Child Care in the Kootenays: Key Findings
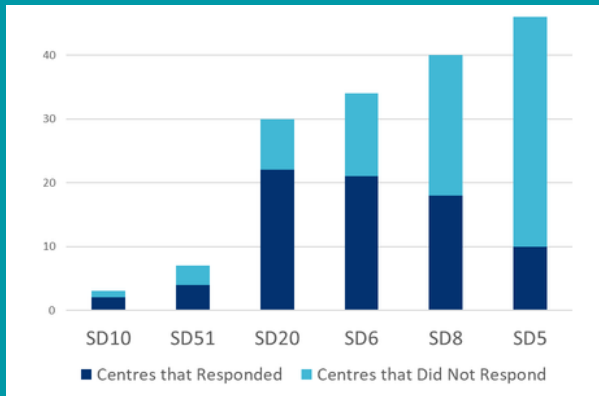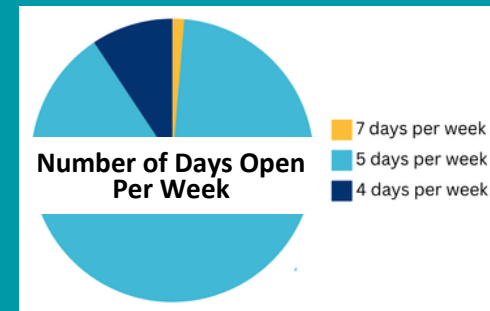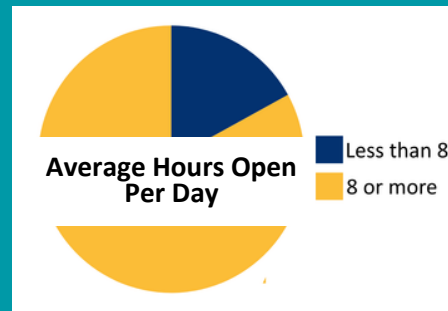
The goal of this project was to understand the business needs and challenges of childcare providers in the Kootenay Region and to contribute to constructive business solutions for the long-term sustainability of childcare providers.

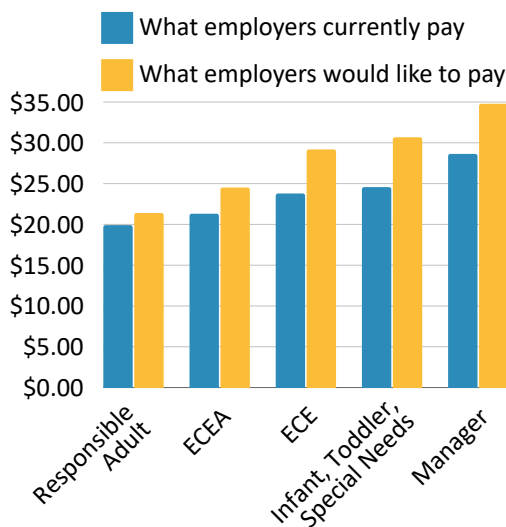We heard from 76/160 licensed providers in the region.

Legend: ■ Centres that Responded ■ Centres that Did Not Respond

(X-axis: SD10, SD51, SD20, SD6, SD8, SD5)

What does childcare look like in our region?

Average Hours Open Per Day
- Less than 8
- 8 or more

Number of Days Open Per Week
- 7 days per week
- 5 days per week
- 4 days per week

- Half of the childcare providers are Non-Profit and 30% are Single Owner/Operator Centres.
- Demand exceeds spaces across the region.

Average wages

Legend:
- ■ What employers currently pay
- ■ What employers would like to pay

(X-axis: Responsible Adult, ECEA, ECE, Infant, Toddler, Special Needs, Manager)

When it comes to wages there is variation across the school districts.

74% of respondents say that what they pay staff isn't appropriate for the required qualifications and experience.

The wage rate listed excludes wage enhancements or top-ups. Wage top-ups are subject to change and thus add to an overarching climate of uncertainty.

Under current operating conditions, is your organization financially sustainable in the long term?

NO 30%
YES 70%
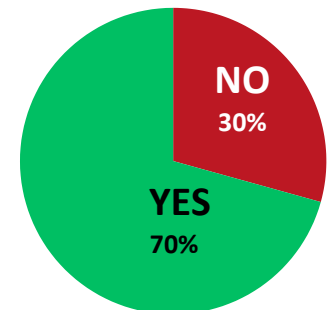
There were no patterns in organization type, size, or type of care for those who responded "no".

Challenges to Business Operations

Significance (+ / −)

1. Balancing income and workload (covering cost of quality care)
2. Human resources (attraction, retention, etc.)
3. Administration (record keeping, licensing, reporting)
4. Financial management
5. Workload
6. Physical space
7. Policy and regulatory knowledge
8. Workforce subject matter knowledge

What are the top supports that would benefit your organization?

