

Willowbrae aims to be McDonald's of daycare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Just as a big Big Mac in Alberta tastes the same as one purchased in Nova Scotia, Willowbrae Childcare Academy intends to offer parents coast-to-coast consistent and reliable service.

Halifax entrepreneur Wayne Cochrane launched the flagship Willowbrae Childcare Academy in Burnside Park in Dartmouth in 2011; a year later, the daycare is doubling in size, three more are on tap to open in metro Halifax and 15 other locations are in the works across Canada and the United States.

"Our goal in the next 10 years is to open 100 locations," Cochrane said from the Calgary airport Thursday. "We know we have a better brand and we've built a good investment model, so everyone wins. During our research three years ago, I didn't see any one brand that could be the McDonald's of the child-care industry, so we thought this was a great opportunity. That's our role; that's who we'll be."

Cochrane, a licensed real estate agent who also founded local software firm Visontech Consulting Inc., recently sold his stake in Exit Realty Metro to focus on franchising the company.

The Willowbrae business model taps entrepreneur investors to finance the daycare, hire a facility director and an on-staff chef. Even the facility's accounting and bookkeeping needs are outsourced so the director can focus on daily operations.

"This is all so the director is truly focused on education and on the children and not be worrying themselves with meal plans and books," Cochrane said.

Early research into the child-care industry revealed an obvious gap in communication between when the child is dropped off and when they are picked up.

To fill that gap, Cochrane created proprietary software that he said enhances operations, security and offers parents peace of mind.

Every Willowbrae facility is outfitted with cameras in every room and outside so parents can, at any point in the day, check in on their child.

Email reports that chronicle the day's events detailing what and how much the child ate and their bathroom and sleep habits is sent to parents nightly.

The expansion at Willowbrae in Burnside Park was precipitated by a growing waiting list that is 87 deep and the need for a corporate head office, Cochrane said.

The expansion, expected to wrap up in May, will add about 132 more spaces for children ages four months to five years.

-reprinted from the Chronicle Herald

Region: Nova Scotia ^[2]

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