

What publicly funded child care means to parents ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Lindsay Windhager is one of the lucky few.

She doesn't have to wake up at the crack of dawn to get her children fed and dressed in time to catch a bus and a train in order to drop her son off at daycare miles from where they live.

She doesn't have to board another bus with her daughter so she can leave her at a different child-care centre. And then make it to work on time so she doesn't risk losing her job.

Or repeat the process after she finishes work in the evening.

For many, that's their slavish routine. Their grim reality. Tough on youngsters. Even harder for their parents.

The Davenport-Perth resident now has both her children enrolled in child care, partially subsidized by the city of Toronto.

At first, she had to get by with no subsidy and place her son in a daycare outside her neighbourhood. That was the only option available at the time.

"To access a spot you have to put your name on the wait-list pretty much at the time that you're pregnant and hope that you're going to connect with spots," she says.

Although frustrated and confused when she began the process seven years ago, she says things are even worse for new parents now.

When her daughter's daycare closed, Windhager was forced to find another spot for her within the system.

Most parents aren't able to access a spot and a subsidy together, so they're left to throw things together as best they can.

At the same time, they're always worrying which daycares will be closed during the next round of cuts.

Three more child-care centres are already on the chopping block. Without increased municipal and provincial funding, that trend will continue.

"The system is pretty much in a total state of crisis and is definitely in need of expansion," she says.

Unfortunately, the Ford administration is headed in the opposite direction.

That means increased fees for those without subsidies (who are already shouldering most of the financial burden) forcing some of them into second-rate, lower quality care options.

Or forced to rely on friends and family from week to week.

In Windhager's case, she finally has her two children in the same child-care centre that's close to where she works.

But there are another 20,000 children who are still waiting for subsidies.

"The system is in need of proper funding and expansion to make it accessible and affordable for all," she says.

So their parents don't have to rob a bank to pay for child care. Or spend half the day commuting to and from child-care centres.

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