

Sask. First Nations mother says long child-care waitlists forced her to go against her cultural beliefs ^[1]

Jessica Dieter was taught a mother should wait until the baby arrives in the physical world

Author: BigEagle, Louise

Source: CBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 31 Aug 2023

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Excerpts

Jessica Dieter never had to worry about getting her older children into daycare once it was time to head back to work, but her most recent pregnancy was different.

Her friends and coworkers advised her to put her unborn child onto a daycare waitlist to make sure she got a spot, due to very high demand for child-care spaces. But for Dieter, to do so would go against her cultural beliefs.

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Dieter was taught by elders and others in her community of Okanese First Nation that a pregnant mother is a conduit between the spiritual world and the physical world, and an unborn child is a sacred being who is still with the Creator. Expectant mothers in the community are taught by Elders to wait until the child enters the physical world to celebrate the new life.

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Child care had been the last thing on Dieter's mind. She was just happy to learn she was pregnant with her fourth child. Then she started hearing from other mothers about how long they had to wait for their children to get into child-care spaces, sometimes beyond the end of their maternity leave periods.

Dieter was uncomfortable with it, but made the decision to put her child on a waitlist two weeks before her daughter was born

"In this world, this speedy world that we have to live in if we want to be successful and go to school and get a job and work, we have to follow these rules," Dieter said. "I don't believe that an Indigenous woman should [have to] go against her own cultural beliefs."

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"You could fill out the paperwork, but their actual date should not be until they're born, because there's so many issues that go along with that, and not just for Indigenous women," she said. "Imagine being a daycare worker put in the position, and the guilt they're going to feel when they call them on finally getting a spot."

She said this would also reduce waitlists.

Dieter said mothers like her who choose to stick with their cultural beliefs will have to wait longer to get access to child care, due to waiting until their baby has entered this world.

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Steven Compton, CEO of the YMCA of Regina, said it is a good thing for parents to be able to afford daycare, but that the promised lower costs drove more demand.

The YMCA currently has around 500 children in child care in Regina and another 254 in Moose Jaw.

Compton said the YMCA had waitlists before the national child care agreement, but they have grown since.

"At the \$10 a day mark, you know, interest went up."

On Aug. 23, 2023, the YMCA of Regina announced it was suspending all child care waitlists until Nov. 30, 2023. Compton said the queues were so long that the YMCA didn't want to give parents false hope by putting them on a wait list.

"The number of available spaces that ... we anticipate having as children age out of the facilities is only a small percentage of the people that are on the waitlist," he said. "We certainly don't want to disappoint families and create a false expectation in the community. And what we're hoping is that we can use this time to catch up."

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