

For parents on wait lists, daycare is a top election issue ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

When Erin George left the doctor's office after finding out she was five weeks pregnant, instead of running home she went straight to a daycare centre to get herself on a waiting list.

Her daughter, Quinn, has since been born, and she's still on a total of 16 lists. George has been given no estimated time of when she will get a spot. The clock is ticking as maternity leave in Canada only lasts one year and George intends on going back to work. The only thing she knows is that she's on an "over 10" family-long waiting list. She doesn't know what number above 10 she is. She does know that she is one of 19,000 families on the waiting lists for childcare centres in Toronto.

In September, talk of cutting 2,000 childcare subsidies floated around city council and had many citizens outraged. With the upcoming election, will childcare be on the minds of voters?

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"Not having childcare isn't an option for us," she says. "Quinn's grandparents live in other cities, so we don't have the benefit of having retired grandparents in the vicinity."

In the Core Service Review this past summer, it was proposed that the City of Toronto divest 57 municipal child care centres to the private sector, cut over 2,000 fee subsidies, cut quality inspections, cut wage and rent grants, and reduce per diem rates paid to child care for city subsidies. The executive council instead voted on the rewording of the proposal, shifting the buck to provincial and federal governments.

A couple of weeks later, Premier Dalton McGuinty told reporters that the province wouldn't be able to help the spaces.

"With respect to the child care spaces, we've got our own particular approach so we are not going to be providing funding for those 2,000 spaces," he told the Sun. "We have created tens of thousands of spaces on our own and when the feds walk away from the table from a national plan, we belted up and said alright, we'll take up the responsibility entirely unto ourselves, that's what we've done on child care."

Elizabeth Forestell, Executive Director of the Central Neighborhood House Association, explains that if subsidies get cut, we're going to have a huge problem on our hands.

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She says for her case in particular, it only takes losing three kids out of eight total to make their program no longer viable. In the end, all eight kids would be left without a spot.

She says with the elections coming up, it's time for someone to take responsibility. "Someone needs to take responsibility for providing high-quality, accessible childcare for people in Ontario," says Forestell. "And, [someone should be] looking for some better solutions in how we do that and make it affordable."

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Andrea Calver, co-ordinator for the Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare is urging mothers to go directly to their local candidates and speak face-to-face about their plans for childcare.

"Luckily, there has been an enormous amount of deputations regarding childcare," she says, referring to September's executive committee council. "It's one of the services citizens want the government to provide and they need to make it affordable."

George says that with the elections coming up, issues about childcare will affect how she votes. "I'd like to vote for someone who believes childcare is an important investment for our province to make," she says. "Also, I'm looking for a party that is committed to continuing the rollout of full-day kindergarten because that reduces the issue of finding half-day daycare."

Mothers For Child Care (M4CC) is a "task force of Mothers," committed to investigating the accessibility, quality and affordability of child care services in Toronto.

Currently, they've launched the "Save Toronto Child Care" campaign and Alexandra Mandelis of M4CC urges mothers to check out their website where parents can write a letter directly to their local city councilor, or to the mayor.

-reprinted from The Open File

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