



MUNFA CHILD  
CARE WORKING  
GROUP

20  
23

# CHILD CARE REPORT

November

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# Introduction

In June 2023, the MUNFA Child Care Working Group formed to assess the needs for child care among Memorial University Academic Staff Members who work in St. John's (at the St. John's Campus, Marine Institute, the Signal Hill Campus, or the Ocean Science Centre).

This Working Group formed in response to calls by MUNFA members about the crisis in child care availability for ASMs. While there is a child care centre located on the St. John's campus ([MUN Daycare](#)), it is primarily for the children of full-time students and has a waiting list of 500-700 people. ASMs must generally seek child care off-campus where the situation is no better, as recent research reveals that St. John's, NL, is one of the worst cities in Canada for licensed child care coverage ([MacDonald & Friendly, 2023](#)).

To examine the child care experiences and priorities of MUNFA parents and guardians, the MUNFA Child Care Working Group conducted an online survey: "Assessing the Child Care Needs of MUNFA Academic Staff Members in St. John's." The survey's objectives were to: 1) assess the unmet need for child care services on the St. John's campus; and 2) better understand how the limited availability of child care (both on and off-campus) impacts ASMs.

The survey was open from July 19 to August 20, 2023 and contained 13 questions about child care needs, experiences, and priorities. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. It was open to parents/guardians of children aged 12 years or younger and those anticipating the need for child care in the next two years who were ASMs working at MUNL in St. John's (i.e., the target group for a child care needs assessment). To avoid double-counting children, we asked that only one parent/guardian per household complete the survey. We also welcomed responses and feedback from all ASMs about how the limited availability of child care for MUNFA ASMs affects them, past experiences accessing child care, as well as soliciting ideas, comments, or suggestions.

# Key findings

## Access to child care is vitally important for ASMs

Access to affordable and inclusive child care is a critical area of faculty support and retention, vital to addressing gender-based inequities in academia, and therefore integral to the university's core mission. The survey illustrates the central importance of access to child care for ASMs and the need for immediate action to expand child care services at the St. John's campus.

1

### ASMs FACE MANY CHALLENGES ACCESSING CHILD CARE

including long waitlists, few spaces, and the lack of child care spaces for children under 2. Pursuing an academic career often means living far from family who can help with child care responsibilities.

2

### THE CHILD CARE CRISIS HAS IMPACTS ACROSS CAMPUS

hampering productivity, limiting the potential of many early career faculty, undermining faculty retention, and ultimately harming MUNL's vision as a distinguished public university.

3

### MUN DAYCARE HAS A LONG WAITLIST

The small number of ASMs who are accessing child care spaces at MUN Daycare have very positive views of the centre. ASMs support its practice of giving priority to students.

4

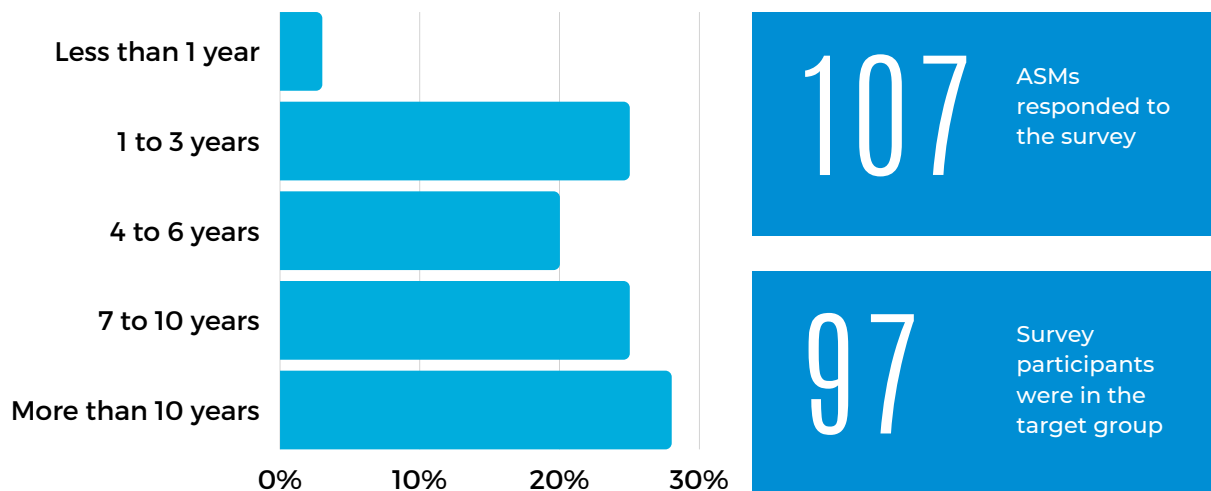
### EXPANDING CHILD CARE SERVICES IS AN OPPORTUNITY

