

# This preschool in Alaska changed lives for parents and kids alike. Why did it have to close? <sup>[1]</sup>

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### Excerpt

She was a teenager, and the mother of a 2-year-old, when a knock came on the door of the trailer she called home. Two women were there to tell her about a federally funded preschool program called Head Start that was opening near her home in Chugiak. Would she be interested in enrolling her daughter?

Then pregnant with her second child, Kristine Bayne signed up. She hoped it would make a difference for her daughter. What she didn't know: It would shift the trajectory of her life, too.

Bayne, who finished high school through correspondence courses after she got pregnant at 16, would go on to take a job with her child's Head Start. Her confidence buoyed, she returned to school to earn a bachelor's degree and a counseling certificate from the state. She would rise through the ranks of CCS Early Learning, the nonprofit that ran the region's Head Start centers, and would retire as a family partnerships coordinator, lending the same kind of help to families that she and her husband received.

"I learned so much," says Bayne, now 65. "How to take care of my children, how to advocate for them, how to have a voice for myself. ... They take you where you're at, and they help you move forward to become a better person."

In this part of Alaska, countless parents tell stories like Bayne's. Head Start has helped them earn degrees that put them on track for better jobs. As drug addiction ravages the community, it has helped parents in recovery and educated children who have ended up in foster care. It has done this while readying youngsters for kindergarten, conditioning them for the school day's rhythms and teaching them how to be good friends and students.

Which is why it was so wrenching when CCS Early Learning closed the Chugiak Head Start, where Bayne had sent her children. In January, it announced it was shuttering another center — this time in Meadow Lakes, where Bayne's granddaughter Makayla, who is now in her care, was enrolled.

### Not enough grownups

The impending closure is not for lack of need. This is the fastest-growing part of the 49th state, and the nonprofit's Head Start program has a waiting list. It can — and did — fill Meadow Lakes' three classrooms to capacity.

The problem is with the grownups.

Specifically, there are not enough of them who want to work at a Head Start. Not when they can make more money working at the nearby Target, which hiked its pay during the pandemic. And not when, with the same credentials, they can get a better-paying job at the local school district.

As a teacher shortage grinds on, what is unfolding in this corner of the state — a region that contains both massive tracts of untamed wild and a booming Anchorage bedroom community — offers a preview of what other programs could face.

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**Related link:** [The Alaska child care market is broken, for parents and caregivers alike. Here's why.](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

**Region:** United States <sup>[4]</sup>

**Tags:** closures <sup>[5]</sup>

women's labour force participation <sup>[6]</sup>

workforce shortage <sup>[7]</sup>

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/24/08/preschool-alaska-changed-lives-parents-and-kids-alike-why-did-it> [2] <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/arts-and-life/life/2024/08/04/this-preschool-in-alaska-changed-lives-for-parents-and-kids-alike-why-did-it-have-to-close> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/16/06/alaska-child-care-market-broken-parents-and-caregivers-alike-heres> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7865> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9036> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/womens-labour-force-participation> [7] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9161>