

# Daycare in Toronto: 'Parent summit' participants tell of vastly different experiences <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

Put five people around a table and ask them to talk about their problems with daycare in the city, and you'll get five different opinions.

Diana Tarango is worried. Her 4-year-old daughter is in all-day kindergarten, but because she can't find before- and after-school care, she can't go back to work.

Perry Wong and Nalini Nankoo are frustrated. They have been looking for a daycare space for their 2-year-old son and have put down non-refundable deposits to get on the waiting list at a half-dozen daycares. They can't afford to keep wasting money, and their son still doesn't have a space.

Cynthia Zhu and Kenny Ji couldn't be happier. They've been in Canada for less than a year and they've got both their kids in subsidized daycare spots near their home.

These stories show how ineffective our patchwork daycare system is, said Councillor Shelley Carroll.

"Child care is an issue that affects us all in different ways," she said. "That's why we need these meetings and why we need to get people talking across generations, too."

Parents, grandparents and even childless adults are all affected by the high cost of daycare, said Carroll, and a better system won't just be better for families with young children, it will be good for the economy as well.

There are 57,000 daycare spaces in Toronto, only enough for 21 per cent of the city's children under 12. The city subsidizes 24,264 of those spaces, which only covers about 28 per cent of children in low-income families.

Making matters worse, the wait-list for a subsidized spot is more than 18,500 people long.

The city is preparing a five-year plan for administering Canada's second-largest daycare system and has asked parents to come to meetings - dubbed "parent summits" - to share their experience and help the city shape its priorities.

Zhu and Ji, Wong and Nankoo and Tarango found themselves around a table in the basement of a North York community centre Thursday night. Sometimes it felt like they lived not just in different cities, but on different planets.

Tarango, newly arrived from Hungary, looked into putting her younger son into daycare, but can't believe how much it would cost.

"I was amazed when I asked the price: \$1,500 per kid (per month)!" she said. "In Hungary, after one and a half years, everything is free. The daycare even provides food free, too."

Facilitators steered Tarango toward the subsidy list, something she'd never heard of before the meeting. Differences in income and child's age can determine how hard it is to secure a subsidy, they said.

Zhu and Ji, who arrived in Toronto in the past year from China, were surprised Tarango hadn't signed up for a subsidy immediately. An immigration officer at Pearson airport had given them a brochure when they touched down.

"It's great. And the food is really healthy, too," said Zhu. Daycare is vital for them, said Ji, because they have no relatives to help out.

Toronto-born Wong gets help taking care of his son from his family, but he had never heard of a child care subsidy.

"Our son is already 2 - we're late!" he said.

The parent summit included a half-dozen tables like this one, and after the discussions were over, everyone came together to vote on some simple questions.

Asked to choose the most important feature in a daycare, the room ranked quality well above cost, convenience and hours of operation.

But when queried on how the city should prioritize its spending, there was a dead split between creating more subsidized places and reducing the cost for all.

Councillor Carroll hopes to get the discussion going online as well, and is asking interested parents to follow the Twitter account

@10dollar daycare.

The next round of meetings will happen 9:30-11:30 a.m. this Sunday at the Chinese Cultural Centre, 5183 Sheppard Ave. E., and the Etobicoke Civic Centre, 399 The West Mall.

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

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

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