

Landmark Toronto nursery school could soon be forced to close

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EXCERPTS:

TORONTO - Since the days of the Great Depression, Bond Child and Family Development has been working with preschool children in the centre of the city.

But now the nursery is at imminent risk of shutting down.

The charity was founded by the Jackman family in 1937 as the Bond Nursery School, and through the decades has won awards for its pioneering work in early childhood education.

The nursery offers half-day programs catering mainly to new Canadians, many from lower income families, many with special needs.

It operates out of two rooms in the Metropolitan Church, with its adjacent playground built by donations from Bay Street financial institutions.

But a crisis arose when the church announced renovations, necessitating a move by the end of 2014.

In addition, one of the facility's principal financial supporters, the city of Toronto, changed its funding criteria and required that Bond Child and Family Development start offering full day programs.

A spokesperson for the board, Jo-Anne Liburd, told Global News that they have been searching for a year for a new home with no success - rents are too high for a charity, particularly with the new need for a facility that can accommodate young children all day long.

The charity's mandate demands that it be located in the centre of the city, where real estate is expensive.

And talks with the Toronto District School Board on sharing a school building were fruitless.

Now the outlook is grim.

"We need an angel and a miracle rolled into one," said Liburd.

The school lost some children with the arrival of full day kindergarten in the public system, but still finds there is a demand for its services, particularly among families on wait lists for child care. It currently has 25 children.

"Once we're gone our children, particularly those with special needs, will have no other alternatives," said Liburd.

Among those exploring the playground on a warm fall day was Hanzata Youssef, not quite 3-years-old, who started coming at the beginning of September. Her parents moved to Canada from Egypt two years ago for university.

"She is starting to say English words, telling me her new friends' names and what she's doing here," said her mother Hoda Youssef. "She's happier now."

Youssef heard about Bond Children and Family Development via word of mouth from other new Canadians and is upset that it is threatened with closure.

"I'd be so sad and my daughter would be depressed," she said.

The board has reached out to local political representatives for assistance in locating a new home.

"I don't think anyone is giving up yet," said City Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam.

"I think we all recognize it's an essential service."

But the deadline is pressing. Although it would be closing its doors on December 31, the board must give notice to parents and staff by

mid-October.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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