

'Morale is at an all-time low': Staffing shortages hit N.S. daycares as province expands public system ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

As Nova Scotia expands its publicly-funded daycare system, operators are sounding the alarm about staffing shortages.

Bonnie Minard, the Executive Director of Portland Daycare Centre in Dartmouth, noted in her 30 years in the industry she has never seen the sector in such a critical condition.

"Morale is at an all-time low. Stress is at an all-time high. We've never seen a situation like we're in right now," Minard said.

Inflation is up, staffing is down and parental fees are frozen.

Minard has hired more early childhood educators, but pointed out how industry-wide there's talk of daycares closing or cutting back.

"I'm aware of situations where ECEs have resigned because they can't afford the gas to come to work," she said.

Early Childhood Educator Krista MacDonald feels this pressure every day.

"I feel like I'm pretty much living on paycheque to paycheque with the gas that's very expensive, food and recently being a single-mother, it's very hard," MacDonald said.

Last summer, Nova Scotia signed a childcare agreement with Ottawa to expand daycare access and lower the fees for parents.

Fees for parents have already started to drop, but wages for workers have yet to go up.

The Houston government is promising more money soon.

"Ensuring that our ECES who work within the childcare sector are compensated fairly is an urgent priority and so we're moving ahead with a commitment to get that done in the fall," said Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development Becky Druhan. "And get it done as soon as possible."

MacDonald loves her job and said she's not asking for a lot, but believes a few more dollars would help so she's not just living paycheque to paycheque.

"It needs to be a priority and it needs to happen immediately," Minard said.

To Minard, the province's promise of offering more money in the fall could mean it will happen in September or November. In the meantime, she's worried more workers will leave, taking childcare seats with them.

"You may not have a child in daycare, but it may impact your ability to hire people," she said. "It may impact your ability to obtain services from other industries because people can't work if they don't have childcare."

The province of Nova Scotia has pledged 1,500 new daycare spaces by the end of 2022 and expects about 300 new ECE graduated this year will help.

Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

Tags: child care ^[4]

staff shortage ^[5]

workforce ^[6]

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