

# Aboriginal child care centres 'not sustainable' in city under current rules <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** Inside Toronto

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 18 Oct 2013

## EXCERPTS:

Child cares teaching aboriginal children their language and culture are "not sustainable" in Toronto under the current system of rules, says the executive director of Native Child and Family Services of Toronto.

In an interview, Kenn Richard said the non-profit agency embraced a mandate three years ago to run three child cares in the city which would reinforce the identity of aboriginal children and build their self esteem.

Since then, two of the facilities have closed and the third, in Scarborough, is in danger of closing soon, Richard said, since by operating it NCFST "is subsidizing the province and city to the tune of \$15,000 a month."

The purpose-built childcare at the Native Child and Family Life Centre on Galloway Road has 56 spaces for children from infancy to age six, and staff there can speak to them in Cree and Ojibway.

Richard said the agency will try hard to save the facility, since it is a valuable resource for an aboriginal community in Scarborough "which is only destined to grow."

He added, however, that the childcare is in "extreme jeopardy."

Two others are gone already, though Richard said he holds onto hope they could be reopened. Gizhaadaawgamik, in the First Nations Public School building on Dundas Street in Riverdale, closed after the province in 2011 chose not to renew the license for its school-age program because of concerns related to the building.

Kiiwednong, on Keele Street near Wilson Avenue, closed in 2012 due to low enrolment.

NCFST is also the sponsoring agency of federally-funded Aboriginal Head Start Programs in the city, including one at the First Nations School and another, also called Kiiwednong, at the Keele Street building that housed the childcare.

Richard said aboriginal day cares are at a disadvantage because there's not enough money available to pay for cultural programs such as language instruction and aboriginal mothers have to join a long general queue to qualify for subsidized spaces.

"At the door, they're often not guaranteed a subsidy," he said. "There's not enough money and lots of rules."

A possible solution is to dedicate a funding envelope for aboriginal children and recognize them as a separate stream for subsidized spaces, Richard suggested.

Richard raised the issue at a meeting of the city's Aboriginal Affairs Committee two weeks ago, and Mike Layton, the committee's chairperson, said he will meet with senior staff next week to try to solve whatever problems are affecting the day cares.

"I certainly think there's something to be concerned about," the Trinity-Spadina councillor said on Wednesday.

"They're playing an important role and we need to be supporting that."

Staff of the city's Children's Services department said they consider continued operation of the Galloway Road childcare a priority, and are signing up children and fasttracking applications as quickly as possible to stabilize its enrolment.

The introduction of all-day kindergarten at a public school down the road "drained a lot of kids out of the daycare" at the Native Child and Family Centre, Paul Ainslie, the local councillor, recalled. "I think I can understand the quandary the parents would be in."

Ainslie said he and his staff have been trying to find other children to fill the NCFST facility, recognizing how important it is to the neighbourhood. "Nobody wants to see a day care centre close down," he added.

-reprinted from Inside Toronto

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** aboriginal <sup>[3]</sup>

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**Links**

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