for MUNL to prioritize the wellbeing of ASMs and their families, while also strengthening community partnerships and tapping into new government funding to repurpose underutilized campus spaces.


## Profile of survey participants

A total of 107 ASMs responded to the survey (106 from the St. John's campus). Ninety seven respondents were in the target group for the child care needs assessment (with children aged 12 or younger, or were planning to have or adopt children in the next two years). Figure 1 summarizes the career stage of the respondents in the target group.

**Figure 1. How many years have you worked as an ASM at Memorial?  
Target group only. 97 responses.**



- 48% of target group respondents had worked at MUNL for less than 7 years (typically the pre-tenure years)
- Note: totals vary because respondents could skip any questions they did not wish to answer except the first (are you a MUNFA ASM working in St. John's?).



“Out of all political and economic issues relevant to our household, child care is by far the most important one. It is paralyzing not to have accessible daycare for parents, including ASMs.”

“I went through hell over the past 13 years with inadequate child care and little to no support.”

-- Survey participants

# I. Child Care Challenges for MUNFA ASMs

The survey shows that child care is a significant source of stress for MUNFA ASMs who face many challenges accessing it. These difficulties include the limited availability of spaces, long waitlists, and the near total absence of child care spaces for children under 2 in the St. John's area (referred to as "infant child care"). Table 1 summarizes these challenges.

**TABLE 1. WHAT ARE THE CURRENT CHALLENGES, IF ANY, YOU ARE EXPERIENCING RELATED TO CHILD CARE? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY). TARGET GROUP ONLY.**

92 Responses

Response	#
Long waiting lists	50
No family nearby to help with child care responsibilities	48
Few child care spaces for infants (ages 0 to 18 months)	40
Not enough child care spaces for toddlers (18 months to less than 3 years old)	33
Can't access \$10/day child care space	27
Lack of after-school programs	26
Can't access regulated child care space	25
Location of child care services	19
Not applicable: no barriers or issues	18
Limited child care spaces for preschoolers/Pre-Kindergarten (age 3 to 5)	16
Other	10

## ⇒ Pursuing an academic career at MUNL often means living far from family members who can help with child care responsibilities.

"The University is trying to attract young faculty members but [doesn't] support their family needs," wrote one ASM, "St. John's is far from everything and newcomers can't get support from their families. It is stressful and it is a major obstacle for integration in the community."

## ⇒ There is a gap between parental leave and child care supports.

MUNFA ASMs can access fully-paid parental leave of up to 1 year (a gain made in the 2023-2026 Collective Agreement). But there are few regulated child care spaces for children under 2 years old in the St. John's metro area. To bridge this gap, ASMs make impossible decisions: "living in two cities to leverage child care," "juggling parenting and working full-time" by working very late at night or very early in the morning or "switching off" hours with a spouse, "hobbling together" unregulated child care until a child care space becomes available. These strategies to "bridge the gap" – are meant to be temporary – but can stretch on for years given the length of waitlists for regulated child care centres.

