

\$10 a day daycare is a great idea, but in Yellowknife it's hard to find a spot ^[1]

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Excerpts

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The territorial government struck a \$51-million agreement with Ottawa in 2021 to lower childcare expenses to \$10 a day by 2026 and create 300 additional spots.

But with more than 500 names on the Yellowknife Daycare Association waitlist alone, that target still leaves families in limbo. A number of mothers shared with APTN that they are delaying their return to work after their maternity leave ends because they do not have access to childcare.

Aurora College program instructor and expectant mother, Anthoula Zachou, said the sector requires more support.

“We really need more spots for infants and toddlers. This is not enough for a whole city of 20,000-plus people,” Zachou said. “Having only two or three daycares with not even two spots in total and some home daycares.”

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According to the latest data in the N.W.T., as of March 31, 2023, there were 1,932 licensed childcare spaces available in the territory. The spaces are filled in 40 family homes, 36 centers, and 31 out-of-school programs across the territory.

It can be just as tough to find childcare outside the capital city. Many remote communities lack daycare-appropriate buildings. The territorial government reports that 14 out of the 33 communities in the territories lack licensed early learning and childcare programs.

In April 2023, Housing NWT and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) launched a two-year pilot project to adjust rules, enabling renters in public housing to make modifications and receive financial assistance for retrofitting homes. The trouble is there's been zero interest.

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The territorial subsidy structure has been subject to criticism from licensed providers for its inadequate response to inflation and its restrictive policy of allowing fee increases of only two to six percent, depending on the total fee rates.

Childcare subsidies are only available for licensed day homes and centers. Kapraelian stated that the territorial government is enhancing training opportunities for day home providers and is also developing a retention incentive fund, along with the implementation of a wage grid by 2026.

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In the N.W.T., the average salary for ECEs working at a center is between \$18 and \$22 per hour.' In the Yukon, ECEs make \$30 according to the wage grid.

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Whitford said that there is undoubtedly burnout in his field but all of his classmates who are currently in the program are there because they have a passion for working with kids.

While the territorial government promises to improve support for educators and expand childcare availability, Bessette maintains a positive outlook.

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