

Child-care services to expand to existing community centres in rural Cape Breton ^[1]

Organization received \$1.2M in provincial funding this spring to expand child-care services

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EXCERPTS

A community effort to bring affordable child care to two northern Cape Breton communities is underway.

There are no licensed child-care centres north of Englishtown, N.S.

One not-for-profit, Taigh Curaim Daycare Society, is trying to change that.

The organization received \$1.2 million in provincial funding this spring to expand child-care services to rural communities in Cape Breton, putting one centre in Bay St Lawrence and another in Ingonish.

They use a model that places child-care facilities inside existing community centres.

"In small communities, it's very difficult to generate a sustainable revenue to keep any one organization going," said Gwen Jarabek, project manager with Taigh Curaim.

"Our goal was to operate in facilities where other community programs exist, so our liabilities such as rent and power and everything else can help support other communities' associations," she said.

Jarabek reached out to Bay St. Lawrence Community Centre right away, noting that rural villages north of Cape Smokey are not adequately served when it comes to child care.

The community centre in Bay St Lawrence would not have been suitable for a child care a few months ago. It was drafty and leaked when it rained.

However, the centre received \$60,000 in funding through the Canada Community Revitalization Fund in the spring that allowed for renovations to the former elementary school.

New windows, doors and steel siding were added.

Amy MacKinnon, the co-ordinator of the community centre, said a child-care inspection passed easily thanks to the renovations.

"Without even knowing it, when the contractor sat down with that 18-page document, we were able to cross almost everything off the list," MacKinnon said.

She said the orange siding, chosen in honour of Orange Shirt Day, brings life to the community.

Two former classrooms will be adapted to fit the child-care centre, and a new accessible playground will be added for community and daycare use.

'It's gonna help a lot of people'

Resident Sabrina Bonnar has already applied for the centre's child-care program for her three-year-old son.

She hopes his application is accepted so she can go back to work.

"It's gonna help a lot of people around the community, I think," she said. "Especially me, as being a busy mother, it's going to be very helpful."

MacKinnon said the new centre will open soon.

The provincial government's affordable child-care agreement with Ottawa is scheduled to see \$10-a-day child care offered by 2026. Jarabek said that will make a difference.

"Ten dollars a day will literally change the decisions that people make in terms of how they organize their lives," she said.

Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

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