

# Southwestern Manitoba child-care shortage a 'crisis' <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

An economic boom in southwestern Manitoba is fuelling a shortage of child-care spaces, forcing some parents to quit their jobs or cross the border to Saskatchewan for help.

CBC News has contacted daycares throughout the Westman area, and almost all of them said they have no spaces available.

A search in the Manitoba government's online child-care database produced no vacancies in the region, which is home to a growing oil industry.

"Yes, it is a crisis," said Lisa Hicks, the daycare director with the Funshine Learning Centre in Virden, Man.

"Parents are desperately looking for care," she added. "There's a long waiting list at our program; there's not many private homes in town."

The Virden centre is licensed for 35 children but there are more than 150 families on a three-year waiting list for spaces, according to Hicks.

Hicks said she has heard of people extending their parental leave because they could not secure child-care arrangements.

"I have heard of people quitting their jobs because they have no care," she said.

'Extremely frustrating and difficult'

Amanda Isaac, a single mother of two from Reston, Man., said the daycare her children were attending shut down in March, just months after she returned from maternity leave.

"I just went blank, I broke down," she said.

Isaac said she called daycares in the Reston, Virden and Oak Lake areas, but everything was full.

As a result, Isaac had to quit her job as an accounting clerk - and go on social assistance - to care for her two-year-old son full-time at home.

"Especially having worked all my life, it's hard having to go from a good paying job," she said.

"[It's] extremely frustrating and difficult, sometimes demeaning."

Some families going to Saskatchewan

Brandy George, a daycare director in Redvers, Sask., told CBC News that some families from Manitoba are crossing the border seeking child care.

George said she currently has five to seven children from Manitoba at her facility.

"From the families that I've spoken with, they have very limited options," she said. "There's not as many centres - licensed centres - available."

In Reston, a local daycare board has been raising money for a new daycare for two years, but members found out in June that provincial grant money was not available.

"Our challenge has been the provincial level of funding," said Andrea Guthrie, the board's president.

"There's no capital funding left at the provincial level and there's a wait list for the operating funding, and that is what centres rely on in order to get up and going."

In Virden, Hicks said she has been trying to expand her daycare centre, but it hasn't been easy.

"There is a freeze on government funding that we would have access to. We would need to fund the whole project ourselves," she said.

"We're looking at needing about \$1 million to build a 50-spot facility ... and we'd still have a wait list."

Isaac said she's not surprised to hear daycares across the region are full, and she's urging the government to do something about the problem soon.

For example, the province should relax its licensing standards for home-based daycares, she said.

"I believe that if we don't get affordable child care, these communities are going to start losing people," Isaac said.

-reprinted from CBC News

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

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