

knowing u numbers

A community approach to understanding
the early childhood education workforce



Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board





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The regional data presented here are part of the larger provincial early childhood education workforce study **Knowing Our Numbers** (KON). The District of Rainy River Services Board is one of 43 regional children's service managers that participated in the study, representing over 91% of all regions in Ontario. Details on the project, methodology, and province-wide results can be found [here](#). In the **Executive Report**, Rainy River District Social is part of the 'North' data region. Census data provided on the following page allows readers to put the results into the context of regional demographics.

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Population and Family

Population		Average number of children per family	1.8
2021	19,437	One-parent families	19.1%
2016	20,110	Lone-parent families	
<i>Change since 2016:</i>	<i>-3.30%</i>	Women	13.9%
		Men	5.1%
Population density per sq km	1.3	Marital status	
Median age	45.2 years	Married or living common-law	57.1%
Racialized population	1.7%	Not married or living common-law	42.9%
Multi-generational households	2.2%	Married or common-law with children	35.4%
Immigrant population	5.3%	Language most often spoken at home	
Indigenous identity	29.8%	English	98.3%
Education		French	0.2%
No certificate, diploma, or degree	21.4%	Other	1.0%
High school diploma or equivalent	31.5%	<small>*Estimates associated with Indigenous languages are more affected than most by the incomplete enumeration of certain reserves and settlements in the Census of Population.</small>	
Post secondary certificate, diploma or degree	47.1%	Home ownership	
<small>*15+ years old</small>		Owner	74.9%
Education obtained outside Canada	4.1%	Renter	18.5%
<small>*25-64 years old</small>		Spending more than 30% on shelter costs	9.7%

Employment and Income

Labour force participation rate		Commuting duration (mins)	Total %	% Men	% Women
Women	55.2%	Less than 15	56.3	48.5	64.8
Men	61.0%	15 to 29	18.9	19.0	18.6
Unemployment rate		30 to 44	11.4	12.8	9.8
Women	8.1%	45 to 59	5.6	7.6	3.4
Men	10.1%	60 minutes and over	8.1	12.2	3.6
Prevalence of low income (LIM)		Income distribution	Total %	% Men	% Women
0-17	16.8%	In bottom half of the distribution	50.5	49.4	51.7
0-5	17.8%	In bottom decile	11.9	11.8	11.9
18-64	12.1%	In second decile	9.4	8.3	10.5
<small>*LIM: Low Income Measure reflects those whose incomes are below half of the median of the adjusted income distribution</small>		In third decile	9.5	9.0	10.0
Median employment income	\$37,600	In fourth decile	9.4	9.5	9.3
Median employment income in 2020 for full-year full-time workers	\$62,000	In fifth decile	10.3	10.7	10.0
Median total income of household in 2020	\$78,000	In top half of the distribution	49.5	50.7	48.3
Median after-tax income of household in 2020	\$69,500	In sixth decile	10.3	10.3	10.4
		In seventh decile	10.0	10.2	9.9
		In eighth decile	10.6	10.9	10.4
		In ninth decile	10.6	11.2	10.1
		In top decile	7.8	8.2	7.5

Reference: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Rainy%20River&DGUIDlist=2021A00033559&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>

Sample Characteristics

On June 5 and 6, 2023, the KON research team conducted two in-person focus groups in Rainy River, one with program supervisors/directors and the other with the RECE/non-RECE workforce. Focus groups help shed light on smaller rural and remote regions whose voices may otherwise be lost a province-wide study. The director/supervisor focus group comprised representatives from child care, nursery schools and Indigenous-led programs, including managers, assistants, and site supervisors from both non-profit and directly operated programs. The workforce focus group included

RECEs and non-RECEs, those working toward their ECE credentials, community engagement coordinators, and pedagogical leaders, from both non-profit and directly operated programs. Both groups also included regional officials and special needs resource consultants. As a small region, participant numbers for the survey were too low to obtain meaningful results. Data were merged with other northern regions and are included in both the [Executive Report](#) and [Northern Perspectives](#). Data presented here are limited to the qualitative analysis.



