

North York nursery school facing shutdown ^[1]

Author: Teotonio, Isabel

Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 7 May 2011

EXCERPTS

Unable to find work, Shani Jones, a 29-year-old single mother of two, returned to school last fall to pursue her dream of becoming a dental hygienist.

It's a goal that was possible only after overcoming the "major hurdle" of finding a daycare in her neighbourhood that accepted babies.

Arpi Nursery School, which rents the basement of Asbury and West United Church near Bathurst St. and Lawrence Ave W., was perfect for her year-old daughter.

It was within walking distance from home - ideal for a mom who doesn't own a car. She could drop off her daughter and make it to morning class in time. Most importantly, her daughter thrived there.

Arpi was a lifeline of sorts, says Jones. But her shot at a fresh start is now in jeopardy because the nursery school is facing possible closure this summer. The shutdown would affect 158 babies, toddlers and children - 143 of whom receive subsidized child care.

The church is in need of money, so it is selling part of the property to a developer that intends to build affordable housing. The church itself will be renovated but that could take up to two years, meaning Arpi must relocate in the interim. After the renovation, the nursery school can return, the new space will be smaller.

Yet after 18 months of searching, Arpi has not been able to find a new home. The premises must be vacated by Sept. 1. If a spot isn't found, the nursery school may have to permanently close, says owner Arpi Meras.

The nursery is one of the largest subsidized daycare centres in North York and has provided social services to thousands of children since 1974. For decades, it has served a community that includes recent immigrants, low-income families and pockets of public housing.

Permanently closing Arpi means Jones and other parents will be scrambling to find alternate accommodations.

"If Arpi shuts down and I'm unable to find placement for my daughter and unable to commute to the new location, then I would have to consider leaving (school)," says Jones, who, like other parents, learned of the problem on Monday.

For Meras, finding a location hasn't been easy because she requires 12,000 square feet, outdoor play space and parking. She has met with city staff, school board officials and representatives of nearby churches and is working with realtors to find a commercial space. But no luck.

"Everybody seems like they're helping, but there are no results," said a frustrated Meras. "There is nothing worse than living with an undecided situation."

The church was instructed by the city to help with a relocation strategy but has had little success. Pauline McKenzie, chair of the architecture committee, says Meras was told in 2005 and given written notification in October 2009.

Meras says she been looking since 2009, but zoning restrictions, licensing requirements and disinterest by landlords have hampered efforts.

Councillor Josh Colle has asked councillors of nearby wards about available space, but has come up empty-handed.

"It's tough because they need a lot of space and need it quickly," said Colle, noting this isn't a city matter but his office is helping so that 158 children aren't without care. "Everyone's trying hard, but to be honest this should've been dealt with a long time ago."

"We need every daycare spot possible in the community," the Ward 15 councillor added.

Closing Arpi would deliver a devastating blow to the community, says Sarkis Harmandayan, who spent hours there while growing up. He and his two siblings frequented Arpi after his family immigrated from Syria in 1980. Even when his parents couldn't afford to pay, Arpi never closed its doors to them.

"It was a place where we could be safe while our parents eked out a living," says Harmandayan, adding it also helped them adapt to their new homeland.

"School work became important for me because of that place," says Harmandayan, who went on to become a consultant. "Partly because of (Arpi Meras) we became contributing members of society."

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: physical environment ^[3]

infant/toddler ^[4]

work/life balance ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/11/05/north-york-nursery-school-facing-shutdown>
Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/11/05/north-york-nursery-school-facing-shutdown> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/physical-environment> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8165> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/5668>