

Twenty claims have now been filed against daycare

By MELANIE HENNESSEY
The Champion

Although it's been over a month since Safe and Sound Children's Centre closed its doors for good in Milton, many former employees and parents are claiming the company still owes them money.

Ontario Ministry of Labour Spokesperson Belinda Sutton said 20 claims have now been filed against the centre by former employees and are being investigated, up from the six reported earlier by The Champion.

"These claims, ranging from \$700 to \$4,000, were for unpaid wages, vacation and termination pay," she said.

The daycare had three locations in Milton — Thompson Road in the New Life Pentecostal Church, which shut down in July, and Pine Street and No. 3 Sideroad, which both closed in August.

Letters that were distributed to parents and staff at the centres from Executive Director Peter Doddington and former administrator Teresa Lister indicated the daycares were shut down due to the divorce between Mr. Doddington and his wife and the subsequent freezing of the centre's bank accounts.

Jane Irish of Milton had her daughter enrolled with Safe and Sound and alleged that she was only given one day's notice by

phone that the centre was closing.

"Fortunately, I was able to change my hours at work to pick my daughter up from school," she said. "It's just the inconvenience more than anything else."

She alleged that she's still owed \$175 for a week's daycare, plus her original retainer fee of about \$100.

"While \$175 doesn't seem like a lot, it's just the principle," she said.

Local couple Roy and Karin Ford, who had their daughter enrolled at the Thompson Road location, alleged that Safe and Sound still owes them about \$375 that would've covered 10 days of daycare, along with the retainer fee. Despite this, the couple still holds a high opinion of the staff and care their daughter received when she was there.

"Our daughter had a good three-and-a-half years there," Ms Ford said. "The women that worked there were wonderful with her. Our hearts go out to all of the employees who lost their jobs."

The Champion left a phone message for Mr. Doddington and also delivered a letter to his home on Friday seeking comment on the Ministry of Labour investigation and the allegations from parents who used the daycare's services. By yesterday at press time, he hadn't responded.

Safe and Sound is now subject to a Superior Court of Justice order

winding up, or closing down, the company. "The court order stays any proceedings against the company, such as an order to pay wages," Ms Sutton said.

She added that after the ministry completes its investigation, BDO Dunwoody of Mississauga, the liquidator appointed for Safe and Sound, will be notified of the amounts in question for any money owing.

The order states that BDO Dunwoody is authorized "to pay any debts, charges and expenses of Safe and Sound as the liquidator considers necessary or desirable for the purposes of carrying out this order."

Safe and Sound has a long and complicated history. It was initially operated by Edwina Doddington, but the business was put in her husband Peter's name. When the couple separated, he kept the daycare centres and took over operating them with several other business people, said Ms Doddington.

The No. 3 Sideroad and Pine Street locations are still up for sale — a process that has now been taken over by BDO Dunwoody.

Purchase offers for the buildings, land and daycare equipment are being accepted until October 15, with a closing date of October 28.

Melanie Hennessey can be reached at mhennessy@milton-canadianchampion.com.

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