

# Parents desperate for childcare spaces: panel

*"You can hear the anxiety in their voices," says daycare operator*

By Andrew Fruch  
SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

For working parents of young children, access to quality childcare is a top concern. But with a province-wide shortage of space in childcare facilities and a price tag that is simply too high for low-income families, many parents are finding it next to impossible to place their children in a much-needed environment.

A panel of childcare experts gathered at the Parkview Children's Centre in Burlington earlier this month to discuss the challenges of providing quality childcare in Halton and the province.

"There are about 9,000 children in Halton who are waiting for childcare programs," said Sharon Pirie of the Parkview Children's Centre. "There is also about 225 children with special needs who are not receiving services."

At Parkview alone, there are about 150 families on the

waiting list for the infant program, as well as a waiting list for toddler programs.

"You can hear the anxiety in their (parents) voices," said Pirie. "We do get phone calls, and parents are concerned. They have been home for a year; their baby is 12 months old and they are ready to go back to work, and they don't know what they're going to do."

#### Many just can't afford it

The cost of childcare at Parkview is \$55 per child each day. For families that rely on the taxable government cheques of \$100 a month per child, they would not be able to send their child to a centre like Parkview, even if a space opened up.

Another concern for childcare is a high employee turnover rate. Early Childhood Educators (ECE) receive no benefits at most centres and some receive only minimum wage. This had led many ECE personnel to move on to better paying employment either in the education field or dif-

ferent fields altogether.

"I was speaking to a couple of supervisors over the last couple of weeks. I heard other people say, 'We feel a little bit like a stepping stone,'" said Pirie. "And unfortunately, because of the wages, people are either moving on within child studies, going off and hoping to work for the public school board, and then some of my other staff are taking courses in programs not at all related. So unfortunately, people are moving on and leaving the field."

Definitely wages are a big factor in that as well as the benefits."

For many, if not all, of the parents and ECE personnel, the answer to childcare would be the creation of a national childcare program.

Oakville MPP Kevin Flynn attended the session and discussed ways to make both federal and provincial governments listen to the needs of parents and workers.

"People think that childcare has fallen off the political radar," said Flynn. "And to be honest, I think it has. Other issues have kind of risen to the top. For a while there, for precious few years or months, I thought we were going to get a national childcare plan and that excited me. Even though I wasn't going partake in that, I was hoping my grandchildren would."

According to Flynn, now is the time for those with an interest in childcare to voice their concerns.

"We're going to a fixed term of government at the provincial level. We know there will be an election every four years. So if childcare is your issue, between now and October, you need to let people who want your vote know this is your issue and you want something done on this."

#### Canada lags behind

Sue Colley of the Code Blue Campaign for Child Care was on hand to comment on the current failings in the government.

"Canada is at the bottom of the 40 industrialized nations in terms of childcare spending."

Colley said the government has failed to meet its promise of 125,000 new spaces in childcare, and the Universal Child Care Plan, which sends out the \$100 cheques is hugely insufficient.

"If you don't have a national non-profit system, you are in trouble."

Executive Director of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC), Elizabeth Ablett, voiced her concerns over the lack of new funding promised by the provincial government.

"Premier McGuinty promised \$350 million in spending for childcare," said Ablett. "Only \$25 million in new funding was included in the last provincial budget. The city of Toronto needs \$35 million just to maintain their current level of services."

Ablett also said Ontario received \$100 million from the federal government to be used on childcare, but that there was no mention of that \$100 million in the budget.

In response to that, the OCBCC has organized a letter faxing campaign to Finance Minister Greg Sorbara.

Through the course of the session at Parkview, it was evident all the factions present believe an overhaul of the childcare system is desperately needed in the province if not the country.

For more information on childcare in the province, visit the OCBCC website at [www.childcareontario.org](http://www.childcareontario.org) or the Code Blue Campaign website at [www.buildchildcare.ca](http://www.buildchildcare.ca).

## Anniversary contest deadlines extended

The deadline for two school contests commemorating Milton's 150th anniversary have been extended.

Now, entries in the Town's Milly the Millstone story writing contest and the Milton Historical Society's poster board contest will be accepted until Friday, June 1.

While winners will be recognized as individuals, prizes will be awarded to classrooms, so it's important that entries are submitted through schools.

Prizes include pizza parties, monetary awards and a visit from Milly the Millstone, the official mascot for the 150th anniversary.

For more details on the contests call (905) 878-7252, ext. 2187, or visit [www.milton.ca](http://www.milton.ca), select the 150th anniversary logo and choose 'school contests'.

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