Child care chain threatens beloved non-profit daycare [1]

Author: Laurie Monsebraaten
Source: Toronto Star
Format: Article
Publication Date: 17 Jul 2014

AVAILABILITY
Read online [2]

EXCERPTS:

For the second time this summer, parents at a high-quality daycare in Toronto are facing the loss of their beloved centre because a for-profit child care chain wants the space and is willing to pay more rent.

North York Little Prints Daycare, a non-profit centre in a commercial building at Yonge and York Mills, opened 20 years ago with more than $300,000 in capital grants from the city and Queen's Park.

The daycare's previous landlords offered free rent so the centre could keep parent fees affordable and provide a high-quality service to building tenants, said parent Neil MacCarthy, whose two daughters, aged 5 and 18 months, attend Little Prints.

But since current landlord Manulife was approached by the Kids & Company chain earlier this year, everything has changed, MacCarthy said. As a result, Little Prints is being asked to take on more space that would require $250,000 in retrofit costs as well as annual rent charges of about $130,000. That is in addition to $170,000 a year the daycare already pays for property taxes and utilities.

The daycare hopes its offer to pay some rent will convince the landlord to let Little Prints stay.
"We can't pay as much as what the for-profit company is offering, but we think there is value in our longstanding connection to the community and our high-quality program," said MacCarthy, who is also a member of the daycare's board. A spokeswoman for Manulife said the company does not comment on ongoing negotiations.

As reported in the Star earlier this week, George Brown College's Scotia Plaza daycare, in the financial district, is also poised to lose its lease to Kids & Company, which offers spots only to employees of companies that pay annual memberships starting at about $5,000.

Scotia Plaza landlord Dream Unlimited had given George Brown notice to vacate by the end of November. But after calls from the Star, the landlord has extended its lease for a year, to give parents time to find alternatives.

Since for-profit daycares aren't eligible for city child-care subsidies, low-income families at both Scotia Plaza and Little Prints would be shut out if Kids & Company takes over.

"I don't know what we'll do if we lose this spot," said Little Prints parent Rachel Bar, one of about 20 subsidized parents in the 85-space centre that serves children from birth to age 5. She and her husband are both graduate students and can't afford to continue full-time studies without a daycare subsidy, she said.

"It just doesn't seem right that a daycare business can push out a high-quality non-profit centre," said Bar, 30, whose 14-month-old daughter Miriam started at the centre six months ago.

Kids & Company, which began with one centre in the Toronto area in 2002, has nearly 60 sites across Canada and the United States and has created "thousands" of daycare spots employing more than 400 staff in the GTA, said spokesperson Linda Starr.

It has grown "by creating a nurturing and educational environment for thousands of children and building positive relationships with the landlords, corporate partners and the communities we serve," she wrote in an email. The company has no further expansion plans in Toronto, she added.

Councillor Jaye Robinson, whose Don Valley West ward includes Little Prints, said she hopes the city can save the centre and others that may be at risk.

"To see the community and taxpayer investment go up in smoke is devastating," she said.
Voluminous Canadian and international research shows that for-profit child care tends to be lower quality than non-profit centres and that corporate chains are the worst, noted Martha Friendly of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

"The most important factor in quality is the staff, which is also your largest expense," she said. "So if you are taking money out for profit, you are paying your staff lower wages and benefits, or you have less staff."

Related link: Proposed Ontario child care law might save two Toronto daycares [3]
Region: Ontario [4]
Tags: privatization [5]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/07/child-care-chain-threatens-beloved-non-profit-daycare
Links
[1] https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/07/child-care-chain-threatens-beloved-non-profit-daycare [2] https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2014/07/17/child_care_chain_threatens_beloved_nonprofit_daycare.html [3] http://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/07/proposed-ontario-child-care-law-might-save-two-toronto-daycares [4] https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856 [5] https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/privatization