

Parents looking for daycare fee solutions [CA-AB]^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

While many of the parents who attended a meeting last week to discuss rising daycare fees seem resigned to the increase, that doesn't mean they aren't going to focus their efforts on potential solutions to ease the financial burden.

About 50 people crowded into the children's centre on Feb. 16 to learn more about the proposed fee changes and ask questions of municipal officials. Kathleen Waxer, director of Community and Family Services for the municipality, began the meeting by talking about the big picture for early childhood education and also the reasoning behind the fee increases (which average 18 per cent).

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Among the options considered were cutting the infant program, decreasing the number of spaces available for children, accepting only full-time spaces or decreasing hours of operation. But, she said she didn't believe any of those options was acceptable.

The difficult part for many local parents is that a big increase in fees could also be unacceptable.

"I don't think I could go to my boss and say my daycare fees went up and ask for a raise," said a parent.

In staffing the centre, provincial licensing calls for specific child to caregiver ratios according to the age of the children. That means a certain number of staff must be present to accommodate a certain number of spaces.

If a space is un-utilized but the necessary caregivers are present then money is wasted.

Waxer knows that some people are feeling pushed to commit their child to a full-time position.

Though she understands that flexibility is important and also more convenient for some parents, she explained that offering these options is more costly to the centre.

"Hourly is the least desirable way for us to accept bookings," she said. This is the reason, explained Waxer, for the cost differences between hourly to full-time care.

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Kris Haslett has a son that attends on a part-time basis at the children's centre and said that when she first heard of the increase she was upset. But, she added that with the state of childcare in the province it's just 'par for the course'.

"My only concern is that they stay operating," she said. It's a sentiment shared by many local parents.

- reprinted from the Jasper Booster

Region: Canada^[2]

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