

PRESS RELEASE

East Kootenay Region in Desperate Need of Qualified Early Childhood Educators

October 19, 2015: The results of the first phase of the East Kootenay Child Care Needs Assessment are not positive for the East Kootenay region. Families, early childhood educators, child care operators, community stakeholders, business, First Nation and local government representatives from Canal Flats, Invermere, Wilmer, Spillimacheen, Radium Hot Springs, Cranbrook, Moyie, Fort Steele, Bull River, Wardner, Kimberley, and Creston **describe what their communities are facing as a significant child care challenge and crisis.**

Jane Boyd (45 Conversations), who was hired by the East Kootenay Child Care Task Force to lead the child care assessment project, concludes that the **child care crisis in the East Kootenay region requires immediate attention to support the sustainable operation of child care facilities as well as to develop affordable quality child care for ALL children in the East Kootenay area.** “The supply of child care in each of these communities is not sufficiently balanced to meet the current or future child care needs of families who reside in these areas,” writes Boyd, “many employees in child care programs in the East Kootenay juggle work situations that are next to impossible.”

Part of the child care crisis relates to how difficult it is to attract certified staff to work in community-based child care programs in the East Kootenay area. Currently, eighteen early childhood educator positions are vacant. Many of these employment positions have been available for over a year. The East Kootenay region has the highest number of vacant early childhood positions in the BC Interior.

The lack of qualified early childhood educators has resulted in the reduction of early learning and child care spaces, which include full closures of once viable early learning and child care programs. Child care centre administrators are continually forced to choose between hiring teachers who have minimal or no early childhood education training or reducing programs and services to children.

Although the East Kootenay Child Care Needs Assessment – Phase One focused on collecting data to better understand factors that affect child care in the East Kootenay region, it is clear from the report the solutions to this child care crisis require a collective willingness of governments and governing bodies to pool their resources.

In the short term, these pooled resources can be used to

- Institute a wage compensation grant that results in increased wages for all provincially certified early childhood educators and early childhood educator assistants working in licensed child care settings in the East Kootenay region.
- Designate and fund full-time spaces in post-secondary education institutions that offer a provincially accredited early childhood education program in a face-to-face on-campus format.
- Forgive student loans for students who complete a certificate in a provincially accredited face-to-face early childhood education program within one year of registration.
- Initiate a rural communities living allowance, similar to a northern living allowance, for certified early childhood educators living outside the East Kootenay region who are willing to make a two-year commitment to a rural community within the East Kootenay region.

In the long term, these pooled resources can be used to

- Research the viability of moving to a fully funded and supported apprenticeship designation for early learning and child care in British Columbia.
- Provide ongoing funding supports to address the immediate crisis in early learning and care in rural communities that include enhanced wages and working conditions for early childhood educators.
- Create a five-year rural communities early learning and care strategic plan with community stakeholders that can enhance the quality of early childhood development, education, learning, and care.

The East Kootenay Child Care Task Force was formed in 2013 by representatives from East Kootenay Children First, East Kootenay Success By 6, East Kootenay Child Care Resource & Referral with other East Kootenay community members who experienced and/or who serve children, families, and child care programs impacted by child care in the East Kootenay area. The East Kootenay Child Care Needs Assessment – Phase One was funded by the Social Grants Program of the Columbia Basin Trust with additional funding and gifts-in-kind from the East Kootenay Child Care Task Force and 45 Conversations. A copy of the full report can be accessed at <http://ekkids.ca/homepage/east-kootenay-child-care-needs-assessment-survey/>.

For more information about the East Kootenay Child Care Task Force and the crisis in early learning and child care contact Mary Noble, Children First Manager, by phone at 250-426-2542 or by email at ekidsfirst@shaw.ca.