

A SURVEY OF CHILD CARE PROVIDERS REGARDING THE SHORTAGE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS ON THE SUNSHINE COAST

Sunshine Coast Early Years Council, April 2016



Sunshine Coast
Early Years Council



United Way
Lower Mainland

Child Care Action Team Survey Report>

Introduction:

This survey was developed and conducted by the Child Care Action Team (CCAT), a sub-committee of the Sunshine Coast Early Years Council.

CCAT members include:

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The CCAT sub-committee received funding from the UWLM/SB6 to conduct a survey to investigate the challenges experienced by local licensed child care centres in the recruitment and hiring of qualified child care staff, to determine the demand for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECE), and what supports an ECE training cohort would require.

Out of 14 licensed group centers providing care for children 30 months to school age, under 36 months, and preschools on the Sunshine Coast, 12 centres participated in this survey. Interviews were conducted with 9 group centres and 3 preschools. One group centre did not respond to requests for an interview and one preschool is owner-operated and does not employ staff. The survey consisted of 14 questions. We also compiled a list of ECE Assistants, Responsible Adults, and others who are interested in completing ECE education.

We would like to thank the United Way of the Lower Mainland and Success by 6 for their support and all of the managers and staff of the Sunshine Coast child care centres for their time and participation in this survey. We would also like to acknowledge the members of the Early Years Council who assisted in the development and completion of this project.

Terms of Reference

CCAT: Child Care Action Team

ECE: Early Childhood Educator.

CCRR: Childcare Resource and Referral

Background

In 2012, the Sunshine Coast Early Years Council conducted a survey to investigate “The present state of child care affordability and availability on the Sunshine Coast especially for families seeking Infant/Toddler Care” (*Sunshine Coast Survey Analysis Report, August, 2012*). 73% of the respondents reported that they “experienced challenges in finding suitable child care.” The challenges included the difficulties of finding part-time care, lack of space in licensed centres, concerns about the quality of informal care, the need for flexible or non-traditional hours, having to use more than one provider to meet child care needs, and the difficulty of finding a child care space in a convenient location. Out of 301 responses, only 4.3% indicated they had access to licensed Infant/Toddler care.

In 2013 – 2015 The Community Resource Centre/The Progress Plan in partnership with The Early Years Council worked on a community plan and “raised awareness and worked to improve availability and affordability” of child care. (*The Progress Plan, 2015*). Subsequently eighty-three (83) new child care spaces for children 0 months to 5 years were planned (24 spaces in Gibsons and 59 spaces in Sechelt) and 46 of the new spaces are currently in operation.

During the survey child care managers consistently reported challenges in finding and hiring qualified staff to work in their centres. Consequently, many child care centres are not operating at full capacity.

The overall goal of the Child Care Action Team is to address accessibility to child care on the Sunshine Coast and we will be working to assist child care centres to be able to access trained staff for their centres so that they can operate at full capacity.

Licensed group child care and preschool managers were surveyed between February and April 2016. The results are as follows:

Question 1: Are you currently operating at full capacity?

All managers of child care centers reported that they are not operating at full capacity.

In total, there are currently forty-four (44) child care spaces in the nine (9) group child care centers that participated in the survey and four (4) spaces in one pre-school that cannot be filled due to lack of qualified staff. One pre-school is operating at full capacity, and one other pre-school reported that the reason why they were not at full capacity is because of lower registration.

Question 2: Have you had challenges recruiting trained staff?

All group child care managers reported having challenges recruiting staff. It is not an issue for the preschools. The reason given by managers for this issue is lack of trained staff to draw from on the Sunshine Coast.

Question 3: Do you currently employ ECE Assistants or Responsible Adults in your centre?

Ten (10) child care centres employ ECE Assistants and Responsible Adults.

Fifty-seven (57) staff are currently employed in licensed child care centres and pre-schools. There are thirty six (36) with basic ECE: of those 36 thirteen (13) have Infant/ Toddler and eleven (11) have Special Needs, sixteen (16) are ECE Assistants, three (3) Responsible Adults and two (2) Educational Assistants.

