

More than just a child care waitlist registry - valued family support, assessment services should stay within Andrew Fleck ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Despite a \$4 million provincial funding infusion for Ottawa child care services, parents and child care staff throughout the city are flummoxed as to why the City of Ottawa is ending community provision of a valued assessment and referral service that fielded over 11,500 calls from parents in 2013.

Andrew Fleck Child Care Services, one of Ottawa's oldest and most respected centres has run the Child Care Information service for the City of Ottawa since 1982. From November 2014, the city plans to have its 3-1-1 operators field child care inquiries, regardless of need or complexity.

Last year at Child Care Information (CCI), trained early childhood educators (ECEs) provided a range of services and supports to 50,000 families through workshops, needs assessments, family support, an on-site resource centre, community outreach and educational workshops. Child Care Information also tracks and keeps statistics on the queries and services Ottawa families called the information line to inquire about. The service is also utilized extensively by other child care centres and community-based programs.

Dick Stewart, retired senior manager with the city of Ottawa, expressed his deep dismay at the centre's closure. Stewart, who is now active in the city's voluntary and not-for-profit sector, says CCI is much more than just a parent referral and registry function:

"There cannot be any reduction in service [CCI] provides to parents and families, but it is not regular call center activity," Stewart stressed.

Initially, the City of Ottawa had indicated that only the automated registry would be uploaded to the city-run 3-1-1 line. But recently the Ottawa child care community learned that the expanded service would no longer be provided by Andrew Fleck and the service contract would be terminated.

Athina Basaliadis, President of Local 2204 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), said trained ECEs offer an invaluable support to parents trying to find the right child care centre for their child with special needs.

"For families in crisis, CCI is a life-line to accessing other supports in the community. 3-1-1 operators are a wonderful resource to the people of Ottawa. But their expertise is referral.

"The ECEs that answer the CCI call number provide needed assessments and supports and help parents to determine both their short-term and long-term child care needs," Basaliadis concluded.

- reprinted from the Digital Journal

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