

Parents struggling to find closer child care for leukemia survivor with Down syndrome ^[1]

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Source: CTV News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 22 Jun 2017

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A Vancouver family that is already dealing with major challenges is raising concerns about the region's chronic shortage of after school care.

Nine-year-old Grace Huynh will start Grade 4 in the fall, but her mother is worried about where she'll go when lessons are over.

Grace has Down syndrome, and requires extra support after school. But right now, her mother says, the only way she can get that support is if she's bused to another school.

The after school program at Grace's school has no spaces available.

"I don't think she'd be able to endure that," her mother, Bella Huynh, told CTV News.

Adding to Bella's concerns is that Grace was diagnosed with leukemia at the end of Grade 1. She's in remission, but needs "maintenance chemotherapy" treatments.

"I don't want to subject her to additional physical stress going through the school bus, because it does take a lot," Bella said.

The BC Centre for Ability Association said there are many parents struggling, and that the lack of space is just one issue families face. There are 442 children on its Vancouver waitlist alone, all in need of extra support at daycare or after school care.

The association is backed by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, but it hasn't had an increase in funding in more than a decade, according to its manager of supported child development.

"More children coming in with higher needs, some higher costs for child care staff, with the same amount of funding that we saw over 10 years ago... It's not really a surprise that our waitlist has grown so much," Terri Calvert said.

The ministry told CTV that \$6.5 million of this year's budget has been earmarked to help fund child care support programs and initiatives. But with the current political uncertainty, it's hard for parents to know whether the pre-election promise will be made a reality.

The NDP's John Horgan has vowed to stick to his campaign promise of \$10-a-day childcare if he becomes premier, saying that his government would create 22,000 spaces over the next three years, growing to 66,000 spaces in five years.

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