

Hefty rent hike threatens future of Tunney's Pasture daycare, parents say ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A bilingual daycare that has been used by federal workers at Tunney's Pasture for nearly 30 years has now been set up for failure, says its parent-run board of directors.

The Garderie Tunney's Daycare, which opened inside the Statistics Canada building in 1988, originally had no rental costs due to a federal subsidy. The original goal was to help promote gender equality in the workplace by providing working moms with convenient childcare. The non-profit daycare included an infant program, which is common now but was rare at the time.

The days of free rent came to an end when the Conservative government pulled the subsidy on Oct. 1, 2014. The daycare's board felt it had no choice but to sign a five-year lease at \$82,000. That rental cost will almost double to \$150,000 on July 1.

Olivier Marois, president of the Garderie Tunney's board of directors, says going from zero to what the government calls "market rent" meant they immediately had to increase daycare fees by around 15 per cent and lay off a few workers to cover costs. They now care for 49 children and employ 15 full-time and three part-time workers, many of them early childhood educators.

"In 2014, when we signed the lease, we were given six months' notice to pay \$82,000, so we raised the fee \$170 across the board for all programs," he said. "It is a great space but it's bigger than what we need according to regulations. So we are trying to increase the number of children so we can increase revenue."

However, in order to retrofit the space to accommodate more children they need to hire architects to redesign the space and apply for a new permit of operations through the province — a process that could take up to a year. Also, a request to freeze the rent until an expansion is possible was denied.

The board has set up an E-petition, asking the president of the Treasury Board to review its existing policy regarding all workplace daycare centres.

Rates at Garderie are currently \$1,700 per month for infants, \$1,350 for toddlers and \$1,150 for preschoolers. Parents say that, due to rising costs, the daycare is becoming "highly uncompetitive," which will potentially lead to its closure.

Regardless, Cecilia Lei, a parent and vice-president of the board, says it's still too early to talk about giving up.

"We are still holding out hope that we will be able to get the federal government to accommodate us. ... We don't know what PSPC has in mind but we are very keen to talk to them, to give us some space to allow us to change our programming."

Public Services and Procurement Canada had not responded to an interview request.

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