

# French first for childcare<sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

KINGSTON - Ashley Moores wants to give her two young children an early start at learning a second language.

Moores' husband, a soldier at CFB Kingston, grew up in Quebec and is fluent in both French and English.

Recently, Moores discovered the Kingston Military Family Resource Centre—located in the Batoche Community Centre on Lundy's Lane—offers full-day, bilingual childcare.

Moores, who heard the two-week-old licensed facility was still accepting clients, immediately contacted the resource centre to inquire about a spot for her twin boys, aged three.

"I found out that they were only keeping spots available for French-speaking children," she said.

Faced with returning to a full-time job and her partner working on base, Moores said she was looking for a childcare option that was convenient for her young family.

She said she has avoided the base's other childcare facility, Sunshine Playhouse, saying the wait list tops one year.

But the main motivation, she said, was incorporating a second language into her children's early childhood education.

"To know both languages is very important," she said. "Day care is just prepping them for education.

"Why offer day care as bilingual and only accept French-speaking children?"

The new facility is also less expensive—offering its 21 child care spaces for approximately \$30 to \$40 per day.

Moores calls the KMFRC's French-only policy "favouritism," and said the "bilingual" title is misleading.

"It's unfair for the families that are being posted in," she said. "It's discrimination. It really is.

"There is no justification for it."

Moores said she is surprised these rules have been created by the resource centre, which helped her through her husband's deployment last year.

"They do play a big part in the military spouse's life," she said. "They do a lot for us, but I just can't get over this."

Iain Harper, executive director of the KMFRC, said CFB Kingston has seen an influx in the number of francophone families stationed there, and the decision to designate the childcare facility as "francophone-first" was based on space available in the facility.

"It's a space issue," Harper said. "If I had more space, I would help everybody.

"It's just unfortunate that I don't."

Harper said a number of childcare spaces are being reserved for French-speaking children in anticipation of postings to the base in the coming month.

"We considered there needed to be alternate childcare for francophone families," he said. "Yes, there are spots available, and people are calling daily and we are filling francophone spaces."

Harper said current figures show that of the military population, approximately 30% identify themselves as francophone.

Recently, the base's only French-language childcare centre moved to the Portsmouth Village area.

"We needed to provide alternative choices for francophone families," he said.

Because Sunshine Playhouse offers services in English, Harper said there is an alternative for English-speaking families.

"I have no control over the wait list of Sunshine," he said. "I understand their frustration if they've been on a (wait) list."

If available spaces are not filled by September, Harper said they would be made available to English-speaking children.

When asked why the childcare centre was being advertised as "bilingual," including on the KMFRC's website, Harper admitted the wording may not have clearly described the services the resource centre provides.

"It may have been forward-looking to use the word bilingual," he said. "If I do get more space, of course we will look at eventually making it bilingual. Our intent is, over time, that our services will be completely bilingual."

"Now, we try to balance the (child) care for all."

But Moores said that misses the point.

"When they look at demand for childcare, I don't think it should go on how many francophone families there are," she said. "It should go on how many families need childcare, regardless of language."

- reprinted from *The Kingston Whig-Standard*

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[2]</sup>

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

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