

Company brings for-profit daycare to Toronto apartment buildings ^[1]

Author: Morrow, Adrian

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EXCERPTS:

Daycare company Edleun is teaming up with one of the nation's largest landlords to bring much-needed new childcare spots to apartment buildings. The move is the latest piece in the Calgary firm's aggressive expansion of its controversial model of for-profit daycare centres.

Under the deal, Edleun will convert common areas, pools or other spaces in buildings owned by the Canadian Apartment Properties Real Estate Investment Trust (Daycare company Edleun) into childcare facilities.

The first two daycares are slated to be built in the Greater Toronto Area. Each will be up to 1,800 square metres in size and accommodate about 100 children, said Ty Durekas, Edleun's president and CEO. The plan is to have them running in nine months.

"We see opportunity to bring more availability of childcare to families that might not have access to childcare centres," he said. "These are in established neighbourhoods where we couldn't get in otherwise."

Edleun's plan is to eventually build daycares in Capreit properties across the province.

The plan takes advantage of Toronto's large stock of decades-old apartment buildings, many of which house large numbers of children but lack amenities.

"If it wasn't for these buildings, there wouldn't be affordable housing for new immigrants, many of whom come with large families," said Graeme Stewart, an architect who has worked on improving the city's apartment blocks. "There's definitely an absolute need for [daycare]."

He said Capreit has shown itself to be a conscientious landlord in being willing to allow improvements to its properties.

Edleun's growth, however, is contentious - so much so that Mr. Durekas said he would not reveal the exact locations of the planned daycares for fear of attracting attention. He would say only that they were in the "central and eastern" parts of the GTA.

Critics of for-profit daycare argue money-making care in general is inferior to the non-profit variety because earnings that could otherwise be funnelled back into the service must be used to pay dividends.

"It's capitalizing on a crisis in childcare in Ontario - why don't we have childcare in some parts of Toronto? It's because there's a vacuum in public policy," said Martha Friendly, executive director of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

Edleun maintains that it is simply plugging a gap in the market. There is a huge shortfall in the number of childcare spaces nationwide - as many as 165,000 - and daycare operators are feeling the squeeze as cash-strapped cities consider scaling back subsidies.

Late last year, the company made its first forays into Ontario, buying up nine daycares in Toronto, Mississauga and Windsor. It already owns more than 20 centres in Alberta and several in British Columbia.

-reprinted from the Globe and Mail

Region: Ontario ^[2]

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