

New daycare pushes for regulatory review to allow more time outside ^[1]

Forest Explorers Outdoor Learning Centre part of a research initiative on outdoor play

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Excerpts

A new daycare in Kanata that's exploring the benefits of outdoor play is pushing for looser regulations around the amount of time children can spend outside.

The Forest Explorers Outdoor Learning Centre officially launched on Monday. It's part of a five-year initiative called the Canadian Centre for Outdoor Play and will serve as a demonstration site for outdoor play practice, research and policy.

The initiative is a collaboration between Andrew Fleck Children's Services, Outdoor Play Canada, the Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group at the CHEO Research Institute and Algonquin College.

The centre is located inside Wesley Clover Park and has play and learning areas, large windows and is surrounded by forest.

Educators have long discussed the benefits of children learning in nature, but there's still not enough research on the subject, according to Louise De Lannoy, executive director of Outdoor Play Canada.

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One stumbling block, however, is the province's current licensing regime.

The centre is licensed under the Child Care and Early Years Act, which means the property and daycare programs must adhere to multiple regulations involving the building, furnishings, playgrounds, records, staff education, nutrition and programming.

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The province does not set out any specific requirements for forest or nature programs, but licensees are still required to meet all other requirements including having physical premises with a civic address and complying with local bylaws.

She said relaxing current licensing requirements could allow for another 40 spaces at the nearby Andrew Fleck Children's Services Ottawa Forest and Nature School.

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Region: Ontario ^[4]

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