## ⇒ The child care crisis is worsening.

Demand for child care increased when NL reduced fees for regulated child care spaces to \$25/day in 2021 and \$10/day in 2023. These welcome fee reductions, however, have yet to be accompanied by meaningful increases in the number of regulated child care spaces available in the province. As a result, waitlists have ballooned. As one ASM explained, "this has been so hard - but I'm even more worried about incoming new faculty and students who are not going to be able to do their work or complete their programs without access to care."

## ⇒ ASMs face a spectrum of child care challenges.

Beyond conventional child care, participants also encounter difficulties finding child care during the summer, on Professional Development ("PD") days, and after-school.

## ⇒ Poor wages and working conditions of Early Childhood Educators.

Survey responses highlight the structural issues underlying the child care crisis, including unfair wages, poor working conditions for ECEs, the devaluing of child care disproportionately provided by women, and "the gendered class dimensions of who gets to have child care and who has to work looking after others children (at a very low unlivable wages)."



“The child care crisis is something MUN administrators should be paying close attention to because it has cascading impacts across our campus community.”

“Although I don't have children myself (nor do I plan to have them), accessible child care is essential to my colleagues who do - and meeting that need promotes better working conditions for us all.”

-- Survey participants

# II. Impact of Child Care Crisis on ASMs' Work

The child care crisis has far-reaching impacts across the campus community, hampering productivity, limiting the potential of many early career faculty, and ultimately harming MUNL's core mission.

**FIGURE 2. IS LACK OF ACCESS TO CHILD CARE NEGATIVELY IMPACTING YOUR ABILITY TO WORK (OR YOUR SPOUSE'S ABILITY TO WORK IF THEY ARE ALSO AN ASM AT MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY)? TARGET GROUP ONLY.**

89 Responses

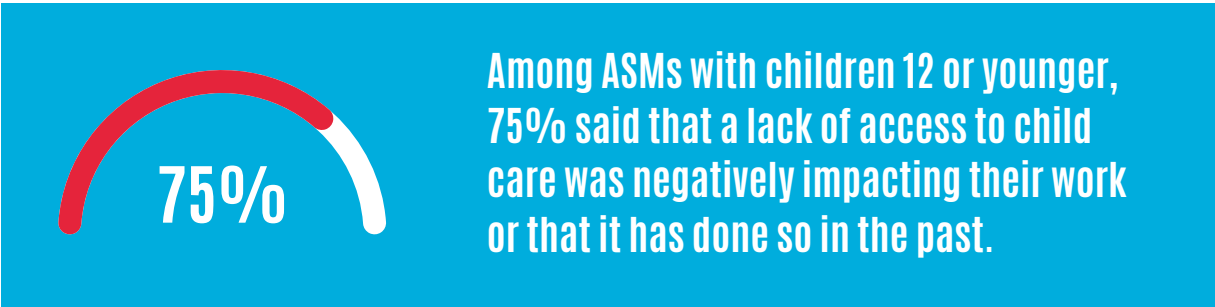
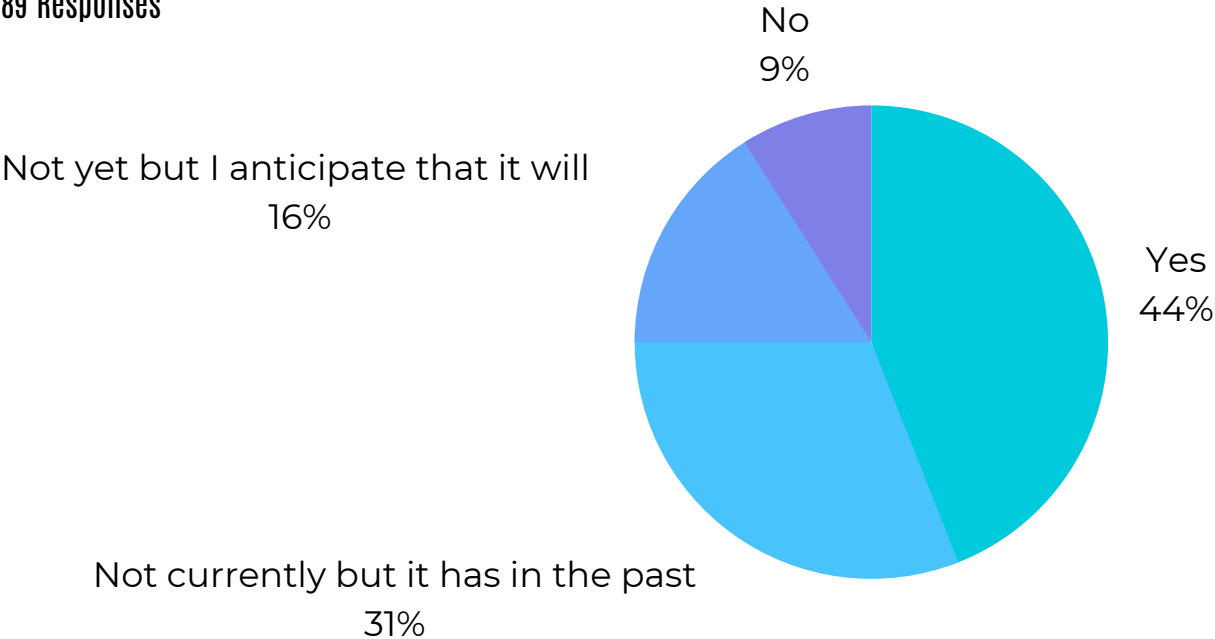


