

Long waits loom for Nunavut day care [CA-NU]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Some Iqaluit kids got lucky this fall. After two years on a waiting list, they were finally able to saunter into Aakuluk Day Care.

The biggest day care in Iqaluit looks after 44 kids every day, but they still have a long waiting list.

"All day cares are like that in Iqaluit," said Michelle Mackay, who runs Aakuluk.

First Steps Day Care, which is now full with 39 kids, has about 70 infants and 45 to 50 pre-schoolers on its waiting list. That's "a good two-year wait," says Shannon Graham.

The waiting list at Kids on the Beach is also "a couple of years long," said Danielle Budgell. That day care has 24 spaces, 12 of which are reserved for students of Nunavut Arctic College.

Nunavut has 959 licenced day care spaces, said Lesley Leafloor, manager of early childhood development for the Department of Education. That number includes aboriginal head start programs, pre-school programs and full- and part-time after school programs.

But for many parents, that's not quite enough.

"I sympathize," said Budgell, describing how she breaks the news to parents. "There definitely needs to be more day cares in Iqaluit."

Rates have also increased at Kids on the Beach. Last year, parents paid \$170 per week for full-time care, and \$100 for half-day care. As of Oct. 1, full-time care will cost \$200 per week, and half-time care will cost \$125.

The fee hike was necessary, Budgell said, because grocery bills are rising and the day care wants to continue providing a hot lunch and two snacks to all of its kids.

Beneficiaries will feel less of a crunch thanks to federal funding from Human Resources Development Canada, which is administered by the Kakivak Association, and covers 50 per cent of day care costs.

More relief for parents could come from the Young Parents Stay Learning initiative. The Government of Nunavut added \$500,000 in its latest budget to help parents aged 14 to 18 cover costs — as long as they can find spaces.

The day care crunch is not unique to Iqaluit.

The Cambridge Bay Childcare Centre, Cambridge Bay's only day care, is full with 46 spaces, and has 10 more kids on its waiting list, said manager Brenda Rideout. Parents there pay \$150 per week.

The Kataujaq Day Care, Rankin Inlet's largest, is also full with 30 kids, and has just "a medium-sized wait list," said manager Debbie Greer.

Kataujaq also manages to provide a hot lunch, charging \$190 per week for infants, \$180 per week for toddlers and \$150 per week for kindergarten students.

An outstanding problem, Greer said, is finding "dependable, reliable staff."

"I would dearly love to see NAC host an early childhood education program here," Greer said.

"There's more quality care needed in the community that offers real pre-school instruction."

- reprinted from Nunatsiaq News

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