

Sask. daycare providers calling on government for financial support during COVID-19 pandemic ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

SASKATOON -- Daycare providers in Saskatchewan say they're facing numerous challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and are calling on the provincial government to provide financial assistance.

Lindsay Jaworski has been running her licensed daycare for almost four years.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic is causing her to consider closing temporarily.

"Should I stay open? Should I close? It's tough because we don't really know what direction to go right now," Jaworski said.

She said none of her parents are essential workers and most of them are pulling their kids out of daycare because they don't need it right now or can no longer afford it.

Jaworski is worried that closing could affect the kids she looks after.

"The kids do really need this daycare feel, it's normalcy. They aren't getting that and I'm seeing that they're anxious and they are nervous, but coming in and getting them to play and laugh, it's really helping. And just the thought of closing and not being able to see these kids again for who knows how long, that's scary."

It's this reason and wanting to help essential workers that some daycare operators are choosing to stay open.

Jaworski, who is part of a daycare networking group that consists of approximately 230 women across Saskatchewan, said the issue is that daycare operators don't have access to financial aid if they are still open, so many of their incomes have dropped.

This is an issue for Jodie Pren, a private dayhome provider in Saskatoon.

"My biggest concern is that I've lost 50 per cent of my income, and can't fill the spots because my own children are home from school. I'm left without the opportunity to recover those wages but also don't qualify for any assistance. There are so many gaps in the system that seem to let us relentlessly fall through the cracks. At every turn, the wording depicting who is 'qualified' for help is so vague that I'm left feeling like maybe I do qualify, but what if I don't?" Pren said in a release.

Emily Mills who operates a daycare in rural Saskatchewan shares this view and said there are ongoing expenses even when kids aren't there.

"Most of us sacrifice a huge part of our homes to use for daycare (like our basements). Even if children are not there playing in our playroom, we are still paying for our furnace to heat the area. Many of us also have daycare vehicles that we are still paying off (even if they are parked and not being used)," Mills said in a release.

These daycare operators are also asking for assurance from the government that if they choose to close their doors for their own safety reasons, they'll have access to financial aid.

"What I think all us daycare providers need is that extra assistance for running and topping off if we don't have enough numbers and we can't do this financially. And the option to get financially assisted if we do need to close," Jaworski said.

Chris Hodges, media relations consultant with the Ministry of Education, said the government recognizes the vital role child care operators continue to play during the pandemic and respects the decisions these organizations have made with regards to staying open or closing.

"The Government of Saskatchewan will continue to provide regular government grants to licensed child care facilities including home based – whether open or closed – through April, and are assessing the situation as it relates to the continuation of that funding. This would include the regular monthly nutrition grant that is provided to licensed home child care providers."

Hodges said licensed child care facilities have not been mandated to stay open.

"The school-based centres that are providing service to workers responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, are making these spaces available voluntarily."

The province said it's working to minimize the financial impact to those centres who are providing this service.

"I do think daycare providers job isn't done in this pandemic yet and I don't think we should get checked off...we just need attention and we need care too," Jaworski.

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