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September 20, 2023

Mayor and Council

Resort Municipality of Whistler

4325 Blackcomb Way

Whistler, BC V8E 0X5

Dear Mayor and Council,

I am writing to share our family's experience and frustration with the lack of licensed childcare centre availability in Whistler and to ask for your help. The current system is broken and our community needs support.

To provide a little background about who we are, my husband and I have lived in Whistler for thirteen years and consider ourselves members of this community. We volunteer our time, support other members of the community and consider ourselves dedicated workers. My husband owns and operates a local millwork company of four employees. I work for an environmental sustainability firm and provide consulting services to public and private sector organizations across BC and Canada, including those local to Whistler.

The primary challenge with the current set of licensed childcare centres is that their wait time is incredibly lengthy and difficult to plan around. Eighteen months ago, we had our first son and life as we knew it changed for the better. It also threw us into the deep end of the childcare issue in Whistler, along with most other families living in the area. We followed the process and applied while pregnant to Mountain Minis and after the birth of our son to Creekside Kids, Whistler Children's Centre and Teddy Bear Daycare. We'll add our son's name to the Waldorf School's waitlist once he becomes eligible around 24 months (for enrolment at 30 months at the earliest). Due to a staff shortage, Mountain Minis is closing its Junior Room at the end of December. The Whistler Children's Centre informed us that it is a

2 - 2.5 year wait for children under 3 years and Teddy Bear Daycare shared that while it is impossible to give an estimate, they only take two children between 2.5 - 3 years of age. Creekside Kids is unable to share a waitlist position. Based on this information, it is hard to fathom when our son may make it into Whistler's licensed daycare system.

As we approached the end of my parental leave (officially ended Feb 2023), I was excited to return to work and financially we needed the money. (While my husband and I are grateful to live in a country with parental leave, living on EI vs. a full-time wage was a significant reduction in income.) We began looking for the only childcare option remaining - a nanny. The process felt like the Wild West. We joined a Whistler Facebook group dedicated to babysitters and nannies and also enrolled on canadiannanny.ca. Our experience was that many nannies were only looking for part-time work on specific days to supplement their other jobs, or needed housing as part of their package, which we couldn't provide. The entire process took about four months, which meant that I had to delay my return to work by two months and had no income (including EI) during that time. It felt crazy. I wanted to be a productive member of society, had a fulfilling career waiting for my return and needed the money to live, but was unable to return to work until we could find a viable childcare option.

We are now fortunate to have a nanny that we like but it comes with its own set of challenges including affordability, availability and continuity of care. From an affordability perspective, we pay our nanny \$30/hr and share this cost with another family to help manage the total expense. We each pay \$15/hr, which comes to \$120 each per 8hr day. For comparison, one 9.75hr day at Creekside Kids Daycare costs about \$30 in total. From an availability and continuity of care perspective, we don't know how long we will have this nanny as her housing lease expires in December and the housing supply in Whistler is its own challenge. We are also left to find other care whenever she is sick or chooses to go on vacation.

Based on the unavailability, instability and high cost of a nanny, my husband and I decided that only one of us would remain working at full time hours and that the other person would reduce their work schedule to three days per week (down from five days per week pre child), rather than attempt to source and pay for a full time nanny. Based on a variety of factors, we decided that I would be the person to reduce that work schedule. As a result, growth in my career is on pause. Prior to having our child, I was given a significant promotion and asked to join my company's leadership team. The opportunity is mine to take once I am available to work a full time position. Instead, I am now a part-time employee that is at times undependable when childcare arrangements fall apart. We also face added financial pressure based on my reduced work schedule.

Our family's story is one of many and we have heard similar frustrations voiced (for years) by other members in the community. As a direct result of the daycare shortage, we have watched other parents reduce their time in the workforce, delay their return to the workforce, quit the workforce to take care of their child and others full time, or leave the community for locations with more affordable and available childcare options. The economic implications of this are numerous and widespread. From a

diversity, equity and inclusion perspective, we are losing the voices and perspectives of parents in our workforce and in our community, further exacerbating the barriers already in place.

I appreciate the complexity of the childcare issue in Whistler (and beyond) and that it is one of many important topics that the Council must consider. That said, without increased attention and resources, we will continue to lose valuable voices, perspectives and contributors in this community. I ask that you please make increasing daycare supply and availability in Whistler a priority for the Council.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sarah Colman