

Cowichan childcare crusader backs mourning Vancouver parents^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Childcare advocate Mary Dolan didn't expect to have a connection to the family whose toddler died at an unlicensed daycare in Vancouver back in January.

But, as it turns out, the father of 16-month-old Mac Sain went to school with Dolan's son-in-law, making her plea even more personal.

As a result of the tragedy, and in her ongoing quest for affordable, reliable, safe childcare, Dolan wants to help Mac's mourning parents Chris Sain and Shelley Sheppard spread the word about the urgent need for childcare reform in B.C.

"They are going public and they are calling for complete reform of childcare. They don't want their child to have died in vain," Dolan explained.

The Vancouver family had sought daycare for their son and eventually got in touch with one that was licensed but it wasn't the quality that they needed, Dolan said.

So they kept on looking.

"They went to another one that was unlicensed, did the diligent thing, stayed with the child for a week, and were satisfied that this person would only have two children at any one time and they liked that aspect because the child was just a toddler."

On just his second day in care, young Mac died.

The matter is under police investigation so the parents can't talk about details but they have been urging people to join them in the fight for a better system.

"They're asking people, they're pleading with the public to learn more about the [\$10-a-day] plan and to talk to the candidates, to talk to whoever, to be informed and know how desperately needed the childcare plan is," Dolan said.

The \$10-a-day plan is not "cheap" childcare, Dolan said, as the real costs would be subsidized by government.

The goal would be to set up a system not unlike the school system, but for children not yet of school age. It would set standards and incorporate those whose families have low incomes, special needs kids and even First Nations cultural practices. Having somewhere safe for their children to go would allow both parents to work and reduce poverty rates, quite possibly keeping kids who might otherwise be removed from their parents' care, at home with their families.

"Centres already out in the community, licensed family enters, group centres, private centres, they could all be part of the network but they would all have to agree to certain things and one of them would be the parent portion of the fee would be capped at \$10 a day," Dolan said.

With the \$7 billion for childcare recently announced by the federal government — and \$90 million of that earmarked for B.C. in 2018 — Dolan said the program could now begin to be implemented, though admitted it would take some time.

"The province has been saying all along, 'oh well, we couldn't implement it, we don't have the money, we need money from the feds.' Here it is," she said. "If we take the money and just put it into more spaces, we're looking on children as little cars that are going to be put in a parking spot. The money goes down the drain."

It's not sufficient just to say 'we'll make more spaces', Dolan added.

"Who is going to be in those spaces nurturing the children, relating to the families, making sure there's appropriate practice and an environment that's stimulating for the children and who will be the early childhood educators, whether in licensed home or licensed groups? Space is not enough. We don't want to hear that they're just going to create spaces because what we need is quality and to keep building on it."

A complete overhaul of the nearly-non-existent current system is required, she said. One that doesn't see children as a commodity to make money on.

"The problem in our system is fees are too high for parents. Even if they can find a place, they might not be able to afford it. Economy is fine but we need social well-being of community, too," she said. "This is for the common good. We're all going to thrive if our children do well. We're all going to thrive if our families are less stressed. We can't keep going the pace we're going."

-reprinted from Lake Cowichan Gazette

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