

Parents fear for fate of cash-strapped daycare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

As he has done every weekday for the past seven years, Saad Kamal walked his two young children into Progress Child Care Centre on Monday morning and wished them a good day.

But with the fate of the cash-strapped Scarborough daycare in limbo, the single father worries he'll have to quit his job directing delivery trucks at Toronto General Hospital to care for Nadia, 5, and Nadeim, 7.

"These kids have been coming here since they were born, since they were babies. This is their family," Kamal said. "I have to go to work. If I don't have daycare, what am I going to do? I don't have any other options."

More than 90 children - from infants to age 7 - attend the private, non-profit daycare near Ellesmere and Kennedy Rds.

The city has so far refused to cover the centre's \$100,000 deficit.

Progress is one of 650 Toronto child-care centres subsidized by the city to help low-income parents. The city said it has already given the daycare more than \$600,000 this year.

Staff came to work Monday morning with no guarantee that they will be paid. Shakunthala Kesavan, who has worked there for 17 years, smiled as she directed a group of 5 and 6 year olds through "Do-Re-Mi".

"These children are from the baby room. I've seen them grow up in front of my eyes. How can I tell them bye-bye all of a sudden?" Kesavan said. "We are running this business for the children. The staff are willing to work without pay. The city needs to give us a hand."

The city started an audit on the daycare on Monday. Board members will meet with the children's services department Tuesday to discuss options.

A sign on the playground fence Monday read "Hurray, we are open!" Parent Amanda Henry hopes it stays that way.

"When daycares close down, it takes away the opportunity from young parents and parents in general to get on their feet and actually be able to independently support their children without financial assistance from the government," said Henry, who works for the federal government. "If you want the workforce to grow, you have to have daycare spaces available."

She added that keeping 5-year-old Naomi and 3-year-old Reelaiah at a daycare where they feel safe is important.

"They love coming here each and every morning. They actually wake me up in my bed every morning and say, 'It's time to go to daycare.' Even on the weekends."

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

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