

City's poor hurt by daycare crisis [CA-ON]^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

Disadvantaged families are in dire need of access to child care, with more than 10,000 children on waiting lists for subsidies, according to a socio-economic report released yesterday.

"Quality of life in Toronto is at risk through underinvestment in the community's future human and financial resources," said Randy McLean of the Toronto Community Foundation, a charitable organization that produces the annual Vital Signs survey examining the city's economic, environmental, educational, social and cultural health.

According to the report, 72 per cent of the city's low-income children up to 9 years old don't have access to subsidized child care at current funding levels.

The percentage alarms Jane Mercer, executive co-ordinator for the Toronto Coalition for Better Child Care, since more than one-third of the city's 190,000 children under 10 are from low-income families.

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Mercer said the average person seeking a subsidy is a single mother with one child who has an after-tax annual income of \$20,500.

The number of children waiting for care has fluctuated day-to-day over the past few years as the provincial government relaxes or restricts eligibility requirements. At this time last year, 6,000 children were on the waiting list, up from 4,500 in October 2004.

But as the provincial government moves to an income-based system instead of a needs-based one, more families will qualify for child-care subsidies, which is good news, said Mercer. Of the 50,000 child-care spaces in the city, slightly less than half are allocated as subsidized spots.

"We're not coming anywhere close to providing enough subsidized spaces," said Mercer. "We also need to know that the funding will be there to make sure those families can get in."

Mercer is calling for the province to create more subsidized spots.

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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