

Queens Daycare workers seek better wages ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The fight for a "worthy wage" continues for daycare workers in Nova Scotia and that is no different in Queens.

Amber Purdy, director of Queens Daycare, along with daycare workers across the province advocated for fair wages on May 1. The day was called "Worthy Wage Day."

"We've been doing (Worthy Wage Day) for the past four years, we're trying to get up to standard with other professionals in the same field or like fields," says Purdy.

This year as a part of their Worthy Wage Day, the daycare wrote letters to MLA Sterling Belliveau and invited him to have lunch with the staff and children. Belliveau was unable to attend but sent a representative. Workers also wore stickers that said "Hello my name is Underpaid".

Purdy says daycare workers are now under the Early Years part of the Department of Education in Nova Scotia. Daycare workers and Early Childhood Educators were under the Department of Children and Family Services prior to the switch.

Purdy hopes this is a move in the right direction.

"We're hoping that the people in the education system will look and see that we are way underpaid for what we do, we're not babysitters, we are early childhood educators," says Purdy.

Purdy says that the first five years of a child's life is very important in their development. She says that their wages do not reflect their responsibilities or their educations.

Most of the workers at Queens Daycare have post-secondary education whether its individual programs, a two-year community college diploma, or a university degree. Many programs include unpaid practicums to be done in daycares as well.

"Almost all of my staff are trained in some area, a couple aren't but under regulations they have to take a program for three months so they can work in the field of early childhood education," says Purdy.

Despite their educations most of the workers at the daycare make just under \$12 an hour. Purdy is at the top of the pay scale as director and also as an Early Childhood Educator within the classrooms and her wages come to \$15 per hour.

Purdy says their training and educations are similar to other positions in the education system but those positions such as Teachers Assistants, have higher starting wages. Many of her workers choose to upgrade their educations as well.

Fees from parents and grants from the government pay for the operating cost of the daycare and the worker's wages. The daycare fees enable her to pay her workers just minimum wage. The grants from the government can enable Purdy to give her workers bonuses and up their wages but grants get cut down when there is a drop in children enrolled.

The workers provide children with basic education similar to a preschool. The children have routines that include educational portions in the day, napping, brushing their teeth, and meals. The daycare has children as young as 18 months enrolled and their after school program cares for children as old as 12. Some of the children enrolled have special needs.

Purdy says it's also difficult to find and retain employees with such a low wage because of the education and stress involved in the job.

Purdy's acting assistant director Tarina Risser has worked at the daycare as an early childhood educator for seven years. Throughout the years she has taken programs to further her education in the field. She makes \$12.60 an hour.

"I feel as though, especially in the position I am in with all the responsibility, all the education I have to upkeep that the wage as of right now is definitely too low," says Risser.

Risser is a mother and says the wages she receives don't allow for much wiggle room with money. She wishes she could save more in order to help her daughter with her post secondary education.

Risser would like the government to understand what goes into her job.

"I would really like (the government) to see what it is we actually do with the children, I think that in general society thinks of us as babysitters, it's much more than that," says Risser.

- reprinted from Nova News Now

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