

'A tough spot': Parents hit by coronavirus downturn struggle to pay for daycare, but don't want to lose spaces ^[1]

Frustration over paying 'for a service that's not being rendered ... while we're in a financial crisis'

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EXCERPTS

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to leave businesses in financial uncertainty, some Manitoba daycares are asking parents to share their financial burden — even though many of the child-care centres are currently closed.

The Manitoba Child Care Association says while many centres are offering credit or reimbursement on dues already paid, others are also asking parents to donate their fees, if they can.

But MCCA president Tracy Cosser warns some daycares have such high costs that even if they're not open, they may need parents' fees for their business to survive the COVID-19 outbreak.

"Every centre has different overhead," says Cosser, who also operates three non-profit daycares.

"Whether you have your own building, or you operate out of a strip mall or a school, our expenses can be very different," she said.

"The bottom line is we have to be here post-pandemic."

Garderie les Tournesols, a St. Vital daycare which is staying open for now, is asking all parents to pay their bills in full — even if their kids aren't attending — or risk losing their child's spot.

"Some daycares can afford to not make parents pay," the child-care centre wrote in French in a letter to parents last week. "Unfortunately, we are not among them."

That's tough news for Lynne Gagnon. The mother of two says she waited three years for a spot at Garderie les Tournesols.

"It's frustrating ... to have to pay for a service that's not being rendered," said the mother of two. "But it's also frustrating to have to pay for a service while we're in a financial crisis, as well."

Like many Manitobans, Lynne Gagnon and her husband are both out of work because of the pandemic. She's now taking care of her kids at home, since most child-care centres are closed.

Gagnon isn't sure she'll be able to pay daycare fees, after the family's bills come due on the first of the month. But she says not paying would also put her in a difficult position.

"Although I can't afford to pay for services while they're suspended, I definitely can't afford not to have a daycare spot once I'm able to work. It's like we're stuck between a rock and a hard place."

Hope daycares 'will do the right thing': minister

The province asked daycares to close as of March 20. But it also encouraged some to keep going, to serve families of essential workers.

Families Minister Heather Stefanson has said all daycares will continue to get their usual provincial grants, regardless of whether they've suspended operations.

"We are also working with centres individually if they are willing to remain open, but are struggling financially to maintain operations during the emergency," wrote the ministry, in a statement to CBC.

Stefanson's office says it also sent out a letter to daycares, asking them to go easy on parents.

"For centres that continue to charge parent fees to hold a spot, we also strongly encourage them not to charge those fees to parents," wrote Stefanson.

"Given that all centres will be receiving their full operating grant to cover expenses, I hope that they will do the right thing when it comes

to parent fees."

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