

# UVic mulls 'big box' childcare; Large for-profit company would clear long waiting list for care <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Child-care groups are accusing the University of Victoria of trying to solve its daycare problems by bringing "big box" child care to B.C.

At a meeting Nov. 24, the UVic board of governors will mull over information about Kids and Company, a large for-profit firm with 25 centres in most other provinces in Canada, including several universities.

One of the few points of agreement in the debate is that more child care is needed at UVic. With 300 children on the waiting list for an acclaimed campus child-care program, many children are kindergarten age before they are offered a place, said Gayle Gorrill, UVic vice-president of finance and operations.

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Under the Kids and Company model, the university would pay a fee and the company would guarantee the waiting list is cleared within six months.

The care would be in addition to the centres already run by UVic. "We are not considering closing or reducing, in any way, our capacity on campus," Gorrill said.

But Lynne Marks, co-chairwoman of the UVic Childcare Action Group, said there is growing concern on campus and in the community that private, corporate child care will lower standards.

"Studies done across Canada and internationally show that privatized childcare leads to lower quality because they need to make a profit," she said.

Major concerns are that there will be less staff who are qualified early childhood educators, a higher ratio of children to staff and high staff turnover, Marks said. A letter from the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C. being circulated on campus says the child-care community is "shocked" that UVic is considering the "false fix of big-box, corporate child-care chains."

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Victoria Sopik, president of Kids and Company, said the critics know little about how the company operates.

"We provide very high quality child care in centres across the country," said Sopik, a mother of eight, who said she founded the business because she knows the importance of flexible child care.

All staff are highly qualified and parents can watch their children on webcams, Sopik said. The corporate model evolved to enable the company to provide high-quality care without charging sky-high fees, she said. Companies pay a fee and, in return, their staff have access to child-care spaces.

- reprinted from the Victoria Times-Colonist

**Region:** British Columbia <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** privatization <sup>[3]</sup>

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