

Saskatchewan · This is Saskatchewan

## This single mom says her son's education comes first. That's why she does sex work

Flexible hours a priority, without stable supports and consistent educational assistant



Janani Whitfield · CBC News · Posted: Feb 15, 2025 5:00 AM CST | Last Updated: February 15



Saskatchewan parents say that having uncertainty over educational assistants programs can make it difficult for them to work reliably. (Shutterstock)

When Piper sends her son to school every morning, she calls out a similar refrain: "I love you, try your best, I'll be here to pick you up when school is done," hoping he will be safe and supported.

As he disappears into the school building, she disappears too, into the pseudonym Piper, as a sex worker.

It's a job the single mother took on in the face of uncertainty and the need for being flexible for her son, who has high needs and isn't always able to attend school unless an educational assistant is there to support him. It's a decision driven by love.

"My son's education comes first and I can prioritize keeping him stable in his education and the progress that we've seen so far," she said in the latest *This is Saskatchewan* podcast episode.

**LISTEN | *This is Saskatchewan's* latest podcast looks at one mother's way of putting her son's needs first:**

<https://www.cbc.ca/listen/cbc-podcasts/1416-this-is-saskatchewan/episode/16127599-this-mom-needs-flexible-hours.-she-does-sex-work>.

Piper is among those concerned about Saskatoon Public School's announcement earlier this month that it will have to cut 80 educational assistants (Piper is not her real name; CBC is using her pseudonym to protect the identity of her son).

When her son doesn't have regular access to an EA, the school will call her to pick him up in the middle of the day.

It becomes hard to hold down a regular position with those kinds of unpredictable shifts, she said.

### **Part-time hours with full-time pay**

She started sex work in 2022, when her son was in Grade 1.

"I began by working at a brothel. I saw an ad posting online and I could make it work with my hours. There was a shift that I could take and I could make it work," she said, explaining that she can work 20 hours in a week and make as much as she could in a full-time job.

In the fall, she had hopes that she would be able to restart her schooling and find more stable, less risky work, but she's had to put that dream on hold, with the latest announcement about cuts to EAs within Saskatoon.

"I have a feeling for a lot of people and for us, this is just a really big surprise. And for the kids, I mean, it's devastating," she said.

The school division, province and federal government [have been at odds on where the responsibility lies](#), as the division said the cuts were a necessity, due to it not receiving expected federal funding as part of the [Jordan's Principle](#) initiative, which is meant to ensure Indigenous children receive the health, social and education services they need.

### **'Don't know what we'd do'**

For now, affected parents are waiting to see how this might impact them, a tense situation Katherine Stevenson is also in.

Her son Hugo Romanski has Down syndrome and autism, and he requires one-on-one support all day. While she doesn't know if the cuts will impact her family, even as a two-person household, she could foresee it forcing upheaval in their lives.

"I don't know what we'd do. One of us would have to stop working altogether," she said.



Kath Stevenson, seen here with her son Hugo Romanski, says that school and after-school programs allow parents to work, and disruptions to these schedules can make it hard for parents to access regular, full-time employment. (Thomas Simon/CBC)

Sometimes, people push back against the idea of equating school with child care, which Stevenson said she understands. But at the same time, the educational system allows parents to work, she said, adding she sympathizes for Piper's situation.

"I think people take for granted that you know you're going to have a family and the kids will be typical and things will go just smoothly and school will be straightforward and they'll never have a need for this kind of support," she said.

"But that isn't how things go. And I think as a community and as a society, we should be supporting each other."

- **Saskatoon boy with complex needs can only go to school for half days due to staff shortages**

As for Piper, she is honest with her family about what she does for work, and is transparent with them about where she's going and what she's doing, in case she goes missing.

"I don't see any shame in doing something that is keeping us fed and housed and really just living the best life that we can currently," she said.

More than concern for herself, she's concerned for her son, and his ability to get an education.

"In the morning when I drop him off, I make sure my son knows he's loved, he's supported, and I will be there to pick him up after school, said with the hope that I will be."

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/single-mom-educational-assistant-1.7459509>

Much as we valorize parents of special needs kids, we still fail to fully recognize the burden and toll taken raising such dependents, knowing your child may well never grow up to be capable of full independence. We need to recognize too the school personnel who, coming to love and enjoy these children, share this burden. We know that autism is not "the fault" of parents; there is something environmental going on that has produced this upsurge in ASD. And much as we applaud "neurodiversity" and do our best to appreciate the "neurodiverse," we fall short in admitting that nevertheless this is not the preferred or best outcome for any child, much as "normal" can be lacklustre and limiting too. Making the most of this life's and this world's opportunities is best accomplished when children grow up to have as much capacity to fit in and achieve by choice in as many places and ways as possible. And much as I might not be given to make similar choices, I cannot sit in judgment of the young sex worker mother because I sense the predicament we have placed many parents in. I slowly learned to avoid questioning the love mothers and fathers have for their children. Poor or bad of a job as they may be making of it, they are by their best (blinkered and blinded) best lights doing what they can. It is safer and more expeditious to assume they just do not know how to love their child than to say they don't or can't (much as such people do exist). If there is moral judgment to be made, it is by them, even if social workers and courts may have to make material judgments to protect their children from them. "I judge not, but if I judge, my judgment is true" actually makes sense. "How was your day son?" 'OK. The usual. How was yours Mom?' "Oh, a lonely old social misfit bachelor this morning, a masochistic guy with a foot fetish after lunch, and then a businessman cheating on his wife. The usual ..." TJB