



## Parents scramble for daycare

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CARLOS OSORIO/TORONTO STAR

Parents who have their children in one of the 57 city-run daycare centres now shut down because of a strike by municipal workers are scrambling to make other plans.

### Informal childcare arrangements pop up on portals such as Craigslist

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**Noor Javed**  
**Donovan Vincent**

Hours after city workers walked off the job, dozens of postings for babysitters, childcare services and private day camps are popping up on the online classified list, Craigslist, to help stranded parents during the strike.

The city's 57 daycares are shut this morning, forcing the parents of 2,800 kids to find help elsewhere. Many centres had sent letters home to parents on Friday to warn them of an impending strike. And while some may have been able to find quick short-term help, a longer strike may force them to be creative.

Alexandra Colella, who posted her daycare services online last night, says she got the idea to advertise when a friend whose son attends a city-run day care asked her if she would be willing to babysit her son if the strike continues.

"There's a lot of city daycares in my area," said Colella, who lives in the 401 and Islington area. "So I am expecting to hear from a lot of people in coming days."

Colella, said she runs a summer daycare program and after-school programs called Sunny Smiles, and

is willing to take in children right away.

Sheila Lind posted her services late last night. Lind said she has little formal training, but said she has had experience taking care of kids in her family. The West Hill resident said she hasn't heard from any parents yet, but is expecting to get calls if the strike continues.

"I am sure people have someone to help them the first few days," she said. "If I was a parent, I would hate to be in the predicament," she said. "I thought if there was anybody who needs help in my neighbourhood, I could help them out."

Jane Mercer, the executive coordinator with the Toronto Coalition for Better Care said the strike is putting parents in a corner.

"We know parents will scrambling to find alternate care," she said. "And obviously parents need to be very careful who they ask to look after their children," said Mercer.

Mercer said people should be cautious of informal caregivers and understand that that informal sector is not regulated.

"It is not illegal and it is a care option that many parents have found works for them. But no doubt parents should be extra vigilant."

She suggests parents speak to their employers first to see if they can get flexible hours. If they decide to go with informal care, Mercer advises checking out references, calling previous clients and the facilities thoroughly.

"We don't want them to get backed in any situation, where they feel they have to take a care giving situation which is anything but ideal."

While some postings have received little response, others like Angela Boudreau, who volunteered babysitting services, says she has been busy all morning.

"I'm off to meet with two families across town."

A few existing at-home daycares like Rugsrats Home Childcare have also opened up new spots to accommodate parents.

Single father Chris Evans was late for work this morning making childcare arrangements for his 5-year-old son Jacob, who attends the Jesse Ketchum daycare, just off Davenport Rd. near Bay St.

Evans, a chef at the Royal Ontario Museum, said Jacob's mother had to take the day off, and Evans figures it will be his turn tomorrow.

He has spoken to his employer about tomorrow, and while his boss understands, he is worried a drawn out strike could test his employer's patience Supervisor Janie Tierney at the city-run Blevins Child care in Regent Park put up a sign this morning at around 7:30 reminding parents they were closed. "We told them Friday, and we assumed they heard it through the media," she said. Lights were off at other day cares in the area, and even at peak morning rush hour, no parents or children came by.