

The State of Childcare in the RMWB

Background

- The COVID-19 pandemic and recent Provincial changes have negatively impacted the childcare sector in the region putting increased challenges on parents and, in particular, women
- This report is based on data from the following organizations: Willow Lake Tiny Tots the YMCA of Northern Alberta, Bethel Happy Daycare, Child Development Day Home, Children First: Eagle Ridge Nest, and the Fort McMurray Early Years Coalition

Key Findings

Childcare Fees

- Due to the over 200% childcare fee increases in the previous ELCC centres, approximately thirty percent of families had to discontinue sending their children to care.
- Wood Buffalo has 3rd highest in the country for toddler fees.

Childcare Spaces

- Only 55% of the 1556 licensed spaces in the RMWB are being accessed. The Region does not need more childcare spaces, but access to quality, affordable, regulated spaces that meets the community's needs.
- Despite many open, unneeded spaces, 295 new spaces were added by the province, 55 of them overnight as a part bi-lateral agreement. It is not public knowledge of how it was allocated.
- Klorious Kids have added overnight and weekend spots in their program, allowing to meet the needs of more families in the region.

Closures

- Two centres (both previous ELCC centres) in the RWMB have had to close their doors since March 2020 and currently 17/122 ELCC centres across the province have closed.
- Sector anticipates further closures due to the changes as operationally not viable to continue.

Childhood Educators

- In February 2020 there were 153 educators, in Feb 2021 there were 104, May 2021 there were 77
- Recruiting and maintaining qualified childcare educators in the region is an ongoing challenge. Some childcare educators will have a base pay of \$16.50 /hr (only \$1.50 more than the minimum wage).

Provincial Changes

- The Early Learning and Childcare Grant (\$25 a day program) is being discontinued affecting 4 local childcare centres
- The Northern Living Allowance (NLA) has been ceased reducing salaries by 33% or \$12,480
- The Staff Attraction Incentive program was also discontinued¹

Provincial Ranking

- According to the Expression of Interest for the Child Care Capacity Grant, Fort McMurray only has licensed space for 6% of the children 0-5 years.

Considerations

- We implore the Municipal Government to lobby our MLA's to endorse the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care plan that would allow equal access to quality, affordable childcare in all demographics in our region.
- If the province participates in the Federal Childcare Plan, childcare rates will be reduced by 50% by December 2022, and be as low as \$10 a day by 2025 for regulated spaces. The current system is leaving too many children and families behind, particularly low-income and racialized families. Studies have shown that for every dollar spent on early childhood education, the broader economy receives between \$1.50 and \$2.80 in return.
- If all provinces and territories participated in the Federal Childcare Plan, it would add approximately 240,000 women to our labour force. The addition of 240,000 women in the labour force would drive an increase in the GDP as much as 1.2%

¹ A Government of Alberta program to attract and retain qualified childcare workers by providing up to \$5,000 for those who remained with their employer for 2 years
² <https://www.cccf-fcsge.ca/2020/07/22/an-examination-of-albertas-support-for-child-care-services-during-the-first-two-months-of-the-covid-19-pandemic/>