

DSSAB proposes solutions to resolve daycare shortage issue in Magnetawan ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

As families in Magnetawan cope with a childcare services shortage issue, the District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board has proposed two solutions that may help parents.

The first suggestion calls for the DSSAB and Magnetawan to work as partners and make the recruitment of new Home Child Care Program providers a priority.

This will mean identifying and hiring qualified personnel who can look after children in a daycare setting.

The second solution will see the DSSAB commit to developing an after-school program for school-aged children during the school year beginning this September.

The Near North District School Board is on board with having the after-school program on its property.

DSSAB says the after-school program will run as a pilot project for the upcoming school year and then it will be re-evaluated to see if it should continue.

DSSAB says it will need a minimum of 10 to 12 children enrolled in the program full-time, as well as recruiting enough qualified people to look after the children.

Working parents in the community have had to find alternatives to childcare when the only licensed daycare facility closed at the end of June after the person who ran the operation retired.

DSSAB is trying to replace this service with its first proposal by creating a new Home Child Care Program that meets the needs of the community.

In a letter to Magnetawan council, DSSAB chief administrative officer Tammy MacKenzie makes it clear that what is not in the cards is creating a full-blown licensed childcare centre in the community.

DSSAB says this type of centre is not a viable option at this time because a licensed childcare centre has to operate on a break-even basis and there have to be at least 25 children registered in the program full-time.

DSSAB says this type of centre also would be required to follow the Child Care and Early Years Act, which takes the cost to operate this type of facility in the Parry Sound District to about \$800,000 a year.

The \$800,000 doesn't include any money needed to acquire a building for the children and staff.

In mid-June, DSSAB carried out an online survey aimed at Magnetawan parents in need of childcare.

Out of those responses, the survey showed 13 non-school aged children needed full-time daycare while five full-time school aged children needed to be looked after.

According to the survey results, the number of children in need of daycare didn't meet the DSSAB's threshold of requiring at least 25 full-time registered children to justify a childcare centre and that's why the agency proposed the Home Child Care Program alternative.

Magnetawan deputy mayor Tim Brunton said he hopes DSSAB's plan will come to fruition, but added he is a little nervous about its success.

That's because DSSAB said the minimum number of school-aged children needed for the after-school program was 10 to 12 students, but the online survey only identified five full-time school-aged children who needed care.

"So they're giving themselves an out almost immediately based on their survey which is disappointing," Brunton said.

Brunton also didn't like that the DSSAB was trying to run childcare as a break-even operation.

He said childcare is not a business but a service that DSSAB looks after.

"Daycare is necessary to communities and there is a cost to subsidize it," he said.

"It would be wonderful if it was break-even. This seems to be a very well written letter that gives them lots of outs. We'll have to stay on top of this."

Mayor Sam Dunnett shared Brunton's concerns, saying he was "totally taken aback with the phrase break-even."

Dunnett said social services are a cost that is borne by taxpayers.

However, council was on board with helping DSSAB find qualified childcare staff.

To that end, it's giving DSSAB \$500 the agency can use to provide prizes to successful applicants as it undertakes a recruitment campaign.

The town council also is asking DSSAB to continue to be proactive in finding solutions and develop policies for home daycare services.

Rocco Frangione is a Local Journalism Initiative reporter who works out of the North Bay Nugget. The Local Journalism Initiative is funded by the Government of Canada.

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