

Childcare shortage boosts enrollment in rec programs ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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Excerpts

ST. MARY'S — A pervasive shortage of affordable childcare is turning some recreational programs in the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's into effective daycares, says Community Development Director Kerri Jack.

"The lack of childcare options [here] is definitely having a real impact on programs," she told the committee of the whole meeting on May 17, adding that the summer day camp is already oversubscribed "with two more weeks to go before registration closes on June 1."

That, she said, was "after we'd set a cap [on enrollment] for our program...based on approved core funding through the provincial and federal governments. We've never had to set rules on who can participate in our recreation summer day camp because we were never focussed on providing daycare. We were focussed on providing recreational opportunities within the community."

Now, an increasing number of families from communities from both inside and outside the municipality are registering for the St. Mary's program precisely because they have no other childcare options during the summertime.

"We have visitors potentially talking up full-time [day camp] spaces. So, we're really trying to accommodate fulltime use of our summer day camp, knowing that childcare is an issue in St. Mary's."

Jack did not provide specific numbers for the upcoming program, but she noted, "this past spring, we extended all of our program age groupings because we knew that there was a childcare shortage and we had to double the number of kids [allowed to] participate."

In fact, the municipality's before-and-after-school childcare program — offered almost continuously since 2020 — posted record registration last year. "It was the most successful we've seen to date," Jack said. "We had 42 children registered, with a cap of 24 kids per day; our numbers usually ranged from 10 to 20. But, as seasonally employment goes up, our numbers go up. That, too, is reflected in our summer day camp registration."

Jack said the trend, while positive, will require a creative response.

"It's [good] in that it is a real big uptake in people really wanting to go to the programs. We're really trying to fill the gap by finding resources to boost our staffing and looking at every detail to ensure that we can offer as much as we can to the community, and to those who need it. But it is a drain on our resources, and [that] is a challenge."

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

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