

Elk Valley Child Care Barriers and Opportunities Survey  
Final Report  
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September 2015

## **Elk Valley Child Care Barriers and Opportunities Survey- Final Report, September 2015**

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## **1. Abstract**

The Elk Valley Child Care Advisory Initiative (EVCCAI) and the Elkford Women’s Task Force (EWTF) collaborated to obtain funding from the Columbia Basin Trust (CBT), in order to conduct a survey that aimed to increase understanding of child care issues in each of the 3 main Elk Valley Communities (Fernie, Sparwood, and Elkford) as they relate to employment. The intent was to investigate barriers and opportunities, and develop both short- and long-term mitigation strategies to previously identified child care issues. The survey was designed to query the perspectives of parents, guardians, and other caregivers, child care providers, employers, and other interested community members. There were 302 respondents, with strong representation from each of Fernie, Sparwood, and Elkford. Surveys were available online and in paper format, although 296 of the surveys were completed online. The results confirmed that there are barriers to availability and affordability of child care in all 3 of the major Elk Valley communities and allowed for both community-specific and valley-wide recommendations regarding mitigation strategies. Furthermore, respondents indicated that they believe that municipal governments, the provincial government, local employers, child care providers, families, and other community organizations are responsible for working together in order to develop solutions to the child care issues.

## **2. Project background and rationale of survey**

### *Background*

Due to the perceived child care crisis in Fernie, Sparwood, and Elkford, the Elk Valley Child Care Advisory Initiative (EVCCAI) was established in January 2014. The members recognized that each of the communities in the Elk Valley has unique child care issues and that solutions may differ between communities. The EVCCAI had several meetings and decided that quantifiable data-based findings on child care barriers and opportunities would be essential in order to propose recommendations to community organizations, local employers, and various levels of government. A collaboration was formed with the Elkford Women's Task Force (EWTF), an Elk Valley non-profit society that operates local social programs. Together, the EVCCAI and the EWTF obtained funding from the Columbia Basin Trust (CBT) in order to conduct the Elk Valley Child Care Barriers and Opportunities Survey.

### *Purpose of the Survey*

The survey aimed to:

- 1) Increase understanding of concerns related to affordability and availability of child care in the Elk Valley.
- 2) Increase understanding of whether child care issues create barriers to employment in the Elk Valley.
- 3) Document opportunities for short- and long-term mitigation strategies.
- 4) Develop data-based recommendations for solutions that are specific to each of the 3 largest communities in the Elk Valley.

### **3. Project partners**

#### *The Elkford Women's Task Force (EWTF)*

The EWTF is a charitable non-profit organization formed in 1992 to address social needs impacting community members, particularly women. Programs include emergency shelter in the Elk Valley safe homes, a homeless outreach program for women leaving violence, counselling services for children who witness abuse, the Elkford Early Years Committee, and the Elkford preschool program. The EWTF provides services throughout Elk Valley communities, including Elkford, Sparwood, Fernie, Elko, and Jaffray.

#### *The Elk Valley Child Care Advisory Initiative (EVCCAI)*

The EVCCAI originated from community identification of child care as an area of concern, followed by investigation by the Child Care Shortage Task Force that began in the summer of 2013. The EVCCAI was formed with the mission to provide the Teck Coal Communities of Interest (COI) Advisory Initiative and Teck Coal Ltd. (a major area employer) with information gathered through collection of quantifiable data, to be used toward the mandate of fostering dialogue and developing solutions regarding child care issues, sector specific challenges, and shortages of child care options in the Elk Valley. The COI's purpose is to put processes in place to maximize community benefits and collaboration, with the goal to increase community sustainability in the long-term. However, the EVCCAI committee is independent from Teck, which is reflected by its diverse member representation. The EVCCAI steering committee includes a child care operator (Kim Bauer), early childhood educators (ECEs; April Kilford, Serina Paul), an ECE education trainer (Anita Palmer), parents of children currently requiring child care (Tiffany Cromey, Jennifer Geoffroy), a school board representative (Bev Bellina), a member of local government (Terry Melcer), and a Teck representative (Sharon Strom). The committee members also represent residents of Fernie, Sparwood, and Elkford. The vision of the EVCCAI is for the Elk Valley to be one of the best rural communities in Canada for ECEs to live and practice, and for all families to have access to high quality, affordable and sustainable child care and early learning opportunities.

### *Columbia Basin Trust (CBT)*

The CBT was formed in 1995 by the Columbia Basin Trust Act, in order to manage and allocate funds endowed by the Province of British Columbia to residents most impacted by the Columbia Basin Treaty, which resulted in construction of 3 dams and mass flooding of inhabited and cultivated lands during the 1960s. The purpose of the Trust is to “exist and act for the social, economic and environmental well-being of the Columbia Basin—now and for generations to come” (Columbia Basin Trust). The Trust operates by supporting Columbia Basin residents to develop and deliver programs and initiatives that originate from local priorities, including by providing funding to enable local projects to move forward. The Social Grant funding stream provides financial support to projects that contribute to the social well-being of area residents, including those 1) “meeting basic needs (food, clothing, shelter) of individuals, enabling all residents to work toward their potential”, 2) contributing to “ inclusive, vibrant, resilient and connected communities throughout the Basin, enabling residents to participate, engage and experience belonging” and 3) supporting “healthy and sustainable social sector organizations, enabling them to support residents in need and contribute to community” (Columbia Basin Trust). The Social Grant funding stream provided full funding for the Elk Valley Child Care Barriers and Opportunities Survey project.

### *Survey Consultant- Phoebe Scotland*

Phoebe Scotland was selected as the survey consultant based on her research experience and educational credentials, including a Master’s degree in experimental psychology from McGill University and training in advanced level research methodology and statistics. Her experience includes conducting both qualitative and quantitative research over the past 13 years, and she has previously completed contract survey work that included formulating data-based recommendations. She has also authored numerous peer-reviewed academic publications and presented her research findings at local, regional, national, and international conferences.

#### **4. Communities of interest**

##### *Fernie*

Fernie is the largest of the 3 communities in the Elk Valley, with an approximate population of 4,448 people (Census, Statistics Canada, 2011). As of 2011, there were 240 preschool age children (0–4 years) and 215 school age children at ages typically requiring child care (5–9 years). Also of note, the population of Fernie is relatively mobile, with approximately 28% of residents living in other communities in 2006, in comparison to the Canadian national average of approximately 18% mobility between communities over the preceding 5 year period (National Household Survey; NHS, Statistics Canada, 2011). The 3 most common industries reported by Fernie residents, using the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) 2007 as a component of the 2011 NHS, were 1) mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (570 of 2,720 people participating in the labour force), 2) accommodation and food services (350 people), and 3) health care and social assistance (340 people).

There is 1 licensed group child care facility in Fernie that can provide care to infants (from 10 months of age) and toddlers, with a capacity of 12 full-time spaces. There are currently approximately 40 children on the waitlist for these spaces, according to local child care providers. This child care facility also has spaces for 16 preschool age children and there are 2 preschools in Fernie, each also with 16 spaces. Area child care providers estimate that approximately 64 preschool age children attend 1 of these 3 centres, as some spaces are shared between multiple children. The cost of child care at the licensed group day care in Fernie is \$940 per month for a full-time infant/toddler space, and \$740 per month for a full-time preschool (age 3–5) space. The Fernie licensed child care facility also offers school age care for children after school and on no-school weekdays, operating Monday through Friday from 8:15 am to 4:45 pm. After school care is also available at the Fernie Academy, a private school, for school age children who attend that school. Fernie also has a licensed family child care centre, which has a waitlist of 8–10 children. Additionally, Fernie has a Strong Start program, which does not meet child care needs (parents attend with their children), but it does provide an opportunity for supported child development in the community.

### *Sparwood*

Sparwood has a population of approximately 3,667 people (Census, Statistics Canada, 2011), with 220 preschool age children (0–4 years) and 225 school age children at ages typically requiring child care (5-9 years). The population of Sparwood is also relatively mobile, as approximately 22% of the 2011 population lived in different communities in 2006 (NHS, Statistics Canada, 2011). The 3 most common NAICS-classified industries in Sparwood, according to the 2011 NHS, are 1) mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (665 of 2,075 people in the labour force, 2) health care and social assistance (170 people), and 3) wholesale trade (140 people) and retail trade (140 people).

There is 1 licensed group child care facility in Sparwood, and there are 8 full-time spaces available for infants/toddlers over 6 months of age, which currently accommodate the child care needs of 11 children through sharing spaces. The formal waitlist for infant/toddler care currently has 20 children listed. The licensed group child care facility also has 8 spaces for preschool age children, which currently accommodate the needs of 9 children. There is a before and after school program operated by the same child care operator, which accommodates approximately 17 children. The Sparwood child care facility operates out of a building owned by the District of Sparwood, and is not required by the District to pay a fee for space. Teck Coal Limited, which leases 75% of the building, pays the utilities for the child care facility. Therefore, the Sparwood licensed group child care centre has lower operating costs than would be possible without these in-kind contributions. Full-time licensed child care in Sparwood costs \$1166 for infants/toddlers, \$895 for preschoolers (ages 3–5), and \$5 per hour to a maximum of \$45 per day for after school care. The centre operates from 6:15 am to 5:30 pm, Monday to Friday. There is also 1 licensed family child care centre in Sparwood, which offers flexible child care schedules and space sharing options Monday to Friday, for children ages birth to 12 years. Child development in Sparwood is supported by a Strong Start program, but this does not fall within the realm of child care, as parents attend the program with their children.

### *Elkford*

Elkford is the smallest of the 3 major communities in the Elk Valley, with a total population of 2,518 people (Census, Statistics Canada, 2011). In 2011, there were 185 preschoolers, ages 0–4 years, and 180 school age children at ages typically requiring child care

(5–9 years). Approximately 22% of the population in 2011 lived in different communities in 2006 (National Household Survey, Statistics Canada, 2011). The 3 primary NAICS-classified industries in Elkford, according to the 2011 NHS, are 1) mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (705 of 1,420 people in the labour force), 2) public administration (90 people), and 3) accommodation and food service (85 people).

Elkford does not have licensed child care and it also does not have a Strong Start early childhood development program. There is a pilot project called Healthy Start (operated by the EWTF) once per week on Saturdays, which focusses on fitness, healthy eating, and other child development projects. However, the Healthy Start program is not a child care option, as it requires parent participation. Preschool age children in Elkford can attend preschool part-time, with 57 children registered for the 2015–2016 academic year. There are also unlicensed child care providers who are responsible for the majority of child care in Elkford. Elkford residents report that the Elk Valley Garage Sale Facebook page is a common place to find child care providers, but many residents report safety concerns over this option.

