

# One less option<sup>[1]</sup>

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EXCERPTS

One of two childcare centres in Clarenville will shut its doors permanently on Christmas Eve, forcing parents on a search for childcare in a town that's already critically short on spaces.

And help isn't coming anytime soon, because the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services rejected a proposal to create a public child-care centre in Clarenville.

Toddler's Corner on Manitoba Drive is closing due to lack of qualified early childhood education (ECE) staff, according to owner Lori Peddle. The privately-run daycare has been open for 18 years and cares for 23 children on a full-time basis.

"It's been a constant battle," she said. "It's always our main issue. The children are the easy part. The parents have always been good. It's always finding qualified ECE staff and keeping them."

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The only other child-care centre is Clarenville Day Care in Shoal Harbour, and it's currently at capacity and has a wait list.

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A proposal by the Neighbourhood of Friends Family Resource Centre to create a public child-care centre was rejected by the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services in mid-November.

"It is with great sadness that I report we are no longer able to assist in the implementation of a publicly supported child care facility and program for the community," stated the board chairman in the group's annual report. "The amount of monies required and the support needed to bring the project from concept to reality is not available. Therefore, the Board has decided to discontinue its efforts at this time."

In February the Neighbourhood of Friends got \$11,200 to hire a development worker for 12 weeks to "explore options for the development of regulated child care spaces in the Clarenville area," according to a spokesperson for the department responsible for youth and family services.

A source told The Packet a \$300,000 proposal to renovate a 3,000-square-foot commercial space on Laskey Place for use as a child-care centre with a capacity for 44-children was turned down as being too expensive.

Meanwhile, Paul Davis, minister of child, youth and family services, told The Packet last week Clarenville is a priority for regulated childcare.

Clarenville will be one of 10 target areas for growth in child-care services, according to Davis. The areas haven't been finalized yet but Clarenville will be among them.

As a target area, Clarenville is supposed to have priority for new child-care spaces, according to the province's 10-year child care strategy, entitled "Caring for our Future."

The document states that "focused and targeted efforts will be initiated in these areas on the creation of regulated child care homes and child care centres."

According to Davis, the provincial government has increased child-care spaces from 4,600 to 7,800 across the province since 2003. Yet that doesn't meet the need for child care, according to a discussion paper released last month by Memorial University's Harris Centre.

Newfoundland and Labrador spends less on early childhood education than any other province, according to the discussion paper, and early childhood educators in this province are among the lowest paid in the country.

In 2012, 60 per cent of children aged five and younger had working mothers, while only 19 per cent of these children had access to licensed child care, according to the paper.

"Clarenville as you know is a rapidly growing community," Davis said. "Development is significant. The influx of young families and growth there is very strong. We know there is a demand for regulated childcare spaces within the community."

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- reprinted from The Packet

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

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