

Daycares report growing wait lists since fee cut ^[1]

Expansions are being planned as a N.B. government's moratorium on new spaces nears its end

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Excerpts

Demand for spaces in licensed child-care centres has increased dramatically since fees were cut in half last spring, according to some New Brunswick operators.

All 60 spots at Centreville Child Care are full, said Heather Perry. Another 55 could be filled today and 26 more children are on a wait list for next year, she said.

"We've heard nothing but great things from families that they are excited to have a little bit of extra money to be able to spend," said Perry, "but really when it comes down to it, how are we going to solve the solution of spaces?"

The situation is similar at Wee Care Daycare in Campbellton, said RosaLee Noël Luge. There are 50 names on the wait list for 62 preschool spaces, she said. They hope to open two more centres in the next year.

Cheryl Lewis, who operates Cheryl's and Cochran's Home Away from Home Daycares in Saint John, said she couldn't give an accurate number of people looking for places, but estimated demand has doubled in recent months, and said she's fielding 10-15 calls a day.

At capacity

The Centreville Child Care centre accepts children from newborn to 12 years old, said Perry. Half of its spaces are for children of preschool-age.

"It's breaking our heart to have to tell these parents that we have no space," she said, "but we're simply at capacity."

The responses she hears back, Perry said, are things like, "I guess Daddy won't be able to go back to work."

Perry said some are saying they simply do not have any other options.

Before fees were lowered, children were in a variety of other care settings, she said.

"Some parents were just staying home from work, they were choosing in-home options, they were probably just finding friends that could look after their children."

The Centreville daycare is trying to raise money to build a new facility that can accommodate 120 children.

There are a couple of other childcare centres in the region, Perry said — one in Bath and one in the Bristol end of Florenceville-Bristol.

She's also heard that a couple of new ones may be in the works.

"Even with more centres popping up we still feel the demand will be there," she said.

"We might have a wait list of maybe 10-15 children, which is a lot more manageable."

The Centreville daycare has actually been planning to expand since 2019. They've done various fundraisers, said Perry, such as, most recently, selling potato boxes. A community gala is being planned for November 19.

The community probably won't be able to come up with all the funds needed, she said. She hopes there might be capital funding from the government to help.

"We'd like to get the ball moving."

Perry said she believes this is an issue in other parts of the province as well, especially rural areas.

When the lower fees were announced last spring, the province said there were more than 2,000 vacant spaces in daycare centres around the province.

A moratorium was imposed on creating new spaces until Oct. 31.

It's not clear how many vacant spaces have been filled since the fee cut, but 522 were filled over the 12 months ending Sept. 1, said Early Education and Child Development Department spokesperson Morgan Bell.

"With this, the department has already reached 26 per cent of our goal of filling 2,000 unoccupied, designated spaces by 2026 under the Canada-Wide agreement."

More information on a new space creation policy will be available in November, Bell said, including which spaces will qualify for designation under the reduced fee program.

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