Question 4: Are any of your staff currently attending an ECE training program?

Twelve (12) are periodically taking ECE courses.

Question 5: For staff that are partially trained what courses have they taken?

Childhood Development, First Nations 100, English, Health and Safety, Caring and Learning, Guiding Behaviour, Curriculum Development 1, Observing and recording 1.

Question 6: For staff that is partially trained, what courses do they require?

Infant /Toddler Practicums, Growth and Development, ECCE Curriculum 1,2,3, Interpersonal communication, Practicum 1, Observing and Recording, Practicums 2 and 3, and some require all courses.

Question 7: Do any of your staff have Special Needs training?

Five organizations have staff with ECE Special Needs training, with 11 Special Needs Certified staff in total.

Question 8: Do any of your staff have Infant/Toddler training?

There is a total of fourteen (14) staff in five (5) of the twelve (12) organizations that have Infant/Toddler certified staff. There are three (3) individuals interested in completing an Infant /Toddler training program.

Question 9: Do you have ECE staff, ECE Assistants or Responsible Adults providing direct support for children with special needs?

Out of the five organizations with ECE Special Needs training there are only two staff that provide direct extra support to children with special needs. In all other centres, all staff share the responsibility of caring for children who require extra support. One centre uses Responsible Adults or Educational Assistants when required.

Question 10: Are your ECE Assistants interested in completing the full training? If yes, what is their preference: online or face to face?

All ECE Assistants are interested in completing the training and the majority of the Assistants are interested in both methods (online and face to face) but feel that face to face has the most benefit for learning.

Question 11: What are the barriers for staff to complete their ECE training and what support would staff require?

The barriers identified by the respondents included: Cost of tuition, loss of wages, unavailability of training on the Sunshine Coast, unavailability of relief staff to cover time off to do course work and practicums, travel time to Vancouver, ferry cost. These views were expressed by all managers of the organizations interviewed.

The supports that ECE staff would require to complete their training were listed as: funding for organizations to pay relief staff, bursaries for tuition cost, paid time away from work to do courses and practicum, allowing staff doing practicum to be part of the child staff ratio in other centres, support for tutors on the sunshine coast, local support for reading groups for students in training.

Question 12: Do you accept practicum students in your centre? If no, what are the barriers?

All 12 centres indicated a willingness to accept practicum students in to their centres, two with reservations.

Concerns expressed included the lack of practicum expectations from specific on-line training institutions and philosophical differences between training institutions and individual child care centres.

Question 13: If you were able to access Responsible Adult training for your staff would you be able to pay to cover the workbooks?

Eleven (11) centres expressed a willingness to pay for workbooks.

Question 14: Would you be willing to work with the CCAT sub-committee in supporting students?

All 12 centres are willing to work with CCAT in supporting students. Managers are willing to open centres to students for observation, practicums, and workshops.

Other issues expressed by respondents:

Comments included:

The need for higher wages for child care workers; lack of people entering the field due to low wages; lack of financial support from government; society does not value child care workers; child care workers subsidize care for parents with their low wages; would like to challenge practicum after 10 years of working in the field; trying for ten years to finish training now going to Vancouver to attend training which is costly and time consuming; training moving towards teaching rather than care; conference fees too expensive; cost of professional development for renewing their ECE certification within five years; out of pocket expenses for program supplies; unpaid time for fundraising events to support program; manager and staff burnout due to long hours and lack of support staff to cover for ECE absences; staff leaving for positions with better compensation (eg: Strong Start).

Summary and Discussion:

The results of this survey clearly demonstrate that there are child care spaces on the Sunshine Coast that are not filled due to a lack of qualified ECE staff. In addition, many child care centres are operating with the maximum number of ECE assistants allowed as per child/staff ratio requirements set by child care licensing regulations (*Community Care and Assisted Living Act, Child Care Regulation, 2007*). Without exception, all the child care centre managers reported difficulties in the recruitment and hiring of ECE certified staff.

