

Dialling for daycare a depressing fact of life for B.C. working moms [CA-BC]^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

The gravelly voice on the other end of the line said: "Daycare's a bitch in New West."

She sounded like she had a cigarette in one hand, a scotch in the other. Not exactly the person I want looking after my kids, two girls aged 16 months and two-and-a-half years.

Not that I even had that choice. Her daycare was full, with a long waiting list.

I dutifully kept calling the numbers on the list. Full. Full.

Many didn't even bother calling me back. I had six months left on my maternity leave, and nowhere to send my kids when I returned to work.

Apparently, I should have been calling when I had a mere notion that I'd like to have kids back in high school.

Of course, when I was pregnant, I signed up for a non-profit daycare downtown, close to my work on Hamilton Street.

Last time I checked, my first-born was number 73 on the list, a list she's been on for three years now.

Surely close to my home in New Westminster there won't be as much competition for spots. My endless calls prompted visits to two daycares at opposite ends of the municipality.

At the first, the caregiver took five minutes to come to the door. Inside, one little girl sat morosely in a playpen. "I was in the bathroom," the woman lamely offered.

I showed myself out, fighting the urge to take the little girl with me.

The second visit renewed my faith. A friendly woman guided me through her basement that looked like a pre-school. Labels like "wall" and "clock" stuck to every item in the room.

Four girls sat around a table, choosing colours from a huge caddy of crayons and markers. It was almost time for the morning stories and songs. I signed on to the long daycare waiting list.

In the meantime, through word of mouth, I found a caring, older woman. Granted, there are no labels on her walls, and she's unlicensed, but my kids are safe.

I feel lucky to have found her. But, I worry she could retire any day. Surely, I'll get into that ideal daycare soon.

A few weeks ago, however, I got the bad news. After more than a year on the waiting list, there's still no room in the daycare I coveted. So I fear my depressing calls must start again.

Strangely, news of a big daycare announcement from Ottawa doesn't make me feel any better. I worry the money will disappear into the hands of some vast bureaucracy.

On the other hand, I'm leery about the expansion of a privately-funded, money-making child-care industry.

I'd prefer non-profit groups to pick up the slack.

The bottom line is this: Study after study shows that early learning is crucial to success later in life, so this is important stuff.

Parents need options.

That's something many of us don't have right now.

- reprinted from the Vancouver Province

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