

Fall River child-care centre says it's closing for good next month

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Co-owner says managers have gone without pay and they can't do it anymore

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EXCERPTS

A child-care facility in Fall River, N.S., is closing its doors for good in November and a co-owner predicts more private facilities will meet the same fate.

"I know private operators that are struggling to keep their doors open, and I think that we'll see more and more private centres close in the next couple of months," said Lindsay Awalt, co-owner of Fall River Childcare Centre.

She blames a variety of factors including a lack of government support, not enough early childhood educators (ECEs) due to low wages, and falling revenues because of a provincial limit on how much parent fees can increase dating back to 2016.

Awalt says two dozen children will be left without child care when her business closes on Nov. 4.

"They announced a year ago that the Canada-wide funding was coming ... but we haven't seen that much money trickle down to the actual ECEs," said Awalt.

"Right now I pay all of my ECEs above the wage floor, but that cuts into the bottom line of our budgets, of course."

Nova Scotia signed a \$605-million agreement with the federal government last year with the goal of increasing wages for early childhood educators beginning this fall, adding more child-care spaces across the province and average fees of \$10 a day per child by 2026.

Following a provincial cabinet meeting last week, Education Minister Becky Druhan said the long-promised raise for ECEs would "happen this fall."

Cindy Duggans has been sending her three-year-old son to the centre for the past year and says she's not only worried about finding other child care, she's also worried about his well-being. That's because he goes to daycare with the son of her best friend, another little boy born two weeks apart from him.

"That's the biggest challenge and pain point for us parents is splitting the children up, there's no way they're ever going to be able to go all to the same place and that's what's upsetting for us," she said.

"We have been putting in significant effort with our son just to help him through managing those changes, and to now receive news that he's going to have a massive upset in his life was just earth-shattering for both my husband and I."

Awalt says the centre simply can't afford to stay open any longer while "running at a deficit where the owner and operators — who are also the directors and work on the floor — are not getting paid."

The Fall River Childcare Centre, formerly known as Mrs Robinson's Childrens Centre Too, has been around for 12 years.

It's been struggling since last year when it was denied a child-care licence that would allow it to expand services to children between the ages of 18 months and 12 years. Although it was recently granted that licence, it's too little, too late, says Awalt.

"We were out about \$10,000 every month due to low enrolment because we had to get rid of the families that were not suitable for the licence," said Awalt. "We can't really make up for it now."

Duggans said some concerned parents in the area have banded together to tell the provincial government that child-care struggles in Fall River are not an isolated incident and it's a widespread issue throughout the province.

Duggans says she wants to see more accountability from the government to child-care providers.

"I feel like the reason why they have to close is because they were mismanaged by the government, and I would love to see some accountability for the hardship that they've caused."

Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

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