Figure 3. How is lack of access to child care negatively impacting your ability to work? (Select all that apply). Target group only.

40 Responses

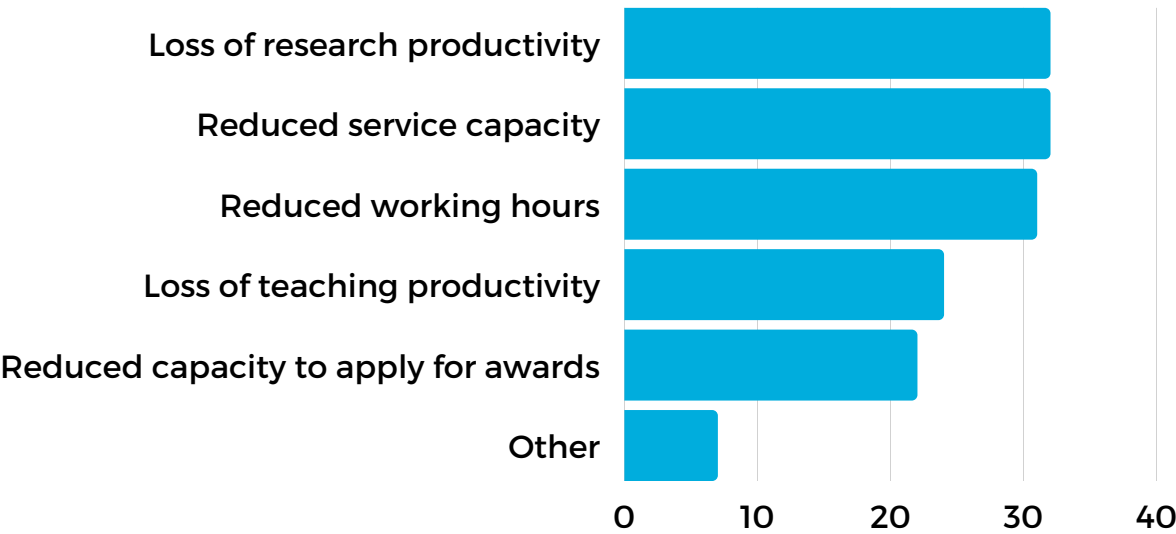


Table 2. Have you considered (or are you considering) taking any of the following actions as a result of a lack of child care? (Select all that apply). Target group only.