## 5. Child care in British Columbia

In British Columbia, child care is classified into 2 major categories: licensed and unlicensed (sometimes also referred to as license-not required, or LNR, care). Whether a child care provider must be licensed or not is determined by factors such as the number of children in care at a given time, and the duration of care. The British Columbia *Community Care and Assisted Living Act* applies to all licensed child care programs, and sets requirements for “staffing qualifications, staff to child ratio, space and equipment, and program standards” (Government of British Columbia, 2011). The Community Care and Assisted Living Act also outlines approved ECE programs for obtaining professional credentials and first aid requirements for child care providers. Types of child care are outlined in the Parents’ Guide to Selecting and Monitoring Child Care in BC, published by the Government of British Columbia (2011), and are described below.

### *Licensed child care options*

Group child care is a type of licensed care that can include infant/toddler care for children from age birth–36 months, and preschool care for children ages 30 months–grade 1. Infant/toddler group child care is required to have at least 1 licensed Infant/Toddler ECE, 1 ECE, and 1 ECE Assistant (with valid first aid certificates and clear criminal record checks) per 12 children. Group child care for children over 30 months of age is required to have at least 1 ECE and 2 ECE Assistants for groups of up to 25 children.

School age group child care is a type of licensed care for children who attend school (including kindergarten) and require care outside of school hours (such as before or after school care or care on Pro-D days). These programs require 1 “responsible adult” for every 10 children in kindergarten or grade 1 (maximum group size of 20 children), and 1 “responsible adult” for every 15 children in grades 2 and higher (maximum group size of 25 children). “Responsible adults” are people ages 19 years and older, who have completed 20 hours of training, completed first aid certification, and cleared a criminal record check.

Preschool programs operate for children who are at least 30 months old and have not begun grade 1. Children attend for a maximum of 4 hours per day, in groups of 20 children at

most, and are staffed by at least 1 ECE for every 10 children, or 1 ECE and 1 ECE assistant for a group of 20 children.

Family child care is licensed, but operates out of the care provider's own home rather than out of a child care centre. This type of care can accommodate children from age birth–12 years, and the care provider is a “responsible adult” who is licensed to care for up to 7 children of varying ages. There are specific regulations around the age combinations that are permitted in this type of child care arrangement. Also, any family members or others over the age of 12 who live in the home must complete a criminal record check.

In-home multi age child care is provided in the care provider's home, but in this case, the care provider is an ECE licensed to practice in BC, and can care for up to 8 children at one time. There are regulations around the children's age combinations permitted, and other regulations such as the criminal record check requirement for people in the home over age 12. Multi-age centre-based care is also licensed, and is provided by an ECE with a maximum of 8 children per ECE at a given time.

Finally, occasional child care is a type of licensed child care for children ages 18 months and older, who require a maximum of 40 hours per month, with days that never exceed 8 hours. If children under 36 months old are included in the group, 1 “responsible adult” can care for up to 16 children at a given time. However, if there are no children who are younger than 36 months old then 1 “responsible adult” can care for up to 20 children at once.

#### *Unlicensed child care options*

Unlicensed or license-not-required (LNR) child care is permitted for situations where a care provider cares for a maximum of 2 children or 1 sibling group at a given time, who are not related to the provider by blood or marriage. Care providers are encouraged to register with their Child Care Resources and Referral (CCRR) program, but this is not an obligation. LNR care refers to those providers who are not registered, whereas Registered LNR (RLNR) care refers to those providers who have met requirements including criminal record checks for people in the home over age 12, character reference checks, a home safety assessment, physician's report on their physical and emotional capacity to care for children, first aid training, and participation in child care-related training. In child's own home care is a third type of unlicensed child care, and refers to child care that may be described as a nanny, babysitter, or au pair. In this situation,

parents have responsibilities regarding Employment Insurance and Canada Pension Plan payments, as well as other obligations of employers.

### *Early childhood education*

ECEs complete several components of training in order to receive their professional credentials. ECEs are licensed through the Early Childhood Educator Registry of BC, and have completed an approved ECE training program, work experience requirements, character and work reference checks, and a criminal record check. The ECE license to practice must be renewed every 5 years, and to do so requires 400 hours of related work experience, references, and demonstrated completion of 40 professional development training hours. Approved ECE training programs take approximately 1 year to complete, with an additional 1 year of training required for infant/toddler or special needs designations.

Certified ECE Assistants must have completed at least 1 ECE class in child growth and development, health, safety and nutrition, or child guidance. They must also have related work experience, complete character and work reference checks, a criminal record check, and they are certified through the Early Childhood Educator Registry of BC. ECE Assistant certification also expires every 5 years. Renewal requirements are 400 hours of related work experience, reference checks, and completion of an additional post-secondary class with relevant content.

“Responsible adults” are required to be at least 19 years old and have completed 20 hours of training in child development, guidance, health and safety, or nutrition. They are also required to have relevant work experience and complete a criminal record check.

There are provincial differences in licensing standards to practice as an ECE, and training in one province is not necessarily accepted in other provinces. This is particularly relevant to child care in the Elk Valley, given the proximity to Alberta. Fully trained and experienced ECEs from Alberta, who now live in the Elk Valley, may not be able to receive certification in BC without taking additional courses or seeking other related experiences.

## 6. Survey methodology

The Elk Valley Child Care Barriers and Opportunities Survey Project was submitted in Fall of 2014 as a proposal to the CBT Social Grants funding stream, and was awarded \$31,000 to conduct the project. The project managers then searched for a qualified social researcher to conduct the survey development, implementation, data analyses, and prepare a report including recommendations for potential solutions. Newspaper advertisements were posted, interviews were conducted by the project managers and an additional member of the EVCCAI steering committee, and Phoebe Scotland was selected as the successful candidate.

Prior to conducting the survey, consultation was obtained from members of the 3 main communities of interest: Fernie, Sparwood, and Elkford. Community information sessions were held in April to May of 2015, in order to gather information regarding child care in the Elk Valley and provide interested community members with information regarding the intent of the survey, as well as timeframes for participation. Newspaper articles, social media, posters in the community, and word of mouth were used to announce this first round of information sessions. Sessions were held at accessible community venues in each of Fernie, Sparwood, and Elkford, as well as an additional information session at the Sparwood Shared Services office of Teck Coal Limited, a major area employer. Forty-seven people attended these sessions and provided their varied perspectives on child care in the Elk Valley. Parents, child care providers, employers, and other interested community members were represented. Additionally, separate interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including parents, child care providers, employers, staff members of the East Kootenay Child Care Resource and Referral Program, and those involved in the East Kootenay Child Care Needs Assessment Project (a similar Cranbrook and area project). Input from these sources enriched the survey consultant's understanding of child care issues presently occurring in the Elk Valley, and contributed to the development of *a priori* hypotheses to be assessed following data collection.

Approximately 1 month following the conclusion of the first round of community information sessions, the Elk Valley Child Care Barriers and Opportunities Survey was available for respondents to complete. The full survey questions and response data are attached as Appendix A. The survey was open for participation between June 4 and July 5, 2015. Participation was solicited through newspaper articles and advertisements, radio advertisements,

flier distribution through area schools, advertisement on the Elk Valley/Crowsnest Pass Communities of Interest Advisory Initiative website, social media, community posters, community partners (such as a public health office, local businesses and Chamber of Commerce, parenthood groups, etc.), distribution with Teck Coal Limited pay stubs and staff email distribution lists, and word of mouth. Respondents were informed that it was not necessary to be a parent in order to complete the survey, and there were separate sections of the survey for parents/guardians/primary caregivers, child care providers, employers, and other interested community members.

Data were primarily collected online, using SurveyGizmo online survey software (SurveyGizmo, Boulder, CO, USA) with display logic to ensure that participants were only asked questions relevant to their circumstances. SurveyGizmo survey diagnostics indicated that the survey had low fatigue and high accessibility scores, and estimated that it would take an average of 22 minutes for respondents to complete. Paper copies, which included all questions in the survey, were also available for pick up and drop off at 2 locations in each community (libraries, community centres, recreation centres). Respondents were instructed to seal the completed paper surveys in envelopes provided to them, in order to ensure confidentiality of their responses. Respondents were anonymous if they chose to be, but had the option to provide contact information in order to receive the results of the survey. Only the survey consultant had access to participant identifying information. A second round of community information sessions was held in June of 2015, during the time that the survey was available for participation. Twelve people attended these meetings to ask questions and get paper copies or online access information for the survey.

Raw data were compiled into a report generated by SurveyGizmo, and were also exported for further analyses using IBM SPSS 23 software. Analyses were performed using SPSS 23 software or GraphPad QuickCalcs online software (Graphpad Software, San Diego, CA, USA). Open field data were categorized as described, or were quoted verbatim where indicated. Data from the 3 communities were combined for overall analyses when appropriate, which was the case for most questions. Findings are also presented separately for each of the 3 communities when differences existed between them.

## 7. Key findings

### *Respondents*

Of 411 surveys started, 302 were completed, for a completion rate of 73.5%. However, IP address data were not analyzed, so it is possible that some of the incomplete surveys represent respondents who later returned to complete the survey. Of the 302 completed surveys, 296 were completed online and 6 were completed using the paper forms. There were 209 women (69.2%), 50 men (16.6%), and 43 people (14.2%) who either indicated that they preferred not to give their gender, or who skipped this question.

The survey was open to people who live or work in the Elk Valley. The 3 main communities of interest were each represented, with 134 (44.4%) participants from Fernie, 79 (26.2%) from Sparwood, 71 (23.5%) from Elkford, and 18 (5.9%) from other communities including Hosmer, Crowsnest Pass, Cranbrook, Jaffray, and Elko. The participation rates for each community are approximately representative of the Elk Valley, when compared with data from the 2011 Census of Population (Statistics Canada, 2011;  $\chi^2 = 5.813$ ,  $p = 0.0557$ ), and also achieved sample sizes that enable separate analyses of responses from each community where appropriate.

Respondents indicated the community in which they work, study, or operate a business. Of the 278 respondents to this question, 77 (27.7%) work in Fernie, 100 (36.0%) work in Sparwood, 68 (24.5%) work in Elkford, and 33 (11.8%) work in other communities.

