

Thousands' more day-care spots promised [CA-ON] ^[1]

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Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 8 Jan 2004

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Ontario's Liberal government is promising to use federal money to create "tens of thousands of new child-care spaces" in the province.

Children's Minister Marie Bountrogianni made the pledge yesterday after allocating \$9.7 million from Ottawa to help the province's cash-strapped child-care centres make health and safety improvements this winter.

The money is part of a \$900 million national child-care agreement signed by Ottawa and the provinces last spring. Under the five-year program, last year's \$25 million allotment must be spent by the provinces by March 31.

"There will be tens of thousands of spaces over the next few years as a result of this money," Bountrogianni told reporters. "Today's money is only \$9.7 million but the significance today is that we are spending money that was meant for child care on child care."

Child-care advocates said Bountrogianni's announcement signals a major change from the previous Tory government, which, despite requests from Ottawa, refused to spend any federal cash for children on regulated day care.

But Heineck said the real crunch for day-care centres is operating money.

Olivia Chow, Toronto children's advocate, was pleased the new health and safety funds will be spent on non-profit centres only, ending the former government's policy of allowing for-profit centres to receive public money for capital improvements.

But Chow, city councillor for Trinity-Spadina, said chronic underfunding by the previous provincial government means Toronto may still lose child-care spaces this year. The city's child-care system needs at least \$18.6 million more in annual operating funds to restore 1,760 child-care subsidies lost last year and to avoid losing another 500 more subsidies this year, she said.

Chow said Ontario could easily fund the city's shortfall through another federal-provincial program aimed at early childhood development. City officials estimate about \$40 million has yet to be allocated under that program from last year. Another \$190 million is scheduled to flow to Ontario April 1.

- reprinted from The Toronto Star

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