34 Responses

Response	#
Reducing your research, teaching, or service commitments	29
Relocating (e.g., to be closer to family)	13
Taking an extended leave from the university	8
Resigning from your position	7
Other	6

## ⇒ **Child care crisis reducing MUNFA ASMs capacity for service, research, and teaching**

Among ASMs with children 12 or younger, 75% said that a lack of access to child care was negatively impacting their work or that it has done so in the past. An additional 16% anticipate that it will negatively impact their ability to work in the future (Figure 2). The child care crisis means that MUNFA ASMs have reduced capacity for service, research, and teaching (see Figures 3 and 4). "It is so challenging to work when my employer does not provide a supportive work environment for parents of young children – my productivity is definitely compromised in this crucial early career period," wrote one ASM.

## ⇒ **Child care access and faculty retention**

The child care crisis has prompted ASMs to consider relocating to be closer to family (who can help with childcare responsibilities), taking extended leaves from the university, or resigning from their position. Survey responses highlight child care as a critical retention issue for ASMs. In the words of one ASM: "If a job came up close to my or my spouse's families, I would immediately apply. I know other faculty members who have made the same calculation even though they deeply wanted to stay at MUN." Another ASM noted that not being able to access childcare "exacerbates" employment challenges for trailing spouses and "increases the chances that ASMs will relocate to somewhere their spouse can be [meaningfully] employed."

## ⇒ **Child care crisis impacts felt by everyone**

These challenges are not solely about ASMs with children; the impact of the child care crisis is felt by everyone. As one ASM explained, "As I do not have children, this issue does not affect my household directly. However, it has affected my work, as colleagues with children have often asked to schedule meetings or classes in ways that allow them to meet their child care needs. I would hope that better child care provision might help mitigate this issue for them and as a consequence for ASMs without children." We received a number of comments from ASMs without children who stressed the importance of child care to the working conditions of all ASMs at MUNL.

# III. ASM Experiences with the MUN Daycare

*The [MUN] Child care centre is a fantastic place, filled with enthusiastic and loving caregivers. Whatever changes are made, I hope this facility and its staff maintain the full support of both the university and MUNFA. ”*

*“I was on the wait list at the MUN daycare from the day we heard I had an interview for an ASM position at MUN. We never made it off the wait list.”*

*“One major challenge with the MUN child care centre is not offering infant spaces”*

*“The centre doesn’t want to give information about the length of the waitlist and the positioning of the child on the wait list”*

MUNSU established the MUN Daycare in 1976 for undergraduate student parents., moving into the current facility in 1992. In 2006, it became a separately incorporated entity (SIE) (Campus Childcare Inc.) mandated by an MOU with MUNSU to provide full-time undergraduate students with child care, followed by graduate students, with any extra spaces going to faculty and staff. Rising demand for child care means that currently, MUN Daycare has capacity for 194 children. Of these 194 spaces, there are no spaces for children under 2 and only 30 spaces for 2-year olds. MUN Daycare is at capacity given current regulations and caregiver ratios. In November, 2023, it had a waiting list of 711 (502 current applications and 209 applications for future programs).

Thus, while Article 26.33 of the MUNFA Collective Agreement states that the “University shall use its best efforts to provide personnel and facilities for St. John’s Campus for the day care of at least thirty (30) children of ASMs aged from two (2) to five (5) years and after school care of thirty (30) children of ASMs aged from five (5) to twelve (12) years...” this Article has never resulted in securing spaces for faculty members in the campus child care centre.

Figure 4. Do you have a child (or children) currently attending the MUN Daycare? Target group only.