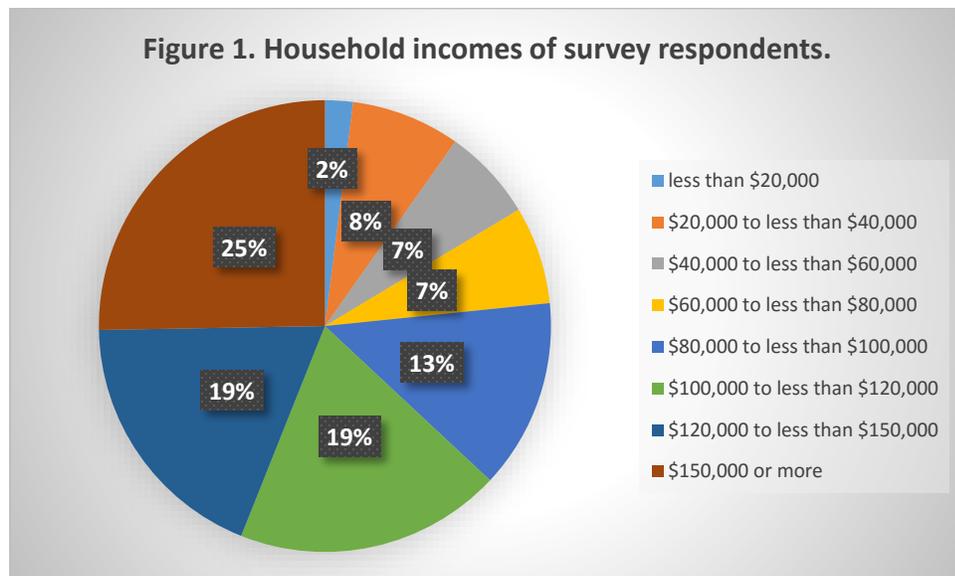
The majority of survey respondents (243 of 302, 80.5%) were parents, guardians, or other primary caregivers to children. It should be noted that findings indicating numbers of children to whom particular situations apply should be interpreted with caution because more than 1 parent, guardian, or primary caregiver of some children may have completed the survey. Respondents were asked whether another parent to their children planned to complete the survey, and 15.0% (36 of 240 respondents) indicated that they did. An additional 89 respondents (37.1%) were unsure as to whether their children's other parent planned to complete the survey. Therefore, it is reasonable to draw conclusions regarding trends observed, but the data should not be used to represent exact child care needs within the communities of the Elk Valley.

Respondents could identify with more than 1 category of interest in the survey. There were 31 participants who indicated that they are child care providers (10.3%), 23 employers,

recruiters, or human resources staff (7.6%), 17 other family members to children who require care (5.6%), 30 future parents (9.9%), and 10 people who had other interests in completing the survey (3.3%).

The majority of survey respondents were married, in a common-law relationship, or co-habiting with a relationship partner (78.5%). The remaining respondents were divorced or separated (4.3%), single never married (4.0%), or did not answer the question (13.2%).

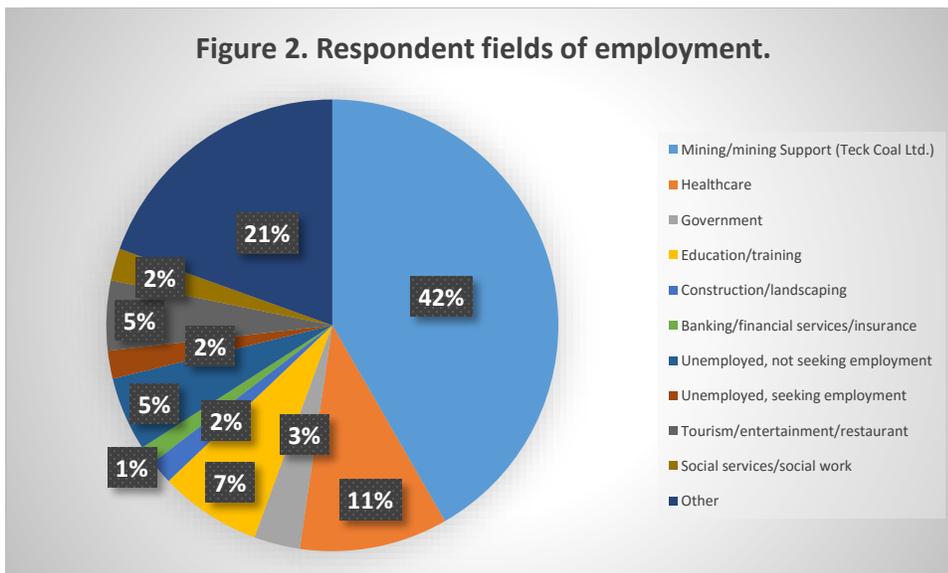
Of respondents giving annual household income information, 44.0% reported household incomes greater than \$120,000 per year (see Figure 1 below). For comparison, the median family income for couple-with-children economic families reported for the 2010 tax year was \$116,110 in Fernie, \$115,022 in Sparwood, and \$126,459 in Elkford (NHS, Statistics Canada, 2011), so the present sample is approximately representative regarding household income. The majority (90.8%) of survey respondents were not recipients of child care subsidies.



Respondents were employed in a variety of fields, with high representation from the mining industry, compared to the general population of the Elk Valley communities ( $\chi^2 = 107.419$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; NHS, Statistics Canada, 2011). This high representation was anticipated given that mining is a major local industry, and because some survey recruitment strategies focussed on employees of Teck Coal Limited. Field of employment categories were combined

into the “Other” category when fewer than 3 respondents indicated a particular field of work. Additionally, some “Other” responses were re-categorized because they appropriately belonged in a pre-determined category listed on the survey.

Respondents were relatively well-educated compared to the general population of the Elk Valley (NHS, Statistics Canada, 2011), with 85.5% of the 264 respondents to this question having completed a post-secondary credential, compared to only 58.2% of the local general population ( $\chi^2 = 175.169, p < 0.001$ ). This difference from the general population of the Elk Valley is likely due to generational shifts in levels of education. The National Household Survey data include all adults over the age of 15, including those who are not currently in the work force, or of typical child rearing ages.



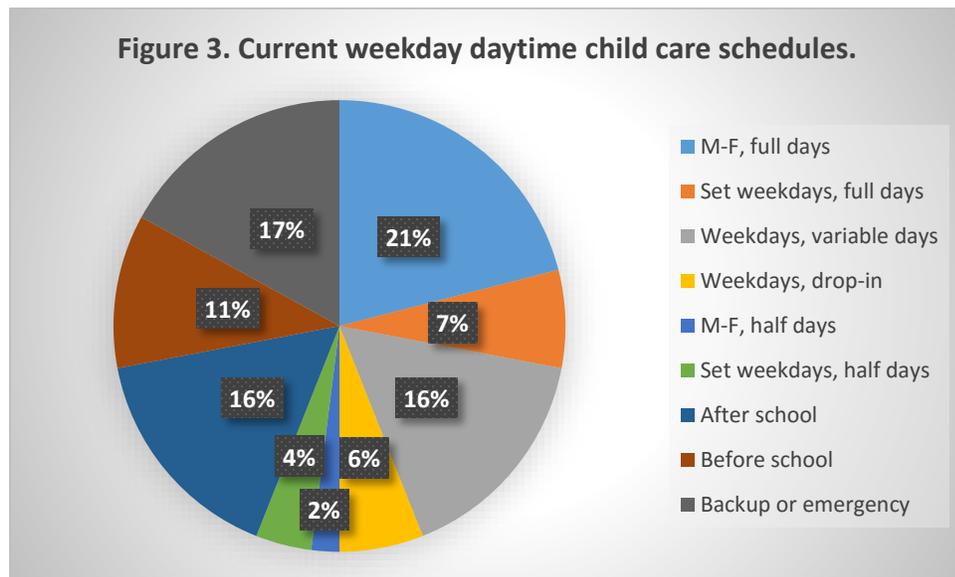
### *Child care use and needs*

Of the 243 parents, guardians, and other primary caregivers who completed the survey, 127 (52.2%) indicated that they currently access child care for their children. Of those respondents who currently access child care, 71 (55.5%) access it in Fernie, 44 (34.6%) access it in Sparwood, 33 (26.0%) access it in Elkford, and 9 (7.1%) access it in other communities. Some respondents indicated that they access child care in more than 1 community.

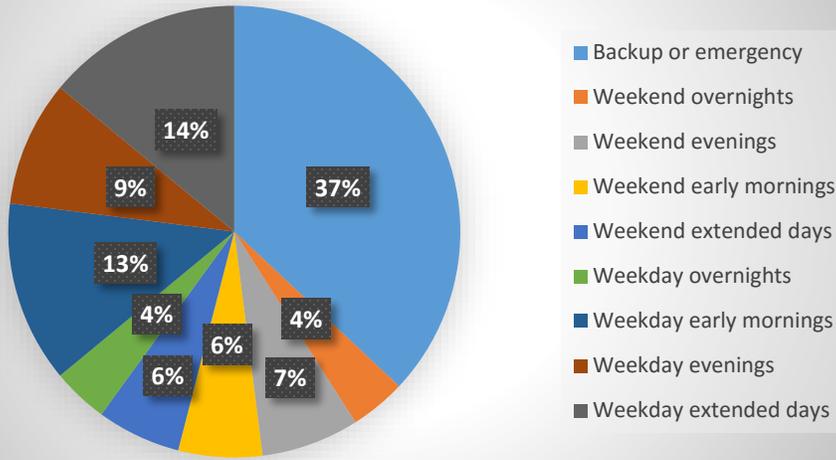
Of the 219 responses regarding frequency of child care access, respondents indicated that 73 of 219 children (33.3%) attend child care full-time (35 hours or more per week), 43 children

(19.6%) attend child care half-time (20–35 hours per week), and 103 children (47.0%) attend part-time care (less than 20 hours per week). There are many parents in the Elk Valley who pay for more child care than they need, in order to ensure that their child has a space. Of the 144 respondents to this question, 59 (41.0%) indicated that they pay more for child care in order to keep a space available when they need it.

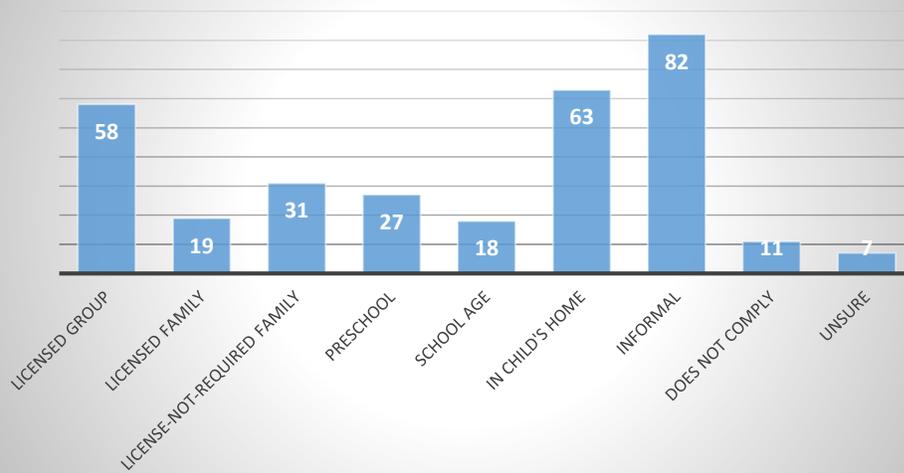
Data was also collected regarding current child care schedules and type of care. Results are presented below in Figures 3, 4, and 5. Respondents had the option to select more than 1 schedule and type of care for each child, which was necessary in order to capture complete data on child care use and needs in the Elk Valley. Respondents currently accessing child care were asked whether any of their children access more than 1 child care option in a single day (for example, having a babysitter take the child to their licensed group daycare), and 35 of 138 (25.4%) respondents indicated that this type of multiple provider child care arrangement occurs for at least 1 of their children.



