

Child care subsidy critical for East York mom ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Michelle Pistano thought she was being proactive when she applied for a child care space and a city subsidy when she was just 15 weeks pregnant with her daughter.

But, unfortunately, like many in Toronto Pistano, who lives in the Coxwell and Gerrard area, was still waiting when the time came for her to return to work. In September 2010, she headed back to work without a licensed child care spot or subsidy for Jaliyah, now 22 months.

But, she wasn't too worried as her workplace had her come back just two days a week so she found a space elsewhere. Pistano's sense of calm quickly disappeared.

"It was awful. I didn't leave her there very long," she said. "I didn't like the feeling I had when I left her."

The single mother found help from a family member and then did what she hadn't ever wanted to do - she went on Ontario Works. It turned out to be the right decision because shortly after she had her subsidy in place and a spot in a city-run child care facility in East York so she could return to school in January 2011 without worrying about her child.

The worry, stress and frustration Pistano went through is common in so many families in the city as the waiting list for a child care subsidy has grown from 3,500 in 2005 to more than 20,000 currently.

The funding available provides 24,000 child care fee subsidies, which is only enough to support 28 per cent of Toronto's low-income children.

As part of the city's core services review, the consulting firm KPMG recommended selling off municipal child care facilities or reducing the number of subsidized spaces as a way to balance the city's budget. Toronto is looking at a projected shortfall of \$774 million.

For parents, child care advocates and some councillors slashing an already strapped child care system is not an option.

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Under the scenario of cutting 2,700 spaces, 67 families would lose their subsidy in Ward 31 and another 33 would be lost in Ward 29.

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While Davis doesn't want to see the city making cuts to child care, she knows the problem can't be fixed by the municipality alone.

"Toronto can't do it alone. We need the federal and provincial government to step up and realize child care is important," she said.

"It verges on discrimination that we don't have a child care system that allows women to work."

In Quebec parents pay \$8 a day for universal, regulated child care and Beaches-East York MPP Michael Prue would like to see something similar in Ontario.

"That's what we think is necessary to give women a full opportunity in society and to give children the best start," he said.

The NDP would first like to stabilize a child care system that is dealing with the removal of four and five-year-olds because of full day kindergarten, and then it would move towards creating a provincial, non-profit system. He said child care is one of the top five concerns he's hearing at the door.

Beaches-East York Progressive Conservative candidate Chris Menary said it isn't a concern he's hearing about. The party has no proposal regarding child care.

Local Liberal candidate Helen Burstyn said the provincial government has created more spaces and introduced full-day kindergarten, which has helped reduce the need for child care for older children.

She acknowledged more could be done.

"When it comes to meeting that demand we don't always have resources at the ready," she said.

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-reprinted from the Inside Toronto

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