

Parents rally for childcare solutions in Kelowna^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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Excerpts

Dozens of concerned parents and community members gathered inside Childhood Connections Monday afternoon to take part in a rally over a lack of available childcare options for families in the city.

One of the parents at the rally, Belinda Hardy, says the goal of the rally was to highlight the "childcare emergency in Kelowna."

"The city of Kelowna has thousands of families unable to find childcare for young children, and hundreds of parents that now face the hard reality of being unable to return to work after maternity/parental leave due to there being no daycare spaces coming available in time," she said.

"Imagine having to put your name on daycare waitlists before you are even pregnant if you want any hope of childcare by the time your child is a year old," Hardy added.

Parents are still demanding answers about the unexpected announcement that one of Kelowna's largest childcare centres is closing.

On Jan. 11, Building Blocks announced it was shutting its Gordon Drive campus down and selling its Sutherland Avenue location to ProductKIDvity.

"The recent closure of Kelowna daycares has further highlighted the crisis state of this situation, having left hundreds of working families without childcare in a city with no childcare spaces available. This has a huge ripple effect on our city, as hundreds of parents panic and face having to leave their jobs since they have no childcare for their children," Hardy added.

"It seems that there has been a childcare crisis in Kelowna for at least five years and nothing has been done to guarantee spots for children and it's great that they are limiting fees for childcare, but there also has to be availability. If you don't have availability in the city then what do you do," she said.

Parents at the rally told Castanet they hope to draw attention to the issue and drive the Ministry of Education and Childcare to take action.

Kelowna West MLA Ben Stewart was also at the rally and is pointing the finger at the provincial government.

"The government has brought out all sorts of promises for families and they have said listen we are brining in \$10 dollar a day daycare and we have been asking and asking in question period... my colleague Karin Kirkpatrick who is the critic, we have been asking about how it is that families can navigate the system," Stewart said.

"They have made it very complex and there is very little \$10-a-day daycare as promised and the situation, as Mellissa has shared with myself and the other MLAs, is that there has been a significant shortage of workers. We have to have the balance," he continued.

On Monday, a parent of children who attend Lil' Dancing Owls daycare in Kelowna, told Castanet they were told the facility was closing a room due to staffing shortages. Castanet has reached out to Lil' Dancing Owls Kelowna and the Ministry of Education and Childcare for comment.

* UPDATE

In an email to Castanet the Ministry of Education and Childcare provided the following statement:

"I know how important accessible and affordable child care is for families – as well as our communities and our economy as a whole. That's why our ChildCare BC plan invests in new spaces, supports operators and providers with more funding, and invests in early childhood educators.

"For years, parents and families were abandoned to a patchwork system, and child care was only becoming more expensive and more difficult to find. It will take time to reverse the damage done by treating child care as a luxury, instead of a core service every family needs, but we're making progress. Since the launch of ChildCareBC in 2018, the Province has funded the creation of 995 licensed child care spaces in the Kelowna area, with 237 of those new spaces operational.

“We also know child care providers are struggling to find qualified employees, which is an issue in many sectors and has been compounded by the pandemic. That’s why we have taken action to recruit and retain ECEs – by helping with the cost of education, enhancing wages and providing better access to training and professional development, and streamlining pathways for internationally educated ECEs. In Kelowna, we’re working with Okanagan College to deliver a Dual Credit Program for high-school students to get college-level ECE coursework and opportunities to work in the sector.”

Region: British Columbia [3]

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