

Vancouver parents, advocate speak out about daycare waitlist fees^[1]

A Vancouver parent says she has spent more than \$5,000 to put her twin daughters on daycare waitlists

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EXCERPTS

Vancouver resident Rory Richards, who began looking for daycare services for her twin daughters before they were born five years ago, says she has yet to find child care for her two girls — and told CBC she has paid upwards of \$5,000 in daycare waitlist fees.

"It's been a long and windy road in our search for child care," Richards told CBC News.

She's among many parents and advocates speaking out about waitlist fees, which they describe as a barrier to finding affordable care.

According to a 2019 Metro Vancouver survey, the region had an estimated 325,142 children under age 12 — and 60,620 child care spaces. This covered 18.6 per cent of children age 12 and under and fell below the 2016 national average, which was at 27.2 per cent.

The survey also noted that by 2024, the number of children under 12 in the region is projected to grow to 350,068.

With child care spaces in short supply, many parents try to secure a spot for their child by placing them on a waitlist, sometimes before they are born — and doing so often comes with a fee and no guarantee of getting a spot, parents and advocates say.

Because Richards has twins, she has to pay twice as much.

"It seems a little predatory," she said, adding she has yet to hear from the approximately 15 daycares she has placed deposits with over the past five years.

'Taking advantage of the desperation'

A 2016 report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that 47 per cent of child care facilities surveyed in Vancouver charged waitlist fees.

Sharon Gregson, spokesperson for the Coalition of Childcare Advocates of B.C., says non-profit and government-funded daycares typically do not charge waitlist fees while most for-profit ones do.

She says some daycares charge about \$20 to offset the administrative costs of managing a waitlist, while others charge higher, sometimes non-refundable fees — and in those cases, it's not unusual to hear of fees ranging from \$100 to \$500 per child.

"Some of the big for-profits are taking advantage of the desperation of parents, quite frankly," said Gregson.

Gregson says legislation banning this practice, as was introduced in Ontario in 2016, would help parents immensely.

CBC has reached out to several daycares that charge a waitlist fee, but did not receive a response by publication.

'I cannot pay for all of them'

Kitsilano resident Gerónimo Ratcliffe, who started looking for daycares with his wife two years ago when their daughter was born, says most of the daycares they looked into — about 100 — charged waitlist fees.

He says he chose to apply to the ones that did not charge those fees and managed to place his daughter on about 20 waitlists.

"I used the ones that are free," Ratcliffe said.

"I know that I'm missing a lot of spots because I cannot pay for all of them ... I don't have a lot of free money to spend on that."

Ratcliffe eventually secured a spot at a daycare in East Vancouver, but says he has not heard back from the other daycares.

Measures to help parents

In April, the province announced in a news release that it expanded \$10-a-day child care to more than 6,500 spaces, and expects to bring

that number to 12,500 by the end of the year. B.C.'s NDP government began the \$10-a-day child care program after being elected in 2017 and pledged during last fall's election campaign to expand it provincewide.

Families using these centres will pay no more than \$200 a month per child for full-time enrolment, and the facilities will not charge waitlist fees.

Katrina Chen, minister of state for child care, says she is aware of the waitlist fee problem and is looking into the matter.

"When my son was born I was on multiple waitlists, I paid waitlist fees myself," she said. "I had to work three jobs to make ends meet."

Chen also said the province is looking into other measures such as the provincial Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative, which provides eligible child care providers with funding to help reduce fees for parents.

"It's a little too late unfortunately for families like mine, but it's not too late for many other parents," Chen said.

Richards, who is now also looking for daycare for her newborn son, says not having access to child care has put a strain on their family.

"It's affected our ability to work and our income," she said. "It certainly can make or break your career, the stress levels of your home, your family dynamic."

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