GOLDEN & AREA A

CHILD CARE ACTION PLAN

2026 UPDATE

Progress, Priorities, and the Path Forward



Wildernest Childcare

info@goldenced.ca | goldenced.ca

Prepared by

GOLDEN COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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SIX YEARS OF PROGRESS

The Golden and Area A Child Care Action Plan 2020-2030 was developed to better understand local child care needs, identify barriers to creating and sustaining spaces, and establish a community roadmap for action. The plan recognized access to quality child care as both an essential support for children and families and an important part of a healthy local economy, helping parents and caregivers participate fully in the workforce.

Since the original plan was developed in 2020, Golden and Area A's child care landscape has evolved considerably. New spaces have been created, local early childhood educators have strengthened their skills and credentials, and partnerships among providers, educators, and community organizations have increased local capacity. This 2026 Update takes stock of that progress while identifying the needs and priorities that remain.

The broader child care system has also changed. Provincial responsibility for child care transitioned to the Ministry of Education and Child Care in 2022, bringing early learning and child care more closely into BC's education system. The Early Learning Child Care Act, which came fully into force in 2024, further established the province's role in supporting an accessible, affordable, inclusive, and high-quality child care system. School districts also have an increasingly important role in supporting and providing child care opportunities, particularly through the use of school property.

Against this changing landscape, the 2026 Update serves both as a reflection on six years of community progress and a foundation for the next phase of child care planning in Golden and Area A. It also builds on a much longer history of community-led work, beginning with the Golden Early Childhood Development Coalition in 2004, a community partnership supported by the Golden Community Resource Society (GCRS) and guided by a shared strategic plan for early childhood development. The 2026 Update recognizes the contributions of local providers, early childhood educators (ECEs), and community partners; documents the progress achieved through the Child Care Action Plan; and identifies outstanding priorities that can help inform future planning, advocacy, and investment by the organizations and levels of government with roles in the child care system.

CHILD CARE CAPACITY AND NEED

Age Group	2020 Capacity	2026 Capacity	New Spaces	2026 Federal Target	Continued Need
Birth to 36 months	27	45	18	96	51
Age 3 to 5 years	77	93	16	105	12
Total	104	138	34	201	63

WORKFORCE TARGETS AND OUTCOMES

Workforce Measure	2020 Target	2026 Outcome	Status
Infant & Toddler ECEs	7	4	Continued need
ECE Assistants	5	5	Target achieved
Special Needs ECEs	-	4	No target established
Additional ECEs	9	13	Target exceeded

GROWING LOCAL CAPACITY

Since the original Child Care Action Plan, local workforce development has evolved around three complementary approaches: growing the number of qualified ECEs locally, recruiting qualified ECEs to Golden, and supporting the continued development and retention of the existing child care workforce. Together, these approaches address both immediate staffing needs and the longer-term capacity and sustainability of local child care.

DEVELOPING A LOCAL ECE PATHWAY

The 2020-2030 Child Care Action Plan identified two interconnected barriers to expanding child care in Golden and Area A: the availability of suitable physical spaces and a reliable, sufficient workforce of qualified child care professionals. In some cases, local providers had the physical capacity to accommodate more children but could not expand without enough qualified ECEs to meet licensing requirements.

Recognizing that increasing the number of qualified local professionals was essential to creating and sustaining child care spaces, Golden Community Economic Development (Golden CED) and the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) began exploring the logistics of delivering ECE training through a local cohort model in 2021, in partnership with College of the Rockies (COTR). The training model was designed not only to make training more accessible to local residents while creating a direct pathway between education and employment within the community, but also to create a supportive learning environment where students could progress through their education together. Participant feedback has consistently highlighted the value of this peer connection and shared experience in supporting students through their training.

That early work evolved and by 2023, Golden CED was convening an ECE Table with WorkBC, CCRR, COTR, local child care providers, and other community partners. Together, the group developed a local training and workforce model that connects residents with education, financial supports, and employment opportunities. The initiative directly advanced recommendations from the original Child Care Action Plan and has become one of its most significant outcomes: strengthening the local workforce needed to support both existing child care services and future space creation.

BUILDING THE CHILD CARE WORKFORCE

- Three local ECE training cohorts have been offered since 2023, with 11 local students completing their ECE Certificate.
- Four local ECEs completed their Infant and Toddler specialization, and four completed their Special Needs specialization.
- College of the Rockies annually reserves seats for Golden and Area A residents in its online ECE Certificate program.
- The local school district supports grade 12 students in accessing the ECE Dual Credit program through COTR.



