

Child care subsidies mean getting ahead or falling behind ^[1]

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Source: Inside Toronto

Format: Article

Publication Date: 31 Aug 2011

AVAILABILITY

EXCERPTS

Dave Walsh said he is furious at the mere suggestion of cutting child care fee subsidies in Toronto, calling it irresponsible management and a cause of stress for parents and families.

A single father of one, Walsh knows how important a child care fee subsidy, which helps families with the cost of childcare, can be.

"The fact of the matter is the day care subsidy allowed me to work," Walsh said. His son is 13 years old now and out of the daycare system, but he was in day care at the YMCA at Dovercourt and College streets for nearly 10 years. Walsh did have a subsidy and said it was absolutely necessary.

"If I had not had the subsidy it wouldn't have made sense for me to go to work," Walsh said. "I might as well have stayed home and went on (Ontario Works)."

At that time Walsh, who works in a music store, said he was only earning about \$2,000 a month. Without a subsidy, day care for his son would have cost in the area of \$1,000 a month.

"When you are talking about \$12,000 a year for childcare, if you are only making \$25,000, you are going to end up homeless or starving," Walsh said. "They (the city) think they will save money by cutting these subsidies, but they won't. It will drive people on to (Ontario Works) and it will encourage the underground economy."

The city is considering cuts to child care through the Core Service Review in order to balance the 2012 budget. The City Services Review by KPMG, a management consulting firm, proposed cutting 2,000 fee subsidies as well as selling off 55 municipal child-care centres, cutting the quality inspection system, cutting payments to community-based child care for subsidized children and cutting funding to the family resource programs, pay equity and city payments to school boards for child care rents.

In Ward 14, Parkdale-High Park Councillor Gord Perks brings first-hand knowledge to the debate over subsidies.

"I am not ashamed to admit that I had three kids in day care at the same time when I was just starting out my life as a parent and I could not have afforded to put them all in at full fee," Perks said. "I needed a subsidy for my kids to be in day care or my partner and I both wouldn't have been able to work."

Access to quality day care and day care subsidies mean the difference between parents being able to make a good life and getting stuck in a dead end, he said.

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Perks was once a day care worker at a centre in Regal Road Public School 25 years ago while he was attending university. He said beyond the cost to families, enabling access to child care helps to create better communities.

"Having a mix of fee paying and subsidized kids, you are also providing early socialization across incomes, which supports having good mixed neighbourhoods, good mixed schools and a good mixed city," Perks said. "Universal access to affordable day care is, in my mind, a hallmark of a civilized society."

His office, like the offices of most city councillors, received hundreds of calls when talk at city hall turned to cuts, Perks said. There are currently 453 subsidized day care spaces in Ward 14, and according to Toronto's Children Services 58 of those could be cut.

"We are doing things wrong at the provincial level and it sounds like the city is embarking on doing things very wrong at the municipal level," said Cheri DiNovo, the MPP for Parkdale-High Park.

The problems with childcare stretch well beyond the city's proposed cuts, DiNovo said. DiNovo said Ontario is sandwiched between Quebec, where there is \$7-a-day day care, and Manitoba, which has \$17-a-day day care.

"In Ontario, if you are lucky enough to be one of the one in 10 who can find a space, you are going to pay \$50 plus, plus, plus a day," she said. "For most young families, the single largest issue is (that) they pay well over \$1,000 per child."

On top of the cost, there is a shortage of day care centres in Parkdale and High Park, DiNovo said, and those that exist have long

waiting lists. According to the city's website, 268,575 children nine years old and under live in Toronto and licensed child-care centres serve only 21 per cent of these children.

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Toronto's executive committee and city council will debate the KPMG proposals in September and vote on them during the 2012 budget vote in January.

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-reprinted from the Inside Toronto

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