

Vernon, B.C. hears about 'desperate need' as city's first child care space action plan created ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The lack of quality child care has left some Okanagan families with few options.

Now the City of Vernon is stepping up its response to the issue by creating its first-ever child care space action plan which could help the community create more daycare spots for kids.

A consultant working on creating the action plan said that, so far, the city has heard from families who responded to a survey that there is a "desperate need" for more child care spaces in Vernon and Coldstream.

"We had about 450 people respond to the survey and over 200 actually took the time to put written comments," said Gabi Haas, who is working to create the city's child care needs assessment.

"All of those comments were about the desperate need for child care in Vernon and Coldstream."

The city said the planning process is expected to provide an inventory of the current child care spaces and wait lists, as well as determine what the demand for child care will look like over the next decade.

Vernon said the action plan is also supposed to suggest locations where child care centres could be set up or expanded.

Additionally, the city said it has already applied for grants "to create new child care spaces within the city, to meet the overwhelming demand" for certain types of care.

Haas said the action plan may help the city secure grant funding by demonstrating the need for child care in Vernon.

The help can't come soon enough for many parents, like Kyla Henry, a mother of two.

Henry hopes to go back to work as a French immersion teacher in May, but it looks like she'll have to settle for working part-time because she can't find appropriate full-time child care for her two kids.

"I do find it frustrating that it's not because I want to go back part-time or because I feel like I need that," Henry said.

"I can't go back [to work full-time] because I don't have the option to."

But it's not due to a lack of trying. Her nine-month-old daughter has been on wait lists since well before she was born.

"As soon as I found out I was pregnant with her — I was five weeks pregnant — I phoned and I put her name on wait lists and basically, so far, I've not been able to find anything," Henry said.

She's not alone. Fellow Vernon parent Jenna Boulianne is back at work now full-time, but only after a lengthy struggle to find child care for her two kids.

"I looked for six months and even when I had to come back to work, I had to come back to work part-time because I didn't have full-time care until a couple months later," Boulianne said.

"So that was very difficult."

Their stories suggest the lack of child care spaces is not only impacting families, but also employers.

"I'm a French immersion elementary school teacher. It's a career that's hard to find replacements for at the moment so, even now, people are asking me, 'When are you coming back to work?' because they have jobs that they need to fill," Henry said.

The city is holding two public meetings on Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2020, to gather public input for the action plan.

The meetings will be held at the Vernon Recreation Centre from 2 to 4 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m.

Related link: [City of Vernon seeks public's thoughts on child care space](#) ^[3]

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