

# Staff shortages impacting childcare centres in Waterloo region <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Access Online <sup>[2]</sup>

### Excerpts

Staffing shortages and difficulties filling open roles are forcing a Kitchener daycare to temporarily close, leaving some parents and caregivers concerned as they sift through their options.

Victoria Learning Centre said the impact should only last for a few weeks as the daycare bolsters its staffing levels through recruitment and training.

Kayla Robins' three-year-old daughter who attends Victoria Learning Centre in Kitchener will need to be looked after elsewhere during the closure.

"I really love the staff there. I love the supervisor. I love everybody there," Robins said.

Earlier this week, she said an email from the childcare centre was sent out informing recipients the centre was temporarily shutting down.

"We were told that about half of the staff members, including the supervisor would be leaving," Robins said.

Adding: "We just can't believe that all these families are in this situation and I think we're all just kind of scrambling of what we're going to do? Where are we going to put our kids? What's going to happen with our jobs?"

Robins said while she doesn't yet have a childcare plan in place for the next few weeks, she said she would like to stay at Victoria Learning Centre.

"I'm sad for my daughter as well because she's bonded really well with them as well, and I'm sure the other kids have bonded with the teachers as well, and now they're going to have to rebuild a bond with new staff members," Robins said.

The email, which was obtained by CTV News, reads: As you know we are currently experiencing a staff shortage. We have been able to fill half the positions, but we still need to fill the remainder."

It goes on to say the centre will shut down for one to two weeks starting Feb. 27.

### **"WE ARE IN A CRISIS RIGHT NOW"**

The Association of Day Care Operations of Ontario said staffing shortages are not unique to Victoria Learning Centre.

The closure is part of an issue that appears to be widespread, impacting families across the province, according to some experts.

"We are in a crisis right now," Kim Yeaman, past president of the Association of Day Care Operations of Ontario said.

"It really is about wages and we see that the wage discrepancy between working in the school board and working in a childcare centre is still quite large. Pensions, benefit plans, regular child care, we don't have that kind of money," Yeaman said.

According to Yeaman, the Canada-Ontario early years and child care agreement is adding to the issue.

"We can't raise our fees, and that's the only way to increase what we pay staff is to increase our fees," Yeaman said.

Yeaman noted the \$10-a-day daycare has "been an unbelievable drain on childcare people. The application process and the actual paperwork involved has been huge."

### **LOCAL STAFFING CHALLENGES**

RisingOaks Early Learning Ontario in Waterloo region said it too has been dealing with a staffing shortage.

"In fact, we closed one of our before and after school programs in Cambridge last week," said Kristine Parsons, director of operations at RisingOaks Early Learning Ontario.

Parsons said more needs to be done to recruit and retain early childhood educators.

"I think that educators deserve professional pay, they deserve benefits, they deserve paid sick time, and a pension would be great," she said.

The Region of Waterloo said all childcare operators in the region are struggling with the retention and recruitment of qualified childcare staff.

Adding they are "working to highlight the vital role early childhood educators play in the delivery of high-quality care as we work to encourage entry into the child care workforce."

### CONESTOGA COLLEGE EXPERT WEIGHS IN

Goranka Vukelich, the executive dean at the Conestoga College's school of community services said the college has actually seen a bit of an increase in enrollment due to several things, including an intentionally strategic plan to increase joining childcare programs.

"Over the last several years, we have been working closely with our childcare community, and we knew, and know, there would be a shortage and so as a result of that and in response to that, we have been incrementally increasing our program enrollment every year," said Vukelich.

Vukelich said as of right now there are approximately 600 students enrolled in the collection of childcare programs.

"This year it's a little bit higher. I might venture to guess last year and the year before when we were in the midst of the pandemic, our enrollment was a little bit lower. Ours is a practice-based, practical programs, and it was not as easy to engage in the practice part during the pandemic," said Vukelich.

According to Vukelich, some of the reasons for the staffing shortage could be from the region's growth and its rapid expansion and the Canada-wide national childcare plan promising \$10 a day daycare.

These coupled with aging workforces are placing stress on the systems.

"We would not be expanding if they didn't need us to," said Vukelich.

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** Childcare closure <sup>[4]</sup>

parents <sup>[5]</sup>

staff shortage <sup>[6]</sup>

decent work <sup>[7]</sup>

recruitment and retention <sup>[8]</sup>

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