

Available Child Care Hours on the Sunshine Coast Child Care Providers Survey Feedback Report

CHILD CARE ACTION TEAM- January 2015

Introduction:

Women on the Sunshine Coast reported to the Community Resource Centre's (CRC) Progress Plan that there was a lack of available and affordable child care spaces on the Sunshine Coast. The existing child care spaces available on the Sunshine Coast are not flexible enough to meet the need of parents, who work in the evenings, on weekends, or shift work. Another key priority identified was the need for more infant and toddler child care spaces.

The CRC Progress Plan collaborated with the Child Care Action Team (CCAT) and developed a child care phone interview survey. The purpose of the survey is to gather information from registered and/or licensed child care providers to determine if existing providers are able to provide non-traditional child care to meet the needs identified and make recommendations to the CRC Progress Plan - Community Plan.

On the Sunshine Coast, from Langdale to Madeira Park, there are twenty-four (24) licensed and registered child care providers. Fifteen (15) out of twenty-four (24) participated in the survey. Of the fifteen (15) service providers, nine (9) are located in the Gibsons to Roberts Creek area and six (6) within Davis Bay to Madeira Park.

Definitions:

The various types of child care are classified by specific licensing and regulatory criteria. For the purposes of this report the providers interviewed will be referred to as: **family child care** providers (operating in private residences) and **group child care** providers (operating in various facilities).

These child care providers were asked seven (7) questions, which included:

1. What are your current child care hours?
2. When is your center closed?
3. How often do parents ask for child care outside your current operating hours?
4. What challenges if any do you face when you first set up your child care center?
5. What are the ongoing challenges for you to provide child care?
6. I could provide additional child care spaces if...?
7. I could offer care at non-traditional standard time if...?

What are your current child care hours?

FINDING: From Langdale to Roberts Creek, child care centers are open, on average, from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday to Friday. In Gibsons there is one (1) family child care provider that offers overnight child care. From Davis Bay to Madeira Park, child care centers hours of operation range from 7:00 am to 5:30 pm, Monday to Friday.

COMMENTARY: Existing child care providers on the Sunshine Coast do not currently have the capacity to provide additional child care in the evenings, on weekends, or for shift work.

Is there time when your child care is closed at specific periods of time?

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FINDING: Of the licensed and registered child care providers surveyed are closed for statutory holidays; and closed for Christmas and Easter breaks, according to the school calendar. Group centers are usually closed for between 1-2 weeks for staff summer holidays, maintenance, and cleaning. Family child care providers will close if they are sick or have a doctor's appointment.

COMMENTARY: When family child care providers are unable to work, there is no alternative child care available. Group child care providers have difficulties finding qualified relief staff that meets the B.C. Child Care Licensing Regulations.

How often do parents request child care outside your current operating hours?

FINDING: Rarely or sometimes. When asked what type of hours parents are seeking, the majority indicated earlier drop off times and later closing times. There are occasional requests for overnight and weekend care.

COMMENTARY: The child care providers interviewed did not report a great demand for non-traditional care. However, child care providers clearly inform prospective clients about their operating hours during the initial interview. There is a strong possibility that parents might not request child care outside of the center's current policies.

What challenges, if any, did you face when you first set up your child care?

FINDING: Challenges child care service providers face when setting up a child care is: finding trained and substitute staff, financial challenges for start up, limited government funding, meeting safety requirements (i.e. fenced yards, wired-in smoke detectors), and meeting government regulation standards.

COMMENTARY: There is a huge financial cost in setting up child care center. It can also be a complicated and sometimes confusing process. It is helpful to have the support from the Child Care Resource and Referral program and Vancouver Coastal Health during the set-up phase.

What challenges do you face when operating child care on an ongoing basis?

FINDING: For family child care providers, the challenges are balancing administration duties with cleaning and on going maintenance in the home, the cost of providing nutritious food, eating challenges amongst children, aggressive behavior of children, and no scheduled breaks during a 12-hour day. These service providers find it difficult to balance family life and working in the home. For group centers, the challenges are financial costs of retaining staff when enrollment is down, finding trained staff and support staff, and cost of building maintenance. Furthermore, family child care providers report feeling isolated and would like more support and recognition. More resources to deal with children with challenging behaviors would also help.

COMMENTARY: Given the current challenges, it is unreasonable to expect family child care providers and group centers to provide non-traditional hours of care, without additional funding and other resources.

Child care providers would provide additional child care spaces if:

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- There were more room in their buildings
- More trained support staff available
- Childcare ratios are changed
- There is more Early Childhood Education training on the Sunshine Coast
- More funding available to support the development of extra spaces

Child care providers would offer care at non-standard times if:

- There were funding available to pay extra wages for staff
- They can find staff who are willing to work non-traditional hours
- Qualified Early Childhood Educators (ECE) staff were readily available for group centers.
- Family child care providers, had funding/support to help with their own family needs while providing non-traditional hours of operation in their home

Summary:

The child care providers surveyed would provide non-traditional care if they had financial support to develop the spaces; and for all child care providers, if there were more trained ECE and support staff available to satisfy the need.

Many family child care providers work with parents if there is a temporary change in the parents' work schedule but they cannot commit to long-term support due to the lack of finances and impact their own family needs.

The child care service providers surveyed do not currently operate at hours that would meet the child care needs of parents who work in the evenings, on weekends, or shift work. Child Care provider report that additional funding and support would assist with the challenges they face daily. Finding financial support to address some of these challenges could improve the availability of child care on the Sunshine Coast.

New Spaces Opening Soon:

The YMCA will be opening two new child care centers in 2015, which will include infant and toddler care. One group child care center will be located at Gibsons Elementary School and the other at the Sechelt Learning Centre. The Sechelt Indian Band is also opening a new child care facility soon. The Sunshine Coast will have approximately 50 – 70 new child care spaces available in 2015/2016 to assist with some of the needs expressed by women on the Sunshine Coast. It is unknown at this time if these new child care spaces will meet the needs of women who work in the evening, on weekends and in shifts.

The Child Care Action Team (CCAT) is working together with the Community Resource Centre's Progress Plan. For more information contact Hilary Griffiths at hilarygriffiths@icloud.com

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