

Ensuring this daycare death wasn't in vain ^[1]

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Excerpts:

It is a working mother's worst nightmare.

And now a defenceless little girl will be laid to rest Wednesday morning, while the woman entrusted with her care remains protected from harm in a segregated jail cell.

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But it is too late for Duy-An "Theresa" Nguyen and that is why an inquest must be called into the scourge of unlicensed and unregulated daycares in our province.

Just 14-months-old, Duy-An died Friday after being taken off life support at the Hospital for Sick Children. She was rushed there two days earlier from April's Daycare in Mississauga, where paramedics found her not breathing and unresponsive.

Luckese, 35, was originally charged with aggravated assault endangering a life and released on \$15,000 bail. But after Duy-An died, police alleged the child had been violently shaken and the mother of two was rearrested for second-degree murder.

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The story is heartbreaking: Relatives say Duy-An's mother An Nguyen had just finished maternity leave and was finding it hard to find child care before heading back to work. Locating a licensed daycare spot that is both available and not expensive can be virtually impossible. After speaking to other parents, Nguyen reluctantly placed her beautiful daughter with Luckese's unlicensed daycare in her townhouse.

Under Ontario law, a licensed home daycare is monitored and inspected and providers are subject to criminal background checks. They are only allowed to have two babies under two and a maximum of five children, including the caregiver's own.

An unlicensed child care provider, though, can legally care for five kids plus her own children without any background or supervision at all.

While April Luckese used to work with Kiddie Kare Inc., she left in 2007 because the mother of two was limited to taking in just three children for a licensed agency but could take in five if she was not.

"Providers can make more money unlicensed than licensed," explained Kiddie Kare owner Janice Luckese, a distant cousin by marriage to April. "They can have five babies if they want -- there's no law that they can't. And babies are the highest paying."

So April opened her own unlicensed daycare: "Mother of 2 boys offering child care in my home. Safe, loving and nurturing home environment."

After just two days of Duy-An being in Luckese's care, her mother was planning on pulling her out because she had the go-ahead from her employer to bring Duy-An to her workplace.

She never got the chance. Instead, she faces the agony of saying farewell to her only child at Saint Salvador do Mundo church in Mississauga.

No doubt she is racked with guilt -- but that poor mother does not have herself to blame. Instead, we have to ask why we allow an unlicensed system where anyone can throw open their doors and take in kids with no monitoring at all.

Child care advocates such as Luckese of Kiddie Kare believe Queen's Park must institute regulations and training for unlicensed daycare providers while the Ontario Federation of Labour is calling for an inquest.

"We hope that this wake-up call will cause the Ontario government to introduce appropriate security measures and safeguards in all child care facilities," said Marie Kelly, the OFL's secretary-treasurer.

So perhaps a little girl's death has not been in vain.

- reprinted from the Toronto Sun

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