97 Responses

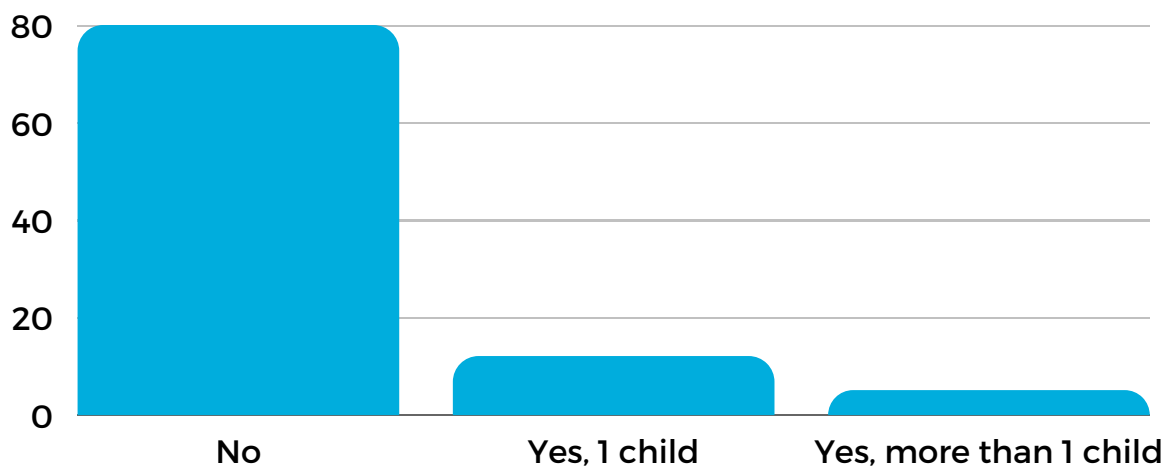
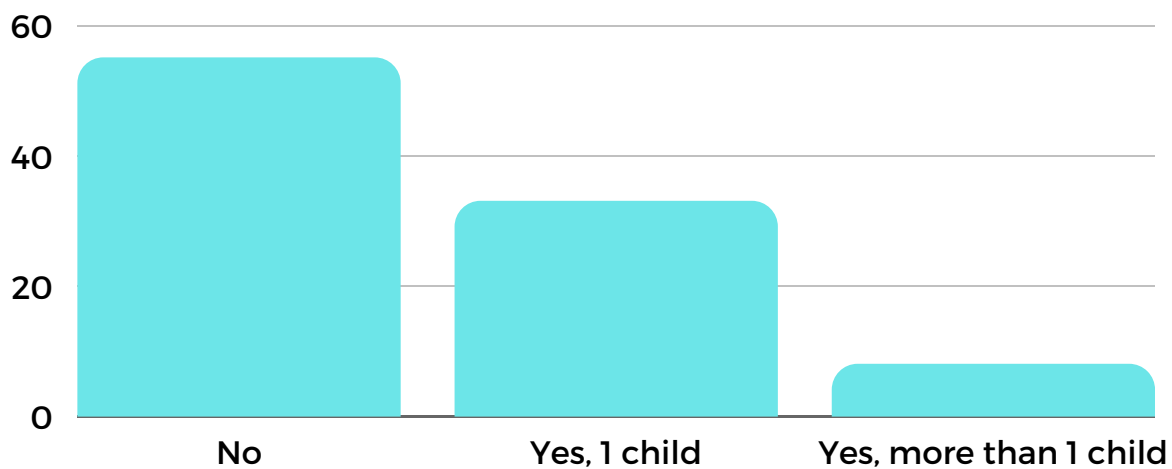


Figure 5. Do you have a child (or children) currently on the waitlist for MUN Daycare? Target group only

96 Responses



# IV. Child care: a collective challenge on campus

The survey provided multiple opportunities for participants to add comments, reflections, and accounts of their personal experiences. We received many comments about the need to support the child care needs of students and staff and the vulnerability of these members of MUNL's diverse community, such as:

