

Day care operators are 'in crisis' [CA-YT] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Early child care workers are undervalued and underpaid, say a panel of day care centre owners, staff and parents.

They spoke at a news conference held Wednesday afternoon at the Nakwaye Ku Child Care Centre at Yukon College.

"The wage issue is in crisis. We aren't paid for the valuable work we do," said Heidi Spinks, a staff members at the Care-A-Lot day care in Riverdale.

Day care workers, many of whom have university accreditation in early childhood education, are getting paid less than major department store staff - as little as \$9 or \$10 per hour, said members of the panel.

The day cares are unable to keep staff because staff wages can be easily surpassed at department store and service industry jobs that have far less stress, said Craig Dempsey, a concerned parent.

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As a result, accredited early child care workers are lost to unskilled jobs. As well, children suffer the consequences of a higher turnover rate of child care workers and a difficulty to keep accredited educators, he said.

Day cares are in a difficult position because raising fees to pay higher wages would put day care services out of the reach of many parents. That would force people to quit work to stay home with their children, said Miranda Colbert, director of the Nlaye Ndasadaye day care.

That loss of income would also bring down the families' standard of living, she added.

Child care worker and mother Echo Johnson is a perfect example. If childcare workers were paid appropriate to their education and importance of the role they play in society, they would not be able to afford their own services.

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The panelists pointed out that licensed early childhood education centres must have 50 per cent of their staff with level one early childhood education accreditation. Twenty per cent of their staff must have level three accreditation.

In Whitehorse, they said, as many as 98 per cent of the daycares are in non-compliance.

"Centres will be forced to close," said Desharnais.

"The government is making it so we need to have these educated staff. They should ensure that we can by making it a lucrative career choice for the people," Colbert said today.

"Most people aren't going into early childhood education anymore."

Colbert points out that ultimately, it is the families, like the 40 families who bring their kids to her centre daily who will suffer the consequences if the day care industry can't sustain itself.

The Star attempted to engage Health and Social Services Minister Brad Cathers in a discussion of the day care operators' problems, but was told the minister would not be available.

To raise awareness about the near-crisis day care centres are in, the Yukon Child Care Association will be asking parents and concerned citizens to sign addressed postcards that will be mailed to Yukon MLAs and MP Larry Bagnell.

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- reprinted from the Whitehorse Daily Star

Region: Canada ^[2]

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[3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7863> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/staff>