

Dundurn day care closure leaves families in lurch [CA-SK] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Dundurn military base is closing its child care centre on Jan.1, leaving 39 families searching for other accommodations in the middle of the school year.

"It was a complete surprise to me," said Ruth Dagenais. "I don't know what we're going to do."

Dagenais is a logistics officer on the base, but lives in Saskatoon. Since the announcement, she's been looking into other day care options without any luck.

"They said find alternate arrangements. But a lot of the day cares are full at this time of the year and because I have an infant, it's even harder."

The town of Dundurn, about 40 kilometres south of Saskatoon, doesn't have a licensed day care and many non-military families in the surrounding area rely on the day care run by the Military Family Resource Centre (MFRC). But despite being open to families off the base, the day care isn't always full, and that's one of the reasons for the closure, said Tammy Leach, executive director of the MFRC.

"Our current military usage is really low, it's sitting at about 16 per cent. So we've never, ever been full. That's the most significant thing to impact the centre. If it was full it would probably be more cost effective to operate."

Leach said although the majority of funding for programs and services on the base comes from Ottawa, child care is not a funded program. She said the day care gets some financial concessions from the base and until now, the MFRC performed some administration for the day care without charging fees. Leach said the day care will now be charged administrative fees because of funding changes in Ottawa, which will lead to a "financial disadvantage."

But Jaquie MacLean, who lives in nearby Shields and sends her child to the day care, said MFRC hasn't considered the affect of the closure or given parents a chance to appeal the decision.

"It doesn't sound like the board is really willing to reverse their decision." said MacLean, one of many non-military families who depend on the base for child care.

Cheryl Klassen, half-time director of the child care centre, said she supports the parents because there is a strong need for licensed child care in the area.

A parents meeting organized by MacLean was held Monday night to brainstorm ideas that could be presented to the board for consideration.

Leach had suggested parents get together and open their own day care or start family day homes, but both Dagenais and MacLean said those options take time and money that most families don't have.

- reprinted from the Saskatoon Star Phoenix

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