- “The graduate student parents I work with are also not able to get spaces as even the demand from students exceeds their [MUN Daycare] capacity. We really need child care services on campus that meet our campus community needs.”
- “I think students deserve priority to child care, so it is hard, but I do feel MUNFA needs to address why ASMs cannot get child care at their own university.”
- “I would like to see a collective approach on campus for Child care that includes all students, staff and faculty (part-time, contract and full time/tenured) and places the most vulnerable (students and staff) first [...] I would like to see this current approach to child care broaden the tent so it's not just ASMs who are collectively organizing child care but also students and staff. Without this collective effort the work toward gaining child care (affordable) will be done at the expense of non-ASMs on campus.”
- “My spouse is a non-ASM employee at MUN, and their work is affected by lack of childcare. It is difficult to look at the impact of child care on solely ASMs, as MUN Daycare is shared between all faculty, staff and students and there will be situations where the intersections between these groups is important.”
- “I support the prioritization of daycare spots for students and staff first.”
- “I completely agree with their current system of providing preference for students. It would just be great if there were additional spaces for ASMs.”

# V. Opportunities

## Expanding Child care on the St. John's Campus

The survey highlights the critical significance of providing child care services to faculty members (as well as staff and students) at MUNL and the wide-ranging consequences of the child care crisis throughout the MUNL campus. Our policy scan, however, indicates opportunities and potential solutions for expanding child care services. **Thus, we urge the university to:**

- 01 ————— Tap into new government grants to fund expansion of campus child care services
- 02 ————— Convert currently underutilized campus properties and spaces - such as the GeoCentre - into child care facilities
- 03 ————— Include expanded child care services at the St. John's Campus in the Multi-Year Infrastructure Plan & request infrastructure funds from Government

# Opportunity 1

## Tap into new government grants to fund expansion of campus child care services.

There are **new** government grants available in NL to support the expansion of child care services at the St. John's campus that **did not exist before 2021**.

The 2021 Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement provides new opportunities to increase licensed child care capacity, such as the Create a Space Incentive Grant (\$10,000 per new child care space created).

Through the Operating Grant Program, it also ensures that these spaces are affordable by subsidizing licensed child care providers to allow them to offer child care at \$10/day (see Government of NL 2023a, 2023b; 2023c).

MUNL should examine opportunities to avail of these resources to support the wellbeing of our campus community.



The funding landscape for child care space development has changed dramatically as a result of the 2021 Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement.

# Opportunity 2

Convert currently underutilized campus properties and spaces - such as the GeoCentre - into child care facilities.



The Capacity Grant is funding conversion of the Fluvarium's underutilized event space into a child care centre (Government of NL 2023b).

The university has underutilized space that could be partly or fully converted for expanded child care services. Government funding is available to support such conversion efforts. For example, the Child Care Capacity Initiative Grant is funding conversion of the Fluvarium's underutilized event space into a child care centre offering 55 new child care spaces, opening in 2024 (Government of NL 2023b).

# Opportunity 3

**Include plans for expanded child care services at the St. John's Campus in the Multi-Year Infrastructure Plan and request infrastructure funding from Government to meet child care needs.**

In the past, the Province has approved use of its annual White Paper Infrastructure Matching Fund for child care expansion at MUNL. For example, in 2014, MUN received \$1.2 million in White Paper funds for the Grenfell Campus Child Care Centre, although this funding was ultimately withdrawn by Government before the project could go forward. MUNL should re-open this conversation in light of Government's new commitment to increase access to high quality, non-profit child care in NL.



**As a major public sector employer, MUNL should be a key ally in the development of a not-profit child care system in NL**

# VI. Conclusion

Ultimately, MUNL's Strategic Plan commits to "proactively taking actions that prioritize care, wellbeing, and support to the people that live Memorial's vision and cultivate its success" (Memorial University 2020:28). Access to affordable and inclusive child care is a critical area of faculty support and retention, vital to addressing gender-based inequities in academia (Hope et al. 2020), and integral to the university's core mission.



**We call on MUNL to take immediate and sustained action and commit substantial resources to expand access to child care services for faculty, staff, and students at the St. John's campus.**

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# Acknowledgements

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