



SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S AND IMMIGRANTS' SERVICES

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Wednesday, May 31, 2023

SUBJECT: DEPUTATION FOR EC4.3 - Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement Implementation in Toronto

Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to participate in the consultation for the implementation of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement implementation in Toronto.

South Asian Women's and Immigrant's Services, previously known as the South Asian Women's Rights Organization is a women-led, community-based organization borne from the organizing efforts of immigrant women living in the Oakridge and Taylor-Massey neighbourhoods. Our organization has been operating for the last 15 years to deliver integration services, civic engagement initiatives, and social and cultural programming to over 2000 low-income immigrant women and their families living in the Oakridge, Taylor-Massey and surrounding East-danforth neighbourhoods.

Our aim is to address the deep economic and social marginalization faced by our community resulting from barriers to accessing dignified jobs and a range of public and social programs that prevent many immigrant women from fully participating in Canadian economic, social, and civic life.

Barriers to accessing affordable and quality childcare have been a long-standing issue with negative implications for the healthy and early development of children, settlement outcomes of immigrant families, prevalence of family poverty, and low labour force participation of immigrant mothers (Bhuyan&Schmidt, 2018; SAWIS, 2012; SAWIS, 2017; Dessanti, 2021). In a recent community survey with 150 precariously-employed immigrant women, only 63% reported having access to childcare (SAWIS, 2022). The most significant barriers to childcare were affordability, lack of subsidies, and lack of available childcare spaces. Lack of access to childcare is reported as a significant factor in many women's ability to access employment opportunities (ibid). This situation has only worsened since the pandemic.

Access to childcare is a right. This right is being undermined due to systemic inequities that create barriers to childcare and sidelines the needs of low-income and precariously employed immigrant and racialized parents in local and national childcare strategies.

We, along with community immigrant parents, commend the Toronto Childcare Services's (TCS) ongoing work to coordinate with federal and provincial governments to implement affordable, accessible and quality child care.

We unequivocally support the commitment in advocating to expand and revise Ontario's fee-subsidy program to ensure affordability for families who may not be able to afford \$10 a day and who fall through the eligibility criterias for the existing fee subsidy program. We urge the



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committee to take the extra step to work with childcare advocates to propose specific recommendations to the province to support equitable access to the subsidy program.

We also strongly support the City's commitment to advocating for immediate wage increases for ECEs to match the wage floor set out by CWELCC workers.

On the other hand, there are two significant concerns in the committee's update.

Firstly, we disagree with the committee's findings about staffing shortages in the sector:

Through our years of experience in delivering employment services in the community, we found that there is a high interest in childcare jobs among immigrant women, but there are also significant barriers to accessing these employment opportunities. To date, Canada continues to structurally exclude racialized immigrants forcing them to work under precarious job conditions.

Childcare workers from our community who are forced to work in precarious conditions reported:

- Lack of recognition of foreign-trained educators' credentials and limited opportunities to gain hands-on Canadian experience.
- Limited opportunities for direct-hire for full-time and part-time positions with publicly operated childcare centers
- "Uberization" of childcare jobs due to prevalence of hiring through staffing agencies which misclassifies workers as 'contractors' and drags down the quality of work conditions

In addition to advocating to increase wages to meet the wage floor set out by CWELCC, SAWIS recommends the City to:

- Support foreign-trained educators to fast-track the recognition of skills and experience and support "practice-ready" programs
- Adopt policies to commit to direct hires for full-time and part-time positions in publicly operated childcare centers to address staffing shortages
- End hiring through for-profit staffing agencies which misclassifies workers as "contractors"
- Operate a public agency that can genuinely address the need for immediate and short-term staffing of centers without violating the workplace rights and dignity of temporary assignment workers.

Secondly, while we support the committee's commitment to advocating for increased CWELCC spaces to meet existing City targets, current plans are not robust enough to address limited childcare spaces.

The 2017-2026 Toronto Licensed Childcare Growth Strategy report had set its vision to meet only 50% of the child population by adding 30,000 new childcare spaces. This is nowhere enough to meet the childcare needs. Community mothers reported:



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- Crisis of long wait-periods to access childcare spaces in licensed centers despite immediate need for childcare
- Having to travel unreasonably far to access the first available space
- Feeling like they are at the “bottom of the list” due to delays in registering for spaces in childcare centers because of the barriers in accessing childcare subsidies
- Delays in accessing childcare burdens families and denies children's rights to timely and quality early learning

Additionally, existing decisions about capital funds and investments for childcare spaces does not address the need for community and neighbourhood spaces, especially spaces in priority neighbourhoods that never had childcare centers to begin but have significant need. In our opinion, a significant contributor to this mismatch is likely due to the limitations of a 25-ward model for a city populated by 2.9 million people which creates crowded wards that are more underserved than before and inaccurately represents the demographic and service needs as neighborhoods with varying profiles are merged.

These issues will have a trickle down exclusionary effect which undermines the TCS's vision for a “child care system that works for all Toronto families” (City of Toronto, 2017). In addition to advocating for increased allocation of CWELCC spaces, SAWIS recommends the City to:

- Increase the target to 85% of child population with a commitment to gradually meet 90-100% of the child population, and add corresponding childcare spaces
- Revise the strategy for capital funds and investments for childcare spaces to prioritize the creation of childcare spaces proportional to the needs of neighbourhoods
- Recommence advocating for the 52-ward model in the City of Toronto to adequately meet the neighbourhood-based needs for childcare

We urge the committee to take immediate and robust action regarding the employment conditions and space availability. These actions will strongly supports the goals of city, provincial, and federal government's initiative to increase access to affordable and quality childcare.



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