

Vancouver mulls subsidizing child care [CA-BC] ^[1]

Author: Bula, Frances

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Vancouver city council is considering subsidizing child care because hundreds of day-care and preschool spaces on the city's east side are sitting empty, after provincial government cuts to subsidies and programs.

A report going to council next week recommends giving \$25-a-month subsidies for 600 spaces, partly to help fill empty spaces and partly to give low-income families help competing for spaces.

City child-care coordinator Carol Ann Young said she is recommending the subsidy strategy to try to bring children from low-income families back into the system after many of them disappeared from licensed care last April, when their parents had their subsidies reduced or eliminated.

Young's report outlines a bleak picture for poor families in Vancouver and the child care centres that serve them after a series of provincial cuts to subsidies, operating grants, wage top-ups, and support to child-care advocacy organizations.

Among her findings of what has happened in the year since the changes:

- The number of low-income, subsidized families in the 6,800-space system has dropped. In most areas of the city, their places have been taken by families who can afford to pay child care fees without a subsidy;

- On the east side, where there are fewer or no higher-income families to take up those places, vacancies have opened up. About 250 of the 1,700 east-side spaces in full-time day care, preschool and out-of-school care are currently empty, with preschool and out-of-school care being hit the hardest;

- Preschool programs saw 88 per cent of children from subsidized families drop out of the program between April and December 2002;

While \$25 a month might seem so small as to not make a difference, Young said it's enough to bring back parents living on a very tight budget.

Preschool programs cost \$107 a month, but parents who received subsidies in those programs paid only \$30 to \$57.

Young said the city subsidy will only help with one part of the problem. Her report to council also recommends that council submit briefs to the provincial and federal governments outlining their concerns about what is happening with child care in B.C. and about the way the province is handling federal money that was supposed to be directed toward child care.

City politicians appear poised to support Young's report.

"If we don't fund this, there are 600 casualties out there," said Mayor Larry Campbell, who plans to call on Victoria and Ottawa to split the \$162,000 bill to provide the 600-space subsidy in 26 inner-city centres.

Councillor Anne Roberts said she fully endorses it, although she sees it as only the beginning of a process to bring money and stability back to the child-care system.

-Reprinted from the Vancouver Sun

Region: British Columbia ^[2]

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