:**

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

**Tags:** workforce<sup>[4]</sup>

staff-pre-primary

#### Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/19/10/ns-rural-child-care-centre-cuts-hours-after-losing-staff-pre-primary> [2] <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/cape-breton-child-care-pre-primary-1.5296770> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7853> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/workforce>