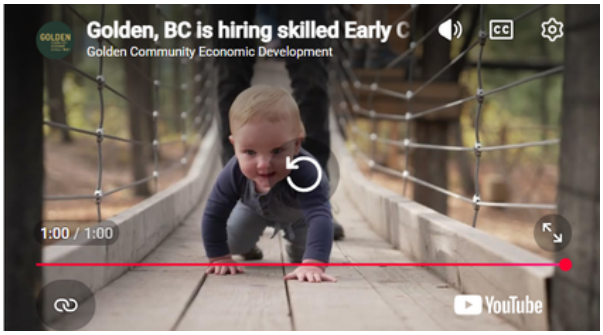
RECRUITING ECEs TO GOLDEN

Alongside efforts to train and grow the local child care workforce, Golden CED pursued a multi-faceted approach to attracting qualified ECEs from outside the community. Beginning in 2021, recruitment efforts focused on connecting prospective child care providers with local employment opportunities while also addressing some of the practical challenges associated with relocating to Golden.

Golden CED worked with colleges and universities across Western Canada to share local employment opportunities with graduating ECE students. In 2024, this work expanded through a promotional video showcasing Golden as a desirable place for qualified ECEs to live, work, and build their careers. The video was promoted through a national social media campaign, supported by a dedicated webpage featuring employment resources which offered a local point of contact for prospective ECEs interested in relocating.

Recognizing that successful recruitment extends beyond finding employment, a local campaign also gathered potential temporary housing options for incoming ECEs. Together, these efforts created a more coordinated recruitment approach, connecting prospective ECEs with local employment opportunities, relocation information, community resources, and direct connection with someone in the community to help make the move to Golden more achievable.

WATCH THE VIDEO



SUPPORTING LOCAL ECEs

Quality child care depends not only on training and recruiting new qualified ECEs but on supporting those already working in the sector. Through the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR), local child care providers have had ongoing opportunities to strengthen their skills, build professional connections, and continue learning throughout their careers.

Since 2020, CCRR has supported professional development through workshops, regional conferences, peer mentoring, and other learning opportunities. Participation demonstrated both the range of supports available locally and the commitment of ECEs to continued professional growth, strengthening the sector's ability to provide high-quality care.

- 538 workshop registrations/attendances across 49 CCRR workshops
- Five regional conferences since 2020, with approximately 20 local professionals participating in each
- 22 participants in peer mentoring between 2023 and 2026
- Six participants in the 2026 book club

EXPANDING SPACES AND OPTIONS

Since 2020, Golden and Area A made meaningful progress in expanding local child care capacity. Licensed spaces for children from birth to 36 months increased from 27 in 2020 to 45 in 2026, adding 18 spaces. Licensed spaces for children from 36 months to school age increased from 77 to 93 over the same period, adding a further 16 spaces. This growth has included both additional licensed capacity and a broader range of early learning opportunities.

HOW THIS GROWTH HAS TAKEN SHAPE

- Existing child care centres created 18 additional infant and toddler spaces, doubling the nine-space target established in the original Action Plan
- Wildernest Child Care opened in 2026, adding eight spaces for children aged 2.5 to five through a nature-based, play-led model with more than 10,000 square feet of outdoor space.
- Forest Kids and Budding Minds, established in 2021, expanded outdoor and nature-based learning opportunities beyond traditional licensed child care.
- Local child care centres have continued to invest in outdoor renovations and improvements to existing spaces.
- In 2024, the school district partnered with Mountain Child Early Learning + Care Centre to create 24 licensed school-age child care spaces at Alexander Park Elementary School.

Together, these developments demonstrate progress not only in increasing the number of available spaces, but in expanding the range of child care and early learning opportunities available to local families. Nature-based and outdoor learning have emerged as particular local strengths, reflecting a priority identified in the original Child Care Action Plan.

UNDERSTANDING LOCAL NEEDS

Alongside work to expand spaces and strengthen the child care workforce, Golden CED continued to gather information about the changing needs of local families. A community child care needs survey conducted in 2025 provided an updated picture of when families require care and helped identify where gaps may remain.

Among 64 respondents, 25% identified a need for drop-off before 8:00 a.m., while 25% required pick-up after 5:00 p.m. Only 4% identified a need for evening care, and no respondents identified a need for weekend care.

These findings provide valuable information for local child care providers considering future programming and business decisions. While the survey identified demand for greater flexibility around traditional operating hours, it found limited demand for evening care and no identified demand for weekend care among respondents. As family and workforce needs continue to change, a periodic needs assessment can help providers and community partners make informed decisions about where additional or adapted services may be most valuable.



Budding Minds Nature-Based Discovery Program

LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY

The 2020-2030 Child Care Action Plan recognized the importance of child care that reflects the diverse language, culture, and needs of local families. Since then, community partners have continued to explore opportunities to strengthen both Francophone and Indigenous early learning and child care in Golden and Area A.

