

'Day care in a box' brings pre-fab child care facilities to rural Manitoba ^[1]

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Excerpt

Just as there is a great need for housing in Canada, there are also not enough child care spaces.

According to Statistics Canada, nearly 26 per cent of all parents were on a day care waiting list in 2023, up from 19 per cent in 2022.

The situation is especially dire in small and rural communities, which lack the extensive social services infrastructure of bigger centres.

"Quality child care supports a strong economy and work force development," said Colleen Sklar, CEO of JohnQ Public, a working group of municipalities and First Nations in Manitoba.

With the help of funding from the Manitoba and federal governments, JohnQ Public has developed an innovative solution to the day care problem that it hopes can be replicated in other parts of the country and in other applications.

Through JohnQ Public's building arm, JQ Built, the group has developed a model it calls "day care in a box."

It contains templates and tools to help small communities make a proposal to local councils, apply for funding, issue a request for proposals as well as other technical details.

JohnQ Public has also developed a building model.

Each day care facility is partially prefabricated and trucked to the community in question, where it is assembled into the finished product.

The design is portable enough to be shipped to remote communities in northern Manitoba where there is a large and growing demand for child care facilities.

Construction of the buildings began in January 2023; the first one opened in July 2023.

As of July 2024, 14 day care buildings had been built and installed. The rest are scheduled to be completed and in place by October 2024.

In 18 months, 22 day care centres with 1,718 child care spaces will have been built.

In April 2024, "day care in a box" won this year's project of the year award from Project Management Institute Manitoba.

The design-build team for the project is Pretium Projects Ltd. of Winnipeg.

"We took the pre-fab floors, walls and roofs built by Holz Constructors and assembled them onsite according to our design," said company president Justin Bova. "The panels were shipped on trucks to the sites, where they were assembled in two days. Then we took another week to make the structures airtight."

Bova said it took six months to build and assemble the day care centres instead of the usual 14 months.

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