

Governments are failing families ^[1]

Editorial

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EXCERPTS

In an era when both parents generally work, the lives of families with young children tend to revolve around child-care arrangements.

So hearing that a daycare is so broke it will close - immediately - as parents at Scarborough's Progress Child Care Centre learned last week, doesn't just create turmoil for youngsters. It can be the end of a parent's ability to work. Families can't afford that. And neither can Ontario's economy.

The city is working with the Progress centre to keep its doors open, so there's at least a temporary reprieve in this case. Toronto, however, isn't offering an ongoing cash bailout, so the 90 kids at Progress, and their families, can't rest easy yet.

But neither can parents of children at most licensed daycares across the province. After decades of underfunding, Ontario's entire child-care system is held together with little more than flimsy policies and frayed good intentions. It is constantly on the verge of collapse.

Like other cities, Toronto does its best to run a child-care program but it lacks the tools and the funding to create the comprehensive, affordable system residents desperately need. That power and money reside in more senior levels of government, which continue to disappoint through their short-term thinking.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government has shown nothing but disdain for regulated child care and the transformative effect it can have on families and the economy. In 2006, Conservatives killed a promising national child-care program and replaced it with \$100-a-month cheques for parents with children under 6.

Since then, Harper has happily handed out \$2.6 billion a year of taxpayers' money through this program without producing any new daycare spaces or enabling parents to afford existing ones.

Meanwhile, Queen's Park has refused to take responsibility for funding a much-needed expansion of child care, settling instead on doing the barest minimum to keep existing subsidized spaces open. Worse still, Premier Dalton McGuinty's government has been deaf to warnings that Ontario's impressive new full-day kindergarten program will deepen the financial woes of some existing daycare centres.

That's the last thing parents need. More than 8,000 children in rural and northern Ontario are already at risk of losing their child care, with hundreds of licensed centres in danger of closing, according to the association representing municipal social service providers.

And, as a new report released Friday shows, many mothers in Toronto feel panicked and hopeless when trying to find affordable, regulated daycare in their neighbourhoods.

They enrol on daycare lists before even picking out their child's name. They scrimp to pay ever-rising fees (for many, child care costs more than their mortgage). And low-income families, that can't afford those costs, wait on yet another list for a subsidy - knowing that their child may be too old for daycare by the time they get to the top.

Politicians, in fairness, cannot expect parents to do more. Only governments can provide the expanded and affordable child care that families, and the economy, so desperately need.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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