

# Windsor and Essex County daycares close <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

On the last day of local municipally run daycare, Jennifer Daly shed some tears - as her three-year-old daughter Payton had the previous evening.

But at least Payton had her stuffed Mickey Mouse and her Mom on Monday to walk her out of the Jefferson Early Learning & Child Care Centre on a rather hard day for youngsters, parents and workers.

"It's very sad," Jennifer said. "I walked in here and saw some staff crying and I burst into tears. You get that emotional attachment with people, especially when you know that your child is being so well looked-after."

Jennifer said Payton will continue at the city-owned facility when it changes over to the private ABC Nursery, though she can't help wonder about the quality of care.

"They really set the bar high for care here," Jennifer said. "They become like family."

City council voted in February to leave the child-care business in order to save more than \$1 million a year between Windsor and Essex County.

At the time, there were 425 children, 65 unionized staff and nine non-unionized staff at seven locations, according to Shannon Hyatt, children's services system manager.

Though parents had six months' warning, and individual facilities held celebrations of community service earlier in August, the final goodbyes still proved hard.

"I don't like it," said Charlene Moore, a Tim Hortons worker whose three children aged three to 12 use the Jefferson facility, as she walked out with a bag of her kids' belongings. "I wish they would have left it open.

"My son has been here since he was little. And it's the best day care around. They taught him a lot."

The end of an era proved difficult for more than just the youngsters and their families. Child-care workers also struggled with emotions.

Joanne Willms, who most recently served as supervisor of the Amherstburg Early Learning and Child Care Centre, began as a municipal early childhood educator in Leamington at the age of 17 in 1975. She earned her early childhood education diploma from St. Clair College while working full time, and said she couldn't imagine a more fulfilling career.

"It's very, very difficult," said Willms, who starts next week as a contract administrator with children's services for the City of Windsor. "It is a sad day, but we're trying to keep our chins up and we're looking forward to something different down the road."

Willms feels proud of the quality of service Windsor provided children and families - and advised her employees to remember the good times.

"I'm going to miss the joy the children give me," she said. "We were in the middle of circle time and I told a few of my staff to close their eyes and try to remember the happiness that we feel when we do our jobs."

-reprinted from the Windsor Star

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