

Indigenous workers in N.W.T. get set for upcoming \$10 daycare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Daycare workers in the Northwest Territories are bracing for a surge in requests from parents looking to take advantage of cheaper programs for their children.

Across the territory the demand for childcare is high, but spaces are limited.

According to the ministry of education, 95 of the 98 licensed childcare providers have joined the liberal government's subsidy program geared at eventually providing \$10 a day care.

Shannon Wedewin said she's living her dream in the home stretch of a two-year early learning and childcare diploma program at Aurora College in Yellowknife.

She told APTN News that the emphasis needs to be on attracting and maintaining quality early childhood educators (ECE) a traditionally undervalued industry.

"When I think about living in the north and lack of structure and buildings, I feel that that needs to take place first," Wedewin said. "We really need to focus on ECE's because they are struggling, burn out is happening."

The Tẖcẖ mother of two said her skills from school have led to job offers back in her home community of Behchoḵ.

"This program has helped me realize I'm a capable person to give back to my community. I can develop those leadership skills and I'm able to be a role model for the change to happen," she said. "It's just been a great accomplishment for me because of the hard work I was able to put into the program.

"I've always been interested in going into a teacher role because teachers always had a big impact on me.

Wedewin said she's worked as a research assistant for an Indigenous language revitalization project with the University of Toronto this year.

"Being an Indigenous woman and being from my home community with the language that I've lost... I put my own time into it every evening just to learn what can I do for myself and how can we help parents understand the importance of language revitalization," Wedewin said.

The Aurora College curriculum is based on the development of inclusive play with a northern focus on indigenous language, culture, and tradition.

Natasha Staples, an Inuk raised in Inuvik, Northwest Territories and now living in Yellowknife, has extensive experience working with daycare children.

She said training northerners in education and caregiving roles will help maintain top-quality professionals who understand where families are coming from.

"We've focused on how to Indigenize and make programs that have a northern setting to it. If you walk into a playroom, you know you're in the north and we expose the children to that," Staples said.

She said it wasn't until taking the college program that she began to understand how many Indigenous educators face intergenerational trauma.

"My mental health going to the program and learning that it's okay that I have baggage, but I can't put it on my kids" Staples said. "Something as small as triggers like 'oh that was a trigger how am I going to handle this right now?'"

Staples said work-life balance and professional-personal boundaries are topics of conversation amongst her peers.

"Seventy-five per cent of the ECE workers I know don't get to turn their phones off at 5 p.m. because there's a parent that asks, 'what happened to my kid today, did he nap? Did he eat?'" Staples said.

Both Staples and Wedewin said their studies gave them communicative tools necessary for increased workload demand created by the proposed \$10 a day childcare.

“Being able to voice ‘hey I’m on edge today, I need a little more push from you and hopefully I can repay you tomorrow when I’m 100 percent tomorrow.’ That’s super important especially for the staff themselves,” she said.

Staples said she plans to take the summer off to care for her own children and explore job opportunities in the fall.

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