

Raise the bar for day cares in Alberta ^[1]

Accreditation program currently voluntary

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EXCERPTS

A week after an unaccredited day care centre in Stony Plain was ordered to close for allegedly force-feeding and mistreating children, Children's Services Minister Yvonne Fritz said the province may need to raise its bar for day care facilities.

"We should have accreditation at 100 per cent," Fritz said Friday.

Since 2004, when the province adopted a voluntary accreditation program to enhance services in participating care centres and day homes, the government has seen 83 per cent comply.

For the past few months, Fritz said her department has been reviewing the funding that helps facilities get accreditation.

"I would think that it would become mandatory," she said.

Currently, the voluntary accreditation system sees some facilities access additional funding to exceed the province's minimum standards, while others just meet Alberta's licensing requirements.

"For me, it's about putting in place measures that assist (organizations) through the grant process for example, or through regulation . . . to ensure that we have 100 per cent compliance for accreditation," Fritz said.

Earlier this week, a government report indicated provincial investigators confirmed a number of accusations against the Stony Day Care Centre.

Allegations that children at the centre had been force-fed and humiliated for toileting accidents led to the closure order.

Many parents this week called the investigation one-sided, however, and said they did not believe the allegations.

"I can understand their frustration and their disappointment," Fritz said, adding provincial staff will be on-site until the July 24 closure to help parents find child care alternatives.

"It's a difficult process for everyone involved," she said.

"I as the minister am confident that the staff made the right decisions to close the day care, based on their investigation. We need to ensure our children are safe. And in this case they weren't, and we've learned that through the investigation."

Staff at Stony Day Care have denied all allegations, and put the reports down to disgruntled former employees.

Owner Sandra Trautman has said she plans to appeal the government order to close the facility.

Fritz, who took over the Children's Services Department earlier this year, did not comment Friday on past government reviews of Stony Day Care.

Government monitoring reports obtained Friday say complaints drove government workers to make unannounced visits to the facility in 2008 and 2009.

In February 2008, a provincial child care specialist said she saw examples of children being force-fed.

"In the preschool room, staff command the children to eat their lunch or drink their water. This command is repeated up to three times until children comply," the report said. "This is inappropriate behaviour towards children by a staff member. Children should be encouraged to eat or drink but never forced."

The same report indicated Trautman received "several non-compliances" as a result of the visit. The specialist made a number of suggestions about the need to better supervise children, and how to deal with toddlers' misbehaviour instead of using timeouts.

"It was also alleged staff members use other types of inappropriate methods for child guidance. Some of these allegations were confirmed today, others are not confirmed based on insufficient evidence," the report said. "It is in your best interest to use all available resources to

rectify this situation."

In September 2009, more orders were issued to Trautman.

"It was learned that certain staff members are swatting the bums of infants and toddlers to direct their behaviour . . . when children do not comply with the staff's direction, i.e. standing on a chair, or running around," the report says.

The 2009 report also mentioned force-feeding, failure to supervise or interact with children when they played outside, failure to "use proper handwashing procedures" when changing diapers, and lack of guidance to staff, who did not have a policy handbook to reference.

- reprinted from the Calgary Herald

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