



## A GREAT PLACE TO GROW PUBLIC CHILD CARE

# Public child care profile: Toronto, Ontario

## A big role in child care

The City of Toronto is the biggest provider of publicly operated child care services in North America outside the education system. The City is among 27 of Ontario's 47 municipal or regional governments that operate child care centres and/or family child care agencies—one of the roles set out for them in the province's *Day Nurseries Act*.

In addition to provision of public child care, the *Act* also defines local governments' role in regulated child care in financing and financial administration. The Toronto Children's Services Division is the "child care services system manager" for the municipality, managing the public financing and providing the associated planning and administration of child care provision (private non-profit, for-profit, and public services) in the City. The City also finances 20% of the budget for fee subsidies, wage grants, family resource programs and resources for special needs children, and 50% of administration costs (the remaining 80% and 50%, respectively, are paid by the provincial government).

### Why public early childhood education and child care?

Most people don't think of non-profit community-based child care centres as "private", but they are. That's because parent or voluntary groups—not public entities such as municipalities or school boards—bear the responsibility for creating and maintaining centres. Almost all of Canada's patchwork delivery of regulated child care services is private, relying on for-profit or non-profit services. And today, Canada is experiencing an alarming trend—a surge in for-profit child care. In some provinces, almost all new spaces are for-profit.

Children and families would be far better served by a public system that blends early childhood education and child care—in other words, publicly funded and delivered early childhood education and care programs managed and mostly operated by local governments or education authorities.

Here's what well-designed public systems can deliver:

- Integrated early childhood education and kindergarten programs.
- Better access and inclusion of families—no matter where they live or their language, origins or abilities.
- More consistent quality.
- With small or no fees, all parents who want child care can afford it.
- Services that are planned and accountable to communities.

### What we want

Our vision is a public system where every child can attend a program that blends early childhood education and care. The research and experience shows that systems based on privately funded and delivered child care are not a foundation for building blended, high quality ECEC programs.

Support public child care—it's the way to go for a great place to grow.

<sup>1</sup> Municipal or regional governments are called CMSMs (Consolidated Municipal Service Managers) or, in the North, DSSABs (District Social Service Administration Boards) for social services purposes.



Overall in the City of Toronto, there are 929 public, non-profit and for-profit child care centres and 21 family child care agencies—also in all three sectors—with more than 55,000 spaces (October 2008) serving 21% of Toronto’s child population 0-9 years. While all municipal centres and family child care services provide subsidized child care, not all non-profit and for-profit centres do. (See “Toronto’s other child care roles” below).

## Publicly operated child care

According to Toronto Children’s Services:

- There are 57 child care centres and one family child care agency publicly operated by the City of Toronto.
- 6% of child care spaces in Toronto were publicly operated in October 2008.
- There were 3,011 municipal spaces in October 2008.
- Child care is provided for children aged 0-9 years by city-operated programs.
- All municipal centres and family child care services provide child care for subsidized children.
- All municipal services provide care for children with special needs.
- Publicly operated services are located mostly in areas deemed to be “high need”.
- Centres are generally open from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
- Child care staff at the municipal centres are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 79.

### **Bellevue Child Care Centre**

Located in the Kensington Market area of downtown Toronto, the publicly-operated Bellevue Child Care Centre accommodates 10 infants and 10 toddlers.

The centre’s cozy setting in a modified Heritage Victorian house on a quiet residential street allows for a home-like atmosphere for this young age group. The outdoor play space, surrounded by large, shady trees, has been specifically designed for infants and toddlers.

All of the full-time staff at Bellevue have diplomas in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Some of the additional languages spoken by staff include Spanish, Croatian, Italian, Finnish and Tagalog. The centre provides field placements for ECE students, offering them valuable experience with the youngest age groups.

According to Toronto Children’s Services, municipal centres offer high quality programs that are child-oriented, with a planned curriculum that fosters the educational, recreational and developmental needs of children. Nutrition, art, drama, music and physical education are all integral to programming. Individual child assessments are conducted with the use of developmental profiles and parent/staff interviews.

As a group, employees in municipal centres are among the most highly qualified in Toronto. The City hires early childhood educators (ECEs) with a minimum two-year community college diploma or equivalent.

The City’s programs operate with an inclusive framework. Parents are encouraged to participate through planning, providing program input, sitting on parent advisory committees, visits, field trips, and fundraising and social events. Programs are partners with the communities they serve, using available resources (e.g., libraries, schools and parks) and sharing their resources (e.g., student training and advisory committees). The City plans programs to meet the diverse needs of city residents. For example, there are four programs currently located in shelters.



**The City of Toronto's municipal child care centres quality promise:**

- Caring, nurturing and safe environment
- High quality, child-oriented programs
- Positive and preventative behaviour management
- Fully trained ECE staff
- Parental involvement and support to the family
- Nutritious meals and snacks
- Choice of location preference (close to work/close to home).

