

Mother: How was my 6-year-old left behind? ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A Lake Echo woman still has questions about how her child was left behind on a daycare outing to a Dartmouth beach last week.

Krista Rennie's six-year-old son Owen Rennie-Munroe was on an outing to Birch Cove on Lake Banook on Wednesday with the East Preston Day Care. But when it was time to leave, Owen asked to use the washroom.

A daycare bus arrived for the day trippers, but when it pulled up, the driver already had a child on board, Rennie said. So when staff did a head count, the number seemed right and no one realized Owen wasn't there.

When Owen came out of the washroom, the daycare group was gone. Rennie said her little boy walked over to the lifeguards for help.

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The incident has been reported to the provincial Community Services Department, which licenses daycares. Community Services wouldn't confirm that it is investigating East Preston Day Care, but a spokeswoman said the department follows up on all complaints.

Rennie is not sure how long her son was at the beach before the daycare group returned for him.

"There's different times that I heard, anywhere from two to three minutes to up to an hour," Rennie said.

"I tend not to believe the two to three minutes."

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The lifeguards called police and Rennie said an officer told her he would report the situation to Community Services.

Rennie said she phoned the department and was told the complaint had been forwarded to its daycare licensing inspectors.

"I think most of my frustration comes from not knowing where to report it and where to go," Rennie said.

"I'm not out for revenge, but I want people to know that this has happened.

"I don't want this to happen to another child."

Rennie said she received an apology from the daycare's director and has also spoken to the worker responsible for the outing, who was very upset about what happened. Still, Rennie said, leaving a child behind is unacceptable.

Martha Gillis, director of licensing services for Community Services, said Monday that she couldn't speak about an individual situation but that her department investigates all complaints.

A licensing investigator can be sent out almost immediately, Gillis said.

In the meantime, Rennie has taken Owen and his nine-year-old sister Abby out of the daycare and is relying on her mother and a neighbour to look after the kids for the summer.

Rennie said Community Services told her that neither she nor her children would be part of the investigation and she wouldn't be informed of its results. Instead, she said, she was directed to continue checking the department's online registry of child-care facilities.

The Birch Cove mix-up comes just two months after a much-publicized similar case involving a toddler left behind at a north-end Halifax park.

In early May, staff at Kids & Company Ltd. left a two-year-old behind after an outing to Fort Needham Memorial Park. People in the park heard the boy crying and called police.

Community Services investigated, but according to its online directory, Kids & Company Ltd. has never violated the province's Day Care Act.

Gillis wouldn't discuss Kids & Company but said that if a daycare acted quickly to correct a situation, it would not be charged with a

violation.

Online records show that the East Preston Day Care has been cited for one violation of the Day Care Act requiring staff using the diapering room to be able to see the playroom. That problem has to be corrected by Sept. 6.

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-reprinted from the Chronicle Herald

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