

# Group aims to rally parents to bolster child care <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

With some 2,000 child care subsidies potentially on the chopping block, one downtown Toronto organization is looking to rally parents to not only salvage those spaces, but to also bolster child care in the city.

Mothers for Child Care (M4CC) launched on May 8 - Mother's Day - in hopes of mobilizing moms and various organizations and agencies to ensure parents have a stronger voice politically.

The need for that cohesive voice was deepened when a city-commissioned cost-cutting report recommended the phasing out of child care subsidies and the contracting out of municipal child care centres as potential means through which the city could meet budget commitments.

The report, prepared by independent consulting group KPMG, has come under fire from various groups for its recommendations.

M4CC spokesperson Alexandra Mandelis said her organization has conducted a survey and encouraged hundreds of Toronto parents to contact their local councillors and Mayor Rob Ford calling for the city to continue funding child care at current levels.

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If 2,700 subsidized spaces were cut, downtown Toronto would be among the hardest hit areas. In Ward 28 Toronto Centre-Rosedale alone, 109 spaces would be chopped, along with another 334 in Ward 27 (Toronto Centre-Rosedale) and 18 in Ward 22 (St. Paul's).

Ward 28 councillor Pam McConnell said the funding cuts would likely not have been on the table had Ontario not stopped subsidizing 2,000 spaces during the time of the Mike Harris government.

"Every other province in Canada pays 100 per cent of the subsidies needed," she said. "We have this ridiculous circumstance in Ontario where (the province pays) us but they don't pay the full bill."

McConnell noted parents in Quebec pay a fraction of what Ontario parents pay for child care and added the problem is getting worse. The number of parents on a waiting list for subsidized child care has grown roughly six-fold since early 2005, from approximately 3,500 people on the list to roughly 20,000 today.

"We have almost as many people waiting on the subsidy list as we have getting subsidies," McConnell said. "You have to be wealthy to be able to pay for a regular spot."

In at-risk communities such as Regent Park, that could sound a death knell for some child care facilities. If more and more families are squeezed out due to cost, some facilities could become unsustainable.

"All day cares need children in them in order to work," McConnell said.

Should day cares be forced to close, that would effectively serve as a "double-whammy" for Toronto families, Mandelis said. She has already spoken to numerous families who have expressed concern that their local child care facility could be shut down.

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Rosemary White, longtime executive director of downtown Toronto's Bond Child and Family Development, said cuts would cause immense damage to the child care system.

"That would devastate us," she said. "We have a wait list of 19 or 20,000 spaces already."

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Mother Sarah Vance is already worried about what will happen when she must go back to work. At a recent rally organized by Stop the Cuts, a group designed to fight against the recommendations made in the KPMG report, she noted the wait list shows the need for more subsidies, not fewer.

"Right now, unsubsidized day care for an infant is \$1,100 a month and for a 10-year-old child, it's \$400 to \$500 a month," she said. "The reality is, we already have a lack of space; we already have a day care crisis."

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"The reality is (with those costs) people - and it's mostly women - can't afford to work."

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The province, for its part, stands by its child care record. The Ministry of Education released a statement noting the Ontario government has increased funding for child care in Toronto by 50 per cent since 2003, expanded full fee subsidy eligibility to families earning under \$20,000 and helped create more than 8,500 new licensed child care spaces, leading to a total of 9,000 additional children receiving subsidies in the city.

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