**Figure 4. Current early, late, and weekend care.**



**Figure 5. Current type of care accessed (# of children).**



Needs for summer care were also queried, as child care availability and needs often change in the summer months when children are not attending school. Of 241 respondents, 44 (18.3%) indicated that their children require full-time summer care and 50 of 235 (21.3%) indicated that their children require part-time summer care.

When asked which communities they would access child care in if it was available to them, respondents indicated that they would access child care for their children in Fernie (135, 42.1%), Sparwood (99, 31.0%), Elkford (77, 24.0%), and other communities (10, 3.1%).

Respondents had the option to indicate more than 1 community in which they would access child

care. Table 1 compares communities where respondents are currently accessing child care with the preferred usage indicated in the survey. Given that more respondents did not indicate multiple communities, there appears to be a strong preference for care in a particular community and strategies that rely on travelling between communities for care are unlikely to meet the child care needs of Elk Valley residents.

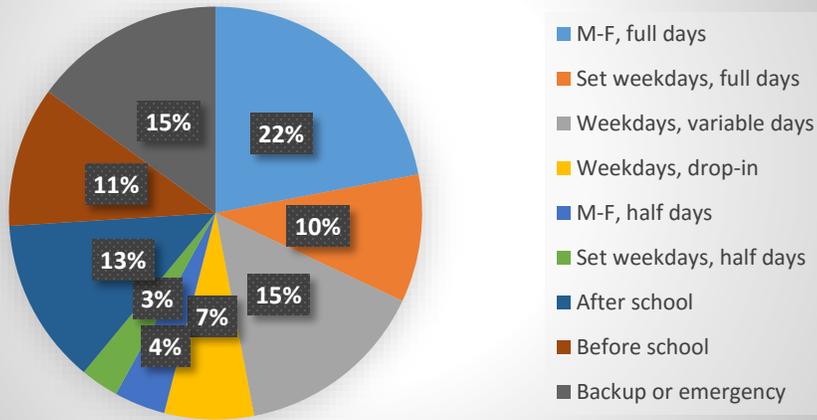
Table 1. Community use and preference for child care.

Community	Current Frequency	Current %	Indicated Frequency	Indicated %
Fernie	71	55.5	135	42.1
Sparwood	44	34.6	99	31.0
Elkford	33	26.0	77	24.0
Other	9	7.1	10	3.1

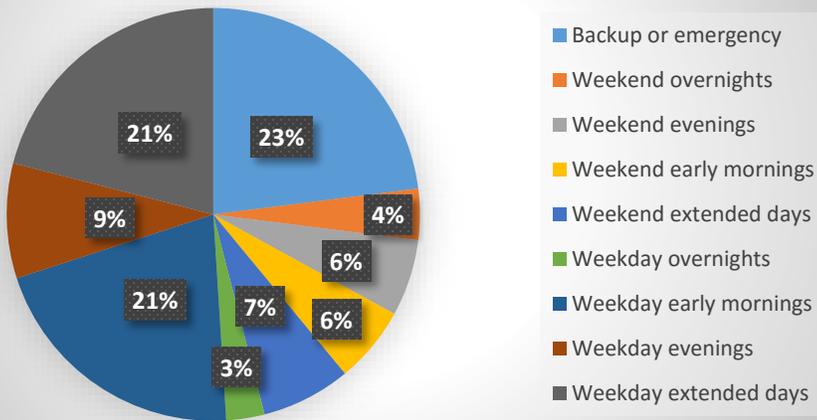
Many respondents indicated that they plan to have or may have additional children in the next 5 years (140 of 275, 50.9%). Child care issues are relevant to population growth rates in the near future, as 115 of 275 (41.8%) respondents indicated that access to child care is an important factor in considering whether to have additional children.

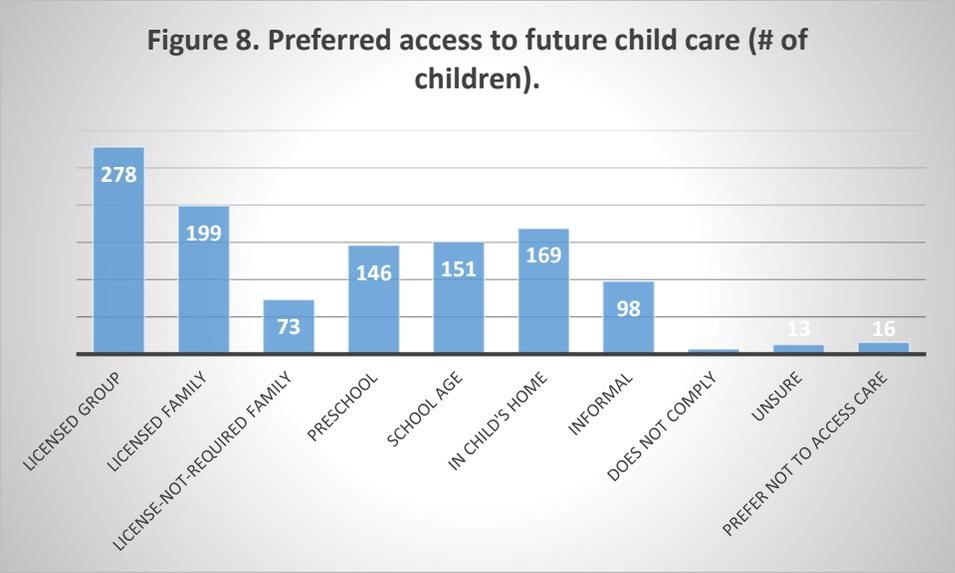
Parents, guardians, and other primary caregivers were asked the frequency of child care that they need for children not currently accessing child care. They indicated a total current need for 153 full-time spaces (more than 35 hours per week), 117 half-time spaces (20–35 hours per week), and 78 part-time spaces (less than 20 hours per week). Parents, guardians, other caregivers, and future parents were also asked to indicate the child care schedules and types of care that they anticipated needing in the future. Data are presented below in Figures 6, 7, and 8, with findings demonstrating a clear preference for licensed group child care.

**Figure 6. Anticipated weekday daytime child care schedules required.**



**Figure 7. Anticipated early, late, and weekend care required.**

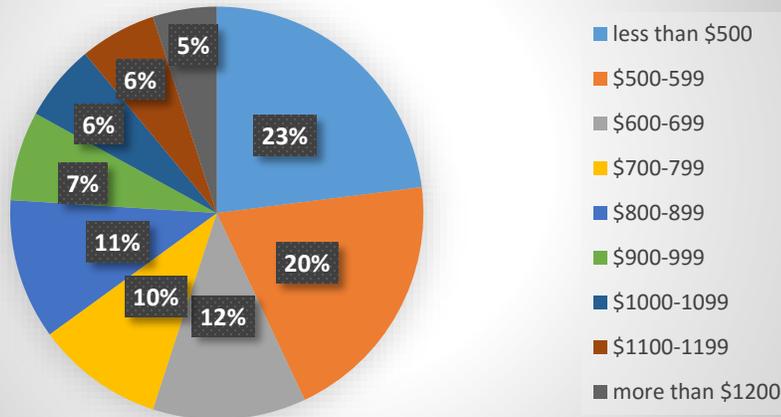




Respondents currently accessing child care, or those who anticipated needing child care for their children in the future, were asked whether any of their children have special requirements that impact child care. Of the 240 people who answered this question, 18 (7.5%) indicated that at least 1 child has special child care requirements, and 21 (8.8%) of respondents were unsure. Future parents would not be able to accurately predict whether their children would have special care requirements. Those who indicated special child care requirements were asked to provide details of need, and gave answers including allergies and food intolerances (8), developmental disabilities including autism (3), needs related to speech disabilities (2), behavioural concerns (1), and being a non-native English speaker (1).

Given that affordability is a specific area of interest in the current survey aims, respondents were asked the maximum amount per month that they would be willing to pay for child care per child, based on an average of 40 hours of care per week, for quality child care that meets their family's needs. Only 44.4% of respondents (104 of 234) indicated that they would be willing to pay rates comparable to current child care fees (over \$700 per child for full-time care) in the Elk Valley. Therefore, costs of care must be considered in strategies aiming to increase accessibility to child care.

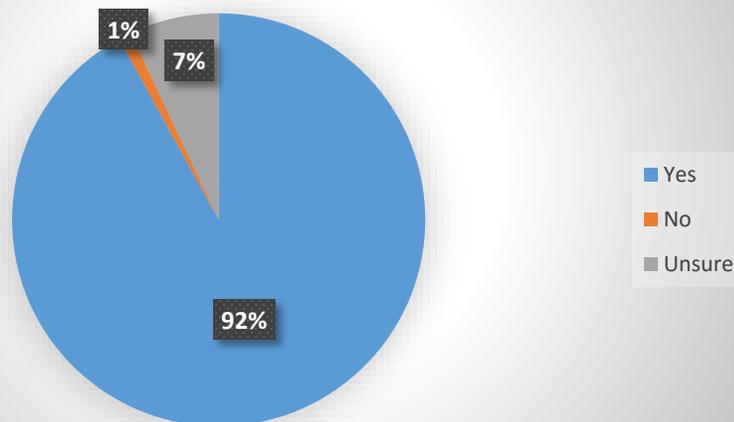
**Figure 9. Fee levels that parents, guardians, and primary caregivers are willing to pay.**



### *Child care barriers*

All survey respondents were asked whether they feel that there are currently barriers to accessing child care in the Elk Valley. Only 3 of 278 respondents (1.1%) indicated that they do not feel that there are barriers. The vast majority of participants (255, 91.7%) indicated that they feel that there are barriers, and 20 (7.2%) of participants were unsure.

**Figure 10. Respondent opinions on whether barriers to accessing child care exist in the Elk Valley.**



Respondents who indicated that there are barriers, or who were unsure, were first asked to complete an open field question regarding the current barriers. Common responses were related to number of spaces available and length of time on waitlists, scheduling (particularly

early mornings and extended days related to shift work schedules), lack of qualified child care providers, cost of care, lack of available infant and toddler care, staff turnover, and lack of part-time or variable schedule care. Examples of open field responses are presented in the anecdotal findings section of this report. Following the open field question, respondents were asked to rate their level of concern regarding pre-defined child care issues, using a slider bar to indicate responses between 0 (no concern) and 10 (maximum concern). Means, standard deviations, and number of responses are indicated below in Table 2. The findings demonstrate that respondents had the greatest concern (8.41/10) regarding the number of spaces available, but moderate to high levels of concern were indicated for all of the child care issues that were queried. Quantitative data obtained from ratings of concern with the pre-determined categories demonstrated similar concerns to those in the qualitative open field format question.

