

Child care system not working in Prescott: Study [CA-ON] ^[1]

Lack of spaces, inflexible hours among the major shortcomings

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

A newly released study indicates parents in Prescott are hard-pressed to find child-care options that meet their needs.

The study was done by the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville and based on surveys of about 160 Prescott families with children and interviews with 12 child-care providers in the area late last year.

It was already known that there are no licensed child-care facilities in Prescott. The study showed there are five licensed day-care spaces run out of a person's home, managed by the YMCA. Including unlicensed providers, there are about 60 child-care spots in Prescott.

But the study said there are 760 children 12 or younger in Prescott, or more than 12 times the number of child-care spaces that are there.

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There are licensed child-care facilities just outside Prescott, including More than Just Babysitting in Maynard and the Educare Children's Centre at South Edwardsburg Public School in Johnstown.

As well, 16 licensed child-care spaces are expected to be available at Central Public School, starting May 1. It is being set up by the counties' Best Start initiative and will be operated by the YMCA.

"While this will be a significant addition to the community, it does not meet the full range of child-care needs in this community," counties staff wrote in a recommendation to the community and social services subcommittee.

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On the affordability of child care, the study said the average cost is \$520 a month, which would account for about 40 per cent of the income of a single parent making minimum wage.

Citing Statistics Canada data, it said the median family income in Prescott is \$48,778. That compares to \$56,197 in Leeds and Grenville and \$61,024 in Ontario.

The study said some families use a variety of options for child care, including part-time care plus friends or family. But such situations were said to cause stress on family units.

With regard to part-time child care, the study said some providers found accepting a child part time took away a full-time spot and was not cost-effective. Part-time care was cited by providers as a common request.

Overall flexibility of services was listed as another barrier to families attaining child care. The study indicates that 26 per cent of survey respondents work varied shifts that involve nights and weekends.

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The study says improving the child-care options would benefit not only families in need of the service but "the entire community both socially and economically."

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"I think there's an economic benefit to child care," [Prescott Mayor Robert Lawn] said.

"I think it permits those who have a need to seek employment if they know that their children are well looked after."

Lawn, a former high school principal, added that there's a benefit when children enter the school system having already been exposed to educational programs, which he acknowledged can also be provided by parents at home.

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With the new Conservative government planning to scrap the Liberal program and implement its own, there's uncertainty surrounding many child-care initiatives in the early stages.

Lawn said he hopes the federal government has a change of heart.

"There's quite strong reaction to (the Tories' plan) ... right across the nation," Lawn said.

"I'm hoping that there may be second thoughts on that."

- reprinted from the Brockville Recorder and Times

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