

Early years council works to address child care crisis ^[1]

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Source: Coast Reporter

Format: Article

Publication Date: 11 Aug 2016

AVAILABILITY

Read online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

The Sunshine Coast Early Years Council is working to address a child care crisis that has developed on the Coast.

A child care needs survey conducted by the council earlier this year showed there are not enough trained early childhood educators (ECE) on the Coast to fully staff child care centres, resulting in some children being turned away.

"Finding a quality, regulated child care space is challenging, sometimes nearly impossible for working families," said Sunshine Coast Child Care Resource and Referral program coordinator Catherine Bunce, who sits on the early years council.

She said the recent survey conducted by the early years council found that a total of 44 child care spaces across nine child care centres are currently empty due to a lack of qualified ECE workers.

"The managers reported that not only are they turning families away but even ensuring adequate staffing levels for current enrolment can be difficult," Bunce said.

"One centre reported having to close their doors temporarily when members of their staff were ill. In addition, children with special needs often cannot be accommodated due to the lack of support staff."

When staff were polled, many said they would like to obtain their ECE certification but the cost of tuition and loss of wages during practicum work were stumbling blocks.

In an effort to help, the Sunshine Coast Early Years Council has announced a new bursary for ECE students that can cover a portion of lost wages during practicum placements.

The United Way is pitching in \$4,000 towards bursaries for the effort, Bunce said, noting: "That's a direct result of the survey report."

Also included in the survey report is a list of action items the early years council plans to work on during the coming months.

Other than continuing to collaborate with and support child care providers, the list speaks to working with Capilano University to bring ECE training to the Sechelt campus.

Bunce said they're making headway on that front.

"[Capilano University is] offering one online course in the fall with the potential of an in-person on campus class in the spring semester," Bunce said.

-reprinted from Coast Reporter

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