

Rural daycares could have trouble meeting numbers ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Some daycares in rural parts of P.E.I. could have trouble enrolling enough children to qualify for new provincial funding.

The new money for early childhood development, announced Friday, comes with a lot of conditions attached: a provincial curriculum, certification for all teachers, accepting infants, accepting children with special needs. Elizabeth Jeffery, who runs Little Wonders Early Learning Centre in Charlottetown, is happy to meet those conditions.

"If the government is going to give us money to run these quality programs, then I think we need to step up and take the training that needs to happen," Jeffery told CBC News Monday.

But there is one condition that concerns some operators in rural areas of the province, a minimum enrolment of 40 students.

Shelly MacDonald-Manning runs the Down to Earth Child Care Centre in the East Point area. She wants to become a part of the provincial system and is happy to put her staff through the proper training, but she doesn't know how she could reach that enrollment.

"We're at our max, and we are for the fall as well, so we have our 20 and that's working fine," said MacDonald-Manning.

"Above and beyond 20, I'm not so sure. That's a big number for East Point."

The province has said it will be making exceptions to the 40-child rule. In some rural areas where there's only one daycare with fewer than 40 children to look after the province will allow that daycare to become an Early Years Centre. But if there's two or three daycares in one area with smaller numbers, the province said they'll have to band together.

"I'm quite a distance away from another centre," said MacDonald-Manning.

"I really want us to be able to stay in this community. This community has supported me wonderfully,"

Operators have one month to decide whether they want to join the new provincial system for the fall. A lot of them say they want more specifics from the government before they make a decision.

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