

Peterborough protesters call for better wages, benefits for Ontario child-care workers ^[1]

Kali's Korner will be site of additional daycare spaces; open house on proposal slated for Feb. 16

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Excerpts

WESTLOCK – Families in desperate need of daycare in Westlock will get some help when the Westlock Child Care Society (WCCS) opens a second location at the Rotary Spirit Centre (RSC) later this summer.

Following months of planning and discussion between the WCCS and the Town of Westlock, the two parties, who have formed a partnership, are moving forward with the expansion to be located at the RSC in the area known as Kali's Korner. To help inform residents of the changes, the town is inviting families and members of the public to an open house Feb. 16 at 11 a.m. at the entrance to Kali's Korner. The expansion is expected to provide up to 41 additional daycare spaces.

"There is definitely a need and we're trying to address that need through opening a second location," said WCCS executive director Christine Villeneuve. "Our current location in Westlock is pretty much full. We have a waitlist (that) runs anywhere between 20 to 80 families and that tells us that there's a need for licensed child care in the community."

Villeneuve said after brainstorming some ideas with WCCS leadership, they approached the town to inquire about available spots for a daycare and took a tour of Kali's Korner. In addition to a licensed pre-school in Westlock, the WCCS is the only licensed full-day child care program in town, she said, noting they first opened in the 1980s and have been operating as a society for more than 40 years. Currently located on the east side of town, the daycare has a capacity of 77 children.

Director of community services Gerry Murphy said the Westlock Child Care Society is going to provide several spots for patrons to bring their kids while they use the facility, such as exercising or watching another child play a sport. That was the original intent of Kali's Korner when it first opened, he noted, adding the town is "going back to that" and partnering with WCCS.

"We know there's a need in the community," said Murphy, noting the partnership won't just benefit families but patrons of the RSC as well. "This is a way for us to serve two needs of the community at the same time. It seems like a really good partnership and it is the reason why we considered this in the first place — this genuinely is a benefit to the RSC and to the people who need (daycare) in the community," he said.

The current play space will undergo renovations to transform it into a commercial daycare space, while a new Kali's Korner will be created between the arena and the main entrance of the RSC. "We're going to create a fenced in area for kids to use the equipment. We're going to move the flooring that's in Kali's Korner right now and the equipment and move it into that location and the daycare is going to take over that space as soon as we can work out the finer details on what they need for that space," said Murphy.

In November 2021 the federal government announced a partnership with provinces to provide funding for affordable child care spaces and signed an agreement with Alberta in 2022 said Villeneuve, noting the agreement has made licensed childcare more affordable for families and since January 2022 "a lot of our fees actually have dropped by about 50 per cent."

In addition, the WCCS was able to access the space creation grant from the federal government to cover start-up costs for new child care spaces. The total grant comes in around the \$180,000 mark, noted Villeneuve, adding the earliest they could open the new daycare, following renovations and hiring additional staff, is June 1. They anticipate hiring about four to seven more staff to work in either the current location or the new location, the latter, which will also see an increase in hours.

"We will be providing extended hours (at the new location) so we'll be open until 8 p.m. Monday through Friday instead of 6 p.m. like our current location," said Villeneuve noting some potential weekend openings as well. "We'll start off with probably a couple of Saturday's a month to see what the need is for the community and that's where the partnership with the town comes in — if a family wants to access the spirit centre and its facilities, there might be some drop-in care available for a limited number of patrons."

Villeneuve said the WCCS looks forward to the exciting new opportunity to help Westlock families.

“It’s a really interesting time because there’s a lot of change right now with childcare. That we’re meeting family’s needs is really important to us,” said Villeneuve.

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