

N.S. creates 550 day-care spaces [CA-NS] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

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Community Services Minister Judy Streach announced Monday 150 new subsidized, portable child-care spaces in Nova Scotia.

Under the province's plan, the day-care spots go to families, not to child-care centres, so families can move about the province and not lose their subsidized space.

If a family picks a day-care centre that is full, it must find another one. Community services spokeswoman Krista Grant said it is the family's responsibility to find a day care that does have an opening.

The 150 spaces announced Monday will be followed by 100 in each of the next four years at a cost of \$700,000 a year. The province has promised not to cut those spaces for five years after that, so the 10-year commitment will cost a total of \$7 million.

Liberal community services critic Stephen McNeil said the 150 new spaces don't come close to meeting the needs of Nova Scotia families.

"There are waiting lists in some regions of Nova Scotia that are larger than the total number announced today — and ... (these ones) are for the entire province," Mr. McNeil said.

...

"We certainly know it is a significant gap," said Virginia O'Connell, director of early childhood development services for the Community Services Department.

She estimated some metro Halifax centres have about 200 children waiting for subsidized spots.

Once the province knows where the longest waits are, it will be able to develop strategies to target the problem areas, she said.

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The province has committed \$23.5 million to that plan, with the balance of \$106.5 million coming from the federal government.

It will include more day-care spaces in the province, more subsidized spots and improved support for the sector through such services as a home child-care system in rural areas.

There are 12,800 full- and part-time day-care spaces in both private and non-profit child-care centres in Nova Scotia. To qualify for these subsidized spots, families must have an income between \$16,000 and \$24,000.

Nova Scotia's child-care budget for the 2005-06 fiscal year was \$38 million, \$18 million of which comes out of provincial coffers.

- reprinted from the Chronicle Herald

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