

Fly-by-night daycare caterer shuts down after province-wide alert issued ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A Toronto caterer that provided more than 1 million meals to day cares across the province has shut down in the wake of a Star investigation showing the fly-by-night operation might be endangering children's lives.

Whole Green Kids, which at one time fed some 75 pre-school child care and Montessori schools in the GTA and Ottawa, was providing undercooked meals, and passing off no-name foods purchased at discount grocers as premium, organic, halal and kosher, the Star found.

Owner Susan Blouin acknowledged her company was a mess and in an interview blamed a mutinous staff for trying to ruin her by undercooking food and sprinkling allergy-triggering peanut products in the kitchen area.

"This could be considered very serious if any children got sick and hopefully would not die," Blouin said in a letter to the Star prior to the publication of the article on June 1.

Public health departments in Toronto, York Region and Durham Region are now working together to investigate Blouin's operation.

All three departments went into high alert and shared information with each other, including intercepting deliveries to two daycare schools in Whitby. The food was destroyed after inspectors found it was not transported at the right temperatures. The daycares have cancelled their contracts.

"It doesn't appear it is operating in the city of Toronto and doesn't appear to be catering to child-care premises, and does not appear to be operating anywhere at the moment," said councillor John Filion, chair of the Toronto Board of Health.

Jim Chan, manager of food safety for Toronto Public Health said his department issued a province-wide alert to health boards asking them to report whether Whole Green Kids had set up shop in their jurisdiction.

Acting on reports that Blouin might have moved the operation to her rented home in Thorncrest Village, a health inspector visited but found no evidence of any large scale cooking.

Blouin was warned by an inspector that if she were to set up shop anywhere in the province, she was to contact the public health department in the jurisdiction, and pass inspection before any meals could be sent out to a daycare, Chan said.

The crackdown is the latest chapter in the saga of Whole Green Kids, a firm that has led a nomadic existence for the past several months, moving from one restaurant kitchen to another after being locked out for non-payment of rent.

Recently, the Star found Whole Green Kids cooking out of the Burrito Burrito Mexican restaurant on Highway 7 in Vaughan. The company, which prepared as many as 1,500 meals a day, was down to four schools, a chef that had been out of work for more than a year and a university student who borrowed his father's car to deliver the meals.

Blouin, who at that time had been renting the Burrito kitchen for a week, "vanished" the day the Star article appeared, said manager Charlie Arcuri. He was paid in advance, and unlike many who have filed grievances against the company, is not out any money.

"I was just trying to make a few bucks with the rental since the kitchen wasn't being used during the night," said Arcuri. Companies that cater to daycares are required by provincial law to operate from commercial premises that are both licensed and inspected.

Although Burrito was a licensed, inspected restaurant, inspectors were not able to inspect the food prepared in the kitchen when Blouin was using it.

Blouin could not be reached for comment yesterday. Her cellphone has been disconnected and she did not respond to questions on email.

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-reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: health ^[3]

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/11/06/fly-night-daycare-caterer-shuts-down-after-province-wide-alert> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/health>