

Providers and parents struggle to navigate Saskatchewan child care regime ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

“I’ll be full for two years right now with the waitlist I have.”

That’s the situation Loida Calderon finds herself in. Calderon is the owner of Daycaroo, a licensed home daycare in Regina.

Daycaroo has had 12 full spaces since opening eight months ago. Calderon says her current waitlist is probably somewhere in the 50-family range. Licensed home daycares have a 12-space limit.

Parents desire for licensed daycares can be largely attributed to the fact that starting in February parent child care fees were reduced by up to 50 per cent in licensed care.

This is part of the government plan to get child care fees down to ten dollars a day by 2025. In their recently released 2022 budget, the Saskatchewan Party set aside \$309.6 million in funding for child care and early learning. This year’s funding will support further reducing parent fees as early as September 2022.

“Parents call me and ask right away if I’m licensed and subsidized because that’s all they care for right now,” said Calderon.

For some parents the fee reduction is saving them between \$300-\$400 a month per child. Also included in the budget is \$4.3 million to create 6,100 new child care spaces in centres and family child care homes as part of the province’s goal to create 28,000 new licensed spaces over the next five years.

Calderon is all for creating new spaces but she’s concerned for private daycares, as more and more parents leave private homes to get cheaper rates at licensed facilities.

“Other providers have called me saying sadly they have to close because of their house or others issues. They cannot get licensed so they are losing parents,” Calderon said.

In an effort to create more spaces the government has been encouraging private child care providers to take the necessary steps to get licensed. There are a few barriers to becoming a regulated home-based provider, which include an initial fire inspection and regular heating inspections.

Home-based providers who become regulated may also have access to grant money to help with startup costs and training, as well as assistance from educated child-care consultants.

Thea Carlson is one of those parents who have made the switch from a private to licensed daycare. Her son is almost two and entered a private home daycare before the fee reduction. The introduction of the subsidy left Carlson paying more for part time care than some are paying for full time at a licensed home.

She would have loved to stay at her private home and would have if it was included in the subsidy. She says her previous provider looked into getting licensed but couldn’t meet the requirements for licensing because they are renting their space.

“We’re disappointed to leave our dayhome. Our son really liked it there and did well there. I feel bad for them and the other dayhomes that are losing people because they don’t qualify for the subsidy,” said Carlson.

When searching for licensed care Carlson said she was put on many waitlists with some saying it would be one to two year wait. The only centre that had a space open wasn’t everything they were looking for and they were left to weigh price point vs quality of care.

Another area of concern for many in the industry revolves around staffing. Cara Steiner is the executive director of Prairie Lily Early Learning Center and the Vice Chair of the Sask. Early Childhood Association.

Steiner feels that overall the new budget brings a lot of positive things to the sector but there is still a big need to recruit and retain workers. The budget does have \$11.4 million for training initiatives and supports for early childhood educators.

Steiner explained there are already some great things in the works. One being a fully funded accelerated Early Childhood Education Level one course that is delivered through Sask Polytech.

However for Steiner the big hurdle comes in the form of low wages. She sees one solution to that problem coming in the form of a wage grid. The government does have a wage grid commitment included in this years budget and Education Minister Dustin Duncan says they are still in the developmental stage to find out how it could be applied.

“Because the sector is very unique, we have centre-based and home-based. What does that look like for a home-based provider who is really their own employee? So we’re are having discussions with the sector to see what that would like,” said Duncan.

Steiner supports a wage grid because she feels it would provide some fairness for workers and providers across the entire province.

“Some multi-site centres obviously have a bigger revenue pool to pull from to be paying their ECE’s at a higher wage. Where as some smaller rural centres struggle to have competitive wages. So I’m hopeful a wage grid would allow workers to go anywhere and be paid a similar wage,” said Steiner.

For Calderon and Daycaroo she is trying to do her part in increasing spaces and jobs by opening another location later this year. She says she’s in the planning stage and already has 15 families who have expressed interest.

“It’s a lot of work but I know I have it in me.”

Region: Saskatchewan ^[3]

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