

2019 Child Care Action Plan shows access, availability as number one challenges for child care in Kimberley ^[1]

Be the Change Group was recently contracted to complete a child care programming and facilities gap analysis.

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EXCERPTS

The City of Kimberley has been working with the Be the Change Group out of Vancouver to complete a comprehensive child care action plan for the past several months. Findings show that more child care options are needed for Kimberley's growing population, and availability is one of the main issues.

In March of this year, the City of Kimberley was awarded \$25,000 in funding from the Union of British Columbia Municipalities through the UBCM Community Child Care Planning Program to conduct a child care programming and facilities gap analysis.

The City contracted Be the Change group to complete the analysis. Thorough research has been conducted over the past several months through community forums, focus groups, and surveys to receive feedback from local parents, child care providers and informants.

This analysis will help support the creation of quality, affordable child care spaces to help provide employment, relief for working parents and support a strong economy, says Pamela Walsh, Manager of Communications and Community Development for the City.

On Monday, December 9, 2019, Jelena Pavlovic and Brandy Svendsen of Be the Change Group presented their findings to Council. The goal moving forward, they say, is to use these findings to create a clear path when addressing and planning child care needs in Kimberley.

"Access and availability of child care in Kimberley is a relevant and emotional topic for the community," said Pavlovic and Svendsen. "Kimberley's recent population growth and the necessity of addressing the community's growing child care needs were referenced by various respondents throughout our engagement."

The project objectives were to collect information regarding childcare needs in the community, create an inventory of existing child care spaces, and identify actions that can be taken to meet Kimberley's child care needs.

319 people responded to the various events and surveys. 257 of them were parents, 19 were key informants, nine were general community members and 34 were child care providers.

According to the data, there are 1760 parents in Kimberley, and the survey captured 228 of them.

Kimberley's population is 7,425. 1,070 of those people are children between the ages zero and 12 years. There are 620 children between the ages of six and 12. There are 235 children between the ages three and five, and 215 children between the ages of zero and two.

There are 248 licensed child care spaces for just over 1,000 children. Only 19 of them are spaces available for children between the ages of zero and three.

There are 13 licensed day care facilities, two registered license-not-required facilities and 21 child care programs (some facilities are licensed for more than one program).

The findings show that long waitlists, hours of care, and affordability are major flaws in the system, according to parents.

Pavlovic says that for parents and families, the most frequently stated child care issue is a lack of access.

The majority of parents spoken to say that they are currently on a waitlist for child care, and most have been on waitlists for a year or more. The longest and most-competitive waitlists are for the zero to three age range, with reported waitlists of over 100 children.

"When asked about key issues affecting child care, 56.7 per cent of parents who took the survey said that there is not enough availability," Pavlovic and Svendsen said in their report. "Further, of the parent respondents who indicated that their children are not in care, 90.7 per cent explained that there are no spaces available and 55.8 per cent said that they cannot find quality care for their child.

"Similarly, the majority of parents who have a child in care said that they chose their child care arrangement because it was the only option that was available. To this end, nearly 90 per cent of parent survey respondents whose children are in care reported having difficulty finding

a suitable space, and, of these, 91.7 per cent indicated that this difficulty was due to lack of spaces.”

One family round table participant said it would be better to have a choice, as opposed to the take what you can get scenario.

“The ideal scenario is that we all have the number of child care spots that we need, and we feel comfortable with the child care spot that our kids are going to,” the parent said. “That we’re empowered to have a choice, and it’s not just you get what you get, this is the spot – take it, like it or not, whether you think it’s safe or not.”

Pavlovic and Svendsen also say that with regards to child care programming availability, the community engagement made it clear that the absence of the school-district run StrongStart BC program is creating a child care gap.

Parents say that the cost of child care is a barrier when it comes to returning to work. 40 per cent of provider survey respondents indicated that they provided child care services from their homes, with the majority explaining that they are stay at home parents.

There are also concerns about the quality of care being offered. 76.2 per cent said they want licensed group child care for children under three years old. 66.7 per cent said that it’s very important or important that their child’s care provider is certified in Early Childcare Education. 52.3 per cent said they could not find quality care for their children.

Be the Change says that low wages, staff recruitment and retention makes ECE qualified workers hard to come by.

There is difficulty attracting and retaining qualified childhood educators due to low provider wages (\$16 to \$18 an hour for qualified ECEs), losing staff to better paying jobs, high burnout and a lack of qualified ECEs.

“I feel for them as a profession, because I feel like they are asked a lot and they aren’t compensated,” said one key informant, outlined in the presentation. “So this is, I think, an issue as to why would someone want to open a facility, when the business model doesn’t work? It’s tight...it’s low pay and high demand.”

Be the Change has many recommendations for the City to help advocate for and address the child care needs of its residents; help increase ECE wages; support heightening the value and professionalism of a career in ECE, and help expand access to childcare spaces, particularly for toddlers and infants.

However, Be the Change says that provincial and systematic changes are also necessary.

“Ultimately, while there are issues the City can address to help improve child care for their community in the short term, for there to be sustainable change, there is a clear need for larger systematic changes in our provincial system and in the ECE profession,” wrote Pavlovic and Svendsen. “As with health care and education, which are administered provincially, there is an incentive for the City to advocate provincially funded child care in B.C..”

Some of their City-specific recommendations included but weren’t limited to:

- Embed child care planning into community planning activities
- Develop a child care action plan implementation team that collaborates with the key players in the region
- Create spaces for child care programming
- Consider developing a City-run or City-administered child care facility
- Expand access to funding
- Improve logistics to facilitate flexible child care
- Revisit the action plan in three to five year

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[2] <https://www.kimberleybulletin.com/news/2019-child-care-action-plan-shows-access-availability-as-number-one-challenges-for-child-care-in-kimberley/>

[3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7860>

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