

B.C. child care map is nice, critics say, but doesn't address shortage of child care spaces ^[1]

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Source: Vancouver Sun

Format: Article

Publication Date: 31 May 2016

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EXCERPTS

B.C. parents are a click away from knowing where licensed child care facilities are in the province and if they have any openings.

The new online resource was announced Tuesday by the minister of children and family development, Stephanie Cadieux, who said it was one of only three child care maps in Canada that shows available spaces.

"We know parents depend on child care so they can go to work or pursue their school," said Cadieux. "We are absolutely committed as a government to helping parents find child care."

But critics say parents need more than an online map.

"Information is, of course, a piece of the puzzle but there's lots more to do," said Pam Preston, executive director of the Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre. "We need more spaces and spaces that are affordable, and wages for early childhood educators that are at least a livable wage."

Preston said licensed child care fees range from \$1,000 to \$1,900 a month and waiting lists abound in B.C. for children, particularly infants and toddlers. She said in Vancouver parents have to get on a waiting list as soon as they know they are pregnant if they have any hope of finding infant licensed daycare.

"In Vancouver, we think there's enough (licensed) child care for only 35 per cent of the kids who need it so that means there's still a large number of children who don't have it."

She said most parents, and particularly those who work shift work when licensed facilities are not open, are having to create a "patchwork system" relying on friends and family and trading off with other parents.

This is the case for Stephanie Bloor and her partner Braden Johnston, who must rely on friends and family to have their 22-month-old daughter Kaia cared for when they are at work.

"We've looked at different child care places but it's impossible because of the irregular hours and shift work," said Johnston.

He said Bloor works as a nurse and he's often out of town for his job so there's no licensed daycare available in the evenings. He said Bloor's mother helps out in the evenings after she gets home from work and in between Bloor leaving for work and her mother arriving they often have to drop Kaia off with a friend. In exchange, they care for that family's children when they can.

"Ideally, we would want a licensed daycare with standards. We don't want to hire someone on Craigslist. You wouldn't drop your kids off at a stranger's house," he said.

Cadieux agreed finding daycare for parents is challenging and particularly for those parents who need it outside of regular business hours. But, she said, "ultimately it is up to the providers on what it is they provide to the community."

She said the government spends \$370 million a year toward child care. From that, the families of 20,000 children receive child care subsidies.

She also said in the last two years the government has created 2,400 new spaces and will be announcing more today amounting to \$11.3 million. Of that amount \$1.2 million will be spent adding 280 new child care spaces in Surrey and \$1.08 million for 110 spaces in Vancouver.

-reprinted from Vancouver Sun

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

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