

The Eastender: Childcare gives kids First Nations pride ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

There is no missing the Phil Bouvier Family Childcare Centre in Strathcona.

The sounds of children laughing and playing in the centre's playground can be heard over the din of traffic from blocks away. Inside the centre, beyond the neat row of cubbies, a unique children's oasis awaits.

The not-for-profit licensed daycare is one of only two aboriginal-focused childcare programs in the city.

Respect is paid to aboriginal culture and traditions throughout - dream catchers hang in windows and First Nations art lines the walls.

The daily menu is peppered with traditional staples such as fresh baked bannock and every Friday a native elder comes to drum, sing and tell stories in the Coast Salish language.

The aboriginal focus is all part of giving the next generation - just over half of the centre's children are of aboriginal descent - what their parents may have lost.

"When you start to teach a child from young to be proud of who they are, as they are growing they are going to be stronger knowing where they are coming from," said the centre's program manager, Horacio Valle Torres.

The centre cares for 24 children aged three-months to 36-months and for 25 three to five year-olds in day long programs that operate five days a week, year round. Many of the children's parents live within a two-kilometre radius of the centre and struggle socially and financially.

Out of the 49 children in the daycare, 45 of the parents receive a subsidy from the provincial Ministry of Children and Family Development to enable them to attend. Twenty-two children are from single-parent families.

"There are always concerns when you work with children and families," Valle-Torres said.

Back rooms are stocked full of extra clothes and supplies for children who arrive without the necessities.

Caregiver Amy Cuellar started at the centre three years ago, after working for years in private daycares and said she recognizes the centre and the children face constant challenges.

"Before I started working here I had never had a conversation with a social worker because I never needed to," she said. "Now, I know all these different social workers on a first name basis."

Four to six of the kids have special behavioral needs and approximately 10 are under ministry care, Cuellar said.

In spite of the challenges, the staff see plenty of successes to keep them motivated.

"This is a job where you don't see the [results] right there. You see it with time," said Valle Torres, who has worked for 16 years with the Vancouver Native Health Society, which operates the centre. He said the most rewarding thing is to see youth he worked with years ago now bring their children to the centre and to see how well they parent.

For Cuellar, the day-to-day rewards of working with the kids, far outweigh the inner city challenges.

"Each and every one of these little people has their own unique, little, sparky personality," said Cuellar, as she watched over a little girl in a pink raincoat who was squealing with delight as she cut a path with a blue rake through the sand to the playhouse in the centre's outdoor sandbox.

"You just never know what is going to happen with them," Cuellar added.

-reprinted from the Vancouver Courier

Region: British Columbia ^[2]

Tags: aboriginal ^[3]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/04/eastender-childcare-gives-kids-first-nations-pride> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7860> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/aboriginal>