

Daycare in Toronto is expensive and hard to find ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Listening to the advice of well-meaning friends and neighbours, I took a day off of work when I was seven months pregnant to get on some daycare "waiting lists."

While there were several daycares within walking distance of my home, only four had infant spaces.

Maternity/parental leave in Canada is one year, but daycare spots for babies 12 to 18 months are scarce. To comply with legislation, infants require a 3 to 1 ratio of care, meaning that daycares hardly break even looking after such small children.

Nevertheless, I visited the four daycares to ensure my baby (at that time gender still unknown) would be well cared for 14 months later.

The City of Toronto managed the nearest one. The registration process involved getting a number and a confirmation letter in the mail at a cost of \$85 per day.

The most coveted daycare in the neighbourhood asked for a \$50 non-refundable deposit to be on its list. I was told this is what it cost to manage the list -- literally a three-ring binder. I quickly paid up.

The other two daycares handwrote my information and asked me to return when the baby was born.

Six weeks after my son's birth -- sleep deprived but determined -- I put him in the baby sling and retraced my steps. I gave each daycare his name and birthday, indicating I would need something for January 2010 "for sure now."

One of the directors couldn't find me on her list, so she wrote down my name again on another scrap of paper. Things were "still early," I was assured optimistically.

With about four months left before my return to work, the coveted daycare (charging \$75 per day) gave me some real hope: I was first on the list for January and things were looking good. Although expensive, the hours were conducive to our schedule and its reputation was fantastic. Our fingers were crossed.

Come November when I followed up, though, I learned that two "siblings" had come out of the woodwork and would be taking the next two infant spots. Once one child is in, siblings get first priority, so we were bumped. I was told I might have a chance in May, but that depended on an opening in the toddler room for June, when my son would be 18 months old. I doubted the stars would align in our favour.

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Daycare in Toronto is extremely difficult to find, not to mention unaffordable. The "waiting lists" are hardly transparent. To find a spot requires perseverance and continual lobbying.

My story highlights some of the problems with this system. I can only imagine the difficulty in finding a subsidized spot, which are even fewer and farther between.

The \$100 Universal Child Care Benefit we get from the federal government each month covers just less than one day at some city-run daycares. The maximum tax deduction you can make for child care is \$7,000 per child.

At the rates being charged in Toronto, families pay \$10,000 to \$18,000 a year for each preschool-aged child in the family. There are so many ways this system can be improved but it requires focus, time and resources. When will this issue get the attention it deserves?

- Audrey Wubbenhorst is a mother who lives and works in Toronto.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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