

Daycare waiting lists at crisis point: Hundreds of families forced to wait for up to two years [CA-BC] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Waiting lists at Lower Mainland daycare centres have reached crisis levels, with hundreds of families waiting up to two years for a chance to place pre-school children.

"I've had to employ someone two days a week just to deal with distraught parents," said Nicky Byres, manager of the Society of Richmond Children's Centres, which operates three non-profit group daycare centres.

The society has 400 families on its waiting list for infant daycare, but can handle only 12 infants at its centres.

"People are shocked when they make that first phone call and they realize the bind they are in," Byres said.

Throughout the Lower Mainland, demand is especially strong for care for children younger than three, said Pam Best, Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre's program director.

Burnaby is seeing record demand.

The Tri-Cities has vacancies for children three and older, but no vacancies for children under three, said Claire Murphy, a YMCA Child Care Resource and Referral program director.

In Vancouver's downtown core, waiting lists range from 60 to 200 people and Surrey is "bursting at the seams," with more than 100 families on waiting lists for ages three to five, said Susan Low, general manager of YMCA Child Care. Byres's Surrey program in the Panorama area does not take infants for lack of space.

Downtown core waiting lists have ballooned as the area has gained housing and schools. The Vancouver Society of Children's Centres has a total waiting list of 1,400, Menzer said.

Census data show a population increase of 149 per cent in the downtown core in the past five years.

Child-care facilities are being built as part of residential projects, but "it's not the facilities that are the challenge, it's the operating costs," Menzer said.

While demand for infant and toddler care is strong, pressure is starting to shift upwards as the children grow, she said.

Byres's Richmond centres have taken only three children from the toddler (18-month to three-year-olds) waiting list in the past six years because she gives priority to infants already in the system.

In areas such as Vancouver's inner city, waiting lists are shorter -- not because of lower demand, but because parents can't afford the cost of child care, Low said.

- reprinted from the Vancouver Sun

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[5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/demand> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/availability>