

Dirty little secrets: Abuse in daycares [CA-ON] ^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

Children in provincially licensed daycares have been hit, kicked, allowed to play in filthy conditions and fed allergy-triggering food that nearly claimed their lives.

A Star investigation based on thousands of never-before-released daycare incidents and inspection reports has uncovered a myriad of serious problems including children wandering off unattended, being forcibly confined in closets and storage rooms as punishment, and served meals prepared in mice-infested kitchens.

But even in the most egregious cases, the provincial Ministry of Children and Youth Services is often slow to act.

Daycares with a pattern of problems are allowed to operate for months or even years on provisional licences, while children are exposed to substandard conditions, internal government documents show.

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The highest rate of reported problems was in Toronto, but that may be because the city's daycares are more tightly regulated than others in the province.

While the majority of daycares appear to be well run, child care in Ontario suffers from a lack of funding that often translates into troubling conditions and poorly trained or unqualified staff.

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Since 2000, nearly 500 licensed daycares have received provisional licences, which are granted to centres that do not meet minimum standards on the condition that they will correct serious problems. The ministry has shut down only 13 daycares during that period.

Daycares in Ontario are operated by non-profit organizations, colleges, municipalities and for-profit companies.

Of the nearly 4,400 licensed daycares in Ontario, 78 per cent are non-profit and the remaining 22 per cent are for-profit centres.

Many daycares with the most serious problems, according to provincial and municipal records obtained by the Star, are for-profit operations. Studies have shown higher quality childcare is most often provided by non-profit organizations & findings that are disputed by organizations representing private commercial daycares.

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A major international study last year ranked Canada at the bottom of a list of 14 industrialized nations when it comes to spending on early childhood education.

The study, conducted by the Paris-based Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), found Canadian child care services rely on underpaid child care workers who receive little support for training, high parent fees and small subsidies.

The Conservative government's decision to scrap funding for a national daycare program in favour of direct payments to families has failed to address what child care advocates call a "mounting social problem."

"We're not even in the game," says Martha Friendly, a child-care of the Toronto-based Childcare Research and Resource Unit. "We're the lowest spender, which shows how much value we place on it."

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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