

Thousands of kids but limited summer camp, childcare options ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

MEDICINE HAT, AB – There may be thousands of elementary-aged children in Medicine Hat but, as it stands now, only a few dozen will likely get an opportunity to attend camp this summer.

On top of that, there remain few childcare spots open for out-of-school care in the city.

It's an issue the coordinator of Monkey Business Day Homes says is becoming a bigger pinch point for parents as they are being called back to work and who are looking for childcare options.

"Childcare is really critical to getting the economy open and moving again," said Kari Fischer. "If people can't go to work, you can't open stores, you can't open up shops. Things that have been closed can't reopen unless those families are able to find childcare."

Fischer says she's been getting more requests for placements than she can fill but hopes to have more day home spaces available.

Still, the need is growing.

The Medicine Hat YMCA did get some good news late last week from Dr. Deena Hinshaw in the form of now being able to utilize its two facilities (downtown and South Ridge) for the purposes of camps.

But licenced childcare options at the Y remain limited to those six and under and – as of Monday – only 32 summer camp spaces each week will be available between June 29 and the end of August.

And the future of childcare in the city is uncertain.

"I think it will be increasingly more challenging – especially in the near future for smaller childcare centres and operators to continue to make a go of it," said Sharon Hayward, Medicine Hat YMCA CEO. "Our families are worried... Even though there is maybe a need or desire for childcare, there is also concern from a health point of view."

Jennifer Usher, coordinator of the Medicine Hat and District Childcare Association, says health regulations, while necessary, also come with a financial cost – ones that are putting the squeeze on providers.

"Because programs can only have a certain number of children in each room and, depending on their setup, if they only have one room then that really limits the number of children they can bring back," said Usher, adding, "you do need extra staff to do all the sanitization."

Several childcare providers who have spoken to *CHAT News* are warning of a possible crisis in childcare once federal and provincial COVID-19 aid packages run out – especially if there is a second wave.

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