

Rural day care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Rural child-care advocates are envious of schools that have money, a system with elected trustees and the government's ear.

Kaytor was one of 50 people meeting Oct. 18-20 in Saskatoon to discuss how rural day cares can work together. The meeting was organized by Rural Voices, a federally funded project that researches child care in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Several participants noted that now that the federal government has committed millions of dollars over the next few years for early childhood development work, child-care centres have to scuffle with other organizations to get funding.

Sue Delanoy, who leads a coalition called Communities for Children, said "the fight is on" between health and education because both systems see money is available.

What piece does day care get of that?"

While the education system is perhaps the logical one for child-care centres to join, Kaytor said there are sometimes problems.

Several of those attending the conference said child care is too weak to join the education system because its needs and views would not be heeded. Participants concluded that they needed their own infrastructure that could then be merged, as an equal partner, with another.

Kaytor said attracting public attention is difficult for day cares.

Part of building the case for putting money into quality rural child care is to convince parents to speak out. But Delanoy, who used to travel to rural communities in Saskatchewan to fire up parents, said it is hard to sustain enthusiasm in several locations.

Because of the effort needed to start or maintain child-care centres, Rural Voices presented a concept called an integrated hub, an idea that started in Langruth, Man., 14 years ago and has spread to other places.

Jane Wilson, first director of the Langruth child-care centre, said the village had a population of 100 when the day care opened with five full-time and five part-time spaces. Gradually it built to 100 spaces by adding four other nursery schools or day cares in communities up to 110 kilometres away.

The five centres are under the direction of one board, which allowed them to cut administration by having all the bookkeeping, training and staff scheduling done out of one place, building in flexible hours, sharing resources such as toys and books and reducing the need to continually recruit parent members to the board.

The first partnership her centre built was with the local rural municipality that rents a building to the child care centre for \$25 a month. Other partnerships include schools that made their gymnasiums available, corporations such as Agricore United that donated money, government staff that made the licensing process less onerous as they came to trust the hub model, and the media that publicized the hub's local success.

She now works as a consultant with Rural Voices, the project that will compile the views of day-care providers and parents and forward the information to child-care lobby groups and provincial and federal governments.

- reprinted from Saskatchewan Western Producer

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