

"I should have applied before I was pregnant": How child care in Toronto fails mothers ^[1]

Report of the Mothers' Task Force on Child Care

Author: Mothers' Task Force on Child Care

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AVAILABILITY

Full report in pdf

Audio of the press conference (Rabble podcast) ^[2]

Excerpts from the report:

On Mothers' Day, 2011, the Mothers' Task Force on Child Care launched a community consultation process to gather information from mothers on what works and what doesn't in child care in Toronto. "I Should Have Applied Before I Got Pregnant" presents the findings and recommendations for future provision of child care services in Toronto.

Findings: What mothers reported

Mothers who responded said the quality is the most important factor in choosing child care, followed by location and cost. City-run and non-profit centres were most trusted for quality, unlicensed home daycares least trusted, but sometimes the only available affordable option.

Availability: "Simply no spaces available"

A panicked, hopeless tone resonated throughout mothers' narratives as they spoke about the availability of child care spaces. Waiting lists are by far the biggest concern. Parents are required to place names on multiple lists and wait years to secure a space in a licensed municipal or non-profit child care facility.

Affordability: Prohibitively expensive costs, subsidy shortage

Costs are taking a financial toll on families. Many parents are paying as much for child care as they do for their mortgage. Some have remortgaged their homes. Subsidies are too low, in short supply and not well-coordinated with spaces.

Quality of care

Quality, availability and affordability are intertwined. Only 31% of respondents felt that most child care programs are high quality enough to meet their children's needs. A high percentage of participants - 69.9% - were in favour of government regulations to ensure quality on behalf of

Toronto's child care centres.

Quality of life

The way child care is provided in Toronto impacts the quality of life of their families. Rushing from long work days to closing centres, children in multiple centres and little availability near home or work means more time in transit and less time with children.

Recommendations: What mothers want

Mothers report that changes are needed. Over 85% of mothers said the current cost of child care in Toronto is not affordable, and it is not easy to find the child care you need. In terms of solutions, mothers are clearly looking to government to step up their role - more than three quarters of respondents - 80.9% - felt that governments do not do enough to provide affordable and available child care options for working mothers.

What do mothers want?

- More affordable child care - Lower fees, more and larger subsidies

- More child care spaces
- More public and non-profit child care centres
- Support from all levels of government for a comprehensive system
- Good government regulation to ensure quality
- Flexibility and longer hours - Extend hours of operation
- A Modern child care system with universal coverage
- A central registration system
- Fair compensation for child care workers

Conclusion: Mothers speak with the knowledge of experience

Clearly, Toronto mothers have a lot to say of value with regard to their struggles for child care services in Toronto. In a short time, the Mothers' Task Force on Child Care was able to gather information because mothers were interested in being heard from and having their concerns taken into account by decision-makers. It is time to include mothers' voices and perspectives in policy discussions and solutions.

Related link: News: "Toronto mothers cry out for child care" [3]

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