

Agency helps parents place disabled kids in daycare ^[1]

Funding allowed organization to broaden service

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Source: Montreal Gazette

Format: Article

Publication Date: 6 Oct 2010

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Finding a high-quality, affordable daycare is tough enough, but for parents whose son or daughter suffers from a physical disability, it can be next to impossible.

Each year, hundreds of parents face this difficult reality in Montreal -becoming increasingly frustrated as they attempt to navigate a daycare system that is already overcrowded, and certainly not designed for children with serious impairments.

"Just because you have a handicapped child doesn't mean you don't have to return to work or to your studies," explained Christine Duquette, coordinator with J'me fais une place en garderie, a local organization that offers information, support and guidance for parents of physically disabled children up to 5 years old. Last year, the agency helped a total of 107 Montreal families find a daycare space for their child, enabling parents to return to work and providing the children with much-needed social interaction.

Until this year, J'me fais une place en garderie was being run by a staff of only four dedicated workers -but \$50,000 in funding from Centraide, approved in May, recently allowed Duquette to bring on a fifth staffer.

"It was like winning the lottery," she said. "We were so happy, so excited, because it meant we could help even more families. For a small organization, \$50,000 means so much."

The demand for the agency's services has grown each year since it was founded in 1994 by a group of parents.

"At this point, we're at 34 families on our waiting list," Duquette said. "We're actively involved in 70 cases, and it's only the beginning of October."

The families are often referred to the agency by hospitals or rehabilitation centres, Duquette said. Parents will first speak to someone over the phone, and may be sent some information so they can start their search independently before a case worker pays them a visit to identify the child's specific needs.

After that, the agency will help the family locate an appropriate daycare, guide them through registration, then go into the facility with them to help with the child's integration into the new environment. Throughout the process, the organization tries to foster communication between parents, the daycare centre and the child's rehabilitation facility, something Duquette says allows for a much smoother transition for everyone.

"We always hope that the child can be integrated into all the regular routines in the daycare," she explained, adding that about 63 per cent of the children the agency helps have a sensory or intellectual impairment associated with their physical disability. "Many daycare centres are now able to welcome disabled children, but we still have a lot of work to do."

- reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

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