



## A GREAT PLACE TO GROW PUBLIC CHILD CARE

# Public child care profile: Drayton Valley, Alberta

The Drayton Valley Early Childhood Development Centre is a publicly operated centre run by the Town of Drayton Valley, Alberta. The centre—opened in 2008—was the first publicly operated child care centre to be opened in Alberta in years.

## Alberta context

In the 1970s and 1980s, various cities around Alberta—including Calgary, Edmonton, Medicine Hat and Red Deer—provided municipally operated child care. In the 1990s, most of these centres closed. However, three Alberta towns—Jasper, Beaumont and Drayton Valley—operate child care services, making Alberta one of only a few provinces to have publicly delivered child care services.

## Development of the centre

The Town of Drayton Valley is located 140 kilometres southwest of Edmonton, and is one of Alberta's key oil towns. The town provides a wide range of services for the community, including publicly operated child care. Drayton Valley has a population of 6,893 (2006 Census), a 13.2% increase from 2001.

### Why public early childhood education and child care?

Most people don't think of non-profit community-based child care centres as "private", but they are. That's because parent or voluntary groups—not public entities such as municipalities or school boards—bear the responsibility for creating and maintaining centres. Almost all of Canada's patchwork delivery of regulated child care services is private, relying on for-profit or non-profit services. And today, Canada is experiencing an alarming trend—a surge in for-profit child care. In some provinces, almost all new spaces are for-profit.

Children and families would be far better served by a public system that blends early childhood education and child care—in other words, publicly funded and delivered early childhood education and care programs managed and mostly operated by local governments or education authorities.

Here's what well-designed public systems can deliver:

- Integrated early childhood education and kindergarten programs.
- Better access and inclusion of families—no matter where they live or their language, origins or abilities.
- More consistent quality.
- With small or no fees, all parents who want child care can afford it.
- Services that are planned and accountable to communities.

### What we want

Our vision is a public system where every child can attend a program that blends early childhood education and care. The research and experience shows that systems based on privately funded and delivered child care are not a foundation for building blended, high quality ECEC programs.

Support public child care—it's the way to go for a great place to grow.



In 2006, an Early Childhood Development Centre (ECDC) project, including a child care needs assessment, was undertaken by Community Futures Alberta, a community economic development network. The project followed a 2005 community plan by the Manasc-Isaac architectural firm, known for green and sustainable development design and planning. At the time the ECDC model was being developed, Drayton Valley was experiencing labour shortages. The plan noted that “the lack of organized and appropriate child care services in the town is preventing a number of potential employees from being fully productive in the workplace.” The ECDC plan recommended the public model for the development of a child care centre in Drayton Valley to address some of these needs.

The town and Brazeau County were both involved in the planning phases of the project. The centre facility was created with \$1.2 million from the town and \$84,000 from the province of Alberta’s Space Creation Fund. The provincial government provided an additional \$84,000 to develop the outdoor centre space that makes full use of the natural environment.

## The Drayton Valley Early Childhood Development Centre

The town website describes the centre facility as “nestled amongst a playground, splash park and a neighborhood that is home to the Park Valley Pool”. In September 2009, the centre and the family child care homes were reported to be at or near capacity (almost 100 children) with a waiting list. The centre has 83 spaces for children 12 months to 12 years old,

68 spaces for preschool-age children and 15 school-age spaces. A regulated family child care agency (day home agency) was part of the original concept and is now enrolling children who cannot be accommodated in the centre, including those under 12 months. The ECDC is fully inclusive of children with special needs. The centre co-operates with various children’s services in the community including family support, out-of-school care and integrated service delivery.

Although the child care centre is part of the town from a governance perspective, there is an “operating board” that includes several town councilors as well as community members. There is also a “governance board”.

In June 2009, after a year of consultations, training, modifications and policy changes, the centre received accreditation from the Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services, a provincially established and funded process. The accreditation includes a yearly quality funding grant of \$7,500. The ECDC’s employees’ wages, high for Alberta, are increased because the program is accredited. Although other town employees are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the ECDC staff are not. They are employees of the town and receive benefit packages that include a pension, use of other municipal services and more.

Parent fees range from a high of \$695 a month for an infant to \$625 for out-of-school care. The centre also provides subsidized child care under provincial subsidy rules. This is the only centre in Drayton Valley that provides fee subsidies.

### The centre’s vision

- A community gathering place, where all parents feel comfortable and supported.
- A child development centre with a full range of child care options, family support, plus satellite family day homes and out-of-school-care programs.
- A hub for other services with coordinated information for families with young children.
- An integrated service delivery facility where the whole community is working together to ensure the health and well-being of our children.

(Source – Retrieved from <http://www.draytonvalley.ca/living-here/ecdc/> before September 21, 2009)

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