

Local daycare facilities and parents waiting on affordable child care from province ^[1]

Daycares and parents wait in anticipation for Ontario to strike a deal for \$10 child care.

Author: Bellantoni, Santana

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EXCERPTS

Guelph parents and daycare providers are left waiting as Ontario continues to be the last province to strike a deal for \$10-a-day child care. They say it would be a huge help for young families with young children.

"I voted for this. This \$10-a-day daycare influenced my vote and I am hating that it hasn't been implemented yet. It would make our lives a lot easier," said Jessica Luttmann, law clerk and mother of an almost three-year-old daughter in daycare.

"A big thing for us is it would influence our decision to expand our family. I could never afford to have two children in daycare at the same time."

Luttmann was supposed to go back to work when the pandemic hit but decided to extend her maternity leave to a 18 months. Her leave ended and her child still wasn't accepted into daycare despite being on five waiting lists. Her daughter finally got a spot in daycare last December.

Luttmann pays \$903 monthly for her toddler to attend daycare.

For parents struggling to afford child care there is a fee subsidy offered by Wellington County.

If a family's annual income is \$30,000, the approximate monthly cost of child care is \$83 with the subsidy. Parents do have to qualify for the subsidy in terms of income and if the parents work full time or are in school.

In a written email response from Luisa Artuso, director of Wellington County's Children's Early Years Division, she said she believes it is crucial to still have the subsidy made available, even if and when the affordable child care plan is put into action in Ontario. If it does, then there could be a demand for spots in child care centres.

"We are in a deficit of licensed child care spaces in Guelph and Wellington County (particularly the County) for the population of children ages birth to 12 years of age in our area, so the current spaces will be in higher demand along with the demand to create more licensed child care spaces," wrote Artuso.

First Steps, a for-profit daycare in Guelph, shut down in March 2020 due to the pandemic and re-opened in July with restrictions. Before the pandemic they were at full capacity, 50 children, and in July with the restrictions they were close to full capacity at what the restrictions would allow.

"When the schools shut down we were still operating," said Tammy Hayes, operator of First Steps. "We're the only industry that we can think of that has worked in an industry with unmasked, unvaxxed people."

The pandemic had an impact on child care centres across the country. In a survey conducted by the Child Care Resource Unit, 72.5 per cent of child care centres in Ontario said their enrolment levels were much lower than before COVID-19 hit. It showed 85.2 per cent of centres thought the enrolment was lower due parents' unemployment or they worked from home.

And 84.6 per cent of centres thought the fears around COVID prevented them from bringing their children into child care centres.

Hayes said she is concerned about how autonomy over her business could be lost if the province comes in to take control.

"We really enjoy being unique and being able to have our own voice and our own thoughts in regards to early years.

"We want the families to only pay \$10 a day, that would be great, but how are they going to do that?" said Hayes, wondering how universal child care would be sustainable.

"Me as a parent I would be questioning, 'okay this is \$10 but what's missing?'" said Denise Mercer, assistant supervisor at First Steps.

“When you take your child to child care you are handing over the most important thing in your life to people you trust.”

Workside Early Childhood Education Centre, a not-for-profit daycare in Guelph, the revenue goes to salaries and supplies. This means they are often running at a deficit.

“I would just like to know more details about how financially it will work out because the thing for us then \$10-a-day child care would be fantastic but what does that mean for the other areas of our budget,” said Christina Roberts Farrell, administrator at Workside.

“I’m just eager for them to make a decision on this and move forward. I mean obviously the sector needs more financial stability from the government.”

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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