

French daycares struggling to recruit staff^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Francophone parents on P.E.I. looking for a place in a daycare where their child can speak and be spoken to in French are frustrated with a lack of spaces.

It's a frustration shared by early childhood centre operators, who can't find people to fill jobs.

Brittany Gallant, director of the Centre éducatif Pomme et Rinette in Wellington, said there's one main reason.

"The pay, for sure," said Gallant.

"It's hard to actually have someone that wants to come work in this field when the pay isn't as high as it should be."

Gallant said incoming certified early childhood educators can expect to start at \$15/hour, which is not very enticing for anyone looking to enter such a demanding field.

Wages low across the province

Both English and French daycares are affected by the low wages, but the problem is exacerbated in francophone centres because they have such a small population base to draw from, said Jason LeBlanc. He's on the board of the Centre éducatif Pomme et Rinette, and interim president of a new organization, the L'Association des centres de la petite enfance francophone de l'Î.-P.-É. The group is looking for better support for francophone daycares, primarily by increasing provincial government funding, so they can more easily recruit qualified staff.

LeBlanc said the recruitment problem got worse when kindergarten was integrated into the schools.

"French early years centres lost educators to both French and immersion kindergartens when they were added to the public school system," said LeBlanc.

Early childhood educators tend to make significantly more money in other provinces, he said, which makes recruitment to P.E.I. nearly impossible.

"It's hard to persuade people to pick up and move when the first thing they do when they arrive is take a pay cut."

'It's very frustrating'

The labour shortage also puts extra pressure on existing staff.

"It makes it harder because we are always short-staffed," said Gallant, "and we never really know what the day is going to look like."

Gallant said it's also hard on parents who call looking for daycare service in French, as, with limited staff, even wait times are hard to calculate.

"It's very frustrating. You don't really know what to tell them," she said.

Josée Babineau is a board member at Centre éducatif Pomme et Rinette, and sends her son there. She said many parents put their child's name on a list before the child is born, and sometimes even that isn't enough to guarantee a spot.

"It's a stressful situation," said Babineau.

"We get regular calls, like weekly, wondering whether their child can come in for September, especially for what we call pre-maternelle, before kindergarten, so a lot of anxiety for parents."

A problem across P.E.I.

Babineau said it's the same, and in some cases, worse, in other parts of the Island. Many parents wait several years just to get into a

francophone daycare, because for many francophone families, daycare in French is vital.

"It's so important in those early years to have, to hear the French language," she said.

"It helps them throughout their school career, so we really want that option for our children."

L'Association des centres de la petite enfance francophone de l'Î.-P.-É recently sent a request to meet with education Minister Doug Currie, but has not yet received a response.

-reprinted from CBC News

Region: Prince Edward Island ^[3]

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