

Daycare serving BC's poorest forced to dump kids ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

"Bridge funding" from the province -- which allowed the Phil Bouvier daycare in Vancouver's Strathcona neighborhood (Canada's poorest postal code) to employ three extra staff members for a short time this year -- ran out this summer.

Now the effects are rippling out. Three staff members had to be laid off, which caused seven children with special needs to have to leave the centre.

"The so-called 'bridge funding' was apparently a bridge to nowhere," says Fern Jeffries, a community activist working with the parents and staff at the beleaguered daycare centre.

"The government provided extra money for Phil Bouvier until after the election was safely past, and then it disappeared," said Jeffries, who served as assistant deputy minister in several B.C. ministries and in other roles in the federal government before her retirement.

The upheavals at this one small daycare centre run counter to what expert researchers are prescribing as a way to counter social ills such as unemployment, crime and addiction. Investing in early childhood development saves money down the line, according to studies done in the U.S. and here in B.C.

Advocates like Jeffries say that all of Canada -- not just B.C. -- is headed in the wrong direction by making shortsighted cuts to daycares and other support for children with special needs.

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The cuts to the Phil Bouvier budget means "there are seven special needs children who will enter kindergarten without the benefit of any early learning opportunities," Jeffries said.

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But Mary Polak, B.C.'s minister of children and family development, said that Bonenfant and the other parents and activists who spoke with The Tyee have nothing to complain about. In an email to The Tyee on Oct 15, Polak insisted that there had been no funding cuts at Phil Bouvier.

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Jefferies told The Tyee in a recent interview that the \$420,000 mentioned by the minister is paid to low income parents to assist them in paying daycare fees. This money, she said, is not a payment to the childcare centre.

Jefferies also challenged the minister's account of the relationship between assessments and funding for special needs children.

- reprinted from The Tyee

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

Tags: funding ^[4]

special needs ^[5]

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