Table 2. Participant levels of concern regarding child care issues.

Child care issue	Average (mean)	Standard deviation	Number of responses
Number of spaces available	8.41	2.34	260
Hours available	7.74	2.62	248
Days of the week available	5.86	3.26	217
Availability of part-time care	6.85	3.04	230
Availability of care on variable days	7.03	3.32	187
Cost	7.93	2.49	245
Quality of care	7.58	2.80	239
Safety and monitoring of care providers	7.10	3.02	224
Staff training and qualifications	7.25	2.83	227
Communication or access to information	6.46	2.85	217
Stability or longevity of care	7.76	2.65	234

Respondents were also asked a series of questions to assess the impact of child care unavailability on their choices to live and/or work in the Elk Valley, as well as decisions related to their employment status. Data are summarized below in Table 3. The data demonstrate that large percentages of respondents have had adverse impacts on their employment due to child care issues, including several impacts that have resulted in unemployment despite a desire to participate in the paid labour force.

Table 3. Child care as it relates to community choice and employment status.

Decision (self or spouse)	Number of respondents impacted	% of total respondents
Choice of community to live in, within Elk Valley	53	19.3
Considered moving from Elk Valley	101	37.1
Not seeking employment	142	60.2
Quit job or retire early	74	31.5
Declined job offer	95	41.9
Limited career opportunities or promotion	132	56.2
Not returning to work following parental leave	101	44.5
Unemployed to care for children, but would prefer to be employed	63	28.5

In addition to querying the impact of child care on decisions to live in the Elk Valley and decisions related to work status, respondents were asked whether they moved to the Elk Valley specifically to pursue an employment opportunity. Given the relatively mobile populations of Fernie, Sparwood, and Elkford, it is likely that a significant portion of the employed population relocated to the Elk Valley for employment purposes. Of the 258 respondents to this question, 172 (66.7%) indicated that they had moved to the area specifically for employment. They were

next asked whether they understood the child care options that would be available prior to moving, and only 22 people (12.9%) indicated that they had this information prior to moving.

Anecdotal reports and survey findings revealed strategies that parents use to compensate for child care unavailability. For example, many parents, guardians, or other primary caregivers of children requiring child care rely on family or friends to supplement formal child care. Others make arrangements to share child care with another family (either sharing a child care space or caring for each other's children at different times), while some couples work opposite shifts to ensure child care coverage. The survey data revealed that 31.2% of respondents (69 of 221) work opposite shifts from their spouse or their children's other parent in order to ensure child care coverage. While this strategy ensures that child care needs are met, anecdotal findings indicate that working opposite shifts places significant stress on families.

Additionally, 3.6% (8 of 221) of respondents indicated that they have school age children at home unsupervised, despite that they feel that they should have adult supervision, and that lack of child care options is the reason for this situation. An additional 1.8% (4 of 221) of respondents indicated that they would prefer not to say whether this scenario occurs in their family. This issue was raised as a topic of concern during the first round of community information sessions.

When available, many survey respondents rely on informal child care, such as that provided by extended family, trusted neighbours, and friends. Of the respondents to this question, 48.5% (116 of 239) had informal care available, primarily as backup or infrequent care options. However, they did also express hesitation over using these child care options, and examples of these hesitations are given in the anecdotal findings section of this report. The responses to this question also indicate that 50.5% of respondents have no informal care options available at all.

The perceived negative effects of child care on various aspects of work, family, and community life were assessed by asking respondents to use a slider bar to indicate negative effects from 0 (no negative effect) to 10 (maximum negative effect). Participant responses are indicated in Table 4, and indicate that the most negative impact of child care is on household budgets (6.92/10). Respondents indicated moderately negative effects of their child care situation on other aspects of life, including mental health (5.66/10) and time together as a family (5.58).

Table 4. Perceived negative effects of child care.

Aspect of life	Average (mean)	Standard deviation	Number of responses
Productivity at work	5.28	3.20	158
Work-life balance	5.33	3.24	177
Mental health (e.g. stress, anxiety, depression)	5.66	3.21	182
Sense of belonging in the community	4.18	3.20	145
Attachment to the community	4.25	3.20	142
Household budget	6.92	2.95	190
Safety and security	5.04	3.13	131
Overall quality of life	5.10	3.11	151
Time together as a family	5.58	3.30	148

#### *Child care opportunities*

Despite that the majority of respondents indicated that they feel there are barriers to accessing child care in the Elk Valley, they did indicate approximately neutral responses when asked to use a slider bar from 0 (no positive impact) to 10 (most positive impact) to indicate perceived positive impacts of child care on aspects of their work, family, and community lives. The response data is presented in Table 5 below, indicating that respondents feel most positive about the effects of child care on overall quality of life.

Table 5. Perceived positive effects of child care.

Aspect of life	Average (mean)	Standard deviation	Number of responses
Productivity at work	4.72	3.19	102
Work-life balance	5.00	3.21	117
Mental health (e.g. stress, anxiety, depression)	4.50	3.31	107
Sense of belonging in the community	3.98	3.06	112
Attachment to the community	4.11	3.11	108
Household budget	3.72	3.51	94
Safety and security	4.75	3.28	97
Overall quality of life	5.12	3.24	104
Time together as a family	5.02	3.32	98

Survey respondents were asked questions to assess potential solutions to child care issues in the Elk Valley. When asked whether they would be interested in job-sharing, 124 of 237 respondents (52.3%) indicated that they would be interested in this possibility, and an additional 40 people (16.9%) indicated that they were unsure. Job-sharing was described in the survey question as a situation where 2 employees share the same position and responsibilities, each working a portion of the position hours.

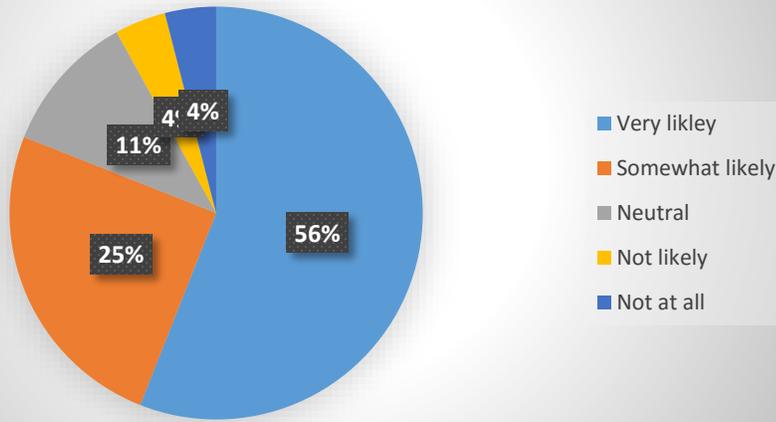
Anecdotal reports indicate that there may be people who are trained in early childhood education living in the Elk Valley, who are currently not working in child care. Survey results found that there are currently 10 ECEs who are not currently working in childcare, and 12 people who have qualifications to work as ECEs with infants/toddlers or children with special needs, but who are not currently doing so. When asked the reasons for not working in child care or for not using the infant/toddler or special needs training, respondents indicated that they do not have child care for their own children, that they would not make enough to pay for child care for their own children, or that they have had challenges with licensing regulations. Some of these trained ECEs did not receive their education in British Columbia, and therefore may be required to take

additional courses in order to demonstrate credentials accepted by the Early Childhood Educator Registry of BC.

An additional 27 people indicated that they currently do not have qualifications to work as an ECE, but that they would be interested in working in the child care field. Furthermore, 77 respondents (32.2% of 239 people) indicated that they would be interested in caring for another person's children in their home on some days, if that person cared for their children in his or her home on other days. An additional 40 people (16.7%) indicated that they were unsure whether they might be interested in a childcare trading arrangement. If support was available to navigate regulations for becoming a licensed family daycare or comply with licence-not-required family care, 40 people indicated that they might be interested in providing this type of care, and an additional 40 people were unsure. Respondents were asked whether they would be interested in hiring a live-in nanny to care for children in their own home, provided that it was cost effective and they had support with finding the right person, and 46.2% of respondents (110 of 238) indicated that they would be. An additional 35 people (14.7%) were unsure. Overall, these data indicated that the respondents to the present survey are quite open to exploring a variety of child care arrangements that could meet their needs.

Respondents expressed a high level of interest in employers offering on-site childcare or child care near to work sites, if that child care is comparable in price to currently available options. These data are presented below in Figure 11. A total of 81% of respondents (193 of 238 people) indicated that they would be very likely or somewhat likely to have interest in using child care offered by their employer.

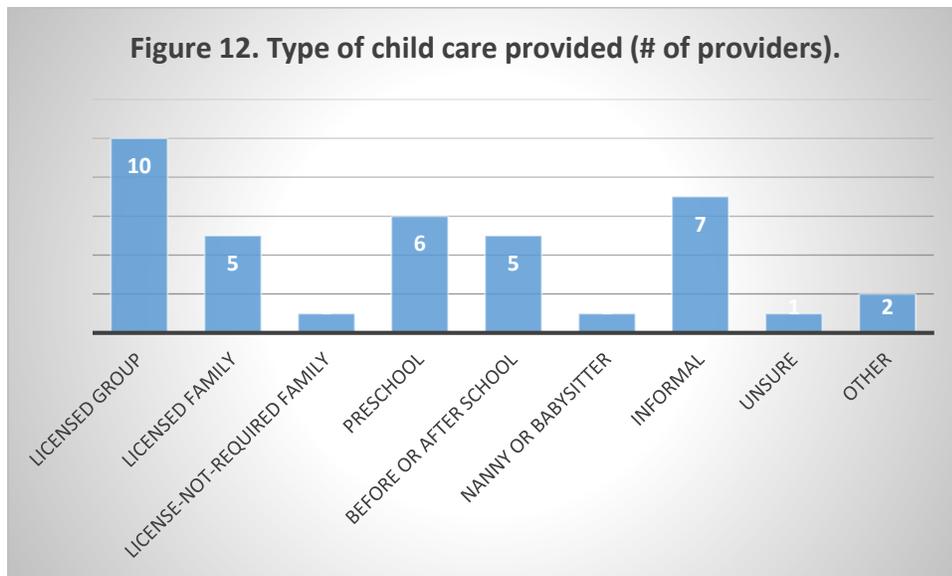
**Figure 11. Interest in on-site child care offered by employer.**



