

Calgary day-care providers seek bigger boost from province

BY COLETTE DERWORIZ, WITH FILES FROM SARAH O'DONNELL, EDMONTON JOURNAL, CALGARY HERALD; MAY 13, 2009

CALGARY - The Stelmach government has helped to create more than 1,500 childcare spaces in Calgary and area during the first year of a plan to deal with an ongoing space crunch, but some operators say it could go even further.

Alberta Children and Youth Services unveiled a three-year plan last May that offered more subsidies to parents, hiked wages for workers and created 14,000 spaces for children.

"People said at the beginning that the plan was really ambitious," said spokeswoman Cathy Ducharme, noting the response to the program has exceeded expectations.

According to the department, the strategy has already resulted in 9,449 new childcare spaces across the province and added 1,100 more staff to Alberta's licensed and approved day programs -- including 1,536 spaces in 46 Calgary and area programs.

The provincial plan offers up to \$1,500 for each new space created and provides maximum monthly subsidies of \$310 for out-of-school care to low- and middle-income families with children in grades 1 to 6.

Although the first year of the plan received a positive review from the head of the Day Care Society of Alberta, some of the individual operators said the province could go even further to address the ongoing shortage of child care spaces.

"The money that the province is giving is better than nothing," said Noreen Murphy, executive director of the Churchill Park Family Care Society, "but . . . in no way does it cover anywhere near the cost of opening up a childcare space.

"Because there is no infrastructure funding for child care in Alberta, every penny to open a private day care or a non-profit comes out of the pockets of parents."

Murphy said she'd like to see the province allocate some infrastructure funding for day cares.

In the past year, licensed day care centres, preschools, out-of-school care and approved family day homes qualified for funding.

Alberta now has 77,234 licensed child care spaces.

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