

Subsidized child care critical to parents, providers ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

It would be difficult to overstate the effect on Ayan Gureye if she was to lose subsidized child care.

The Somali woman who immigrated to Canada in 1992 has four children ages three months to five years in home-based child care in her Mount Olive neighbourhood of north Etobicoke.

"If my kids had to come out of subsidized day care, I would have to stay home," said Gureye, 31. "A mother needs to get an education to go to work to go forward with her life. She is the one who succeeds."

An audit of city services by consulting firm KPMG in July suggested "phasing out" 2,000 subsidized child care spaces could save \$24 million. The core service review is intended to find savings to aid the city's \$774-million budget shortfall.

Meanwhile, there is a record 20,000 people on the city's waiting list for subsidized child care.

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Ruth Kottas and Angie Katchutas co-founded Rexdale Home Child Care Agency 29 years ago. The majority of providers are in north Etobicoke's Wards 1 and 2, with some in central Etobicoke's Ward 4.

Providers are encouraged to work flex hours, nights and weekends, to accommodate parents' busy schedules. Matches may also be made to accommodate language and culture.

Some 98 per cent of Rexdale Home Child Care Agency clients are on city child care subsidy. Subsidies are based on income tax assessments.

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The daily cost to have a child in day care through the Rexdale Home Child Care Agency is \$41.09 for an infant and \$34.64 for a child three years and older. Costs at city-run child care centres in Toronto range from \$23.70 per day on the low end (for a school-aged child) to \$91 per day (for an infant). The percentage that gets covered by subsidy is dependent on the family's income.

For 20 years, Samira Kassam worked as the supervisor at Terry Tan Child Centre in The West Mall-Bloor Street West area of Etobicoke. Yet she chose home child care through the Rexdale agency for her children, Quordilya, 7, and Quinn, almost three.

"I like that home care is a smaller group of kids. It's more one-on-one interaction. I really wanted a home environment, especially for him," she said of her son, as he played with a toy truck on her lap.

If she lost her child care subsidy, both Kassam and her husband would have to consider second, maybe even third jobs, she said: "That would mean no quality time with the kids."

Today, Kassam works in one of nine full-day kindergarten classes at Marvin Heights Public School in Mississauga where she said the program's implementation has been so successful, the provincial government has hired the school's principal to implement full-day kindergarten in schools across Ontario.

However, the success of full-day kindergarten is creating a further crisis for city-subsidized child care.

As increasing numbers of four and five year olds leave subsidized child care for full-day kindergarten, child care agencies and providers are forced to find ways to make up for those lost fees in order to maintain economically viable businesses.

Child care agencies will then start competing for younger children, Kottas said.

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Already, home child care providers report space availability as children leave their care for kindergarten. Home child care providers are mandated by the province to care for no more than five children at one time.

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In late September, Toronto City Council will grapple with an enormous list of potential core service cuts, including the elimination of 2,000 subsidized child care spaces, which could save \$24 million.

It is a battle that gravely concerns Kottas.

"We're highly concerned. Advocacy is very important. There is a provincial election coming. It would be great if the province would provide the City of Toronto with the 80/20 split. The city has been funding existing spaces at 100 per cent. It has been ongoing for years.

"The city is forced to do something."

York West Councillor Giorgio Mammoliti concurs. He was recently appointed chair of a city task force examining child care and told Toronto Community News in an earlier interview that the province bears some responsibility for the current situation (having already cut 2,000 spaces and set to cut 700 more next year).

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-reprinted from the Inside Toronto

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