

Province funds 200 new Island childcare spaces ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

More than 1,000 new childcare spaces will be created in B.C. in the coming year, including 200 on Vancouver Island, the province announced Monday.

"We've made it a priority in British Columbia to address the ongoing demand for childcare, and licensed childcare in communities around B.C.," said Stephanie Cadieux, minister of children and family development.

In May, the province asked childcare providers to apply for funding to create new licensed spaces. Thirty-two childcare providers in 28 communities were awarded a total of \$7 million in capital funding. This will help support 1,006 new childcare spaces across the province, including 118 in the capital region and another 82 across the Island. Cadieux said infrastructure for the spaces will be created, starting by spring.

"It's a crucial step to helping families find high-quality and affordable childcare," said Cadieux, adding funds are earmarked for another 1,000 spaces by March 2016 and the goal is to have a total of 13,000 new childcare spaces created in the next eight years.

The government currently supports 107,000 spaces across the province. Cadieux said childcare providers who were not successful in securing funding for new spaces in this phase are encouraged to apply again.

Cadieux made the announcement at the Little Paws pre-school in the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, alongside executive director Bruce Parisian, Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Minister John Rustad, and a table full of well-mannered toddlers.

"What this really means for you guys is we'll be able to support more of your friends," Rustad said to the children, and then noted aboriginal families are a fast growing group in B.C., with a high demand for childcare spaces.

The friendship centre will receive \$495,900 toward its new XaXe Stelitkel (sacred and precious) Daycare Centre development. Parisian said the funding means construction for the daycare will likely begin in December on the same property as the friendship centre.

"This is something we've dreamed about since we came into this building," Parisian said. "Look at this space - it's about children."

While the Little Paws pre-school gives priority to aboriginal children and children with special needs, Parisian said it has an open-door policy to those in need. And it will be the same for the new daycare. The majority of the costs are subsidized for parents by the centre and the province.

Parisian said the friendship centre will have to raise an additional \$50,000 to complete the daycare, which will accommodate 70 children.

Bloom Montessori in View Royal will receive \$127,000 to create 40 new spaces for children aged three to five years.

Langford, which was identified by the province as one of the underserved areas, will see eight new spaces with \$27,171 going to the Learning Nook.

Childcare providers in Cowichan Bay, Cumberland and Parksville will receive about \$200,000 to create 82 new spaces.

Belinda Macey, program co-ordinator at Victoria Childcare Resource and Referral, said new childcare spaces are good news but the province will also need quality staff to work in them.

"We need more early childhood educators who are well-trained," she said. Her organization helps families, from all socio-economic backgrounds and needs, find child care options in the region. She said infant care spaces are in high demand.

"They can be quite costly to open and run, and the ratio of educators to children is greater," Macey said. "When your baby is born, you should begin your search."

According to the resource and referral organization, the cost of group daycare for infants in the capital region ranges from \$800 to \$1,785 a month and for three- to five-year-olds runs from \$600 to \$1,610 a month.

Non-licensed (home) childcare providers are a lower-cost alternative. They can care for up to two children, not including one of their own,

and can register with the childcare resource and referral organization after completing a course.

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