

# Daycare space for McGill limited, waiting list over 700 children long <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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### EXCERPTS:

The Post-Graduate Students' Society (PGSS) is seeking to reapply to open a daycare centre after having been denied twice by the provincial government. Currently, members of the McGill community face a shortage of daycare spaces, with university waiting lists for daycare spaces running over 700 children.

According to PGSS Member Services Officer Brighita Lungu, 16 per cent of graduate students and 30 per cent of post-graduate students have children, accounting for approximately 1,000 PGSS members. The lack of a daycare for the PGSS poses a series of problems for student parents trying to focus on academia, while also having to take care of their children.

"I can imagine parents can't focus on their studies, [and] can't dedicate their time as much as possible," Lungu said. "That has repercussions. Their quality of performance, [including] writing papers, going to conferences [are impeded] because they have kids, and that's quite unfair."

Many PGSS parents have attempted to place their children in other daycares on campus, including the Student Society of McGill University (SSMU) daycare and the McGill Childcare Centre (MCC).

The SSMU daycare has 40 spots available, 10 of which are guaranteed for children of graduate students. According to SSMU VP of Clubs and Services Stefan Fong, graduate students often utilize the majority of spaces.

"Statistically, there are fewer undergraduate students [with kids]," Fong said. "Last year, there were maybe 10 undergrads to 30 [graduate students]."

The waitlist for the SSMU daycare currently has 40 people on it, the majority of whom are graduate students, as children of undergraduate parents have priority in being admitted to the daycare.

The MCC provides 106 spaces for children of faculty, staff, undergraduate, and graduate students at McGill. However, according to a report released in October 2013 titled "Childcare Access at McGill University: an Overview of the Current Situation," there are 749 children on the MCC waitlist, with the children of graduate students comprising of the largest proportion at 259 spots.

According to Diana Tosi, assistant director of the MCC, the daycare has previously attempted to expand their spaces in order to reduce the waitlist, but was also denied by the government.

"We applied two different times when the government opened the doors to new projects," Tosi said. "The first one I believe was two years ago, and we were denied. We applied for 80 spaces and then the government opened up more spaces a year later and we applied again [...] last June, and we were denied again. Very few spaces were given to the downtown core, so we probably didn't even have a chance."

PGSS and the MCC's failed attempts to expand their daycare operations are the result of limited financial support from the provincial government because every space for a child is subsidized by the government, there are large costs associated with providing additional daycare spaces provided.

"It's hard to open a daycare now; we're happy we opened one [10 years] ago because now the rules are a lot more strict, because there are too many daycares in Quebec," explained Fong. "Every time [the provincial government] adds a new daycare to the list, they have to add more money in subsidies."

"Parents pay only \$7 a day, and that includes two snacks and a lunch," Tosi explained. "The rest of it is subsidized by the government. So this \$7 a day program is very costly for the provincial government."

The minimum daily fee for provincial daycare is expected to go up to \$7.30 this October, Tosi explained, also highlighting the impact of subsidies on daycares.

Even without a daycare, PGSS has attempted to provide support and services for student parents. This includes creating family-friendly

events for PGSS members to participate in, and improved parental support services on their website.

PGSS is also implementing a Study Saturday program, where student volunteers take care of children of students on one Saturday a month while the parents focus on their studies.

"Study Saturday is a cool program," Lungu said. "We had a huge turnout: Around 40 parents with about 50 kids that expressed interest. We only made the budget for around 30 kids."

Lungu explained the previous reasons that PGSS was denied permissions to start a daycare.

"One time, [we were denied] because the space was too small and not considered a success, and the last application they submitted last year was [denied] based on zoning," she said. "[The space is] not considered a residential area, and there is not high [enough rate of] immigration [....] Its not a high priority on the Ministry's list for this area to have a daycare specifically for PGSS."

The PGSS does intend to apply for a daycare again, though a concrete plan has yet to be developed.

"Unless you have new facts and information and present the problem in a different light I don't think we [will] have much success," Lungu said. "We're trying to retune the project and basically put the documents together. Likely by the end of this year we are going to apply again."

**Region:** Quebec <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** funding <sup>[4]</sup>

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