Hundreds of P.E.I. children on waiting list for childcare spaces [1]

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EXCERPTS

Megan Crozier didn't know how long she would have to wait when she put her son, Chance, on a waiting list for daycare when he was two months old.

About nine months later, Crozier said she's struggling to find childcare so she can start looking for work.

"It's so frustrating," she said.

Now at 11-months-old, Chance is one of hundreds of children in P.E.I. on the provincial childcare registry waitlist, with many parents struggling to find a place to help care for their children.

During a recent public accounts committee meeting, MLAs heard from provincial early-years advisor Carolyn Simpson who said the early-learning waitlist has about 500-600 infants registered over the next year or two.

Not all of them will need a space right away, Simpson said.

"You have to recognize that parents, when they register, we have to tease that back to some of these children may not have been conceived yet."

Simpson told the MLAs that in any one year the demand for spaces is at least a couple hundred children and families are planning in advance of when childcare will be needed.

The industry has to be ready to respond to the demand for childcare spaces, so the province works with the Early Childhood Development Association and providers, she said.

"We follow the trends. It's not like we sit and wait."

Most people are looking in Charlottetown, Stratford and Cornwall, Simpson said, adding that the province is working with a few established centres to grow.

How the childcare registry works:

- Register online with the P.E.I. Early Learning and Childcare Registry at peichildcareregistry.com [3]
- Choose from a list of childcare providers. Parents can register for more than one centre at a time.
- Sign in at least every 90 days to keep the account active.

Parents will be contacted when a spot opens up at one of the selected providers.

She said parents aren't just going on the registry and they're also calling centres to check on the situation there.

"The last thing you want is a parent not be able to return to work or school or accept a job."

This was the reality for Crozier, who said she recently graduated with a master's degree in social work but hasn't been looking for work because she doesn't know if she will have childcare available for her son.

"That's kind of been the biggest struggle for me because I would love to work and I know the jobs are out there, but without childcare put in place it is hard to start looking and getting things lined up."

Crozier said she's the first person in her social group to have a baby, so she didn't know she needed to get Chance on the waiting list so early.

"It is really discouraging and I wish it was better than that because it does make it hard, I think, primarily for women who are the caregivers, to stay in the workforce and find work."

Although the waiting list hasn't helped her find a spot for Chance, Crozier said she might have found an in-home provider.

For Crozier, if she can find a place for Chance, it ultimately doesn't matter to her if he goes to a childcare centre or an in-home provider.

"As long as it's a safe environment," she said.

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