



# School Age Care Directors Association of Alberta

This document represents a synopsis of who we are, who we represent, and the challenges being faced by those in our industry.



This document was created by the School Age Care Directors Association of Alberta to provide an outline of concerns shared by members of the Association as a means to educate and open much needed dialogue with policy makers and government officials

#### What is School Age Care in Alberta?

School Age Care (SAC) programs serve children in kindergarten to grade six of working families in Alberta, and are either profit or non-profit organizations. Licensed SAC programs are required to follow the Child Care Act and Provincial Licensing Regulations as outlined by the Human Services branch of the Alberta government. Programs in Alberta are eligible to apply for Accreditation status by demonstrating standards of excellence on a yearly basis. SAC programs provide care to children during non-school hours, which may include school holidays and professional days. SAC programs provide socially and culturally sensitive, developmentally appropriate, child-based activities that encompass arts, recreation, and field trips. The development of today's youth is critical to the future of our society. SAC programs play a critical role in communities by providing a primary level of intervention services to families and children. These services support youth in reaching their full potential as citizens and future community leaders.

Currently there are 768 licensed school age programs operating in Alberta. Programs operate out of retail spaces, community based buildings (schools, churches and community halls), or can be attached to early learning childcare centres. Each location presents its own unique strengths and challenges to SAC programs as outlined in "Issues Facing School Age Programs".

SAC professionals must meet the same core requirements as their peers who work in early child care settings. These requirements include first aid, a Criminal Record check and one of three possible levels of provincial education equivalencies. Staff certifications can be received by submitting transcripts to the Provincial government from a recognized post-secondary ECE certificate, diploma or degree program or equivalent education. Certified professionals are able to work with children 0 - 12 years as recognized under the Child Care Act as Child Development Assistants, Workers and Supervisors. The system of educational equivalencies poses its own unique strengths and challenges as discussed in "Issues Facing SAC".



## Families in Alberta are facing a crisis in accessing licensed, affordable, high quality school age programs close to their community.

### Issues Facing School Age Programs

Alberta Education's 2013 Budget Highlights project an increased enrollment of 3% with children entering the school system from Early Childhood Services. This population increase is putting higher demand on SAC programs that are full and operating at licensed capacity or on programs that are struggling to find professional staff members. There is a continuous demand from the community to expand SAC program spaces to meet the number of children in need of care. Many communities are being built without community centres, churches and schools. When schools are built, they are full to capacity. This leaves programs looking for space to meet the growing demands for regulated, high quality childcare. Opportunity exists in commercial spaces but serious problems are inherent in these spaces such as: expensive lease rates, lack of outdoor play space, transportation of children to and from school. Programs that are fortunate enough to be located in schools often face the challenge of having to pack their program into a closet each night and set it up again the next day. In addition, programs that have leased space in classrooms are in constant fear of losing contracts each year-end due to the school enrollment increases. Most programs are also unable to operate on non-school days and during school vacations when parents require care even more. Many programs have long wait lists which force parents to choose between working regular business hours secure in the knowledge their child is cared for in a licensed program, or leaving their child unattended at home or in unlicensed day homes. Increasing the number of available spaces will solve only one part of the problem, however.

Programs also struggle to expand due to the lack of school age educated professionals, and an inability to provide a living wage to its staff members while maintaining affordable fee options for families. Professionals in Daycare programs receive up to 181 hours per month in Wage Enhancement funding. SAC professionals receive a maximum of 100 hours monthly, even when many programs operate more than 100 hours per month. This lack of recognition for all the hours a staff works in direct childcare results directly in SAC programs losing good staff to Daycare where they receive additional wages.



In a recent update from Action to End Poverty, 58% of Albertans are earning \$15.00 or less per hour and are considered low-income earners. Most SAC programs can only afford to provide \$15.00 base pay per hour to front line professionals. High staff turnover results in professionals moving from program to program in an attempt to earn higher wages. This is disconcerting for families who want and deserve consistent, quality professionals to care for their child.

In addition to insufficient wages, SAC professionals are also experiencing substandard educational opportunities. The majority of workshops, conference topics and post secondary courses focus on the early years of childhood (0-5). Many professionals in the School Age field find that resources must be adapted to suit the developmental needs of the children they work with. For all of these reasons SAC programs are having difficulty satisfying core staffing requirements which state that 1 in 4 staff be certified as a Child Development Worker or Child Development Supervisor. This requirement effectively forces employers to hire based on an applicant's educational credentials rather than their experience and suitability for the role.

Statistics show that access to quality, recreation based youth programs during the middle years reduces the risk of youth: engaging in youth crime, dropping out of school, and participating in at-risk behaviors. SAC professionals support children as they undergo the critical transition from childhood to the teen years by providing guidance and skill development including conflict resolution, bullying intervention, leadership and stewardship. SAC professionals and programs also support Alberta's families by providing a safe place for children while their parents are at work, reducing the number of children who are left at home alone.

The future of Alberta depends on the strength and integrity of its citizens, citizens that SAC professionals are helping to create every day. It is vital for all levels of Government to recognize the impact that SAC has on Alberta's families, and to support us in our current efforts so that in the future we may all reap the rewards. Making a positive impact in the lives of school aged children has been shown to save the economy money in the long run; being proactive is always more effective than being reactive.

It is our hope that this document has helped to illuminate the challenges being faced not only by those in our industry, but indeed by every working family in Alberta who requires access to quality School Age Care.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these perspectives, and we look forward to building a brighter future for all Albertans together with your support.

**Child Development Supervisors can earn a maximum of \$662.00 per month in a School Age Program, yet in a Day Care program a CDS can earn up to \$1198.00 per month.**

### **How Can Policy Makers and the Provincial Government Support School Age Programs across Alberta?**

- Institute equality in Wage Enhancement Funding so that professionals in School Age Care are on even ground with those in Daycare settings
- Encourage communities to provide access to spaces suitable for the provision of child care
- Ensure that educational opportunities offered by post-secondary institutions, including the on-line Child Development Assistant Orientation, provide a foundation of learning and development for children 0 to 12 years.

# For more information:

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