1. **Financial Support (26 total)**
   - Wage Enhancement (17)
   - Grants and loans to support materials, business development and growth (9)
2. **Mentorship Support:** including administrative assistants and access to lawyers and such **(14)**
3. **Workforce (7 total)**
   - Immigration Support (4)
   - Recruitment and staffing including benefits for staff (3)
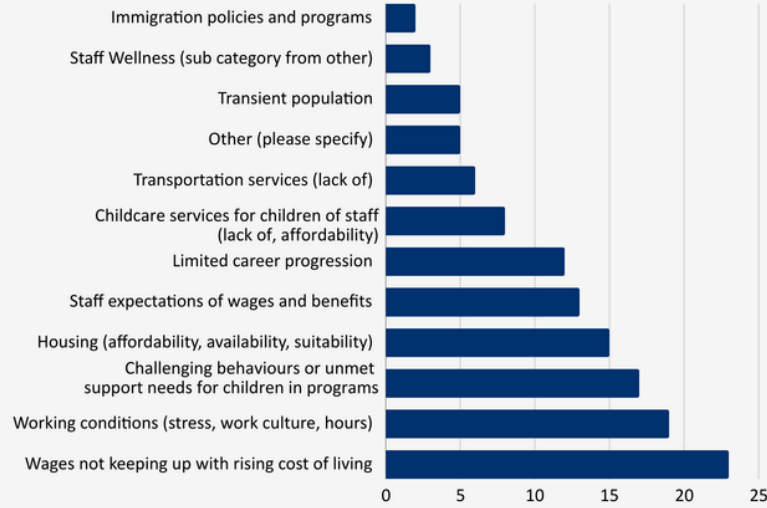4. **Professional Development (6)**

Ideal business support characteristics

1. In person with one-on-one support
2. Offered outside working hours (evenings and weekends)
3. Flexible
4. Free of charge
5. Hands on

Recruitment Challenges

Bar chart (axis 0–35):
- Organization does not know how or where to recruit employees
- Other (please specify)
- Newcomer supports for international workforce (lack of cultural training)
- Immigration policies and programs
- Transportation services (lack of)
- Wages and benefits offered not in line with competition in the area
- Child care services for children of prospective staff (lack of, affordability)
- Applicant expectations of wages and benefits
- Housing (affordability, availability, suitability)
- Level of applicant experience, skills, and training (lack of qualified)
- Wages not keeping up with rising cost of living
- Available workforce/shortage of workforce (lack of applicants)

Retention Challenges

Bar chart (axis 0–25):
- Immigration policies and programs
- Staff Wellness (sub category from other)
- Transient population
- Other (please specify)
- Transportation services (lack of)
- Childcare services for children of staff (lack of, affordability)
- Limited career progression
- Staff expectations of wages and benefits
- Housing (affordability, availability, suitability)
- Challenging behaviours or unmet support needs for children in programs
- Working conditions (stress, work culture, hours)
- Wages not keeping up with rising cost of living

Strategies to Address Challenges in Recruitment & Retention

The top strategies used by >50% of respondents included:

1. **Positive culture and work environment**
   - selected by 63% of total respondents, selected by 88% of respondents without recruitment problems, and 79% without retention problems
2. **Paid professional development (time and paid)**
   - selected by 61% of total respondents, selected by 88% of respondents without recruitment problems, and 79% without retention problems
3. **Paid planning time within work day**
   - selected by 56% of total respondents, selected by 100% of respondents without recruitment problems, and 58% without retention problems

   Health care benefits
   - selected by 56% of total respondents, selected by 88% of respondents without recruitment problems, and 68% without retention problems
4. **Competitive wages**
   - selected by 50% of total respondents, selected by 88% of respondents without recruitment problems, and 63% without retention problems

▶ The top five strategies for recruitment and retention were the same, highlighting a consensus on the effectiveness of these strategies. However, those who were successful in recruitment and retention used a combination of strategies, suggesting there is no single solution.

▶ It was observed that challenges with recruitment and retention were amplified as provider size decreased.

▶ While housing was noted as the 4th most common challenge for recruitment and retention, it had no presence on the list of strategies used by childcare providers. It is beyond the purview of childcare providers to provide housing solutions, and therefore requires collaboration with local housing societies, local governments, and other community organizations.

Recommendations & Ideas* *A diversity of needs requires multiple responses. Ideas identified include:*

Workforce Recruitment
- Create a position that serves the temporary / on call needs of multiple small child care providers
- Help navigate recruiting from outside region – includes housing, immigration

Changes to Support Programs
- Proactive engagement and relationship building from support organizations
- Identify clear pathways to supports based on key eligibility (for profit versus non)
- Ensure all providers have access to similar supports
- Offer support programs and services outside standard working hours
- Create operational funding opportunities

Training & Technology
- Provide targeted, sector specific training at appropriate times
- Explore application of AI for reporting efficiency

Partnerships
- Share business management and other professional services
- Opportunities for all centres to host practicum placements

Mentorship
- Peer or one-on-one business mentorship combining business and sector specific knowledge
- Linking knowledge transfer with succession planning

*Based on responses from the survey and focus groups