**Toronto's other child care roles**

In addition to providing publicly operated child care, the City is responsible for management of the public child care funds that come from the province, including federal dollars transferred to the provincial government. Within this responsibility, the City plays a variety of roles with non-profit and for-profit child care programs that have service contracts (purchase-of-service agreements) to provide subsidized child care. Since City policy adopted in December 2004, there have been no new service contracts for subsidy provision with for-profit operators (several other Ontario municipalities have since adopted similar policies).

As part of the overall approach to quality improvement it has voluntarily assumed over the years, the City has developed its own Operating Criteria—requirements that go above and beyond the *Day Nurseries Act*. To receive a service contract from the City, a centre must meet these criteria. The City's Children's Services Consultants use the criteria to work with community-based non-profit and for-profit programs to promote ongoing quality improvement.

The City of Toronto also engages in research and evaluation to examine quality and test out new ideas. For example, the Toronto First Duty pilot project blended care, education and family support to attempt to create a "seamless day" in five sites. First Duty and its evaluation form part of the national body of knowledge about blending early childhood education and care in school-based settings. Another example of a Toronto-initiated research project is Gordon Cleveland's 2008 analysis of City Operating Criteria data (see "Relevant quality research" on the next page).

For many years, the Toronto Child Care Advisory Committee has provided "advice and support on child care issues to Toronto City Council and to the staff of Toronto Children's Services". The Committee's members represent the various sectors of the Toronto child care community. The City also has an appointed Children's Services Advisory Committee to "advise the Mayor and City Council on policies, programs, strategies and actions to achieve a comprehensive system of integrated, inclusive and high quality services that will support best outcomes for Toronto's children."

**Toronto Operating Criteria**

There are nine categories in the Toronto Operating Criteria: Infant Program, Toddler Program, Preschool Program, School-Age Program, Playground, Nutrition, Administration, Financial Management and Working Together.

Each item within these categories is measured on a one-to-four scale. Child care centres must receive an "adequate" on at least three. Monitoring is conducted annually by a Children's Services Consultant and is unannounced. Child care centre ratings are posted on the Children's Services website.



## Relevant quality research

In a study conducted by Gordon Cleveland (2008) comparing for-profit and non-profit child care services in the City of Toronto, it was found that municipal centres had higher quality scores on every scale using the Operating Criteria for infant, toddler and preschool rooms. Within these age groups, the non-profit centre averages were always above commercial centres, but publicly operated centres scored the highest. There were no significant differences between non-profit and commercial school-age care. However, municipal school-age care was consistently rated higher on the quality scores than commercial and non-profit services.

## History

The development of child care services in Toronto began in the 1940s and World War II, when the federal government offered provinces the *Dominion-Provincial War Time Agreement* for the development of child care services to support mothers working in wartime industries. The agreement was 50% cost-shared between the federal and provincial governments and offered to all provinces. However, only Ontario and Quebec opened centres.

During the war, the majority of child care services in Ontario were opened in Toronto (other regions included Peel, Oshawa, Windsor and Hamilton). In Toronto, local government operated most of the programs for preschool-age children. This involvement of the Toronto local government was the first substantial publicly operated child care in Canada.

After the war, the federal government revoked the *Dominion-Provincial War Time Agreement* and Ontario announced the closure of its child care centres. The City of Toronto maintained or re-opened centres established during the war. This was perhaps due to public pressure organized by the Toronto-based Day Nursery and Day Care Parents' Association, one of the first child care advocacy groups in Canada.

Ontario passed the first provincial legislation for child care, the *Day Nurseries Act*, in 1946. The *Act* shifted administrative responsibility from the province to the municipality with 50% of the operating costs of municipally and community-operated child care provided by the provincial government.

For many years after the passage of the federal Canada Assistance Plan—the national welfare program abolished in 1995 by the Chrétien government—Toronto's publicly-operated centres entirely, or almost entirely, served low-income subsidized children. More recently, however, more fee-paying families have begun to use the public centres operated by the City.

### Kipling Child Care Centre

The publicly-operated Kipling Child Care Centre provides spaces for 10 toddler and 16 preschool-aged children. Children are actively involved in the daily planning of activities.

The centre is located within Kipling Acres Home for the Aged and offers a number of intergenerational programs in coordination with the home's staff.

All centre staff hold ECE diplomas. Some speak multiple languages, including German, Tamil, Hungarian and Spanish. This site also provides placements for students studying Early Childhood Education.

## References

Beach, J., Bertrand, J., Michal, D. & Tougas, J. (2004). *Working for change: Canada's child care workforce*. Part three: Case studies, pp. 51-56.

Cleveland, G. (2008). *If it don't make dollars, does that mean that it don't make sense? Commercial, nonprofit and municipal child care in the City of Toronto*. Toronto: Children's Services Division.

**For more on child care in the City of Toronto, visit the Toronto Children's Services website at: [www.toronto.ca/children](http://www.toronto.ca/children)**

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