

Lambton County council set to debate closure of daycare centre Thursday ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

For Terri Lynn Sullivan, Coronation Park Day Nursery is her helping hand out of poverty.

Every day the 37-year-old single mother brings two of her children - seven-year-old daughter Tayleena and two-year-old son Trevon - to the Lambton County-run daycare centre.

Sandwiched between two elementary schools, the Oak Avenue facility has become a second home for her children while Sullivan continues her studies at Lambton College.

"It's been their stability while I've been able to stabilize myself," said the Sarnia mother, who has battled both domestic abuse and addictions. "Without it, I don't see how I would be here today."

But Sullivan - like other parents who rely on the daycare centre to help pull themselves out of poverty - may have to find support elsewhere if Lambton County council decides to shutter Coronation Park Day Nursery at its Thursday meeting.

Senior staff recommended the closure in light of the loss of \$1.3 million in provincial funding and fewer children due to the implementation of full-day kindergarten.

The proposal has drawn ire from parents and day-care workers who charge the initial staff report was made public less than a week before it was debated at a standing committee of county council.

That committee ultimately backed the closure.

No public meeting has been held yet to discuss the report with potentially affected families.

Nine delegations comprised of parents, retired workers, another daycare provider and even children are instead signed up to speak at Thursday's meeting.

Sarnia Mayor Mike Bradley has filed a notice of motion to hold off on a decision to allow for a period of public input.

"This isn't a quick decision," said Mary Aikin, president of CUPE Local 2926. "These are 169 children and families to boot that need to be considered and there has not been a time frame to consider that."

The union, which represents 38 out of the 40 workers, has also questioned why the closure was the only recommendation. County staff project a \$1.1 million deficit in 2014.

"If it is going to close, let us see every option," Aikin said.

When asked about this criticism over lack of public input, Lambton County Warden Todd Case said he plans to listen to the delegations Thursday.

"Information was given and if there was not enough information in people's minds, they'll have a chance to speak to it (Thursday)," he said.

The latest county report points to 202 spots in Sarnia and 154 in Lambton County currently available in licensed childcare and home-based centres.

But for Sullivan, Coronation Park is about much more than a place to drop off her children. It is also a second family.

When a blaze damaged her Kathleen Avenue townhouse in 2010, Coronation Park workers came to her family's rescue, ensuring they had clothing, food and even a place to stay.

"They were right there from day one for me and my kid," Sullivan said.

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- reprinted from the Sarnia Observer

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