

Campus child care inaccessible, unaffordable, says report ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Day care is largely unavailable and unaffordable for University of Manitoba student parents, and more child care spaces are desperately needed on campus.

That is the conclusion of the most recent in a series of reports issued as part of the University of Manitoba child care working group, commissioned by the university to study options for improvement of campus child care services.

The report, by child care consultants Betty and Wayne Kelly, was released last month with the title “Moving Child Care Forward at the University of Manitoba: Background, Analysis and Recommendations.”

The report outlines the challenges facing student parents who must juggle between their obligation to their children and their study commitments, arguing that many parents either do not have access to child care at the U of M or simply cannot afford child care fees on top of their tuition payments.

“Going to university is undeniably a major commitment for any parent with young children, but the added cost of child care presents a major barrier,” the report states.

“Without subsidy support, it’s a challenge; without a subsidized space a low income family has very few options. Access to subsidized child care is essential.”

The University of Manitoba offers three child care facilities to students attending its Fort Garry, Bannatyne, Selkirk, and Thompson campuses.

The Fort Garry campus offers students two facilities: the PlayCare Centre, with a current capacity of between 16 and 20 children, and the Campus Day Care Centre, with a capacity of 60 children. These facilities are bolstered by the Makoosag Intergenerational Children’s Centre at the Selkirk Street William Norrie Centre, which houses the U of M’s inner city social work program. Makoosag has a capacity of 52 children.

The child care working group estimates there are 3,210 student parents and at least 1,449 staff and faculty parents at the U of M. They have access to just over 128 child care spaces, ensuring that the three campus facilities have an estimated combined waitlist of over 700 names.

Access is not the only issue raised in last month’s report, however. Affordability is also top of mind for the authors.

Child care is subsidized by the provincial government on the basis of family income. Single parents making less than \$16,420 annually are eligible for the full government subsidy, ensuring that they pay no more than \$2.00 a day for child care. Single parents making less than \$28,354 per year are eligible for a partial government subsidy, while those making more are not eligible for any government child care subsidy.

Without a full or partial subsidy, U of M student parents on average pay \$30.00 a day for infant children and \$20.80 a day for preschool children.

Susan Prentice, a sociology professor at the U of M and a member of the child care working group, argues that the issue of affordable access to child care on campus is paramount to ensure the success of students from diverse backgrounds.

“There’s this invisible reality on campus that the university, for a long time, hasn’t been recognizing,” Prentice said, adding that the typical assumptions about the background of a university student are increasingly outdated.

“It’s long overdue that we pay attention to the needs of student parents.”

Prentice estimates that around 16 per cent of Canadian post-secondary students are parents, with a third of Canadian indigenous and international students also looking after young children. Without a full provincial subsidy, these students pay more for child care than they

do for tuition, she said.

“You have to be very poor in Manitoba to qualify [for provincial assistance].”

Linda Therrien, currently a technical assistant for the City of Winnipeg forestry department, told the Manitoban that access to the U of M Campus Day Care Centre was the only thing that got her through university courses as she cared for her two young daughters.

Therrien was a physical geography student from 2010 to 2014.

Six months into her studies, Therrien and her husband separated, leaving her to care for daughters Sophie, now eight, and Madelaine, now 11. While Madelaine was of school age in 2010, Sophie was still a toddler and required day care.

After two years on a waitlist, shortly after she began her university studies in 2010, Therrien was able to get Sophie into the Campus Day Care Centre.

As a single mother making less than the provincial low-income cutoff, Therrien was fully subsidized for Sophie’s day care.

“I was ecstatic that I could continue studying and attending school,” she said of the subsidy and access to the day care.

“I wouldn’t be where I am now without it.”

She told the Manitoban that campus child care allowed her to focus on her studies for long stretches of time during the day while maintaining other commitments. However, she still struggled to balance parenting and course work.

“I did have to bring my oldest to class with me on a couple of occasions,” Therrien said.

“You know, when she wasn’t feeling the greatest, and I had to go to class.”

Recommendations

The report makes several recommendations for improving access to campus daycare services, including relocating the Play Care Centre on the Fort Garry campus, as well as creating several satellite offices for the Campus Day Care Centre, expanding to more locations on the main campus and to Bannatyne, which currently lacks any child care services.

The report also recommends that the university study the demand and feasibility of flexible, part-time or short-hour child care options.

“We are very hopeful that we can achieve these goals and do so within a reasonable time,” said Gregory Juliano, co-chair of the U of M’s child care consultative committee, in an email.

Juliano told the Manitoban that the committee is seeking out partners both internal and external to the university to improve child care services.

“Our early discussions have been positive, but it is still too early to predict if or when we will have more definitive information on these important goals.”

The University of Manitoba Students’ Union (UMSU) is also making child care improvement a priority on campus, according to UMSU president Jeremiah Kopp.

“Child care and the lack thereof on campus right now is a top priority for UMSU in the coming year, and we’re going to work with the administration and with the province to try to increase the number of child care spots at the University of Manitoba,” Kopp said.

Unlike the university-run faculties at the U of M, the University of Winnipeg Students Association runs a campus daycare centre offering 96 spaces.

Kopp would not rule out the possibility of UMSU eventually providing day care, saying only that “all stakeholders will have to be at the table” in future talks about access to child care at the U of M.

-reprinted from The Manitoban

Region: Manitoba ^[3]

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