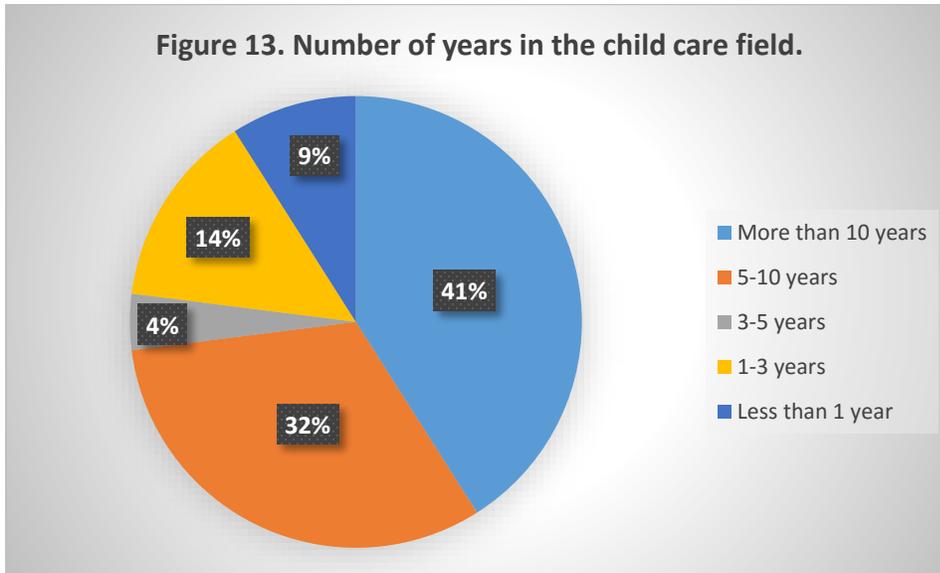
### *Child care providers*

The survey included questions designed specifically to assess perspectives of child care providers, and 31 respondents categorized themselves as child care providers. The child care providers worked in a variety of care models, with the majority employed at licensed group child care facilities. Data on types of child care provided by survey participants are given below in Figure 12.

**Figure 12. Type of child care provided (# of providers).**

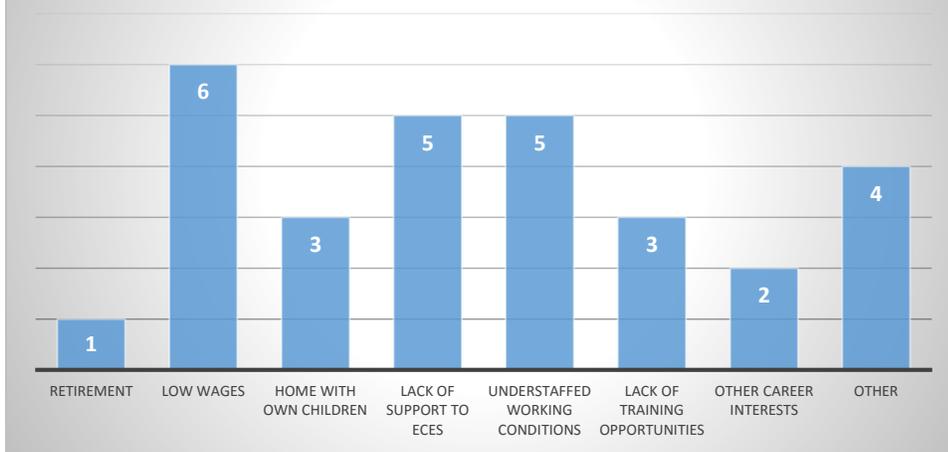


Child care providers were asked to indicate their highest level of education in child care. Of 25 respondents, 20% were ECE certified with infant/toddler or special needs certification, 36% had ECE certification, 12% were ECE Assistants, 4.0% had the “responsible adult” designation, and 28.0% had no ECE education. The majority of child care providers had been in the child care field for many years. Data regarding number of years of experience are presented in Figure 13.



Child care providers were asked whether they plan to be working in child care 5 years from now, with 50.0% responding “yes” (13 of 26), 19.2% responding “no” (5 of 26), and 30.8% being unsure (8 of 26). Reasons for not working in child care in the future are summarized below in Figure 14.

**Figure 14. Reasons for leaving child care field (# of respondents).**

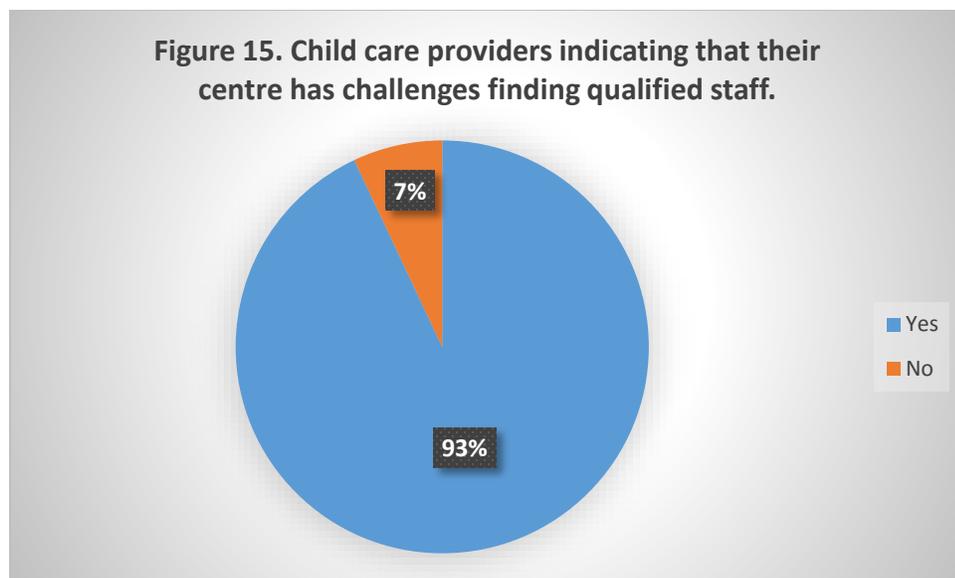


Child care providers were asked to indicate their level of concern regarding issues related to their profession, using a slider bar from 0 (no concern) to 10 (maximum concern). This data is summarized below in Table 6. Findings indicate that low wages are the most concerning issue for child care providers (9.32/10), which was supported by open field responses.

**Table 6. Concerns of child care providers.**

Provider issue	Average (mean)	Standard deviation	Number of responses
Low wages	9.32	1.25	20
Lack of training opportunities	5.97	2.48	18
Lack of support to ECEs as professionals	7.47	2.16	17
Understaffed working conditions	8.08	2.15	16
Job instability	4.11	3.78	11
Other	7.28	2.09	4

The challenges experienced by child care providers were further explored by investigating reasons for low numbers of spaces being available. Of 15 respondents who worked at centres with hired staff, 93.3% (14 people) indicated that their child care centre has challenges finding qualified staff (see Figure 15 below) and 37.5% (6 of 16) indicated that finding or maintaining appropriate space is a challenge. Respondents were asked whether there is a waitlist to begin child care at their centre and of those to whom the question applied, 88.2% (15 of 17) said yes. Furthermore, child care providers confirmed that preference is often given to families using a full-time space rather than a part-time space, with 76.9% of applicable providers indicating registration preference for children who attend full-time.



### *Employers*

An aim of the present survey was to investigate employer perspectives on child care in the Elk Valley. There were 23 employers, recruiters, or human resources staff who responded to the survey and 81% (17 of 21 respondents to this question) indicated that they have employees who require child care for their children. Table 7 presents survey data regarding child care issues from an employer perspective, based on reports to them from their employees. Employers indicated whether the listed events had occurred, specifically as a result of employees or potential employees not having child care for their children. Importantly, 45% (9 of 20) employers, recruiters, or human resources staff reported that they had to cancel a service offered

by the business, close temporarily, or otherwise had day-to-day business operations impacted by absence of an employee due to child care issues.

Table 7. Experiences of employers related to employee child care.

Child care issue	% reporting issue	Proportion of total responses
Missed work in past 1 year	76.2	16/21
Quit job in past 3 years	28.6	6/21
Did not return from parental leave in past 3 years	33.3	7/21
Declined job offer in past 3 years	23.8	5/21

Employer respondents were asked whether they offer any assistance to their employees regarding child care, and 14.3% (3 of 21) indicated that they do. Specific assistance offered included special leave for caring for ill children (2) and discounted child care rates for employees at a child care centre.

*Finding solutions*

Survey respondents were asked who they feel should be responsible for ensuring that child care needs are met in the Elk Valley. The grid below (Table 8) summarizes findings, with results indicating that the majority of respondents feel that addressing child care solutions should be a partnership with several contributors, including community organizations, parents, guardians, and primary caregivers, employers, child care providers, and all levels of government. Of those respondents who indicated that 1 of these contributors should be taking on a leadership role, municipal and provincial government were most commonly identified as preferred leaders.

Table 8. Perceived responsibility for findings solutions to child care issues.

	Not at all responsible	Minor contributor	One of several contributors	A leader in finding solutions	Solely responsible	Number of respondents
Parents and other family members	4.2%	12.7%	48.5%	28.5%	6.2%	260
Organizations that provide child care	1.6%	3.9%	45.1%	46.7%	2.7%	255
Employers	5.0%	12.4%	45.7%	34.9%	1.9%	258
Community organizations	6.0%	11.1%	56.3%	26.2%	0.4%	252
Municipal government	1.9%	5.8%	34.2%	50.6%	7.4%	257
Provincial government	3.5%	5.4%	31.4%	50.8%	8.9%	258
Federal government	7.0%	10.2%	31.3%	43.4%	8.2%	256

*Anecdotal findings*

In the process of gathering background information for the survey design, during interviews with key stakeholders, and through open field responses to the survey, it became clear that the full scope of the issues regarding child care in the Elk Valley cannot be fully elucidated without considering personal experiences of individuals, in the context of the group data. In many cases, the impact on families and care providers could be observed in the emotional relay of child care related events. Participants in these discussions felt that ensuring access to high quality child care in the Elk Valley is a critical aspect of community sustainability, and often made comments about the impacts of child care issues on their mental health, children’s development, and gender equity in the workplace and in society. The majority of survey respondents gave anecdotal and/or open field responses. The comments below are representative of details that Elk Valley residents shared and the thoughts that they wanted to be included in this report.

“I believe the responsibility for the education of all children begins when they are born, not when they turn 5, therefore I believe we need universal child care in Canada. We do the best we can with wages and funding, but unless we have more we will never achieve the quality of care our children deserve.”

“It’s hard to keep child care providers in an area where they can make more driving truck.”

“Options are not well-advertised or known. I am entirely unaware of my future options.”

“Lack of child care is why I am unemployed. I don’t have a choice. I have also done child care for others as they don’t have options for child care. It is a terrible situation for a lot of women, who can feel quite trapped or stuck.”

“I didn’t know before I had kids that the hardest thing about being a parent would be not being able to work. I believed that I could have both.”

“I’d love to stay working as an ECE, but I wouldn’t make enough to pay for child care for my own kids. Besides, there probably wouldn’t be a space available for them anyway.”

