

Illegal home daycares: Eva's grieving mother calls for more oversight in Ontario ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Even though she sometimes wants to wither away from the world, Ekaterina Evtropova refuses. More than four months after the death of her only daughter at an illegal daycare in Vaughan, she remains firm in her calls for greater oversight in Ontario's unlicensed child-care sector.

"I really want to have something change in the daycare system," Evtropova told the Star in her first media interview since a summer news conference where she announced she's suing the government and her former daycare provider over the death of her daughter, Eva Ravikovich.

"I wake up with Eva and I go to bed with Eva. Every single minute I have her on my mind," she said. "I don't want anything like this to happen to any other child - to any other parents as well."

Evtropova, a 26-year-old nursing student at Ryerson University, said she was startled to read about the unlicensed daycares inspected by the education ministry in the year before her child died.

Last Saturday, the Star reported that the province inspected nearly 300 unlicensed daycare businesses between July 2012 and July 2013. The inspection reports obtained by the Star detail a series of health and safety concerns noted by inspectors, including soggy bedding, unfenced pools and lax supervision - even at daycares deemed legal.

"It's just shocking what's going on in daycares," said Evtropova. "I could not even think that something like this is going on. . . . It's terrible. Terrible."

Unlicensed daycares in Ontario aren't subject to mandatory inspections or regulations imposed on licensed child care. They're only visited by ministry officials when someone complains about them, and inspectors can only enforce a single rule: no more than five kids under age 10, not including the care provider's own children.

Evtropova's 2-year-old daughter, Eva, died July 8 at an unlicensed daycare on Yellowwood Circle, near Langstaff Rd. and Dufferin St., where health officials found dirty conditions, including potentially deadly bacteria on aging food in the kitchen. At least 35 children were signed up for care.

Two other children have died in unlicensed care in the past four months, most recently on Nov. 13, when a 9-month-old baby was found lifeless at a home daycare business in Markham.

Coroners have not determined a cause of death for any of these incidents, and investigations continue.

The deaths have increased pressure on the government to update the decades-old Day Nurseries Act, and address concerns about unlicensed care that have been aired - yet not acted upon - in four public inquests since the 1980s.

Provincial ombudsman André Marin is reviewing the way the education ministry oversees unlicensed care, after the government admitted it failed to respond to 25 of 448 complaints about these businesses between January 2012 and July 2013.

At Queen's Park Monday, the NDP's children and youth services critic lashed out at the minority Liberal government, calling for increased oversight for unlicensed child care.

"Unlicensed daycare inspections in Ontario have revealed a troubling number of violations: children sleeping in damp, airless rooms in soggy bedding or sitting in broken, unsanitary high chairs," said Hamilton-Mountain MPP Monique Taylor.

"Inspecting only when there's a complaint is too late and is resulting in tragic deaths," said Taylor. "The time to act is now."

In the meantime, Evtropova awaits news about how Eva died, and whether the government will produce new legislation regarding unlicensed daycare.

It can be frustrating, even excruciating, she said. But it's all she can do.

"It feels like somebody just went into my sides, scooped everything out, and then put this thin layer of skin over top of it," she said. "The outer world does not see what's going on inside. That's what my feeling is. It's terrible."

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

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