

Childcare spaces in Vancouver remain a luxury ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

It was a bittersweet moment for Terry Tayler as she stood at a lectern last Thursday in a childcare centre that now bears her name.

There she was with Mayor Gregor Robertson celebrating the news that the city had surpassed its three-year target for creating new childcare spaces by 99 for a total of 599 built or committed since 2012.

But before Tayler showed up to the press conference, the 68-year-old great grandmother dropped off two of her granddaughter's children at an in-house daycare, which she described as "not ideal."

"It's a home where they don't go outside to play and they sit in front of the television all day," said Tayler as children in an adjoining room participated in a yoga class before enjoying the facility's enclosed playground. "And this breaks my heart when I see what is happening here."

Added Tayler: "It's ironic, isn't it? The place is named after me and my own family can't afford to have their kids here."

Tayler is the founding president of the Collingwood Neighbourhood House, which operates the childcare centre on the former site of the Eldorado Hotel at Nanaimo and Kingsway.

The centre, which has 37 spaces for children 18 months old to five years old, was built with \$4.6 million in community amenity contributions as part of the city's agreement with the developer, who built highrises on the property.

Fees are \$1,255 a month for a toddler and \$860 a month for three to five-year-olds. Depending on a parent or parents' income, government subsidies are available to offset the cost. At least 71 children are on the waiting list.

Collingwood Neighbourhood House has a total of 410 childcare spaces spread over 10 facilities, including six schools. Waiting lists range from 200 to more than 300 children, depending on time of year.

"There is a huge demand in the neighbourhood," said Jennifer Gray-Grant, executive director of Collingwood Neighbourhood House. "We love opening new spaces but we always feel like it's a drop in the bucket of this huge need. So it's thrilling to hear the city is exceeding its target with new spaces."

Dr. John Carsley of Vancouver Coastal Health attended the press conference and stressed the need for more quality and affordable childcare.

In Quebec, from where Carsley moved to Vancouver seven years ago, the government devised a subsidized childcare program where it spends more than \$2 billion per year. The result is childcare costs are \$7 per day.

My jaw dropped practically to the ground when I found out what the situation was in British Columbia for early learning and childcare," Carsley said.

Though he described the childcare in B.C. as "wonderful" and believes the public licensing program is one of the best in the world, Carsley said there just aren't enough spaces to meet the demand. And that fact, he said, is having an effect on the health benefits of children.

"The evidence is clear that high quality, licensed, modern early learning care or childcare gives kids a boost," Carsley said. "It makes them better ready for school. And we know that being better ready for school makes kids better ready for life."

In total, there are 3,200 city-facilitated licensed childcare spaces in Vancouver. Each year, the city contributes close to \$2 million in grants that support childcare and early learning.

City council went on record in 2011 of supporting a coalition's campaign to lobby the provincial government to implement a \$10-a-day childcare plan for B.C.

"Unfortunately, we don't see the type of support we'd like to see from the provincial and federal governments for bigger childcare programs," the mayor said. "So many cities and towns are left on our own to try and make the best of it."

-reprinted from Vancouver Courier

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