

# Low cost child care thrives in Nunavik [CA-NT] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

KUUIJUAQ - Thanks to lots of money and a plan, child care in Nunavik is a successful regional industry, one that's managing to satisfy both its employees and clients.

By 2002, every community in Nunavik will get at least one new child care facility. These centres will serve 850 children and employ more than 150 Inuit child care workers.

This rosy state of affairs is due to an investment of millions of dollars and a commitment by all levels of government to offer low-cost, high-quality child care in Nunavik.

"We can measure our success in society with how we treat our children," said Margaret Gauvin, regional child care coordinator for the Kativik Regional Government.

"Child care is a priority in Quebec."

It's a commitment that Quebec backs up with cold cash.

This year, child care in Nunavik will receive \$11.5 million, with most of that money coming from Quebec.

A visit to Kuujuaq or Inukjuak shows just what this money buys. The communities' child care centres are both attractive, wood-built buildings that accommodate 80 children up to the age of six.

Another new 80-place centre is slated for Kuujuaq, where the demand for child care outstrips the present supply. In Inukjuak, a second 30-place centre will soon open its doors at the Nunavimmi Pigiursavik technical and vocational school.

Lisa Epoo, the director of Inukjuak's Tasiurvik child care centre, said she has no trouble recruiting either children or workers.

By September, 2000, all working parents living anywhere in Quebec will pay only \$5 a day per child.

Those on social assistance already pay nothing at all for child care services.

And staff salaries - due to recent increases by Quebec - are excellent. A trained child care worker can now expect to receive more than \$20 an hour in salary and northern benefits.

"With the increase, it's done wonders," Epoo said.

Nunavik's 16-month, college-level training program has already produced 16 graduates, and 46 more students are taking courses in Kuujuaapik, Puvirnituq, Salluit and Quaqtaq.

All child care is intended to be delivered in Inuttitut, and a culturally-appropriate program is now being developed in conjunction with Avataq, Nunavik's cultural institute.

Put this progress together with the five new daycare centres going up this year, along with another four in 2001, and Nunavik will soon be able to meet all its child care needs for the foreseeable future.

According to Gauvin, Quebec has been generous in funding child care in Nunavik.

"We met with government officials and explained to them that day care is more expensive here," she said.

"So, grants are now indexed at 69 per cent. That means for every dollar that's spent in Montreal, \$1.69 is spent here. One of our biggest successes was this increase in grants."

Capital grants, used to build or equip facilities, were also increased by 100 per cent. These increases were retroactive until April 1, 1999.

Just a few years ago, there was only one, 40-place centre in Kuujuaq, and nothing at all in other Nunavik communities.

A 1995 regional consultation, however, showed a growing need for daycare due to the increasing number of women in the workforce.

Elders also said they needed help to care for larger numbers of young children. All communities wanted daycare centres badly.

"Child care became a regional socio-economic priority," Gauvin said. "And it was supported financially and morally by the local and regional authorities."

The KRG, the Makivik Corporation and the Kativik Regional Development Council contributed to building the facilities and training personnel.

Gauvin said this investment of time and money has provided a big payoff.

"We can measure our success in society by the way we treat children," she said. "And for every dollar you invest in children, you save \$7 in social and educational remedial costs later."

Although it may take 15 years to see the results, Gauvin said she expects Nunavik's child care centre graduates will be equipped to well in school and life.

But she said residents of Nunavut shouldn't feel it's their fault if the territory's child care centres can't meet the population's needs.

"They don't have the resources," Gauvin said. "When you build child care centres, you have to train staff and you have to operate them. The next priority is to respect Inuit culture, language and traditions. And when you work in a nice environment, when you're trained and you're receiving a good salary, then you perform better."

-Reprinted from Nunatsiaq News

**Region:** Canada <sup>[2]</sup>

Nunavut <sup>[3]</sup>

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