“Workshifts create barriers. Rules for daycares create barriers. Cost creates barriers.”

“I was on the waitlist for a year before I even moved to Elkford...I asked around and everyone seemed to be using Facebook to find babysitters so that’s what I did...I found my children in a car in -5°C weather with no shoes, socks, or jackets and the care provider was standing smoking 2 cars away...people don’t report these things because they’re scared to lose their child care. My mom came from [the West Kootenays] to bail me out when I didn’t have child care and I asked a friend to help me for a while. This caused tension though. I was posting ads in Calgary, on bulletin boards, on Facebook, everywhere I could think of, trying to find a nanny...I have been approved for a live-in caregiver application to hire a foreign nanny...the process takes about a year and I have spent \$2000 so far...I will pay for the caregiver’s flights, medical the first

month, and pay her minimum wage. No room and board can be charged for her to live in my home...I hope it works out.”

“There is no child care that coordinates with the mine schedules.”

“We have had luck finding local nannies who we trust, but have had 5 in 18 months, all who have moved on for reasons unrelated to the job. This creates a lot of stress and change for our family, and makes it challenging to provide extra commitment or flexibility to our employer.”

“I have a master’s degree in educational studies and have been a hands-on stay at home mother for 13 years. This however does not count as valid child care experience to the licensing board. This means that I am not fully qualified to work with children. If the licensing rules accepted other types of qualifications then there might be more available child care workers. The pay scale of an ECE does not make retraining an economically viable option.”

“There are not enough licensed at EDUCATED child care facilities. We have a lot of stay at home moms that take on children, but I personally want my children in a regulated environment with safety, learning, and schedule standards. And the ones that are here, with certified and educated staff are so expensive it’s not plausible.”

“Not enough day care facilities have forced me to stay at home with child during the day and work evenings only. I’m unable to work full-time as my husband already works and is away during the day.”

“We have been through 3 live-in nannies over 5 years...Then the nannies were gone and I went through 5 people in 12 months. They just drifted off to other jobs and were not committed.”

“We are currently considering moving away to be able to pursue career interests alongside our family needs.”

“Either myself or my husband will need to quit our job if we don’t find care soon. We both really like our jobs and have worked hard to get our careers established.”

“Child care is very expensive so for me to go to work doesn’t make sense as I would pay out most of my cheque to child care.”

“I am discouraged that the efforts of citizens in our community to set up not for profit child care societies have not been supported very strongly by our municipal and provincial governments.”

“I feel that setting up a strong system of child care is extremely important for the next stage of achieving gender equality in the workplace.”

“Our family has been seeking child care for our first born since we were 8 weeks pregnant, the search is still ongoing and our first born is 1 at the end of this month. It has made our first year of parenthood stressful and worry stricken.”

“We used 3 different day homes in Sparwood prior to 2013; in 2013 my mother moved to the Valley to act as a live-in nanny for us.”

“Hours of operation for commuting parents to mine sites need to coincide with shift schedules including travel times.”

“Anything you can afford comes without a receipt so you can’t claim it, so not really all that cost effective.”

“If Teck wants to retain employees in the Valley, they need to get involved with making quality child care accessible.”

“The mine should really seek to get proper child care in the Valley since they bring in families to work.”

“There is a lack of government support on provincial and especially municipal levels (i.e. City of Fernie) for licenced daycare spots.”

“For new parents there is little information to help prepare you for child care issues...I put my son on the waitlist when he was 2 months old and after 9 months he is still in the teens on the wait list...I suggest having a centralized place to find out information on available private day homes, rather than it being a case of who knows who having more access to child care. To me that makes child care less accessible for it is a bit of a private club.”

“\$10,000 to take full ECE training to make just over minimum wage.”

“Why would anyone go into the child care field, they will be paying off student loans for a long duration.”

“I can’t tell my employer the week before if I am going to show up to work or not.”

“My husband and I must work opposite shifts, having just 1 hour for the 3 of us [including child] during each day. Even our days off are not the same.”

“I fought with the Government of Canada over hiring a New Zealander nanny legally. In the first 6 months of work, I had 8+ sitters. I was not able to claim any of it on my taxes, because they were all on visas, or not claiming the money. I was taking home less than \$200/week after child care expenses.”

“I believe that safe, reliable, affordable child care should be mandated at the federal and provincial levels. Child care affects absolutely everyone in society- the current level of service is a barrier to productivity, family life, healthy communities, and work equality.”

## 8. Findings by community

### *Fernie*

The majority of Fernie residents (52.8%; 67 of 127) indicated that they work, study, or operate a business in Fernie, but large proportions reported their communities of employment as Sparwood (27.6%), Elkford (7.1%), or other communities (12.6%). However, of Fernie residents who currently access child care, 90% (68 of 76) do so in Fernie. Similarly, when asked which communities they would access child care in if it was available to them, 90% indicated a preference for Fernie despite that they had the option of indicating multiple communities. Therefore, there is a preference for child care in the community of residence over the community of employment, similarly to findings for Sparwood and Elkford.

Segregated analyses of responses by community indicated that there were no differences between responses to most questions given by Fernie residents compared to the overall data set. However, Fernie residents reported less access to informal child care options (such as with family, friends, or trusted neighbours), with only 38.3% of respondents indicating that they have this type of care available, compared to 48.5% of the total survey respondents ( $\chi^2 = 5.012$ ,  $p = 0.0252$ ).

### *Sparwood*

Sparwood residents were highly likely to work, study, or operate a business in their home community, with 76.1% (54 of 71) of Sparwood respondents both living and working in Sparwood. Sparwood residents also reported working in Fernie (2.8%), Elkford (9.9%), or other communities (11.2%). Of those currently accessing child care, 97% (34 of 35 respondents) do so in Sparwood. Additionally, 88.3% (68 of 77) Sparwood respondents indicated preference for accessing child care in Sparwood, demonstrating a similar preference pattern to Fernie and Elkford.

Similarly to segregated findings for the other communities, there were no differences in responses to most questions for Sparwood residents compared to the overall data set. Open field responses by Sparwood residents to the question asking respondents to describe current barriers to child care more heavily emphasized concerns related to shift work, compared with responses from the other communities. Sparwood residents reported that they are more likely to have

access to informal child care options (63.3%; 38 of 60 respondents), compared to the total survey respondents ( $\chi^2 = 5.406$ ,  $p = 0.0201$ ).

Of 6 Sparwood employers, recruiters, or human resources staff, 100% reported that they had employees who could not attend work at some point in the past year because of child care issues.

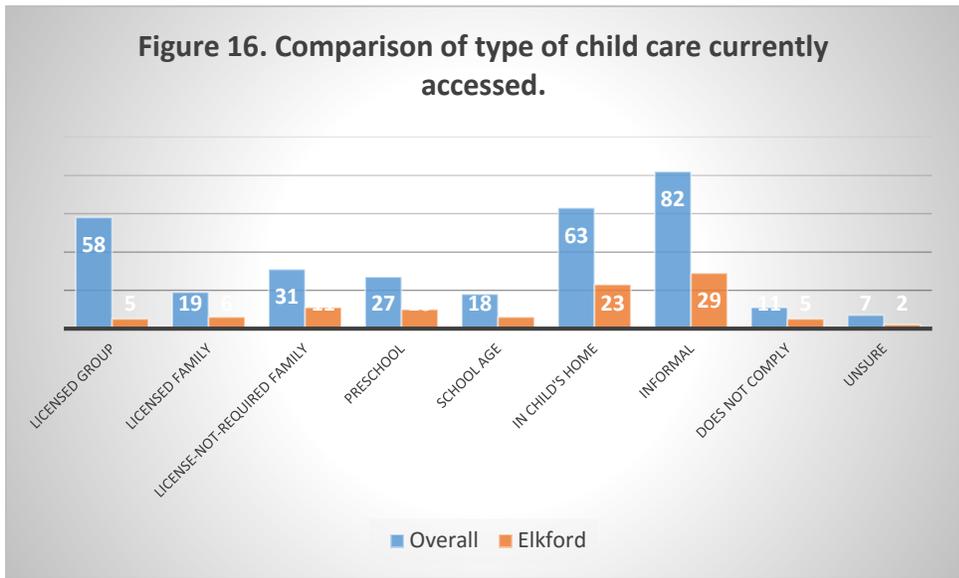
Sparwood child care providers also reported higher levels of concern than the overall child care provider respondents regarding lack of support to ECEs as professionals (9.6/10 compared to 7.47/10 for respondents across communities). However, these data were not analysed to determine statistical significance due to a low number of respondents. Another relevant finding from the responses of Sparwood child care providers was that 100% of respondents indicated that the centre they work at gives preference to children using a full-time space over those using a part-time space.

### *Elkford*

Elkford respondents primarily work, study, or operate a business in Elkford (81.0%; 51 of 63 respondents), demonstrating similar trends to those observed in Fernie and Sparwood. The remaining Elkford residents indicated Fernie (3.2%), Sparwood (9.5%), or other communities (6.4%) as the communities that they work in. Of the Elkford residents currently accessing child care, 82.1% (32 of 39) access it in Elkford. The vast majority of Elkford residents indicated a preference for child care in Elkford (91.8%; 67 of 73) over other communities, similarly to the home community preference observed for Fernie and Sparwood.

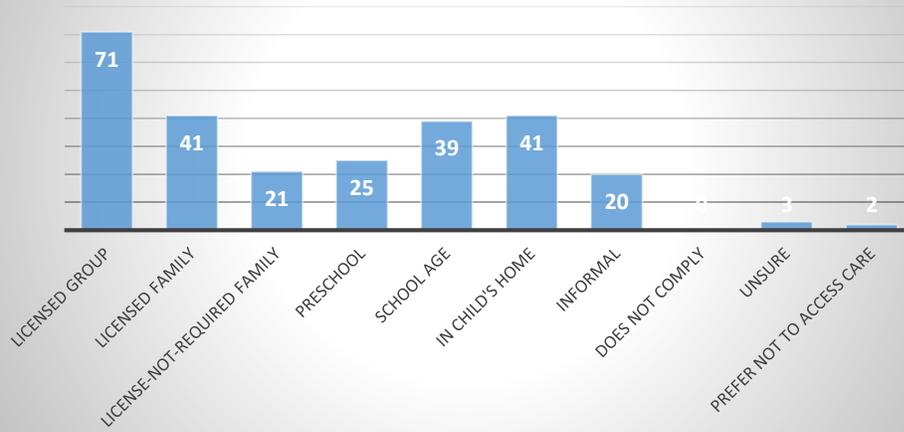
Responses to most questions had similar responses from Elkford residents as for the overall data set. However, there were differences in the type of child care currently accessed in Elkford. Fernie and Sparwood have licensed child care facilities but Elkford does not, so it is not surprising that Elkford residents reported more informal care, care from a nanny or babysitter in the child's own home, or in a license-not-required family daycare. Figure 16 compares type of care currently accessed in Elkford with the overall data set. However, Elkford respondents prefer licensed group child care similarly to respondents from Fernie and Sparwood, with data indicating that 27.2% (72 of 265) of care needs are preferred to occur in licensed group child care settings. Elkford residents also indicated higher proportions of children in part-time care than those in the overall data set. The overall data indicate that 61.4% (43 of 70) of children

attend part-time child care in Elkford, compared to 47.0% in the overall data set ( $\chi^2 = 3.841$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ). A greater proportion of Elkford respondents indicated special child care needs, with 18.9% (10 of 53) indicating special needs and 9.4% (5 of 53) responding that they were unsure, compared with 7.5% and 8.8%, respectively.