The shortage of trained staff not only affects the availability of child care but also has implications for the quality of care that children receive. Research has shown that the level of staff ECE training is one of the main predictors of quality care in a child care program, thus underlining the importance of access to professional development for child care providers (Friendly et.al., 2005).

Child care provider burn out has also been identified as an ongoing issue. Child Care managers reported that they often work long hours, and are frequently taken away from their official duties to cover for staff absenteeism. Managers also have to cover staff/child ratio requirements when qualified staff are not available. One centre reported having to close when staff were ill because they did not have enough staff to cover child/staff ratio requirements. This shortage of ECE staff shows that until the number of qualified ECEs on the coast increases, access to child care will not improve.

The managers interviewed reported that all their ECE Assistants are interested in completing their training; other Basic ECE certified staff are interested in obtaining Infant /Toddler and or Special Needs training. The barriers for ECE Assistants to complete the training were identified as loss of wages, finding time off to do courses, travel costs if they go into Vancouver, and ferry schedules. There are twelve (12) individuals registered in training programs at this time but all are having difficulty accessing the courses they require, both face to face and on-line. Several only have practicums to complete but are unable to leave their jobs due to loss of wages, plus the unavailability of support staff to cover when away from the centre. Child care centres cannot afford to pay for the extra support staff to cover the employees out on practicum placements so employees need to take time off from work without pay to complete their practicum requirements. The support that ECE assistants need to complete the training are paid wages, and bursaries to cover training costs. Responsible Adults are also interested in getting their ECE but cite the same barriers to training as the ECE Assistants.

All of the group child care centres and preschools interviewed are willing to have practicum students but two centres said that philosophical differences between individual child care centers and training programs and/or lack of practicum expectations by specific on-line training institutions were barriers for them. Eleven centres would be able to pay for Responsible Adult training workbooks, and all are willing to work with the CCAT sub-committee to support students.

There are 11 child care staff with ECE special needs certification but only 2 provide direct extra support to children with special needs; the other centres share the responsibility as a group to provide support for the special needs program or use Responsible Adults, Educational Assistants or staff with no training.

The Infant Development Consultant at Sunshine Coast Community Services Society expressed concerns that her clients are being turned away from child care centres because of the lack of adequate staffing to care for children who require extra support. She told the researchers that there are several children in her caseload who would benefit from attending early childhood programs. Not only could lack of access to programs have a negative effect on school readiness when their developmental delays go unaddressed but in addition, these children miss out on the visits to programs from local therapists.

The Sunshine Coast is experiencing a child care crisis. Lack of access to child care means that there are families who cannot access employment opportunities or education. Unemployment can lead to chronic stressors on families with detrimental outcomes for children including poorer nutrition, inconsistent parenting, worse health, higher rates of developmental delays and behavior challenges. (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010)

In the 2015-16 fiscal year, the Sunshine Coast Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) had over 2600 visits to their on-line child care directory and 150 in-person requests for child care referrals. These figures do not include families who searched for child care on their own without accessing the CCRR. With a population of approximately 30,000 including approximately 3050 children ages 0-12 years (Vancouver Coastal Health, 2009) on the Sunshine Coast, these figures demonstrate a significant need for child care.

Recommendations:

- The Sunshine Coast Early Years Council work on obtaining bursaries to support ECE training and funding to support practicum students.
- Support Responsible Adult training to enable Responsible Adults to work as substitutes for ECE Assistants who are away on practicum or courses.
- Continue to collaborate with child care centres, preschools, Sechelt Indian band and Capilano University to develop a cohort of Sunshine Coast ECE students for either in-person or on-line training.
- Collaborate with Capilano University to bring ECE training to the Sechelt Campus.
- Advocate for improved wages and working conditions for child care providers.
- Continue to work on improving accessibility to child care.

Limitations of the Study

The Sunshine Coast is a relatively small community. As there are only fourteen licensed group child care centres and preschools on the Sunshine Coast, the results likely cannot be generalized to larger communities.

In addition, much of the data collected were anecdotal, in particular what managers identified as the barriers to staff recruitment and access to training. The results may have differed slightly if individual staff members were interviewed but time constraints did not allow for a large number of interviews.

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