

'Help on the way' for Toronto families waiting for childcare subsidies, Tory says ^[1]

Author: D'Amore, Rachael

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EXCERPTS

Toronto Mayor John Tory says "help is on the way" for the thousands of parents sitting idle on a lengthy waiting list for childcare subsidies even while back-to-school season looms.

John Tory made the remarks Thursday while he cut the ribbon on a much-needed new daycare centre in Scarborough.

The Kingston Road East Early Learning and Child Care Centre, which closed in 2012, has undergone substantial renovations and is now ready to take in 54 children.

The two-storey space has an infant room, two toddler rooms and one pre-school room.

Tory touted the city's latest addition to its pool of city-owned childcare spaces is "progress" but acknowledged that more needs to be done to alleviate the families who either cannot afford the growing cost of childcare or haven't been granted a spot or subsidy.

"This particular centre is especially important in Ward 36 because it falls within the Scarborough Village neighbourhood where there is a high density of apartments and multiple family households and where 27 per cent of families are single-parent led families. That's why the provision of a service like this is important," he said.

"The renovated centre has open and spacious play rooms and dedicated play spaces for each age group. Anybody who had been to the previous childcare centre and is familiar with the space will be very impressed by the renovations."

Tory said that he has faith that investments made in the city's 2017 budget as well as by the province and federal government earlier this year will provide the relief many Toronto families are yearning for.

"My message is that I'm very confident help is on the way because assuming that the other two governments come through with the matters that they've announced in their budget -- which gives me reason to believe that when you put it in a budget it's going to happen - this will allow us, as I've indicated, to be able to supplement those efforts as we do to make a substantial number of additional new subsidies available," he said.

"In the end, that's the greatest shortage - the subsidies. There are actually childcare spaces that sit empty at the moment because they people out there who need them can't afford the going rate."

While the Kingston Road daycare adds 54 spots for families waiting on childcare, it's a drop in the bucket compared to the 17,500 families on a waiting list for childcare subsidies.

City of Toronto subsidies are currently only available to households where each parent either works or is attending school, and the amount of subsidy granted to one household depends on overall income.

For example, in a household that earns \$72,830 annually - the median income for a Toronto family - the subsidy would reduce childcare costs for one toddler to \$45.40 a day.

That cost is approximately half the average cost of childcare for a toddler without the subsidy, which sits around \$95.16 a day.

A family of two children who both require childcare but don't qualify for or didn't receive a city subsidy could be paying upwards of \$4,000 monthly for childcare alone.

Earlier this year, the city's 2017 budget set aside a \$3 million in funding to provide 300 new childcare subsidies. The addition brought the total number of city-financed subsidies for childcare subsidies to 26,359.

"I'll be the first to say that there is much more work to be done in childcare in consort with both the province and the federal government,"

Tory said.

"All three levels of government I believe, at this point in time, are committed to the goal of creating a more affordable, accessible and high quality child care system for Toronto's families."

In its 2017 budget, the province announced that it earmarked \$200 million to fund 16,000 new childcare subsidies and 8,000 new childcare spaces.

Prior to that, an additional \$1.6 million was allocated by the province to build 45,000 new licensed spaces.

The investment was part of a vow on part of the province to provide 100,000 more children aged four and under access to licensed child care over the next five years.

Once budgets were sorted, the provincial government went on to appoint a University of Toronto professor to lead a new study on childcare affordability in Ontario with the aim of suggesting new ways it can make it more accessible for families of all incomes.

The review is expected to be completed by the end of February, 2018.

Tory went on to say that the shortage of childcare spaces is not only an issue pertaining to family incomes, but an economic issue that relies on collaboration of all levels of government to overcome.

"As a result of it being an important economic and family issue, it's one that's important for us to address together, all of the governments together with the non-profit sector and the people in the private sector involved in child care to make sure that we can do what we have to do to make sure we have a strong, prosperous and fair city," he said.

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