

Briefing Note



Prepared for: Regional Districts of Central Kootenay, East Kootenay, and Kootenay Boundary & Columbia-Shuswap Regional District Area A

Issue: The lack of affordable housing is amplifying workforce issues in the childcare sector.

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Purpose: To call attention to the need for affordable housing for childcare workers, in order to support the overall viability of the sector and to highlight the role that local government can play.

Background

- Issues in childcare have a negative impact on overall economic development. A lack of accessible, affordable, high-quality childcare is a barrier to individuals entering, or remaining in the workforce.
- A recent study identified issues impacting childcare in the region that extend beyond the lack of available spaces, including:
 - An unpredictable and shifting regulatory environment, that can be difficult for providers to plan around
 - A situation wherein employers are unable to have the funds necessary to cover their costs
 - Workforce shortages, as well as issues such as difficulties in recruitment and retention
- Workforce issues were the second highest ranked issue for childcare providers. Providers noted that this was a barrier to staying open, as well as expanding services.
- Workforce attraction and retention is a complex challenge relating to factors like wages and working conditions. However, one of the most significant challenges impacting recruitment and retention was availability of affordable housing.

Discussion

- Childcare providers are taking multiple steps to address recruitment and retention challenges. However, they are unable to provide housing to their employees to address this issue, as:
 - Childcare providers are already under a situation of financial stress, and do not have the funding to provide housing

- Providing housing is beyond the mandate and skillset of these childcare providers
- There are ECE's (domestic and international) who have expressed a desire to relocate to rural regions like the Kootenays, but a lack of housing is a barrier to doing so.
- To address this issue, local government must convene multi-partner collaborations across community partners – including childcare providers - to find innovative ways to fill the housing gap in order to facilitate the attraction and retention of potential employees within the childcare sector.

Conclusion & Next Steps

A lack of accessible and affordable housing in the region causes workforce issues in the childcare sector, which leads to issues in the wider workforce as families are unable to access the childcare services they require to remain in, or to enter the workforce. This acts as a barrier to rural development in the region. As childcare providers are unable to address this issue on their own, local governments need to intervene. This intervention will have widespread benefits for the workforce of the region, far beyond the childcare sector.