

Vaughan daycare shut amid force-feeding allegations ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Cudley Corner Child Care Centre, a private daycare in a Vaughan strip mall, has been closed by provincial licensing officials over a raft of alleged health and safety violations including force-feeding infants.

The alleged violations, caught on the centre's security video earlier this month, include staff who physically restrained children in the infant room while "(forcing) food down the children's mouths," according to a ministry protection order issued Friday.

In one instance, a staff member was allegedly observed pushing a child's forehead back to be fed while the child cried and kicked in distress, according to the ministry order taped to the centre's door. The staff member allegedly also laid the children down flat on her lap when she fed them, causing a choking hazard, the order said.

In an interview last night, the daycare's lawyer Symon Zucker said the ministry's description of the video "is false and misleading."

"The video simply does not support or corroborate the allegations," said Zucker, who is launching a court action to get the centre re-opened.

The ministry became aware of the alleged violations on Thursday when York Region Children's Aid Society filed a complaint, said Alessandra Fusco, a spokesperson for Education Minister Liz Sandals.

Children's Aid, which is continuing to investigate, also contacted York Regional Police, Fusco said in an email. But police have indicated they will not be investigating, she added.

The ministry order was issued "to suspend the operation of the centre and address identified threats to the health, safety and welfare of children," Fusco said.

"These threats related to the use of prohibited practices ... in regard to harsh and degrading measures on children, specifically force-feeding of infants," she said. "Children were also at risk due to insufficient supervision and failure to follow the centre's sanitary practices."

Unsanitary conditions allegedly included an incident where a staff member was observed taking a bib from the garbage and putting it on a child. A child in the infant room was also observed leaving the area unattended and returning without staff noticing, according to the ministry order.

Staff behaviour was "both highly dangerous ... (and) would humiliate the children or undermine their self-respect," said the order, signed by Pat Cosgrove, a licensing and compliance manager for the ministry.

The 96-space centre on Major Mackenzie Dr., west of Highway 400, opened in May 2013 and serves children from birth to 6-years-old, according to ministry licensing records. It is part of a chain of five centres in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton operated by Cudley Corner Child Care Centres Ltd.

The daycare's lawyer said Cudley Care suspended two employees as a result of the ministry's investigation last Thursday and agreed to make a number of changes requested by ministry staff.

"The following day, after being told by the ministry people 'don't worry about it, just follow ministry recommendations,' the director ... arrives and does a protection order, which essentially suspends the licence," Zucker said.

A staff member leaving the shuttered Vaughan centre Monday evening was also puzzled by the ministry's action.

"Everything looks worse on recording, especially when there's no sound," said the woman who refused to give her name. "If I was a parent, I would be pissed if my kid came home starving."

The staff member acknowledged a worker "kind of forced" the child to eat but noted "these girls had the kids' best intentions at heart."

Carolyn Ferns of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care said she feels sorry for parents who rely on the centre and are now

scrambling for another alternative. She said she is wondering what is being done to ensure “quality options for all families who need them.” York Region has one of the fastest-growing child populations in the country and the need for child care is very high, she noted. Yet the latest regional statistics show there are only 245 regulated spaces for every 1,000 children.

-reprinted from Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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