

Turned down by child-care providers, Ontario mom says 'huge stigma' persists for babies with Down syndrome ^[1]

Accessing child care has become increasingly difficult, says the Down Syndrome Association of Hamilton

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Excerpt

Each time Trish Jarvis posted to social media in search of child care for her daughter, she says she grew more frustrated and nervous. And each time, she ended up back where she started — with no one willing to accept Farley into their care.

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But her experience demonstrates how challenging it can be to find care for infants and toddlers who have disabilities.

The Down Syndrome Association of Hamilton has heard from a number of families who find accessing child care "increasingly difficult" across the region, said Heather Gain, the association's chair.

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The child care sector is experiencing a staffing shortage and a lack of resource workers to support infants and toddlers with disabilities, said Kathryn Underwood, a professor of early childhood studies at Toronto Metropolitan University.

While that shouldn't translate to excluding them from early childhood education, the province has done "nothing" to ensure children with disabilities are included or prioritized, said Underwood.

"I know from talking to families that many are told in a kind of benevolent tone [by child-care providers], 'Oh we don't have the resources to care for your child,'" she said. "So then what happens? We don't really know."

She said there needs to be a clear process to address discrimination when it occurs and more oversight.

The Ministry of Education, which oversees child care, declined to comment. Minister Stephen Lecce announced Thursday Ontario would boost early childhood educator minimum wages from \$20 to \$24 an hour next year to help address the worker shortage.

Related link: Ontario announces comprehensive strategy to boost child care workforce and protect children ^[3]

Region: Ontario ^[4]

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