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| <b>To:</b>                     | Warden Hicks and Members of Grey County Council |
| <b>Committee Date:</b>         | October 14 2021                                 |
| <b>Subject / Report No:</b>    | SSR-CW-08-21                                    |
| <b>Title:</b>                  | Child Care Sector Status Update                 |
| <b>Prepared by:</b>            | Tara Cockerill, Children's Services Manager     |
| <b>Reviewed by:</b>            | Barb Fedy, Director of Social Services          |
| <b>Lower Tier(s) Affected:</b> | County-wide                                     |
| <b>Status:</b>                 |   |

## Recommendation

1. That Report **SSR-CW-08-21** be received for information.

## Executive Summary

Access to quality licensed childcare is a key factor in supporting a family's ability to work and attend education activities. The purpose of this report is to advise Council of the current serious shortage of childcare spaces in the County and the actions being taken to address the situation.

Currently Grey County childcare operators are short about 150 registered staff and are able to operate at only about 70% capacity. There are over 800 children on the waiting list for a licensed childcare space. The Children's Services department uses all the financial and program supports available, however, the lack of registered staff is a problem that will take time and new approaches to solve.

## Background and Discussion

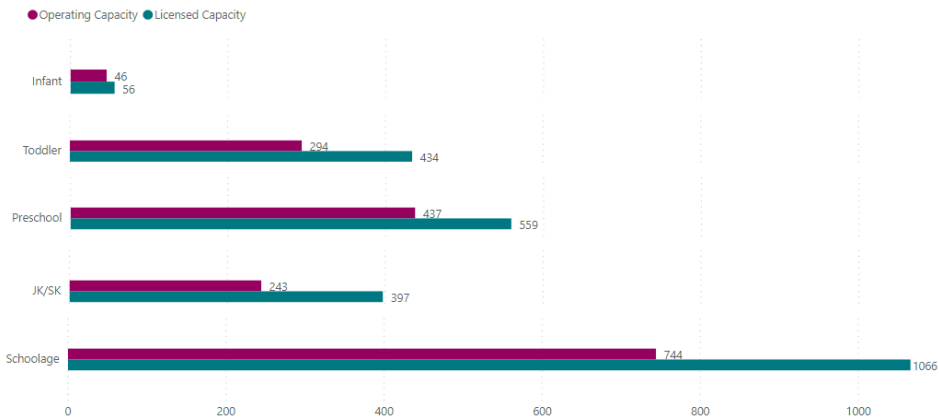
Prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic the local childcare sector was struggling to recruit and retain the qualified staff required to operate at the full licensed capacity. The pandemic has had far reaching impacts in the sector. The Children's Services department is working within the provincial framework to stabilize the existing child care structure and create a more robust system to support our families and the local economy.

Apart from a short closure at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, local child care operators have worked throughout the pandemic, adhering to all evolving provincial and local health and safety guidelines, providing emergency child care for eligible families, and wearing full personal protective equipment (PPE) while providing quality childcare for hundreds of children in Grey

County. This group of frontline workers was excluded from the ‘pandemic pay’ that was provided for other frontline workers.

Local operators are reporting a decrease in operating capacity due to a shortage of qualified staff.

Licensed Capacity Vs. Operating Capacity By Age (Q3, 2021)

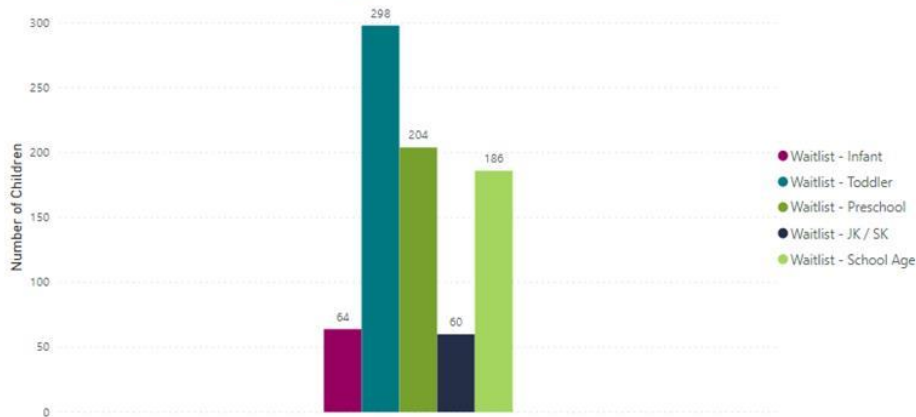


### Waiting Lists

While the local child care sector is currently licensed for 2512 spaces, staffing limitations have reduced programs to operating at 70% of the current licensed capacity. Approximately 150 additional staff would be required for existing licensed child care programs to operate at full capacity in Grey County.

As of September 2021, operators have stated that there are 812 children on licensed child care waitlists.