The Advantages of Public Delivery

The Rainy River District Social Services Administrative Board (DSSAB) is responsible for a large geography (15,000 square kilometres) but a small population, with under 20,000 people living in and around 10 municipalities. The district has eight child care centres. Four are publicly operated by the DSSAB, three are privately managed by non-profit boards, and one is an Indigenous-led centre.

The COVID-19 pandemic destabilized the district's child care workforce. As with the rest of Ontario, the sector was already strained from competition with full-day Kindergarten, and the better pay and working conditions schools could offer early childhood educators. At the same time, the DSSAB was tasked with taking on the operation of child care programs, a directive that came out of a 2018 review of children's services. The new model was intended to better support a professional workforce, expand capacity, and remove barriers for parents working shifts or with non-standard schedules. Many employers in the district use 12-hour shifts with various rotations. Implementation was barely underway before the pandemic stalled the transition.

The DSSAB's decision to move to public operations coincided with the building or major renovation of five district schools, which provided purpose-built space for child care. The move was also financially advantageous. Schools charge cost-recovery rent, whereas the DSSAB was funding significant facilities costs for some of the non-profit, board-owned buildings.

Facilities and other administrative savings have allowed the DSSAB's compensation rates to approach those of ECEs working in full-day Kindergarten. As public sector employees, child care staff members are also eligible to join the OMERS pension and benefit plans. Standardized human resource policies and supports reduce uncertainties.

New capacity was added to the system, including 20 infant, 35 toddler, and 48 preschool places, as well as 45 before- and after-school spaces. Locating centres within the schools also makes it viable for the DSSAB to operate out-of-school programs. As DSSAB employees, educators of school-age children are deployed throughout the system, largely avoiding split shifts.

The DSSAB took on a young early childhood workforce, with a mean age of 33 years. About half did not hold ECE qualifications. They were given five years from the time of hire to obtain their diploma as a condition of continued employment. The district works with the local colleges to support training options for adult learners.

Rainy River's population is almost 30% Indigenous. The one Indigenous centre serves 10 infants and 15 toddlers, as well as 24 preschoolers through the Aboriginal Head Start Program. The centre is focused on incorporating Indigenous knowledge and healing. Educators from other centres visit to learn Indigenous perspectives to incorporate into their own programming.

The Focus Groups

THE TRANSITION TO PUBLIC DELIVERY

The transition to the public delivery of child care by the DSSAB took place through the completed construction of new purpose-built centres in schools. As a new facility was completed, the district assumed the centre's license and responsibility for its operation.

Some centre directors were resistant, feeling a loss of ownership and responsibility for their program. Management styles changed from a collegial 'flat' approach to a more hierarchical style. There were also new operating systems and protocols to learn and implement.

With time, however, the benefits have become evident. For instance, managers can now call on others with specific expertise if problems arise.

"It was really nice that everything no longer landed on me."

In addition, improved compensation and benefits reduced staff turnover and drew in new recruits with the requisite skills. The greater availability of replacement staff also lowered workplace stress. Focus group participants said they no longer feel guilty if they take a sick day or go on vacation.

Supervisors credit the district's centralized hiring practices with the staffing improvements. The DSSAB has the capacity for greater outreach and to screen new applicants. A focus on pedagogical learning and a judicious use of apprenticeship programs to help staff earn their ECE credentials has contributed to a more professional work environment.

The district's central fee payment system is also appreciated. It is more convenient for parents, relieves staff of a heavy administrative burden, and removes the commercial interface between centres and families.

The 2018 review of the child care system found large disparities in fees and wages across centres. There has since been a levelling of child care costs and staff wages. Program staff wages in district programs range between \$25–\$32 per hour depending on credentials, responsibilities, and experience. All full-time permanent staff receive full benefits.

Wages are competitive in non-profit centres, averaging \$23 per hour plus the \$2 wage enhancement. Most programs offer benefits.

Parent fees across the system average \$18.90 per day.



STAFFING SHORTAGES

While educators working in public programs are pleased with the new system, shortages, particularly of casual replacement staff, remain. Working with children and families still grappling with the fallout from the pandemic places additional burdens on staff, and burnout is a common complaint.

