

**ADVICE TO MINISTER**

<b>CONFIDENTIAL ISSUES NOTE</b>  Ministry of Children and Family Development Date: Updated November 8, 2021 Ministers Responsible: Katrina Chen	<b>Kelowna Child Care staff shortage</b>
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**ADVICE AND RECOMMENDED RESPONSE:**

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### KEY FACTS:

During the week of November 1, Building Blocks, a child care centre located in Kelowna announced it would be closing 24 child care spaces for infants and toddlers in the coming days. Parents whose children attended Building Blocks were given three days notice of the closure.

On October 24, Building Blocks sent a letter to Interior Health (and CC'd Minister Chen and opposition critic Karin Kirkpatrick) expressing their discontent with Interior Health's requirement for Building Blocks to close the spaces due to non-compliance. The letter cited four main concerns, including:

- Long wait times for criminal record checks, leading to a lag between when ECEs can start working after they are hired.
- Long wait times within the provincial ECE registry for students seeking certification.
- A challenging, convoluted process for people from other countries who want to work as ECEs in Canada.
- Complaints about the licensing and regulation process.

On November 5 2021 CBC Daybreak South ran a story on the Building Blocks closure, featuring interviews with a parents impacted by the closure, as well as with Laura Forbes, director of Building Blocks, and Melissa Hunt, executive director of Childhood Connections.

Interview participants including Melissa Hunt and Laura Forbes were critical of government in the interview, suggesting there is a child care crisis in the Central Okanagan, and asserting that government's work to build more child care spaces has contributed negatively, leading to the unintended consequence of an ECE shortage.

Building Blocks owner Laura Forbes was critical of health authority regulations and licensing procedures, saying they make it too hard for ECEs to get certified and join the work force. During the interview, Childhood Connections E/D Melissa Hunt said there are over 190 child care spaces lost due staffing shortages, and suggested six other facilities from Lake Country to Kelowna have had to close. Melissa Hunt suggested the ECE shortage is a part of a larger problem and poor planning on the part of the province for the ratio of child care spaces created to staffing.

On November 6, Minister Chen was interviewed by CBC Daybreak South and responded to assertions made in the November 5 interview with Building Blocks. Minister Chen spoke to government's work to make it easier for ECEs to train, attend post-secondary, get certified, and join the workforce.

Building Blocks said they worked with Interior Health to come into compliance to prevent closing. However, the Interior Health licensing ratio of staff to children needs to be maintained at all times and Interior Health had to enforce this regulation despite the demand for child care spaces being high.

An Interior Health issues note indicates Interior Health has been working with Building Blocks on licensing compliance issues since March of 2021.

**Media Interest:** Minister Chen spoke to the issue one on [CBC Daybreak](#). ECE shortages have also received other coverage:

- [Global news story](#).
- [Castanet Kelowna news story](#).

Communications:	Theresa Chaboyer	250-704-3076
Program:		778 698-5313

#### APPENDIX: Interior Health Issues Note

- The Licensee of Building Blocks Educare-Gordon Campus has made the decision to close two Infant Toddler programs within the facility s.13 s.13
- This involves two classrooms with a capacity of 12 children each; or a total of 24 spaces for children under 36 months of age.
- The Licensee made this decision in order to come into compliance with the Staff to Child ratio requirements of Section 34 and Schedule E of the Child Care Licensing Regulation.
- The daycare provided notice to families impacted by the closure on Nov. 2, three days before the closure. The letter to parents/guardians cited Interior Health (IH) Licensing requirements as the reason for the closure.
- Issues of non-compliance at the facility date back to March 2021 and IH moved to progressive compliance in October 2021 due to non-compliance and high risk rating of the facility.
- Multiple media outlets are covering the closures based on parent/child care advocate concerns.

#### Key Messages from Interior Health:

- We appreciate the challenges that the Licensee's decision to close these programs is creating for families.
- Across the province, Licensing Officers work with facility Licensees and operators to provide education and guidance, assess the suitability of a Licensee, and conduct facility inspections. The purpose of this work is to ensure that Licensees are meeting and maintaining compliance with the B.C. Community Care and Assisted Living Act and Child Care Licensing Regulation.
- Licensing Officers and Licensing Leadership have been working closely with the Building Blocks Educare Licensee to address ongoing non-compliance at the facility since March, providing support and opportunities to address challenges.
- The Act and Regulation are in place to protect children in care and health authorities have a legal responsibility to ensure Licensees are in full compliance with this legislation. We will support Licensees in creating plans to address issues of non-compliance and will move to enforcement action if a Licensee cannot or chooses not to take appropriate actions.
- Ultimately, the legislation and health authorities under the legislation have an obligation to ensure children in care are safe.

#### Background from Interior Health:

- Building Blocks Educare – Gordon Campus is a licensed child care facility in Kelowna. The facility has a licence for 184 total spaces including:
  - Group Child Care (Under 36 Months) with total capacity of 84 - 7 programs with a capacity of 12 in each.
  - Group Child Care (30 Months to School Age) with total capacity of 100 - 4 programs with a capacity of 25 in each.
- Since March 2021, IH Licensing has been working closely with this Licensee to address the issues of non-compliance related to staff to child ratios and staff qualifications. Licensing Officers have been

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responding to complaints, conducting inspections, and have met with the Licensee on multiple occasions to support the Licensee to come into compliance.

- As a result of ongoing non-compliance, this facility was assessed as operating at a High Risk on October 1, 2021 and placed in progressive compliance on that date. The Facility Licensing Officer, Licensing Manager and the Licensee met and discussed at length the areas of concern, implications of being in progressive compliance, as well as the potential for further progressive compliance or action on the licence should the Licensee not come into immediate compliance with the legislation.
- During this meeting, options available to the Licensee were explained (i.e.: requests for exemption and/or temporary placements), as well as time spent with her on trouble-shooting staffing levels and opportunities within the current staffing compliment that could help solve her staffing issues. s.13; s.22
- Since the progressive compliance meeting, Licensing Officers have conducted three inspections, and had multiple telephone, zoom, and in-person meetings with the Licensee to discuss continual non-compliance and the inability of the Licensee to gain compliance.

In the past two weeks, the Licensee has been provided with several opportunities to develop a compliance plan acceptable by Licensing in order to address the staff to child ratio shortfalls. The Licensing Officer accepted a compliance plan from the Licensee on October 28, 2021 addressing the issues of non-compliance related to staff to child ratios.

However, the Licensee was found to be in non-compliance with her accepted compliance plan on November 1, 2021 and another plan was submitted. In the amended plan provided by the Licensee, it specified an 18 step plan for closure of the two Infant Toddler programs as noted above. These program closures are effective at the end of day November 5, 2021.