

Three city-run daycares to close ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Misrak Ayalew and her two boys would have to fall back on government welfare with the closing of their local child-care centre.

Every day, the single mother drops off Keduse, 9, and Abel, 7, at St. Mark's Child Care Centre, near Queen St. and Lansdowne Ave., by 7:30 a.m. and picks them up at 5:30 p.m., after work at Tim Hortons.

"If they close it down, I'd have to stay home. We don't want to go back on social assistance," Ayalew said after learning St. Mark's is among three city-run child-care centres that could close next August under Mayor Rob Ford's proposed 2012 city budget.

If approved by council, the centres, serving 100 children, would close to save the city \$670,000 in 2012 and \$1 million by 2013, the budget says.

Greenholme-Albion Child Care Centre, on Jamestown Cres. in Etobicoke, and St. Mark's both serve 4- and 5-year-olds and have vacancies because of all-day kindergarten. Neither will be viable when area schools offer the program in several years, city staff say.

Bellevue, which serves 20 infants and toddlers near College and Bathurst Sts., is a small centre that also houses the city's children services administraton. Those offices are slated to move to Metro Hall and would make the centre unviable.

Councillor Janet Davis, vice-chair of the community development and recreation committee, said Toronto can't afford to lose any child-care spaces when 20,000 families are waiting for subsidies and those who can afford full fees are scrambling to find spots.

"There are all kinds of rationale you could provide for closing these centres," she said. "The truth is there will be a 100 fewer child-care spaces for families in those neighbourhoods."

Under the city's long-term plan, daycares that are losing children to all-day kindergarten should be retooling to serve younger children, Davis said.

"It almost seems like the city has tossed in the towel with two of these (centres) and said all-day kindergarten is going to make them unviable and we'll let them go," she said Tuesday.

"If this is what we do with all of the child care centers that will be affected by all-day kindergarten, we'll have none left."

In this context, losing a centre serving infants and toddlers "makes no sense at all," she said.

Davis said she will fight to keep the centres open. But if they have to close, she wants new spaces opened in neighboring centres.

"If anything, parents are telling us they need more child care, not less," she said.

Closing St. Mark's would cause havoc in the working-class community made up mostly of immigrants and visible minorities, said Shaquel Sealy, who daily picks up her little sister, Shalondra, 7.

"My mom just got laid off and is back to school," sighed Sealy, who is in Grade 11. "I'd have to leave my class early or Shalondra would have to stay in the office for an hour before someone could pick her up."

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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