

# Edmonton parents forced to get creative with daycare <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Lack of quality child care spaces and the expense of hard-to-come-by spots are forcing some parents to think outside the box.

Currently, there are regulated or licensed daycare centres, out-of-school care programs and family dayhome agency spaces for just 20 per cent of Alberta's children aged zero to five.

When Amie Detwiler began looking for a space for her son Alex in the spring of 2014, she had no idea what she was getting into.

"If I were to tell a new mother who's looking, depending where they want their child to go, they almost need to start right when they give birth, or even when they're just thinking about having a child," she said.

"My husband works by the University of Alberta so we thought maybe we'll see about those kind of places. You're looking at two-year wait times with \$1,400 a month costs. It was just astronomical in that section of town."

In Mill Woods, where the family lived, prices were more reasonable, but she still looked at 10 to 15 different daycares before finding a place that could take her son for \$950 a month, or half her pay cheque.

"If you didn't have subsidies and had to go any cheaper than that, I wouldn't leave my dog at some of those places," Detwiler said, adding she feels bad for families who have no other choice.

Detwiler's sister went a different route, opening her own dayhome — residential care centres regulated by the province — in Beaumont to allow her to spend time with her kids, while bringing in income.

Adine Shewchuk with the Jasper Place Family Resource Centre, 16811 88 Ave., does tours with parents all time but not all of them can be accommodated.

A father pushes a stroller through the hallways of the centre carrying his daughter to a classroom and tells Shewchuk his son is 11.5 months old — almost ready to start in the programming.

"We have eight spaces for 12 months to two-year-olds — there are probably 50 people waiting for those spaces," Shewchuk explains. "From a parent's point of view, the idea of choice isn't there."

Shewchuk points to the irony that staff working at the Jasper Place centre likely could not pay to have their children in their programs.

"I think mainstream society sees this time as a child's life as a holding pattern where you make sure everybody's fed and safe," Shewchuk said.

"Then once they start school, that's when the learning starts."

Detwiler says daycare has been fabulous for Alex, now 19-months old. Once a shy, clingy kid, he can now go off on play on his own or with other kids without needing his parents around.

From the outside, her son's daycare in a strip mall setting doesn't look like much, but after speaking with the staff and seeing the space, she was reassured.

For other parents, Detwiler says don't judge a book by its cover when looking for a child care space.

"Just to try to keep as much as an open mind throughout the process as you can," she said.

Daycare by the numbers:

\$1,920: The maximum universal child care benefit per year for children under six and \$720 per year for children six through 17, or \$160 per month.

\$900: Approximate average cost per month to parents for a full-time, licensed child care space for one child.

43.2%: Number of children developing appropriate in all areas of development compared to 46.4% provincially. Children in Edmonton City Centre (33.6%) and the Edmonton Northeast (33.7%) are developing appropriate at lower rates than Edmonton's Southwest at 54.3%.

51%: Per cent of regulated centre-based child care centres in Alberta that are for-profit in 2012.

1,961: The number of non-profit child care spaces lost in Alberta from 2010 to 2012. Only 79 spaces were created in the for-profit second in that time period.

-reprinted from the Edmonton Sun

**Region:** Alberta <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** affordability <sup>[4]</sup>

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