

Gov't cuts funding for daycare training [CA-NB]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Liberal government has overhauled a major program that gave funding to daycare operators to purchase materials and train employees, and is directing all money in the fund towards boosting employees' wages.

Since 2001, child-care centres were able to tap into the Quality Improvement Funding Program to train employees, purchase materials or help subsidize wages.

The provincial government has changed the focus of the program, however, meaning local child-care centres could receive less funding.

Lori LeBlanc, executive director of Unicorn Children's Centre in Riverview, said she's receiving \$12,000 less this year from government.

And that means the not-for-profit centre will have to scale back the materials and equipment it purchases for the children, she said.

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LeBlanc said she didn't learn of the changes until March, once the centre had already prepared its budget for the year. The changes to the program came into effect on April 1.

"If this government believes in quality child care this action does not demonstrate it," she said.

Shannon Hagerman, spokeswoman for the Department of Social Development, confirmed the program is now focusing solely on helping child-care centres pay for wages.

The focus of the program has typically been wages, she added.

"This is to respond to the growing number of new child-care staff in the province," she said.

However, she stressed the amount of money directed to the program increased by \$2.2 million this year for a total of \$15.7 million.

As well, child-care workers can access money from other Social Development programs to purchase materials or train employees, Hagerman added.

Although the amount of money directed to the program has increased, individual operators will likely receive less money, said Jody Dallaire of the New Brunswick Child-Care Coalition. That's because the province has increased the amount of funding for wages to help create new child-care spaces, she said.

"For existing programs, it's a loss because they're losing funding for professional development," she said. "Overall, the funding has increased but it's spread more thinly across multiple centres."

Dallaire said government needs to increase the amount of direct transfers to centres and help decrease the fees for parents.

"We believe we should move away from a subsidy-based system where there's wage subsidies and subsidies for low-income families to a system more like Quebec's where there's more direct transfers to programs and parents only pay a small co-payment."

- reprinted from Times and Transcript

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