

Increasing supports for little kids with big needs
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Children with special needs throughout Renfrew County will receive the extra support services and the resources they require while attending licensed child care facilities. With available funding under the Day Nurseries Act and the Best Start program, \$532,000 has been dedicated as Special Needs Resourcing funds in 2008, to be administered by the county of Renfrew's Child Care Services division.

The funds will provide enhanced staffing, resource materials, workshops and direct intervention and implementation planning for children with special needs.

That level of service, based on the level of need, will be determined by the integration co-ordinators, hired by the county in December, parents and child care providers.

The funds are provided to the nursery schools, day cares and licensed family homes to hire staff to meet the needs of the children. Funding for special needs in these facilities has been available since 1994, but it has doubled as a result of the Best Start initiative. With approximately 1,200 licensed child care spaces in Renfrew County, it is estimated about 10 per cent of the children require additional care, according to Judy Mulvihill, manager of child care services.

Integration co-ordinators Amanda Kutchkoskie and Sarah Hastings began their duties Dec. 17, 2007. Both are working full time and currently share the growing caseload of between 90 and 100 files.

Because of the work involved in each case, especially with new families, Ms. Mulvihill believes the caseload should be capped at between 35 and 40 files.

A contract integration co-ordinator position was also advertised, but is yet to be filled. Although two job offers were made, both declined to accept the position because of its contract status, she told the county's social services committee earlier this week.

The position has been advertised a second time as a renewable contract.

Pembroke Deputy Mayor Les Scott, who represents the city on the committee, asked if the county is missing out on the best person for the job because it is being offered on a contract basis.

David Anderson, director of community services for the county, explained the county opted to go to contract route because of the uncertainty of the caseload when the files were transferred from Renfrew County Integration Services.

"People want a full-time job with benefits," he said. "There is a stigma in the county of Renfrew about contracts and we heard that loud and clear."

Ms. Mulvihill believes there is enough work to support a third full-time integration co-ordinator.

In November, Renfrew County Integration Services, which had been administering the funds, notified the county it did not want to renew its contract for special needs resourcing services. At its regular meeting, county council decided to run the services under the Child Care Services division.

In February, provider agencies will be asked to complete a survey as to the gaps in special need resourcing services in the county.

Areas of focus will include the referral process, communication with outside agencies, integration with services for children in the county and school transition support.