

# Grandmother steps into the breach <sup>[1]</sup>

Day Two in the Toronto Star's series "The Child Care Challenge", Part 2

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## AVAILABILITY

**PART 1:** Ontario child care facing uncertain future <sup>[2]</sup>

**PART 3:** Licensed daycare rare in early 1980s <sup>[3]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Sue Prabhu doesn't mind the two 90-minute round-trip drives from Mississauga to Toronto every day.

The retired provincial bureaucrat loves looking after her 12-month-old granddaughter in her Mississauga home while her Toronto-based son and daughter-in-law work.

What makes Prabhu angry, however, is that little Olivia had to spend almost a month in an unlicensed home daycare -- where she was left crying alone in the basement -- before she was called to the rescue.

"The woman said Olivia cried too much and that she had to leave her alone in the basement while she fed the other children upstairs," Prabhu says, still barely able to believe it.

"I'll tell you, when I heard that I said 'There's no way my granddaughter is going to spend another minute in that house,' " she recalls. "It's terrible that parents today have so few options."

Prabhu's son Neal and daughter-in-law Lisa Sawatsky put their name on numerous daycare waiting lists in their West Toronto neighbourhood months before Olivia was born.

"It is crazy how difficult it was to even get on a waiting list," Sawatsky says. "When you call to leave your name, the answering machine is always full. For some centres you have to make appointments to drop off applications. And in many cases, waiting lists are closed."

"I can't imagine how difficult it must be for families with more than one child or no car," she says.

When Sawatsky had to return to her job as a graphic designer last summer -- with no daycare spot in sight -- she had no choice but informal care.

Although the unlicensed babysitter's \$700 monthly fee was half of what licensed daycares in the area were charging, Sawatsky soon realized her mistake.

"Our parenting styles were just too different," Sawatsky says, diplomatically. "We're just so fortunate that Neal's mother was available to step in."

Since Olivia is starting to walk, Prabhu is looking for children's programs in Mississauga so her granddaughter can interact with other toddlers.

And the grandmother says she is more than willing to help out with Olivia's new baby brother, born last week, if she is needed when Sawatsky returns to work again.

In Mississauga in the 1980s, neighbourhood babysitters were the only option for children of working mothers, Prabhu notes.

What's shocking, she says, is that 30 years later, it seems little has changed.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

**Related link:** Day one in the series: Five years on, children still wait for quality care <sup>[4]</sup>

**Region:** Canada <sup>[5]</sup>

**Tags:** spaces <sup>[6]</sup>

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