

Child care 'disruption' possible ^[1]

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Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 9 Feb 2022

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Sioux Lookout, Ont. — Some Sioux Lookout parents may be scrambling for options for their children by the end of March if the two municipally-run day-care centres close due to a dispute that has pitted one union against another.

The town's Biidaaban and Sioux Mountain Children's Centre day cares were to be transferred to the Kenora District Services Board at the start of this year under a plan announced in September.

Sioux Lookout is the last community in the region to transfer municipally-run child-care services to the services board. Supporters say it makes sense because the services board specializes in providing certain social services, including child care.

Sioux Lookout's two municipal day cares provide 35 spaces; there are more than 100 children on a waiting list. Sioux Lookout has other day-care services, but it wasn't clear Friday how many spaces they provide.

On Jan. 20, the services board told the municipality it intended to "withdraw" from an agreement to operate the two municipal day cares due to an unresolved dispute over which union would represent about 20 day-care workers.

The workers are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), but were destined to become part of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers if the transfer to the Kenora District Services Board went through.

The electrical workers union represents the board's unionized employees. But the Canadian Union of Public Employees argued the Sioux Lookout day-care workers should remain with them and filed an application to maintain the status quo to the Ontario Labour Relations Board.

"Losing (Canadian Union of Public Employees) status would set child care back decades in Sioux Lookout," the union's Local 2141 vice-president Kristin Wray said in a news release. "We'd be back at square one at the bargaining table to maintain our collective agreement rights that ensure respectable jobs and quality child care in our community."

The transfer of the day cares' operations to the Kenora District Services Board was to have taken place on Jan. 1. In the wake of the dispute, the municipality said it would keep them open until March 31.

"We remain hopeful that there will be minimal disruption in the provision of child-care services, and that the (Kenora District Services Board) will have alternative arrangements in place to fill the gap," Sioux Lookout chief administrator Michelle Larose said in a municipal news release this week.

"Nevertheless," Larose added, "parents should prepare in the event that there is a disruption to the services."

In the same news release, Mayor Doug Lawrance said "it's unfortunate that the issue of which union will represent the Sioux Lookout child-care workers is hindering the smooth transition of child-care services."

"Our primary goal from day one of the transfer talks," Lawrance added, "was to have this resolved to best provide continuous service to local families and children."

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: child care services ^[4]

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