

Parents camp out for day care spots^[1]

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Source: CTV Calgary

Format: Article

Publication Date: 1 Mar 2013

EXCERPTS:

Dozens of parents are lined up outside a southwest Calgary community centre in the hopes of getting one of a few precious child care spots for their kids.

Parents lined up outside the Rosscarrock Community Hall starting Thursday afternoon and have been waiting for more than 15 hours.

Registration for the Kidzinc program began at 7 a.m.

The organization runs programs specialized in fine arts and recreation.

They include a variety of arts and crafts, group games, and outdoor play opportunities.

The programs are open for kids in Grades 1 through 6 in several different communities across the city.

There are limited spaces available, with one parent saying there are just five spots in one of the locations.

"We've been out here for 15 hours plus for our kids to get child care spots for September of next year," says Johannes Van Leenen.

Van Leenen is looking for child care for the eldest of his three children, who are nine, six and six.

"I tried last year as well but was unsuccessful."

He's been in line since just after he got out of work on Thursday afternoon.

Van Leenen says there is really no opportunity for parents to have their kids looked after outside of this child care facilities if they have to work during the day.

There are only a couple organizations that offer this type of care, and if you don't get a spot, things can be difficult. "Either you don't work or you need to cut your hours back or you hire a nanny," Van Leenen says. "If you're a single mom, you can't afford that."

He hopes the mayor will focus on the issue. "It's terrible that we live in a city like Calgary and can't provide enough child care to allow families to work."

Tim Dixon is looking for care for his daughter who is entering Grade 1 in September.

He's been in line since about 3:45 a.m. and he's surprised by the line up.

When he's come on previous years there hasn't been a line. "I was surprised and yet not because there's limited spaces for each school, the way they've grouped them."

Dixon says that if his daughter doesn't get into Kidzinc, they'd have to make alternate arrangements. "We'll do what we have to do."

He wonders if there is any plan for child care. "The education system is managed at the provincial level. Hey Nenshi, Alison, what are we doing? If children aren't our priority, what is?"

Laurie Boychuk, a single mother of two children, is convinced she'll get a spot for her daughter and is positive about it because the school in her community doesn't offer the care she needs.

"Normal school hours are 9 a.m. to 3:20 p.m. and I work 7:30 a.m. to about 5 p.m. every day."

Boychuk is first in line for the spots she is looking for.

"This is one of the organizations that are accredited and it's with a reputable company."

She says that by enrolling her daughter in this program, she'll be saving money as opposed to putting them into day care. "It's less hours than my child would be in day care. It's about \$350 per month plus bussing."

Boychuk still feels the government needs to do something. "I think it's pretty sad that parents need to stand out here. I think the provincial government needs to step up their support of families. I think they need to focus on child care and education."

Christine Tuturia, executive director of Kidzinc, says that they opened their facility 35 years ago in Spruce Cliff. "It was started by people in the community who recognized parents were working and didn't have a place for their kids to go."

They began with about 15 children but have since grown to accommodate 300 kids in seven locations around the city.

Tuturia says that they keep their registration costs low to accommodate for as many families as they can and so that low income families can take advantage of government subsidies and end up paying very little for the service.

They have a number of families registered in the program and they are allowed to enroll first. The remaining spots are then offered to the public on a first come, first serve basis.

She says that it is not an ideal situation but they continue to work with government to get more access for parents. "Our big issue is finding the space to accommodate these families. With enough space, we could accommodate another 75 to 100 children."

The government has helped with rolling out an accreditation program for the organization. "It helps us with recruiting staff and offering high quality service."

Tuturia says they're continuing to network with local politicians and community groups. "It depends on who you talk to. Some have been very supportive, others not so much. It needs to be looked at across the province so parents don't need to decide between their kids and their work."

Of the parents waiting in line on Friday, she says that many will be put on a wait list that may move quickly or may not see any movement whatsoever.

"It puts parents in a very difficult situation because you're putting your need to work up against your child being in a safe place."

For tips on choosing a child care facility visit Alberta Human Services' Finding Quality Child Care [2].

-reprinted from CTV Calgary

Region: Alberta [3]

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