

'I am sorry': Owner of Calgary daycare that suddenly closed apologizes for confusion ^[1]

Early Foundations says it has reopened for business

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EXCERPTS

The owners of a northeast Calgary daycare and preschool that abruptly closed last week are apologizing to both staff and parents for what they say was a misunderstanding.

CBC News previously reported that staff were forced to shutter Early Foundations child-care programs after they were unable to reach the owners and hadn't been paid.

But the owners say it's a family emergency that led to the confusion — and they're hoping parents will give them a second chance.

'It should not have happened'

"I apologize. It should not have happened but it happened and I can't rectify it," said one of the owners, Saddiqa Tariq. "I am sorry for the parents [and that] they have to look for other daycares and they were also under stress."

Tariq's family opened the Westwinds Drive daycare in 2017, and since last year, her son and his wife have been in charge of its operations.

But, while out of the country, Tariq says something happened to her son — and he's currently in hospital abroad — which is why staff weren't able to contact him.

"Their cellphone became inactive because the battery got dumped in water or something," she said. "Even I am unable to get the complete information because he is still in the hospital."

Employees paid

Tariq says that on Friday, as soon as she heard about the issues staff were having, she rushed to the daycare to try to prevent the closure. However, she didn't have any of the business's paperwork with her to prove she was an owner.

"This weekend, I contacted my legal counsel and they filed my case on Monday," she said. "And on Monday, I got a court order that I am the right person, I'm the owner of this place."

The family immediately began contacting staff.

"I called them and they all came in. We had a meeting and notified parents that everything is up and running," she said.

As for their missed pay, Tariq, who is now acting as the daycare director, says a glitch in their system is to blame for that. She says she's solved the problem, and employees have been paid.

"The staff is very supportive," she said.

Staff back at work

Staff member Shobha Khanal says staff were totally in the dark on Friday.

"It was very stressful, but for us, we can get a job anywhere," she said. "But I felt bad for the parents. It's very difficult to find a daycare for your children when you have to go to work."

Khanal says now that staff knows what's happened, and have been paid — they all plan to continue working there.

"They are doing what they can for the teachers' needs," she said. "They're like asking people what they need and asking to help, so they're doing very good."

In a statement, Alberta Children's Services said it can confirm that the child-care program had notified the agency that they have reopened and that the program remains in compliance with the Child Care Licensing Act and regulations.

"The licensing officer was on site yesterday to offer support and check in," the agency said. "There were no changes to the program's accreditation status as a result of its business decision to temporarily close."

Enrolment suffering

Tariq says that prior to the rushed closure on Friday, Early Foundations had an enrolment of 117 kids. Now, there are roughly 50.

"Parents have lost their trust in our business," she said.

But she wants to assure them that staff are at work, the daycare is open for business, and nothing like this will happen again.

"We will do more due diligence to make sure that in case of emergencies or in case of unknown circumstances, how to deal with situations like that," she said.

Trust lost

But for parents like Sambadh Kongara, who spent the weekend finding his child a new daycare, it's all too little, too late.

"I'm here to return my key fob and I am asking them for a refund," he said. "I already paid a lot of money to the other daycare, [I paid] here at the beginning of the month, and we also paid some money toward registration fees."

The father says he cannot trust Early Foundations enough to believe something like this won't happen again.

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