

No surprise deliveries for child care [CA-NS] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Most of the money announced by Finance Minister Neil LeBlanc was earmarked for distribution under a five-year, provincial-federal childhood development initiative, signed in 2000.

Further funding for the cash-strapped sector "remains fuzzy," said Elaine Ferguson of Child Care Connections, a provincial advocacy group.

"The budget talks about a framework that will provide new funding for child-care programs and services. How they're going to do that we don't really know."

About \$7 million has been spent so far to recruit and retain qualified staff. Another \$1 million is slated for early childhood training institutions.

"It is greatly appreciated and any money is a good thing. But we would really like to be part of the discussion about how the money gets put in (the system.)"

For instance, money spent on staff, who in 1999 made an average of \$17,300 per year, caused salary disparities within the sector. Only workers in full-time programs at day-care centres were eligible. Workers in part-time programs and family home child care were left out, as were resource teachers for children with special needs.

"What's happening now, not as many people are leaving the sector, but what they are doing is moving from centre to centre. It has destabilized the quality of care," she said.

"It should have been used to set a standard wage. Because there is no standard wage, training programs are still having problems recruiting students."

The sector is also nervous about what will happen when the initiative ends. "There is a concern that there is not a plan for further increments. Without annual (increases), retention will remain a problem."

Under the initiative, the province has invested more than \$11 million in the child-care sector and early childhood development since November 2001.

The funding has also been used to create 325 new full-day spaces and 74 part-time spaces. About 200 are subsidized for use by low- and moderate-income families.

- reprinted from The Halifax Chronicle-Herald

Region: Nova Scotia ^[2]

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