

Almost 20,000 Toronto tots waiting for child care subsidies ^[1]

Author: Monsebraaten, Laurie

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EXCERPTS

A record 19,817 Toronto children are waiting for daycare subsidies while the city scrambles to keep its chronically underfunded system afloat with unused money from all-day kindergarten.

It is a situation akin to "rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic," said Jane Mercer of the Toronto Coalition for Better Child Care.

The city's recovering economy, high cost of living and a new generation of young educated women entering the workforce are putting new pressure on the city's daycare waiting list, she said.

"We don't have a child-care system. We don't have a plan. We are literally flying by the seat of our pants," said Mercer who wants Queen's Park and Ottawa to act.

A staff report being discussed at city hall Wednesday says Toronto is shifting about \$760,000 in unused all-day kindergarten funds to child care. But instead of helping to ease the exploding subsidy waiting list, the money will go into the city's child-care reserves to shore up the existing system.

Funding pressures "which result largely from provincial contributions to child care not being indexed to inflation" mean the city has to fund about 2,700 of its 24,000 daycare subsidies from reserves, says the report to the city's community development and recreation committee. Without the new money, those reserves will be drained by early next year.

Neither the Toronto public nor Catholic boards offered extended-day programs this year and only four sites in the public board are considering it for next year, said the report by Elaine Baxter-Trahair, head of children's services for the city.

Since Queen's Park is allowing municipalities to spend unused subsidies for the extended-day portion of all-day kindergarten on the broader child-care system, Toronto's reserves will now last until early 2013, she said.

The financial juggling may help in the short-term but solves nothing, said Councillor Janet Davis (Ward 31 Beaches-East York).

"The province has got to come to terms with paying the real costs of child care and paying for the additional spaces we need," said Davis, vice-chair of the committee. "How much longer should the families of Toronto wait?"

Toronto's chronic child-care funding crisis calls for new thinking, says a second report on the issue before the committee. The city-commissioned report by respected child care expert Martha Friendly, calls on Queen's Park to:

- Annually index to inflation all child-care transfers to municipalities in the short-term.
- Introduce a new child-care funding model to address the loss of 4- and 5-year-olds to the school system, chronically low child-care worker wages, high parent fees and the overall shortage of licensed spaces.
- Develop a comprehensive multi-year plan that includes predictable funding, clear goals and quality measures.
- Commit to spend 1 per cent of the province's Gross Domestic Product on child care by 2020 as recommended by UNICEF.
- Consider a moratorium on licensing new for-profit daycares until a new provincial plan and funding model is in place.

Friendly says Toronto should consider setting maximum daycare fees and a city-wide salary scale for child-care workers. It could also design a pilot project to show how subsidizing programs instead of parent fees would better meet the city's needs.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: subsidy ^[3]

spaces ^[4]

availability ^[5]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/11/06/almost-20000-toronto-tots-waiting-child-care-subsidies> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/subsidy> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/spaces> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/availability>