

Daycare funding sliding; Growth outpacing child care slots in York [CA-ON] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

York Region needs \$30 million in provincial daycare funding just to bring service levels up to 1995 standards, a new report warns.

"The total is \$30 million just to bring us back to a decade ago. It's a pretty serious problem," said Elizabeth Wagle, the region's director of family and children's services.

Thornhill MPP Mario Racco said he hopes his government will address the issue in the near future.

There are only enough licensed spaces in York to accommodate 15 per cent of children between birth and 12 years of age in pre-school facilities and before and after school programs.

While not all children require day care and some working parents rely on family or babysitters to watch their youngsters, thousands of parents can't get their children into licensed centres.

The level of provincial funding for subsidized day care has remained the same since Queen's Park downloaded the service to regions in 1999. At the same time, York's population has skyrocketed and its demographics have changed to include more low-income families.

As a result, the percentage of subsidized spaces dropped to 10.6 per cent in 2003, down from 17 per cent in 1999.

Not only is underfunding a hardship on families, Ms Wagle argues it hurts taxpayers.

Parents who can't work because they are unable to access child care cost taxpayers more in welfare costs than the price of subsidizing their daycare costs, she said.

Mr. Racco agrees provincial funding for social services in York, including child care, has traditionally fallen behind other communities.

- reprinted from Metroland Papers

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