

Parents set up 'Pay what you can' child care as Ontario teachers strike ^[1]

Five day camps were set up in low-income areas across the GTA.

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EXCERPTS

"I would love for Ford or Lecce to just come here for a day, and not just keep these kids safe and happy, but actually teach them something," she told HuffPost Canada Thursday. "It's not easy!"

The lactation consultant is playing teacher to some 20 kids at a legion hall west of Toronto for two days. She and a group of organizers with the pro-union Ontario Parent Action Network set up five "pay what you can" child-care spaces in low-income neighbourhoods while elementary teachers are on strike.

Most of the camps had between 20 and 30 kids registered, organizer Jess Lyons told HuffPost, except for one in Newmarket, Ont., which had 70.

"We want to highlight the fact that parents and families share the same goals as our educators," Lyons said. "We want to help each other out ... and make the strike days easier."

Salvador-Watts said she's most worried that full-day kindergarten won't be around when her three-year-old son, Theo, starts school. Theo's five-year-old sister, Naomi, is currently enrolled in full-day kindergarten with both a teacher and an early childhood educator (ECE).

Naomi's French vocabulary is "incredible" now and her English reading has "improved dramatically," her mother said.

It terrifies me to think that my son, when he enters the school system, that may not be there. Liana Salvador-Watts

Salvador-Watts hired two education workers for the York camp by collecting \$10 donations from the parents who could afford it. There were four volunteers also present, doing crafts and games with the kids. One was Salvador-Watts' neighbour, a grandmother.

Ontario's elementary teachers are staging rotating walk-outs and weekly province-wide strikes after fresh negotiations with the province fell apart last Friday.

The government said it committed to keeping full-day kindergarten during negotiations last week. But the president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), Sam Hammond, said the commitment wasn't formal.

"Everything that we agreed to has to be part of the collective agreement ... not a letter that is given to our general secretary in the lobby of the hotel," Hammond told reporters Monday.

ETFO is one of four major Ontario teachers' unions staging strikes or work-to-rule campaigns right now.

The government argues that the teachers are only fighting for more compensation. But the teachers say they're taking a stand against the government's other policies, including bigger class sizes and mandatory online learning.

The politics of it all wasn't lost on Salvador-Watts' campers at the legion.

Many kids shouted out "strike," when she asked them what their teachers were up to.

"And why are they on strike?"

"Because Justin Trudeau doesn't pay them any money!" one child supposed.

"You are so close," Salvador-Watts answered.

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