

'We're completely bleeding money': Fall River daycare latest casualty of growing crisis ^[1]

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Excerpts

A pizza lunch is barely enough to calm the mayhem that comes with a room full of toddlers, but there's no shortage of love and care at the Fall River Childcare Centre -- a lifeline for dozen of parents in the area, but not for much longer.

After struggling financially for months, the owners say the end is near: the doors will close next month.

"We're completely bleeding money," co-owner Lindsay Awalt told CTV News Wednesday, saying losses have been topping \$10,000 a month, and there's no more runway.

"As an owner and operator, and director, and early childhood educator, I'm actually not paying myself right now," said Awalt. It's difficult as well for workers like early childhood educator Jenna LeBlanc.

"It's devastating, honestly," says LeBlanc. "I love it here. This is my home. I don't want to work anywhere else," said LeBlanc. "I love my kids."

Accessing childcare is becoming a growing issue in Nova Scotia, with more and more parents saying it simply isn't available.

Like untold numbers of others, Amber Rochon's family is left to wait -- and hope.

Parents are actually signing up months before their children are born.

"Personally, I'm on so many wait-lists right now that I can't even remember how many I'm on," said Rochon.

Operators have also been sounding the alarm about rising costs and staffing shortages.

Like others, Fall River Childcare has struggled to amend its licence in the rapidly changing sector, which is moving toward the much-touted Canada Wide Early Learning and Childcare Agreement -- the \$10 daycare.

"We are in year one of a five-year transformation in Nova Scotia," Nova Scotia Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development Becky Druhan told CTV News, adding the department continues to work with parents and operators, including Fall River.

The end game is what's important, she says.

"We're in the midst of a transformation that's going to allow more families access to affordable care, and we're well on the way to that," said Druhan.

"I should never have had to close my business that's needed and I should have got some funding last year to help us keep the doors open," said Awalt, summing up the decision to close this way: "Devastated and heartbroken."

The doors will close Nov. 4.

Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

Tags: workforce ^[4]

waitlist ^[5]

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