

Manitoba's daycare centres struggle to keep staff with some wages lower than retail ^[1]

Manitoba's daycare centres struggle to keep staff with some wages lower than retail

Author: Froese, Ian

Source: CBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 26 Feb 2020

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

MJ Farrow feels helpless. Some of her child-care workers could earn a higher wage in retail, and there's nothing she can do about it.

"When I can have a staff say to me, 'I can go work at Shoppers Drug Mart and make more money than I can working in daycare,'" — Farrow said she is left dejected.

She's tried to convince two employees at her Stars of Promise daycare to get more training, but they don't see the point.

"They told me: why would I do this when there's no money in this field?" Farrow said. "Why should I come out owing \$10,000 or more in student loans, and get peanuts — \$15.50 [an hour]."

Poor wages — like an employee of 20 years making around \$20 an hour — are one drawback facing non-profit daycare centres in Manitoba. They're stretched financially by a stagnant provincial grant since 2016, and by having parent fees capped by the province since 2013.

The status quo isn't sustainable, Farrow insists. She wrote to government to make her case earlier this year, while struggling to prepare the 2020 budget for her Concordia Avenue daycare.

Likened to a crisis

"It's really hard when ... you're cutting everywhere and you can't give a raise increase of more than one per cent because you just don't have the money," said Farrow.

Her daycare has resorted to continuous fundraising. They sell chocolates and chips. They hawk hot lunches twice a month. They ask for donations of toys and clothes.

"Everybody keeps telling us we're supposed to have quality care, and I don't understand how we can have quality care," Farrow said.

The Child Care Coalition of Manitoba understands the lament from Farrow and other daycare directors. They will host a press conference later today to highlight the growing concern in child care, which the organization likened to a crisis.

Brianne Goertzen, a coalition member, says the answer to this problem is at the government's fingertips.

The NDP commissioned a report in 2016 that proposed scaling parent fees based on income, and adding thousands more child care spaces — but the main thrusts of the report were never acted upon.

Instead, the Progressive Conservatives embarked on their own review, focusing on the funding model. KPMG won a contract to do the review in 2019 after signing a non-disclosure agreement.

"If we already have something on the books, why would we be going to KPMG at this point in time, and why would we be making sure that this contract was private and confidential?" said Goertzen, who once ran in a federal election for the NDP.

She worries cost-cutting will take precedence over improving the daycare system.

Goertzen holds the previous NDP report in high regard. It sought ways to create a universally accessible child care system available to anyone who needs it.

The report pitched higher wages and a sliding scale for daycare costs — families below the median income would pay less than 10 per cent of their income toward child care.

The document also set a course for the government to realize its promise of building 12,000 additional child care spaces.

It suggested stand-alone preschool centres on school property — as well as spaces in post-secondary institutions and new Manitoba Housing properties — as possible options.

Waiting list was 16,000-strong

The province had 16,000 kids on the waiting list for child care spots, but the government removed the list from its website last year because it considered the estimate inaccurate since it included 1,000 spaces for children who hadn't been born, the province said last year.

In 2019, the Tories were re-elected under a promise to encourage more home-based daycare and boost funding for those spaces. The Progressive Conservatives pledged a \$500-per-month subsidy for 3,000 lower-income families to use for whichever child-care choice they see fit.

In a statement, the province said it funded more than 2,270 new spaces since the Tories' election in 2016, with another 1,600 new spaces expected by the end of the fiscal year.

The new review will be released this spring. It will assess the effectiveness of current operating grants, parent fees and wages.

It will also provide "recommendations on the implementation of a new portable child care benefit for families to support accessing the child care of their choice," Families Minister Heather Stefanson said.

She said the Tories' review is distinct from the report from the former NDP government, "which did not consider other innovative options for providing child care."

NDP child care critic Danielle Adams said the province needs to ensure non-profit daycare centres are viable.

"With the freezing [of grants], which is essentially equated to a cut, it makes it harder for daycares to operate. It makes it harder for them to maintain staff, which ultimately makes it harder for them to provide child care for families in Manitoba."

Related link:

Region: Manitoba ^[3]

Tags: wages ^[4]

workforce ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/20/02/manitobas-daycare-centres-struggle-keep-staff-some-wages-lower>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/20/02/manitobas-daycare-centres-struggle-keep-staff-some-wages-lower> ^[2]

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/low-wages-daycare-centres-manitoba-1.5475805> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7857> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/wages> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/workforce>