

More daycare centres needed, but not as urgently as staff, says expert ^[1]

A new child care centre in Queenston is adding a much-needed service to Niagara-on-the-Lake and its adjoining cities.

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Source: The Hamilton Spectator
Format: Article
Publication Date: 20 Sep 2023

AVAILABILITY
Access online ^[2]

Excerpts

A new child care centre in Queenston is adding a much-needed service to Niagara-on-the-Lake and its adjoining cities.

The newly-opened child care centre in Queenston, Sweet Love Childcare Centre, is one of six licensed centres in town.

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There are an estimated 10,000 kids across the region waiting for daycare by the end of 2023, said Satinder Klair, the director of child services with the Niagara Region.

Candice Penny, the executive director at Niagara Nursery School in NOTL, said in an email to The Lake Report that there are 242 kids on its waitlist.

“Parents are frustrated and stressed with how long it is taking to get a child care spot, even though they are on multiple wait lists,” she said.

Christine Lett, supervisor at Childcare Central, said there are more than 400 kids on the waitlist at the centre.

Lett recommends parents put their children on the waitlist even before they’re born.

...

Some families who just got a spot this year were on the waitlist for about a year and a half, she said.

One of the major issues daycare facilities in the province are dealing with is staffing.

“There’s a shortage of registered early childhood educators,” said Klair.

He said the region’s licensed capacity is currently operating at 64 per cent rather than 100 per cent.

...

Niagara-on-the-Lake is doing a bit better than the region as a whole, he said, operating at 74 per cent.

“Even if we were to bring Niagara-on-the-Lakes operating capacity to 90 per cent, it would require an additional 32 registered early childhood educators and 12 educational assistants,” said Klair.

...

Many people have also left the field, which makes it harder to find qualified workers, said Penny.

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Klair said that the target from the province is to build 591 child care centres across the region that are eligible for the new 10 dollar a day daycare program — an initiative that is supposed to help lower the cost of child care for families.

He agreed that more centres are needed across the province due to its increasing population, however more centres can’t run if there’s no staff to run it.

“We need spaces to accommodate our growth, but then we also need staff to be able to operationalize what we have,” he said.

...

He said the province has addressed this issue and committed to releasing a provincial workforce strategy this year.

“I do believe that we need a provincial wide strategy that really speaks to the wages of the sector,” he

said.

...

He added that students come out of a two year early childhood educator diploma program to a job that pays between \$19 and \$22 dollars an hour.

...

Lett said an increase of pay is important, but it also comes down to workplace conditions and environments and “being able to support staff and whatever their needs are in the classroom.”

Klair hopes there’s something relating to compensation for workers in the provincial workforce strategy.

“We can’t keep waiting, so when is that workforce strategy coming? Can we make a commitment to our educators that yes, your wages are going to go up?” he said.

The region has done a lot of work to strengthen the workforce at a regional level, said Klair, like putting together a recruitment table at the region and launching new programs with different institutions, such as Niagara College.

“What we hear from our recruitment table is it comes down to wages and level of responsibility that the staff are taking on,” he said.

The region has also been piloting a program in Grimsby that would allow workforce sharing among the different municipalities in the region.

Instead of each centre having its own roster of supply staff on call, there would be a pool of supply staff that the centres share.

“So they get more shifts, get more hours, they get more flexibility,” he said.

...

“As much as the province wants to include more spaces, until there’s more staff, they’re not going to be able to do that.”

Related link: Calls continue for the province to do more to address a workforce crisis in child care [3]

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