

YMCA daycare workers strike at 3 Ottawa locations ^[1]

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Source: CBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 12 Jul 2016

AVAILABILITY

Read online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Dozens of childcare workers at two YMCA locations and an east Ottawa public school are officially on strike after going one year without a contract, leaving nearly 350 children without daycare.

About 40 workers, represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) 2204, began a picket at 7 a.m. Tuesday at three locations:

- Taggart Family Y on Argyle Avenue in downtown Ottawa.
- Ruddy Family Y on Centrum Boulevard in Orléans.
- Avalon Public School on Portobello Boulevard in Orléans.

The workers include early childhood educators and educational assistants.

Their local union president, Athina Basiliadis, said low wages, poor benefits and a lack of a pension are the sticking points. Right now, workers make an average of \$14.41 per hour, and want an hourly wage that resembles the 2012 provincial average of \$17.29.

"It's hard for (workers) to provide the best quality care when poor pay and working conditions contribute to poor continuity of care for young children," Basiliadis said in a union news release.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees said the number of children enrolled is:

- 232 at Avalon.
- 48 at Ruddy.
- 63 at Taggart.

Contract negotiations have tackled issues like high staff turnover, plus the recruitment and retention of skill workers, the union release added.

In a statement, Rob Adams, associate vice president of child care, camping and youth engagement at the YMCA-YWCA in the Ottawa area, said his organization hired interim staff to keep the daycares open during the strike.

Adams also said childcare centres would be closed on Tuesday, but would reopen Wednesday.

Union vice-president Carla Tomlinson is concerned "tender, young children" have a difficult time adjusting to the unfamiliar faces of temporary workers called in to replace striking workers.

"Having a room full of strangers to come to take care of you can be a very difficult thing," she said. "Having strangers come into your program, who don't know the program and don't know the children and families seems like it could be a bit of a disaster. It's not providing continuity and best care for children."

Meanwhile, Basiliadis said her workers have received a lot of support from the community.

"We had an info picket [at Taggart Family Y on Monday] and we had a lot of parents participating and we felt that it was positive and a success."

She also said the union is hoping to meet with YMCA officials on Tuesday.

-reprinted from CBC News

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