



MEDIA RELEASE: May 18, 2022

School District #27 successful in application the ChildCareBC New Spaces Fund.

Williams Lake, BC – School District, local government, and First Nations representatives from the Williams Lake community gathered today at the former dormitory site at Lake City Secondary's Columneetza campus to announce details of a successful application to the ChildCareBC New Spaces fund. The program provides funding to create new licensed childcare options to help families access quality, affordable, and inclusive childcare while strengthening communities across British Columbia.

The School District applied for the maximum funding available to create 119 new childcare spaces in the community. The successful application will see \$3 million be put toward transforming the former dormitory site into a childcare facility.

"We are very pleased that our application to the Province was approved, and we can get to work transforming this vacant District property into a vibrant early learning and childcare facility," said School District Board Chair Ciel Patenaude. "Once this project is complete, there will be a whole new look and feel at our Columneetza campus that will benefit our entire community."

The plan will see the proposed operator, KidCare Daycare, extending their existing services into the new facility, creating a net gain in the community of 119 additional spaces. "Initially we see us filling the spots with before and after school care for school-aged children, which is a very clear need in our community. While that work is underway, we plan to use the additional space to host and train new Early Childhood Educators to build up our capacity to create more infant and toddler spaces," said Irene Willsie, Executive Director of the Women's Contact Centre that operates KidCare.

The proposal included architectural renderings for renovating the current dorm rooms and a series of hallways into larger rooms that will become the main rooms for the childcare spaces. "Initially we will be renovating the first and second floors of the facility, so there will still be opportunities to use the third floor for additional spaces, or program rooms. SD#27 is also contributing additional funds to update and revitalize the Columneetza cafeteria to support the daycare and school," said Superintendent Chris van der Mark. "We are currently formulating plans for design and construction timelines. We look forward to updating accordingly as we progress."

There have been a few attempts to access this fund with different proposals brought forward from the community in the past. "In the end, I think we have landed on the best option for Williams Lake," said Mayor Walt Cobb. "This has been a priority for the City since we started our Childcare Needs Assessment and Action plan work in 2019. I would like to commend School District 27 for their commitment to supporting families in

"Learning, Growing and Belonging Together"



Williams Lake, and the leadership they have shown in their application. Having a shared vision strengthens our community, and I am pleased to see this essential project go ahead. I would also like to recognize the current providers of childcare in our community for stepping up and letting Council know just how dire the situation in our community is. Thanks to their efforts, we gained a greater understanding of the challenges this sector faces and how it is negatively impacting our economy when parents cannot find appropriate care to return to work after a parental leave.”

Representatives from Williams Lake First Nation, the Women’s Contact Society, the City of Williams Lake, and School District 27 were on hand at the site to celebrate the announcement. “It was a community effort to get us here today,” stated Board Chair Patenaude, “and we would like to thank those groups who supported our application. It is good to see collaboration like this happening”.

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