

Local child-care centres ready to accept more children, but problems hiring staff preventing growth ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Child-care centres in Fort McMurray say they can take on more children as their waiting lists grow, but a shortage of early childhood educators is limiting expansion plans. Organizations want the provincial and federal governments to offer more support to their sectors.

Since the pandemic began, the YMCA says 20 per cent of Alberta's early childhood educators have left the province or are no longer working in the industry. The province's occupational outlook forecasts that by 2028, there will be a shortage of 4,600 early childhood educators across Alberta.

The province's \$10-per-day child-care deal with the federal government is expected to create more than 40,000 new child-care and early learning spaces across Alberta. The agreement is part of a national \$30-billion, five-year campaign to make child care more affordable across Canada.

Another provincial-federal agreement is expected to give as many as 1,300 early childhood educators with a wage top-up as part of the "first step in our long-term strategy" to support the field.

The Boys and Girls Club (BGC) of Fort McMurray wants to hire three more full-time staff, while the YMCA of Northern Alberta wants to hire 17 early childhood educators at six centres in Fort McMurray.

Annalise Yuzda, vice president of childcare at the YMCA of Northern Alberta, said in a Tuesday interview that the industry struggled to find staff even before the pandemic. Yuzda adds that staff burn-out within the industry was also a common occurrence that has worsened because of the stress caused by the pandemic.

"It's been two long years of COVID and child-care has been on the front line," said Yuzda. "We have been operating since June 2020 right through and it's been hard."

Locally, the YMCA has 317 children attending their child-care centres and another 160 children on the organization's waitlist. The BGC has also seen demand for child-care increase since the provincial and federal government announced their \$10-per-day child-care plan last November.

The pricing reductions will be rolled out in phases. By the end of 2022, Alberta will see a 50 per cent cut in average parent fees for children under six in regulated child-care.

Jennifer Kennett, executive director of the BGC Fort McMurray, said the organization has 85 children in their child-care program with room for about 15 more children. But, even that increase isn't possible until more more staff members have been hired.

"Anybody who has ever taken care of a child for longer than an hour knows it's a pretty demanding role," said Kennett. "It is engaging, nurturing, developing, it's all of those things you want to have for your children but it's not being supported at a higher level."

Kennett and Yuzda would like to see some form of the northern living allowance reinstated for early childhood educators, as well as benefits and pension plans. The Alberta Government cancelled the monthly northern living allowance for Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo's child-care workers in July 2020. The subsidy was worth \$12,480 annually.

-With files from Vincent McDermott, Laura Beamish and Olivia Condon

Region: Alberta ^[3]

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\$10 a day ^[5]

early childhood educators ^[6]

problems-hiring

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