Staffing problems are compounded in Indigenous programs, where qualified early childhood educators are in demand by health and other social services offering better pay and status. This represents a shift in local employment practices in recent years.

Unable to maintain ratios, centres are operating below capacity. One staff absence may require the closing of an entire room, leaving parents scrambling at the last minute for alternate care. Supervisors, administrators, and EarlyON staff are all pulled from their duties to cover ratio.

“Licensed child care is not a desirable field. The stress of the pandemic, and how the ministry [is] changing things every other week, add to the stress. Why would you go into this field if you can do a hybrid model or work from home? What is the draw?”

“There are no high school courses to prepare you for ECE. ECE is not something they push in school because they don’t see it as a viable career path.”

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Participants have a generally positive view of the district’s accelerated training program. This partnership with Northern College offers a compressed program leading to a recognized diploma.

Seven Generations Education Institute offers a two-year, full-time, weekend/evening ECE diploma program at their Fort Frances campus to accommodate people working full-time.





They have been flexible with students attending their regular in-class programming, allowing them to work in centres while completing their schooling so they don't miss out on job opportunities. The school works with students to ensure that placements fit with their lifestyle. Confederation College also offers a two-year daytime ECE program at the local campus in Fort Frances. District staff participate in their career fairs and all centres accept their students for placements.

Child Development Practitioner Apprenticeship programs also support staff to obtain their ECE diploma. Students study infant and child development, as well as health, safety, and nutrition. Classes take place in six-week sessions. It takes between two and five years for a student to obtain their diploma. Two RECES have already received their credentials through the program. *"Those who went through the ECE program seem more invested in the job,"* a director noted.

While training opportunities are available, it is difficult for centres to release full-time staff for

in-class study or placement hours at a different centre. Not all staff are financially able to absorb the reduced working hours, and access to a car is also essential.

Placement students, usually a source of new hires for centres, are not coming back for permanent jobs. Instead, many early childhood education students are combining their placement requirements with full-time work in other centres.

"There could be somebody that's worked in our child care system for 5 or 10 years and now they have to do a [student] placement. We can't afford to let them go to do the placement, and they can't afford to leave work to do a placement."

"We're the only child care in our town, but getting qualified people to come in to our community is hard. That's why I was a big proponent of the apprenticeship program. We have some good people here who could benefit, and we need trained staff to get quality. Just because we're remote doesn't mean we deserve less quality."

STAFFING QUALITY

Concerns were raised about the quality of staff. New graduates lack expected skills, particularly in their interactions with children. In addition, pedagogical knowledge is cursory.

“They seem to be losing their basic understanding of development.”

Professional development is focused on the basics of safety and child development. Even qualified staff want training in *How Does Learning Happen*, a curriculum framework that may not have been available during their studies.

“With direct delivery, there’s a level of quality expected. We need to do more, but we’re just not opening programs because we don’t have the quality of staff.”

SPECIAL NEEDS RESOURCING

There is great demand for child care for children with disabilities. The district has centralized its special needs resource staff and now has a full complement of resource teachers. The DSSAB-employed resource consultants provide service to both district and non-profit centres, though one non-profit centre and the Indigenous-led centre still have a resource educator on-staff.

Four centres have been able to hire supplementary staff through Jordan’s Principle.

“The approval process [under Jordan’s Principle] is fast; reimbursement is very slow.”

Problems occur when schools are not equipped for children with disabilities.

“When children go off to Kindergarten, the school will ask the child care centres if they can take them back.”

Children with disabilities may have modified days or shortened weeks when they go to Kindergarten. Parents must accommodate this schedule, particularly if the child hasn’t been engaged with early years programming prior to school entry. Child care centres are often unable to provide care for children in their preschool programs after the child has gone to school since the space has been filled.

Parents will sometimes not disclose their child’s needs out of fear they will be denied enrolment, even though this is not the practice among child care centres.

Findings indicate that publicly operated programs have improved educator working conditions, created efficiencies through centralized administration, and increased special needs resource support. However, workforce shortages continue to have ripple effects in all forms of child care program operations across the province.