FRANCOPHONE CHILD CARE

Golden CED supported early work toward establishing French-language child care in Golden, including convening volunteers, supporting research and feasibility work, and facilitating connections with Francophone organizations. The Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Brittanique has since worked with École La Confluence and the Town of Golden to advance the initiative. The project is currently paused while the proposed site is being used to support the bridge replacement project.

INDIGENOUS EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

Golden CED has also worked with Métis Nation Columbia River Society to explore opportunities for culturally connected early learning and child care. Early discussion included plans for a new office and community space incorporating a child care centre. While that longer-term vision remains, the organization has also focused on creating more immediate support for families.

New early-years funding for 2026-27 has enabled Métis Nation Columbia River Society to hire a dedicated early years coordinator. Current initiatives include a summer camp, child care at events and workshops, and exploration of flexible spaces where parents and caregivers can work or participate in activities while their young children receive care nearby. Together, these initiatives provide practical solutions in the short term while continuing to build toward the longer-term goal of a dedicated child care centre.





PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

Significant progress has been made since the 2020-2030 Child Care Action Plan, particularly in workforce development and the creation of new spaces. However, gaps remain. The progress and community feedback documented through this 2026 Update point to several priorities for continued attention by child care providers, community partners, the school district, and other organizations with roles in the child care system.

CREATE MORE CHILD CARE SPACES

- **Increase infant and toddler spaces.** Continue expanding capacity for children from birth to 36 months, where a significant gap remains.
- **Explore opportunities on school district property.** Consider opportunities to create additional child care spaces on sutiable school district property and other appropriate sites.
- **Advance French-language child care.** Continue work with Francophone partners toward establishing French-language child care in Golden.
- **Advance Indigenous early learning and child care.** Support Indigenous-led opportunities for culturally connected early learning and child care, including the longer-term vision being developed by Métis Nation Columbia River Society.
- **Explore employer-supported child care.** Encourage large employers to consider child care as part of the workforce planning, including opportunities to support or facilitate spaces for employees' families.

STRENGTHEN AND SUSTAIN THE CHILD CARE WORKFORCE

- **Continue recruiting qualified ECEs.** Build on existing recruitment partnerships and resources to attract qualified ECEs to Golden.
- **Support retention and professional development.** Continue opportunities that help local child care professionals build skills, strengthen connections, and remain in the sector.
- **Respond to changing family needs.** Understand how local child care needs are evolving, including demand for care outside traditional operating hours and different types of care, and periodically reassess needs as family circumstances, workforce patterns, and provider capacity change.
- **Explore options for unexpected staffing gaps.** Consider whether a shared or substitute ECE pool could help local providers respond to short-term staffing shortages and maintain available child care spaces.



CARRYING THE WORK FORWARD

Since the development of the 2020-2030 Child Care Action Plan, both the local child care landscape and the broader provincial system have changed. In 2022, responsibility for child care moved to the Ministry of Education and Child Care, reflecting a provincial shift toward integrating early learning and child care more closely with the education system. The Early Learning and Child Care Act came fully into force in 2024, further establishing the provincial framework for an accessible, affordable, inclusive, and high-quality child care system. Boards of education also have an increasingly defined role in supporting child care, particularly through the use of school district property and opportunities to provide or partner in the delivery of child care.

Within Golden and Area A, the original Child Care Action Plan provided a local framework for understanding need, bringing partners together, and turning identified priorities into action. Since 2020, that work has helped grow the local ECE workforce, attract qualified ECEs to the community, support professional development and retention, create new child care spaces, strengthen culturally and linguistically connected opportunities, and build a stronger evidence base for understanding the changing needs of local families.

The 2026 Update marks a transition in that work. It documents the progress made, identifies the priorities that remain, and provides a foundation for continued planning by the organizations and levels of government with roles in BC's evolving child care system. Golden CED will continue to recognize access to quality child care as an important contributor to community and economic wellbeing, while future child care planning and implementation can build on the partnerships, local knowledge, and capacity developed through this work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The progress reflected in this 2026 Update has been made possible through the commitment and collaboration of local child care providers, educators, and community partners. Golden CED gratefully acknowledges the organizations that have contributed their expertise, resources, and time to strengthen early learning and child care in Golden and Area A, including: Child Care Resource & Referral, College of the Rockies, Work BC, Golden Child Daycare, Mountain Child Early Learning + Care Centre, School District No. 6 (Rocky Mountain), Francophone partners, Métis Nation Columbia River Society, and the many families and community members who have shared their experiences and perspectives throughout this work.