

Growing population places pressure on Saskatchewan's childcare providers ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

A growing, and younger, population is putting the squeeze on childcare providers in the province.

On Wednesday, Statistics Canada released figures that named Saskatoon as the fastest growing metropolitan area in Canada along with having the youngest median age.

This is creating issues for parents looking to work but unable to find a daycare provider.

One person feeling the pinch is Angela Brown. She recently moved back to Saskatchewan from Alberta with her husband and two young children and although she managed to secure a part-time spot for her 4-year-old daughter at Parents' Child Development Cooperative, her 15-month-old son is still on the waiting list.

"To have a place that you trust and that is reputable and the child enjoys is huge," she said. "If you don't have that, your days at work are awful," said Brown.

Brown has yet to rejoin the work force since neither of her children have full-time placements at childcare facilities. Parents' Child Development Cooperative currently has 250 children on its waiting list and the average wait period is approximately 18 months.

"I definitely consider our province to be in a childcare crisis," said Kimberly Carpenter, a manager with one of three care centres run by the company in Saskatoon.

In 2012, the number of registered births in Saskatchewan hit a 22-year high, placing additional stress on an already strained industry where lengthy waiting lists and costs comparable to rent have become major issues.

"As much as we'd love to say, please give us two more centres because we could fill them next month, could we find quality staff to staff them by next month? No," Carpenter said.

According to Carpenter, balancing business costs with paying staff competitive wages, while offering parents affordability has been a major challenge.

"We don't just babysit anymore. We're not just here to change diapers and put band aids on boo-boos. We are here providing an early education for these children."

Saskatchewan's Education Minister Russ Marchuk spoke with Global News during the final day of the SUMA convention. He said while the province does recognize there is a major issue when it comes to creating new spaces and staffing them, they are continuing to search for solutions.

"Since coming into office, we've increased childcare spaces by 42 per cent across the province," said Marchuk.

The province currently has a commitment in place to open up 500 facilities across Saskatchewan.

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Region: Saskatchewan ^[2]

Tags: demographics ^[3]

spaces ^[4]

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/13/02/growing-population-places-pressure-saskatchewan%E2%80%99s-childcare> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7858> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/demographics> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/spaces>