

Severe child-care crunch looming [CA-ON]^[1]

Author: Van Brenk, Debora

Source: London Free Press

Format: Article

Publication Date: 4 May 2004

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

London and Middlesex County will have a dire shortage of licensed child-care spaces for school-age children two years from now, a report for the city and county warns. While London is expected to have enough day-care spaces for babies, toddlers and preschoolers, the availability of before- and after-school spaces will have to double to keep up with demand.

And even if the jump in space is met, that will create another problem as city coffers are strained by the greater demand for child-care subsidies for low-income families, said Coun. David Winninger, head of a city hall committee that received the report.

The report, conducted by consultants asked to assess local child-care needs, concludes the city and county budgets are insufficient to meet those demands.

The report was given to city council's community and protective services committee last month.

The numbers startled child-care advocate Margaret Hoff, a member of the city's early years advisory committee.

She contrasted Ontario's commitment with Quebec's, where parents pay only \$7 a day for licensed child care and the province pays the rest.

Winninger said the city is writing the Ontario government asking for a boost in funding for child care.

Before- and after-school programs operate out of most schools and combine schoolwork and play.

Without the additional spaces recommended in the report, Hoff believes more children will be left watching TV instead of playing with their peers in a trained and supervised environment.

Hoff is on the board of a day-care centre that is considering whether to expand to include babies.

But the report's finding that there will likely be enough spaces for younger children has prompted the board to consider adding school-age spaces, she said.

The report recommends 207 more spaces be created for young children, and 867 more for school-aged children in the county by 2006, and that 1,843 licensed school-age spaces be created in London by 2006.

- reprinted from London Free Press

Region: Ontario^[2]

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