

# Parents call on government to stop daycare closure <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

The owner of a Fortune daycare is planning to retire from a 30 year career this December. Parents fear, if no one purchases and takes over the business, the gap in services will deepen in the area by over 20 children. Local nurses, teachers, entrepreneurs and other workers will be forced to scramble to find alternate arrangements.

There are already 86 children in immediate need of childcare in Kings County according to the Early Childhood Development Association's registry. Island-wide 1,124 youngsters are on the list.

"You could get the key today and go to work tomorrow," said Ms Brown.

She wants to sell to someone willing to maintain the service. The location is fully equipped to house 32 children and she has invested considerably over the years to make the daycare a welcoming, safe space that fosters positive early childhood development. But it has been months since she listed the business, and no one has shook hands on a deal. She is considering selling to someone with different goals.

"The space could be used for many purposes," she said.

Ms Brown takes care of Jessica Townshend's three children, Henry, 2, Benjamin, 4, and Ella, 5, while Ms Townshend works as an RN at Souris Hospital and her husband, Isaac Townshend, runs his family potato business in Fortune Bridge.

"The road block is simple," said Ms Townshend, "The government will not financially help the general public take over an essential business."

Ms Townshend has looked into a variety of options to remedy the situation including taking out a \$400,000 loan to buy the business just to keep it in operation. But she decided she was not in the position to foot the bill. She suspects others interested in purchasing with the proper qualifications aren't either. She calls on the province, particularly the department of Education and Life Long Learning, to step up and assist the community with an appropriate preventative solution.

Ms Brown confirmed more than one early childhood educators has shown interest in purchasing, but for one reason or another were not willing or able to follow through.

"It doesn't just affect the kids or the individual families. This affects the whole community," said Ms Townshend.

If nothing is done, Ms Townshend will have to quit the job she loves, has trained for and worked diligently to attain.

Amid a serious nursing shortage across Canada and PEI, Ms Townshend is one of four hemodialysis nurses working in Souris. She provides locals with life-sustaining care every day in the community she loves. Dialysis patients spend four hours a day, three days a week receiving care.

On her days off, Ms Townshend hardly rests.

She often steps onto the floor in the inpatient unit at Souris Hospital due to the Island's critical nursing shortage.

It doesn't make sense for Mr. Townshend to give up his job should their three children lose their daycare.

"When there is no childcare, young families, teachers, nurses, doctors, workers in general don't move here either," Ms Townshend noted. "Something needs to be done."

There are a number of government grants available to assist Islanders interested in providing childcare from their home. But Townshend has found none solve this issue.

"This is not a 'home daycare', this is an open, functionally running facility that the owner is selling," she said.

PEI's target for new spaces in the Canada Wide Early Learning and Childhood Care agreement is to add 452 new spaces by the end of 2022-23.

“PEI is on track to meet its new space target,” said a representative from the province.

To date, 332 new spaces have opened to date, and the province is currently working with applicants to open approximately 100 additional new spaces.

“I love the work, I love getting to know the kids and the parents,” said Ms Brown who has become a fixture of the community and has even cared for over three generations of some families. “But I think I’ve earned a break.”

She is looking forward to a lifestyle that doesn’t require waking up at the crack of dawn or working well into the evenings - rain, shine, sleet or snow.

She added she’ll rest easier if she could be certain she is not leaving families and the community in a lurch.

**Region:** Prince Edward Island <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** child care <sup>[4]</sup>

parents <sup>[5]</sup>

closures <sup>[6]</sup>

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