

Just one in 10 in B.C. finds daycare affordable [CA-BC]^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Only one out of 10 British Columbians with kids is happy about the affordability of daycare, a new poll has found.

In fact, British Columbians are generally more unhappy with their education and health care systems than other Canadians, according to results of the poll, conducted by Angus Reid Strategies.

Only 13 per cent of British Columbians with children said the affordability of daycare is good or very good, compared with 31 per cent of Canadians.

Crystal Jones is the program director for Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre, which provides information to parents about child care. Though she knows the industry better than most parents, Jones still can't find an affordable after-school daycare spot for her seven-year-old daughter, Gracie.

"I've had to reduce my hours so I can meet her child-care needs at the end of the day. That has a direct impact on my family," Jones said. "We don't have anything available for her for the school that she goes to."

Jones said she has racked up a massive gas bill driving Gracie to and from different child-care activities. She still hasn't found a viable option for September after-school care.

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Jones said Westcoast recently managed a waiting list for a new daycare in Vancouver's Mount Pleasant neighbourhood, which had 500 people on the list for 49 spots. She said the wait for a child care spot in Vancouver can take years.

Even when parents can find child care, it's debatable how affordable it actually is.

"B.C. has a high cost of living as it is, so families with kids are already stretched on a range of ways -- more here than they are elsewhere," said Paul Kershaw, a professor at the University of B.C. with the Human Early Learning Partnership. "Child care services are just going to exacerbate that."

Kershaw said it costs about \$700 per week for full-day child care for a three- to five-year-old across the province on average, with prices in Metro Vancouver closer to \$1,000.

"You often hear parents talking about how child care for one child is akin to a second mortgage," he said.

The high cost of child care is partially due to higher rental costs for land in B.C., but also because our child-care workers are paid higher wages on average than in other provinces, Kershaw said, adding that the good pay for child care workers usually translates into better-quality child care.

But in B.C., that doesn't seem to be the case. Only 32 per cent of B.C. parents say the overall quality of daycare is good or very good. In the rest of Canada, more than half feel child care is of good quality.

"I think that people who work in the field are stretched. They are being asked to do more for less," said Jones, who worked as a supervisor in a child-care facility for 16 years.

Kershaw says the solution to the problem is greater government investment in child care.

"All the research would say, 'Invest in this. It's a really big economic driver down the road. It's a really good investment in your long-term economic growth,'" Kershaw said. "We have a disconnect between the research and acting on it."

B.C. has less satisfaction than the rest of Canada in other areas of education, too. Five per cent fewer B.C. parents think the overall quality of primary education is good or very good than in the rest of Canada.

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But the biggest perceived shortcoming is in educating children with special needs. While 35 per cent of Canadian parents are pleased with

access to special education, only 22 per cent of B.C. residents feel the same way. And while 31 per cent of Canadians are satisfied with services for children with special needs, only 25 per cent of British Columbians are satisfied.

"I think the special education numbers are easy to explain," said BC Teachers' Federation president Irene Lanzinger. "We used to have guaranteed numbers for those things, and one of the first things the Liberals did was take those provisions out of our collective agreement ... in 2002."

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Angus Reid Strategies surveyed 7,000 Canadians -- including 1,000 from B.C. -- online from May 20 to 26. The margin of error for the complete sample is plus or minus 1.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

- reprinted from The Vancouver Sun

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