

LETTER: The gap with childcare worker training in Squamish — and B.C. ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

I am a mother of two children ages four and six, and a licensed in-home childcare provider. I am writing to you to inform you of the risk of wasted tax dollars which are intended to address the growing childcare crisis in B.C.

One aspect of the childcare crisis is the lack of qualified Early Childhood Educators. Federal and provincial governments are making significant financial investments to address this. This year, the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training invested millions into expanding post-secondary programs, which offer Early Childhood Education. Capilano University accessed some of these funds which enabled them to offer an Early Childhood Education program in Squamish.

Local media published this story, as it was much needed good news to a community who recently lost a large childcare center due to a lack of qualified ECEs. The Ministry of Children and Family Development have also contributed by offering bursaries to fund post-secondary studies, which are required to become a certified Early Childhood Educator. The combination of the local program being offered in Squamish and bursaries made taking the next steps in Early Childhood Education accessible.

The reason I am writing to you today is that I am one of 23 students who enrolled in Capilano University's new Squamish Early Childhood Education program. Even though I have just started, I have already been inspired, realizing my passion and purpose as an early childhood educator. I see the same in my classmates, some of whom are even paying babysitters so they can attend classes in the evening. We are all passionate about what we do. We pour ourselves into our work as childcare professionals all day, and as students in the evening. Our families also make sacrifices in order to support our passion for this work. We were all incredibly disappointed to find out, however, that we will not receive any bursary funding. This semester alone cost each student approximately \$1,000.

Early Childhood Educators are paid less than \$20 per hour. Real estate and rental costs in Squamish have sky-rocketed in the last five years. The reason there are not enough certified Early Childhood Educators in Squamish is because it is not economically viable. Without the bursary funding, it makes no sense for many of my classmates to pursue this program.

During Capilano University's information session launching the Squamish Early Childhood Education program, prospective students were told that every year, thousands and thousands of dollars are not distributed because students don't apply. While this was not a guarantee of funding, it certainly implied that funds were readily available. At the end of October, we were told that there was an unprecedented number of applicants to the bursary program, and that they were cutting off applications a month early.

After several unanswered phone calls and emails to follow up on the status of my application, I was told over the phone that the funding was being prioritized according to program completion date.

Being that Squamish's ECE program is new, we are all first-year students, so it was no surprise when I learned recently that all bursary funds have been expended and no more further bursary applications will be approved.

So, what changed? We were told that each year, thousands of dollars in ECE bursaries are unclaimed. Why then were there over 2,500 applications this year? I'll tell you what changed, the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training invested millions into expanding post-secondary programs which offer Early Childhood Education, and no one thought to increase the amount of bursary money available to fund all the new ECE students.

Lack of bursary funding for Squamish ECE students also puts other initiatives at risk. The District of Squamish, School District 48 (SD48), and Sea to Sky Community Services Society (SSCS) have partnered in a project to build a childcare facility at Valleycliffe Elementary which will create 36 new, and much needed, childcare spaces.

The project is scheduled to be complete in the spring of 2021. Qualified ECEs will be required to staff this center, thus underlining the importance of the bursary funding for ECE students in Squamish. The Union of British Columbia Municipalities alone has contributed \$851,000 toward this project. All levels of Government are investing in childcare, which is amazing, but initiatives -to fund new spaces are useless without qualified ECEs.

I am appealing to you today to ensure that bursary funding is made available to Squamish ECE students specifically. It would be such a shame for millions of dollars of tax-funded, well-intentioned, investments to be wasted because students cannot afford the tuition without bursary funding.

Lack of enrollment will likely affect the viability of Capilano University's ECE program in Squamish.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration in this matter.

Lindsay Kingston

In the Meadow Childcare

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