

Childcare advocates lay groundwork for national program ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Children First Society director Patricia Davison is preparing.

She said the NWT Early Childhood Development Association spent the last month surveying parents others connected to the sector to get their input on the future of child care in the NWT.

Now that the surveys and discussions have been finished, a final report will be tabled by the end of the month and sent to the NWT Early Child Care Working Group. The information will then be forwarded to the GNWT to help inform decision making.

"It's to help figure out the best way to fund young children so that they can develop and grow into a good, well-rounded citizens," she said. "The type of model we're looking for is that early childhood programs would have enough funding that the parents would only have to contribute a small portion of the overall cost."

The 2021 federal budget earmarked \$30 billion over the next five years to establish a \$10 a day National Child Care program. For parents, this means they would spend a maximum of \$10 for each day a child is in some sort of external care. Low prices are accomplished by subsidizing day cares, early learning centres and other facilities to cover the expenses.

Every facility has its own challenges and circumstances, but Davison was quick to point out several ways steady funding would benefit the Children First Centre and its students. Noting digging up grant funding requires a full-time staffer plus a second person to help out just to keep the lights on, she said dedicated funding would not only give peace of mind to the society but also allow it to begin making longer term plans. It would also free up staff – and grant money – for larger, one-off projects.

Davidson said research has shown every \$1 spent in early childcare saves between \$9 to \$13 in health, education and justice down the line as children grow older.

Another major area dedicated funding would help the centre and all early child care providers was in staffing. Davison noted she had employees who had been with the centre since it opened eight years ago who don't have retirement plans. While her staff are dedicated, she noted many child care providers have great difficulty keeping good staff for any length of time because the wages are so low.

"Children First Society is very fortunate in a lot of ways," she said. "We're doing okay, but when you look at what we're paying our staff for the work that they do and the education that we're expecting them to have, it just doesn't balance out.

"People will come in, we'll train them, we'll give them some great skills and some early childhood courses and they'll go across the street and make way more money. So why would they stay? I don't hold it against them, but it's a real dilemma."

Compounding the problem is the current funding model is based on attendance, meaning if a child stays home sick one day, the facility doesn't get funding for that day, which could mean staff hours need to be cut.

Past that, Davison said she would like to use funding to reduce the costs of programming to parents to make the centre more inclusive, and with that in mind expand the building or move to a larger one. As of right now, the Children First Centre is at capacity and has a waiting list.

"Our mission is to support the greatness of all children in Inuvik. That's very hard to do when we're bulging at the seams facility-wise," said Davison. "Right now, if you're a single-income, lower-waged person, it's difficult. We've implemented lots of things to help people access programming, but if the program fees were lowered completed we could open up the doors and really say it's for everybody."

Region: Northwest Territories ^[3]

Tags: federal budget ^[4]

funding ^[5]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/05/childcare-advocates-lay-groundwork-national-program>

[2] <https://www.nnsl.com/news/childcare-advocates-lay-groundwork-for-national-program/>

[3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7861>

[4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federal-budget>

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