Elkford residents described the lack of any full-time child care, and specifically the lack of a licensed child care facility, in the open field responses regarding child care barriers that currently exist. They also expressed concerns over there being no options that accommodate shift work schedules and safety concerns over unregulated and unlicensed care providers who may be providing child care for a large number of children at one time. Many Elkford residents also feel that qualified ECEs and/or nannies are not interested in moving to Elkford because it is a relatively small and remote community that does not have many amenities or transportation options.

**Figure 17. Preferred type of child care in Elkford (# of children).**



## 9. Recommendations

### *Short-term mitigation strategies- Elk Valley*

- Develop networks of people who need child care in each community, in order to facilitate child care trading. The survey results indicate interest in this option (a total of 117 respondents indicated openness to this idea), this may help to address needs of shift workers, and it would be a low or no cost option for families. The disadvantages include that it would not be regulated and there would need to be capacity to organize this system. However, criteria could be developed for being part of the network, such as proof of having taken a first aid course or passing a criminal record check. Capacity may exist through existing community organizations, or a next step by the EVCCAI may be to further investigate child care co-ops (for example, as outlined by Babycenter, 2015) and facilitate progress in this area.
- Create a network of trainers or support people to guide others through processes such as for hiring a foreign nanny, or providing LNR family care at home. Anecdotal findings indicate that there are people in the Elk Valley communities who have experience with these processes, and information sharing would likely mitigate the complications experienced by those who are initiating them. The East Kootenay Child Care Resource and Referral Program (EKCCRR, 2015) would be a valuable partner in this strategy, as they offer resources on these topics that would be beneficial to expanding information sharing.
- Create information packages for families regarding cost saving or budgeting methods as they relate to child care. It seems that some people are not aware of options such as child care subsidies or tax credits, although this may be in part due most of the survey respondents earning income that makes them ineligible for these programs. Information packages could contain information specific to the Elk Valley when applicable, and the East Kootenay Child Care Resource and Referral Program would also be a valuable partner in this strategy, as they distribute information on subsidies and provide access to items that would facilitate low-cost child care provision (such as a toy library and low-cost non-toxic art supplies, education related to child care, etc.).

- Collaboration by Elk Valley child care providers to develop a system of availability sharing, in order to reduce overpaying for unused child care and also potentially create more space availability to accommodate additional children. This strategy could also reduce problems associated with preference given to those requiring full-time care. Creating an information sharing system for child care providers may be a logical next step for the EVCCAI.
- Promote and support the College of the Rockies (Ferne campus) with offering ECE courses and/or programs on campus or online. This recommendation is based on recent success of the College in with providing several people with training requirements for providing license-not-required child care in their homes, or for being able to work in a licensed child care facility.

*Long-term community development strategies- Elk Valley*

- Residents of each of the 3 main communities in the Elk Valley have indicated clear preference (and follow through, as evidenced by current use) for child care in their home community over the community that they work in. This finding is not particularly surprising given the geographic distribution of the communities. Sparwood is the central community, and is 34 km from Elkford and 31 km from Fernie, for a total distance of 65 km between Elkford and Fernie. Additionally, employees of Teck Coal Limited (41% of survey respondents) may work at mine sites that are distant from their home communities. The mine sites are up to 30 km away from the nearest community (Teck, 2015), adding to commuting time and extending the length of time that child care is required. Therefore, a strong conclusion, which impacts all recommendations in this report, is that it is essential for each community to have child care that fully addresses the needs of that community. Although interconnectedness between the Elk Valley communities can provide child care solutions for some families, relying on resources in another community will likely not meet the needs of the majority of people.
- Support availability of trained ECEs, in order to enable staffing of licensed child care facilities. Parents, guardians, and other primary caregivers of children across the Elk Valley have voiced clear preferences for licensed group child care facilities. Child care providers have clearly outlined that staffing child care centres is a major challenge

(indicated by 93% of child care provider respondents), which limits the ability to open new spaces in all of the Elk Valley communities. The survey identified that there are at least 10 trained ECEs in the communities, who are currently not working in child care. Therefore, recruitment may focus on people who are already trained, or who require minimal upgrading to their training, in order to work in the child care field. Recruitment strategies to train new ECEs would be beneficial, and would be most effective if they are expanded beyond the level of individual child care centre levels to involve municipal government and other community partners. However, issues of recruiting new ECEs to initial training occur throughout BC, with wages for work as an ECE cited as a major deterrent to entering or staying in the field. Furthermore, it is well-known that Alberta has fewer licensing restrictions and higher ECE wages, so the proximity of the Elk Valley to the Alberta border is a particular concern specific to the Elk Valley. Specifically, COTR should be supported with efforts to train ECEs. Training that occurs on a part-time basis and that accounts for the scheduling needs of those being trained would enhance the probability of new ECEs being available to work in licenced group child care facilities in the Elk Valley. Scheduling considerations should include the needs of current child care workers who want to upgrade their qualifications, as well as those who currently work in other fields but have interest in working in child care.

- Support strategies to increase the wages of ECE staff in licensed child care facilities. Child care providers have indicated low wages as their primary concern within their profession and those trained as child care providers but not currently working in the field have clearly indicated that wages are the primary reason for either not being employed or for seeking employment in other fields. Therefore, long-term strategies must support wage increases for qualified ECE staff in licensed child care facilities. There are currently well-established initiatives aimed at the BC government with aims of accomplishing this goal. For example, the \$10 a day initiative, by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, proposes wage increases to approximately \$25 per hour plus improved benefits, as well as support to those who want to become trained ECEs (2015). For comparison, ECEs in the Elk Valley currently earn \$14–21 per hour. More direct strategies, such as approaching local employers, community organizations, or funding agencies for support may yield more immediate changes to the current child care barriers.

- Job-sharing options should be explored with local businesses. The Elk Valley is in need of a strategy to enable women, many of whom are highly educated and skilled, to participate in the labour force. Job-sharing by these women, their partners, or both may provide opportunities for people to use their developed skills to the benefit of local employers. It is logical to approach Teck Coal Limited regarding initial exploration of this strategy, given that Teck is a major local employer and given that some employees are reportedly already job-sharing in positions with Teck.
- Solutions for 12 hours shifts, plus commute time, in dual-income or single parent families must be considered in order to fully meet child care needs in the Elk Valley. This does not necessarily mean that children require child care for the entire duration of time (and licensing regulations require that this cannot occur in licensed child care settings), but hours of available care must be flexible enough to accommodate shift work schedules in all Elk Valley Communities. Acting on this recommendation likely involves developing child care options that involve multiple care providers in a single day, which parents feel confidence in. Other strategies to address this recommendation may include job-sharing or developing a child care co-op, as outlined above.
- Approach Teck Coal Ltd. to explore opportunities for a flexible work schedule that allows parents to adjust hours around typical child care centre operating hours. For example, it may be possible for some Teck employees to change their work hours from 7 am–4 pm to 8 am–5 pm in order to coincide with child care hours. This recommendation is based on the fact that this major area employer is primarily responsible for the shift work schedules that are identified as a major barrier to accessing adequate child care in the Elk Valley. Even if additional spaces were available in a licensed group child care facility with typical operating hours, these hours would not adequately address the child care needs of Elk Valley residents because they do not coincide with the shift schedules at Teck. Therefore, it is recommended that the EVCCAI examine a subset of data specific to Teck employees and explore opportunities to partner with Teck to address any prevalent childcare issues arising from the data.

*Community level mitigation strategies- Fernie*

- Lack of informal care options was the major difference between Fernie respondents and the overall data set. Therefore, the major recommendation specific to Fernie is to develop

a parent network with child care as the focus, in order to promote relationships being formed between local parents that enable trust to develop, thus fostering informal child care options and other forms of informal support. A child care co-op would also be beneficial to this goal.

- Provide support to child care providers currently operating unlicensed and unregulated child care, in order to promote standards for safety and confidence in quality of care. Anecdotal reports indicate that there are several such care providers operating in Fernie, some of which may be eligible for registration with the East Kootenay Child Care Resource and Referral Program with little or no need for additional training or documentation. The providers who operate these child care businesses may be unaware of the standards for registration and may not be aware that they do not need to have ECE credentials or meet licensing criteria in order to be registered. Increasing the number of Registered License-Not-Required child care providers may make it easier for parents to find child care that they feel comfortable with, rather than relying on word of mouth. Parents would also likely be reassured by the first aid, criminal record check, and other requirements for registration.

#### *Community level mitigation strategies- Sparwood*

- Although Sparwood has a licensed group childcare facility, there is currently limited part-time child care available in Sparwood. It is recommended that part-time care options be considered in any future child care development strategy.

#### *Community level mitigation strategies- Elkford*

- Development of licensed group child care in Elkford that accommodates full-time spaces. Given that Elkford currently does not have licensed child care, and that licensed group child care is strongly preferred by survey respondents, the most significant need in Elkford is to develop this type of care. Without licensed group child care, Elkford is a community with significantly limited potential to support dual-income or single parent families, and therefore likely does not attract such people to the community. The inability for both parents in Elkford households to work has been identified as a source of gender inequality among residents. Furthermore, without licensed group child care, the ability to

support optimal child development is limited because children can only access ECE-provided care on a part-time basis once they reach preschool ages. Given that there was a higher percentage of children with special needs identified in Elkford and that supported child development is only available in licensed and regulated care environments, children in Elkford have limited access to developmental supports. Therefore, the recommendation is to approach the District of Elkford and other potential funding sources in order to develop licensed child care in Elkford.

- Provide support to child care providers currently operating unlicensed and unregulated child care, in order to facilitate standards for safety and confidence in quality of care. Similarly to the needs outlined above for Fernie, Elkford would benefit from an increase in Registered License-Not-Required child care providers. There is currently concern among community members that the Facebook-based method of finding care providers does not incorporate safeguards. This concern would be addressed by criminal record check, first aid certification, and other requirements of registration with the East Kootenay Child Care Resource and Referral Program, and would not require licensing or ECE certification from care providers. Community education regarding registration requirements may contribute to implementing this recommendation.

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