Child Care Centre Total Waitlist By Age (October 2021)



Wages for staff in licensed child care range from \$14.25 to \$23.20/hour. Staff working in frontline positions in licensed childcares are eligible for an additional provincial Wage Enhancement Grant (WEG) of \$2.00/hour for child care staff and \$20.00/day for licensed home child care providers.

The staffing shortage in many sectors (tourism, manufacturing etc.) has resulted in numerous qualified staff leaving for better paying jobs outside of the child care sector.



## Recruitment and Retention Activities

A sub-committee of the Early Learning Planning Committee (ELP) was developed to focus on recruitment and retention of qualified staff to support the Early Learning Sector. This joint Grey-Bruce ECE Recruitment and Retention Committee works with a variety of stakeholders, including colleges, child care operators, labour boards and economic development to develop plans to find and keep the necessary staff to operate at licensed capacity.

On August 23, 2021 a [joint press release](#) with Bruce County went out to the community announcing the official launch of the [“Be an ECE”](#) website for Grey County . This website provides information on ways to access courses, grants, and other funding opportunities.

The Children’s Services Department is working closely with the Communications Department to develop targeted promotions to inform the community about the importance of ECEs in our community and how to become an ECE.

A [Pathways to ECE](#) document has been created to share with guidance counselors, employment services and other stake-holders to ensure ease of access.

This committee recognizes that these activities are part of a long-term sector plan and may not address the immediate need in our region.

## Supports for Licensed Child Care Centres

Working within the *Ontario Child Care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres Service Management and Funding Guidelines, 2021* the Children’s Services Department flows a variety of funding to operators to support viability and provide financial supports to parents.

### *General Operating Grants*

General Operating Grants support the costs of operating licensed child care programs to reduce wait times, stabilize service delivery and where funds allow, improve access to high quality, affordable early learning and child care services for children and their families.

General Operating Grants are provided to licensed child care centres that have a purchase of service agreement in good standing with the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM). Centre's must demonstrate that its revenue covers base staff wages.

Funding is distributed based on a historical allocation and has not been adjusted since 2015.

As the allocation has not changed, funding is not currently available to support new or expanded programs.

### *Wage Enhancement Grant*

The Provincial Wage Enhancement Grant (WEG) provides \$2.00/hour (taxable) to frontline child care staff. These funds are flowed to operators on a quarterly basis and are reconciled at year end. Grey County applies for this funding on an annual basis through the province and it is not guaranteed to be available on an ongoing basis.

### *Capacity Building*

Capacity Building funding supports child care staff with professional development and learning activities. Ongoing professional development activities ensure staff continue to be inspired to continue in providing creative, engaging environments.

Over the past year, the department has worked with the County IT department to develop their own Learning Management System (LMS) to ensure operators and staff can access professional development resources and take part in virtual learning. This model supports registered ECEs in maintaining their professional learning requirements, access information of interest and acts as a portal for operators to access memos and forms in a single location.

### *Repairs & Maintenance Funding*

Repairs & Maintenance funding supports operators with costs related to compliance with Ministry of Education or Public Health requirements. Operators apply for this funding annually and it is distributed based on priority need and funding availability.

### *Play-Based Material & Equipment Funding*

Play-Based Material and Equipment funding supports licensees to create enriching environments with open ended materials that promote children's learning and development consistent with the pedagogical approaches set out in *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*.

This funding is flowed to operators on an annual basis based on funding availability.

### *Expansion and Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Funding*

Expansion and ELCC funding are used to provide General Operating Funding to centres that opened or expanded after 2017. These spaces are not included in the regular General Operating Grant allocation. A total of 494 licensed child care spaces have been created in Grey County since 2017.

## Universal Child Care Program

The 2021 Federal Budget highlighted an investment of \$30 Billion in funding to support Universal Child Care over the course of five years with ongoing funding of approximately 9 Billion annually to sustain the program.

Each province is negotiating individual universal child care plans with the federal government. The Ministry of Education has indicated that prior to the call of the election on September 20, 2021 negotiations had been progressing for an Ontario Universal Child Care Plan. Further updates will be provided to Council as they become available.

## Early Childhood Educator Recognition Day

One way of continued encouragement for those thinking of entering the field is the recognition of their efforts through Early Childhood Educator Appreciation Day. The Coalition for Better Child Care promotes [Child Care Worker and Early Childhood Educator Appreciation Day](#) each year. This year the appreciation day falls on October 21, 2021. The Children's Services department will be distributing resources to early learning programs to recognize the important work and dedication of those that work in this field and the impact on the families within our community.

## Legal and Legislated Requirements

None

## Financial and Resource Implications

All efforts outlined within the report continue to be managed through the approved departmental operating budget.

## Relevant Consultation

- Internal
  - Social Services
  - Planning
- External (list)

## Appendices and Attachments

n/a