

# CTV investigates: Daycare dilemma <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Boyadjian, Lee

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## AVAILABILITY

Video online <sup>[2]</sup>

### EXCERPTS:

#### Part 1: Still not enough daycare spaces for Waterloo Region preschoolers

The introduction of full-day kindergarten was supposed to help ease daycare crunches in Waterloo Region and across the province.

But despite about 75 per cent of Ontario kids aged 4 and 5 now spending their whole day in school - an age group that half of all child care spaces were dedicated to when the program was launched - a common refrain remains in place.

"We don't have enough licensed child care in Waterloo Region," says Nancy Dickieson, director of children's services for the Region of Waterloo.

Despite that current shortfall, Dickieson says efforts are being made to get younger students into daycares.

"We have a plan that plays out over the next couple of years," she says.

"We're hoping that will create a significant shift as those spaces gradually end and the new, younger age groupings open up."

Full-day kindergarten was announced in October 2009.

In addition to educational advantages, it was expected to free up spaces in daycares for younger students, as older students would no longer need daycare.

Older students were expected to spend time before and after the school day, if they couldn't go home, in school-run programs.

Local school boards jumped at the chance and offer before- and after-school programs.

"We've got these beautifully resourced rooms that we're building - they're fully equipped, they're ready to go, why should they be empty at 3:30?" says Scott Podrebarac, an early learning administrator at the Waterloo Region District School Board.

Waterloo Catholic District School Board spokesperson John Shewchuk notes that the service isn't offered at all schools, only those with sufficient demand.

"There's a tipping point there where you have to decide if you can afford to actually run it," he says."

The arrival of those programs meant the boards had to hire a significant number of early childhood educators.

At Conestoga College, enrollment in early childhood education programs has doubled over the past six years.

This year, approximately 500 students are enrolled in the program.

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#### Part 2: Renovation, staff expenses blamed for lack of infant daycare

The introduction of full-day kindergarten was supposed to open up spots for infants and toddlers in Ontario daycares.

So why is it that of the 20,000 new daycare spots opened up during the four-year rollout of full-day kindergarten, most are being used to care for kindergarteners before and after school?

Local daycare providers say it's because of the cost that would be involved in retrofitting current facilities to handle younger kids and hiring more staff to help take care of them.

One staff member is needed for every three infants attending a licensed daycare.

With Waterloo Region only having enough daycare space for 12 per cent of the region's children, some daycares say best financial decision is to focus on before-school and after-school care instead of taking in younger kids.

That leaves kids like Theodore James with no option but to start out in unlicensed daycare - home care.

Theodore's parents wanted him at a licensed centre, but were unable to find one until he was a bit older.

"We noticed a big difference from when he transitioned from home daycare to the learning centre," says mother Roshan James.

But other parents - like Mary Feldskov - say home daycares provide the best environment for young children -like three-year-old Audrey - to develop.

"The next best thing to being at home with her own mom is to be at home with someone else's mom," Feldskov says.

When Feldskov was ready to go back to work, she was so sure she wouldn't be able to find licensed care that the first place she looked for daycare was Kijiji.

"Then we called some of our neighbours and our friends, talked to people at church and got several referrals from our network," she says.

Despite the continued difficulty in finding licensed daycare for young children, local daycare officials say change is on the horizon.

"We've certainly had a number of programs who have come on board very, very quickly and some more waiting to see what the impact will be on them," says Nancy Dickieson, Waterloo Region's director of children's services.

One of those organizations to include younger children "very, very quickly" is the YMCA.

John Haddock, CEO of both the Kitchener-Waterloo and Cambridge YMCAs, says the organization would take on even more toddlers if there was a demand for them to do so.

"We've been able to increase the number of spaces we have toddler-aged children, but we haven't had the uptake yet of the toddler-aged children," he says.

To date, the provincial government has spent more than \$100 million to help retrofit daycare spaces for younger children.

-reprinted from CTV News

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** funding <sup>[4]</sup>

kindergarten <sup>[5]</sup>

integration <sup>[6]</sup>

full-day early learning <sup>[7]</sup>

unregulated <sup>[8]</sup>

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