

Desperate parents use extreme tactics to land daycare spot [CA]

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EXCERPTS

Bribes, threats, tears - child-care directors say these are some of the increasingly desperate tactics parents are using in an effort to get their children into daycare as waiting lists grow to unprecedented lengths.

One woman walked into a Winnipeg child-care centre this week cradling an infant born just a few weeks ago.

She innocently asked whether she could add her child's name to the waiting list, hoping that in two years he could be admitted to the program for two- to six-year-olds.

Karen Ohlson, the executive director of K.I.D.S. Inc. child care, watched with sympathy. With a waiting list 460 names long, and an average of six new children admitted a year, there is absolutely no chance that child will reach the top of the waiting list before his 12th birthday, she said.

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At least a dozen times over the past four years, she has been offered bribes by parents who say they are willing to pay whatever it takes to get a spot for their child.

"We've had people standing at the office door saying how much would it take, with their chequebook in hand, pen in hand, saying 'I really need this spot, it really is going to make an economic impact on our family and I don't care how much it costs,' " Ms. Ohlson said.

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Ms. Ohlson said it's an indication of how difficult it is to get a spot in a licensed child-care centre.

She was recently confronted in the grocery store by an angry parent whose child had been on the waiting list for three years. She had to be rescued by store clerks as the woman grew increasingly confrontational, she said.

Her colleague was chased from room to room by a belligerent parent who refused to believe that, after years of waiting, a space still wasn't available for his child.

"It doesn't matter where you are in Canada, the story's the same when it comes to child care. Not enough services and too many parents looking for spaces," said Pat Wege, executive director of the Manitoba Child Care Association.

"It's very much a pressure cooker to find licensed child care anywhere in Canada right now."

Ms. Wege has been hearing horror stories like Ms. Ohlson's for a few years now.

Every week her office receives about a dozen calls from parents, many of them tearful and frustrated mothers, wondering how they can get a spot for their child so they can return to work.

Ms. Wege said a number of social trends have combined to exacerbate the situation. A tight labour market has made work more attractive to mothers who might otherwise have stayed home, and decreases the number of unlicensed daycares being run from peoples' homes.

More adults with young children now live in cities far from their own parents, which cuts down on the assistance grandparents can provide, and there are more single parents for whom staying home with children is not an option.

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She said the federal government's decision to scrap the \$1-billion national child-care plan promised by its Liberal predecessors had a disastrous impact on child-care expansion.

"No government, federally or provincially, has done a great job planning for child care," she said, deriding the Conservatives' \$100-a-

month child-care benefit as laughable.

- reprinted from The Globe and Mail

Region: Canada ^[2]

Manitoba ^[3]

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<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7857> [4]

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