



Champion COMMUNITY Page

Little down time for day care entrepreneur

You have to be on all the time, every shift. And you can't hide if you're having a bad day.

Day care seems so easy. Keep one eye on a few kids, watch your soaps, manage a few household chores, and it's easy to have dinner on the table at six.

According to Rebecca Caspar, day care can be like that, but it shouldn't.

Ms Caspar has been operating a day care out of her Briar Crescent home for the past year. A lengthy description of activities she sets for her young charges seems likely to keep them busy enough, until she begins with the afternoon list and the realization sinks in of just how hectic her schedule is.

Ms Caspar used the services of the Halton Child Care Registry, which seeks to link parents of children needing day care with local providers. The registry helped her get started as a small business and has kept her client list full since the beginning, she said.

"I needed information and they were there," said Ms Caspar. "I found the registry very helpful. I didn't have to advertise and I used their service to become licensed. Most of the other agencies take a cut off the top."

Affiliation through the registry also provides some discount offers on food and art supplies from area companies. In addition the registry insurance policy saves the day care \$34 a month in coverage.

Ms Caspar also takes care of her own five-year-old son Cory. She says operating a day care provides her with the opportunity to be with her son and allows her to make a lot more money than she would as an early childhood educator.

The child care industry typically pays its front line employees about \$18,000 per year, while Ms Caspar said she will make more than \$30,000 this year.

"It's organized as a small

business," she explained in between answering questions from inquisitive Taryn. "To me it's a career. I provide a contract to parents. There are emergency forms, transportation forms, medical forms and accident forms that need to be filled out. Everything is covered."

In the event that she is unable to take children on a particular day parents are encouraged to have a back-up care giver. Ms Caspar said she has only taken three days off in the past year, two for funerals, and with the contingency plans in place there was no difficulty. Reliability is a key in this industry.

Her contract requires that she give four weeks notice for holiday time but she has provided parents with four months notice on an upcoming holiday.

Ms Caspar has substantial background in childhood education and development. She holds a degree in social work and was employed for some time in a group home facility for high-demand young offenders.

She said work there was not what she had expected so she began to look into other areas.

She said one-on-one contact with the kids is what first attracted her to day care. In fact, she is limited by law to caring for no more than five children other than her own. In a typical large day care center the ratio between staff and children is more likely 10-1.

The day begins before 8 a.m. when the first two children arrive at her door. Another comes at 8:30 a.m. and the final one arrives at nine.

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Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Youngsters Adam O'Donnell-Gillies and Cory Early play a game of Snakes and Ladders at a local day care centre.

Registry seeks uniform day care rules to regulate system across the region

Seek the underpinnings of the workaday world and you will find the foundation anchored in a little known web of independent child care services.

Child care comes in as many shapes and sizes as children themselves. There are large day care centers, licensed organizations, some of which are operated by big corporations for their employees. Then there are independents and small businesses. However, the most pervasive type of child care is the compliant neighbour who takes in a few of the local kids for a fee.

This unregulated industry has caused some concern among parents and local governments. There are guidelines for operating a day care but they are not well known nor are they strictly followed.

The new Halton Child Care Registry is aimed at shedding some light on these issues for both parents and day care providers.

Operating as a referral service for parents, the registry workers are also trying to get day care providers in Halton to sign on and

abide by minimum guidelines.

Registered day cares and their operators are scrutinized by cross-checking criminal and Children's Aid Society records of those working or living on the premises. In addition, operators have a fire and safety check done and are provided with provincial regulations.

In the end it is supposed to give some level of comfort to nervous parents and offer neighbourhood operations insight into how they should be running — while providing a steady stream of referrals to match supply and demand.

"Parents need to know," said Janet Proctor, marketing director for the organization. "People have cared for children in their homes for years. We are trying to make the services more consistent."

The Halton Child Care Registry office is located in Milton at the old train station in Chris Hadfield Park. It falls under the

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