

Childcare Access at McGill University:

An Overview of the Current Situation

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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Context.....	4
Current Provision of On-Site Childcare Spots.....	5
Supply of On-Site Childcare Spots.....	5
McGill Childcare Centre (MCC) .....	5
SSMU Daycare Centre (SDC) .....	6
Off Camus Daycare .....	7
Drop-In and Emergency Care .....	8
Demand for On-Site Childcare Spots .....	8
MCC's Efforts to Increase On-Site Spots.....	9
Past Efforts.....	9
Current Efforts .....	10
Constraints .....	12
Physical Space .....	12
Cost.....	12



## On-Site Childcare at McGill University:

### An Overview of the Current Situation

In recent years, there have been several informal attempts to understand the nature of the present state on-site childcare located at McGill University (MU). In particular efforts have been made in this regard by both the McGill Association of University Teachers (MAUT) ad-hoc committee on daycare and the Post-Graduate Students' Society (PGSS) Family Care Caucus (A. Shrier, personal communicati





cared for on the first floor (A. Vincent, personal communication, September 4, 2013). The spots for infants were added in June 2009 (SDC, n.d.). SDC is privately run, and prioritizes applications from full-time undergraduate students, followed by graduate students, and then staff and faculty (SDC, n.d.). Since April 2012, the Centre has stopped accepting applications from outside the MU community (SDC, n.d.). Like MCC, SDC charges parents seven dollars per day (SDC, n.d.). Extra fees are only charge when the children go on a field trip, in which case the parents must pay only the actual cost of the outing (A. Vincent, personal communication, September 4, 2013).

For the past five years, MU had a contract with a daycare located near the downtown campus, which only accepted private members (M. Cubano-Guzman, personal communication, July 2, 2013). This contract granted staff and professors access to the childcare centre, and MU paid a small fee for corporate membership while McGill employees paid the cost of the childcare (M. Cubano-Guzman, personal communication, July 2, 2013). This contract was ended in 2013 due to budget cuts and low participation rates (M. Cubano-Guzman, personal communication, July 2, 2013).

MU

PGSS has arranged for its members' admission to a local

preschool's drop-in spots for t



Table 1

*Number of MCC of waitlist spots by child's age and MU-affiliated parent's occupation (L.*

Gallagher, personal communication, March 6, 2013; L. Gallagher, personal communication, September 6, 2013). MCC ap

October 2012, MU's Office of the Provost recommended the creation of such a position in its response to the recommendations of a report issued by Principal Heather Munroe-Blum's Task Force on Diversity, Excellence, and Community Engagement (Masi, 2012). The envisioned position would have provided information regarding eldercare and family illness, and would pay attention to the fact that many of MU's students, staff and faculty are not from Quebec (Masi, 2012). This position was referred to informally as the Family Care Initiative (FCI). The possibility of expanding the FCI to include multiple positions was discussed (G. McClure, personal communication, September 23, 2013).

An inquiry into the status of the FCI by Vanessa Conzon, one of the authors of this report, prompted a discussion on the initiative involving Ghyslaine McClure and Lynne Gervais, respectively the new Assistant Provost and the Vice President of Human Resources (G. McClure, personal communication, September 23, 2013). As a result of these discussions, the Provost Office stated that it would not pursue the creation of the FCI for two main reasons (G. McClure, personal communication, September 23, 2013). Firstly, it stated that MU's current financial situation does not allow the creation of new positions, especially if they are not directly related to the core mission of MU (

Office referenced the relocation services provided by Human Resources as well as Montreal International, a firm external to MU that provides relocation advice and to which Human Resources refers new recruits (G. McClure, personal communication, September 23, 2013).

If MAUT, PGSS, and MU all officially support the expansion of on-site daycare spots, what is preventing the provision of private or additional public spaces?

In Quebec, the physical location of childcare centre must meet a list of requirements that include restrictions on the ratio of space per child, distance to outdoor play spaces, and window and ceiling heights (Quebec, 2013). The Director of MU's Campus and Space Planning Office has stated that MU

children of hospital employees, and thus meets all of the government's physical space requirements (L. Gallagher, personal communication, September 6, 2013).

Creating more childcare spots is costly. Although the Quebec government pays for subsidized daycares, it is expensive to renovate existing spaces in order to meet the government's childcare centre requirements.



explanation for the results is that as long as parents' have satisfactory childcare options within their community, on-site childcare does not necessary lead to positive results (Glass & Finley, 2002; Goff et al., 1990).

Few studies have focused on the particular effects of on-site childcare on university employees. One study of this population found that satisfaction with on-site childcare was correlated with the desire to segment work from family life (Rothbard, Phillips & Dumas, 2005). Those employees who wished to keep these two spheres separate were less satisfied and committed to the organization than those who wanted to meld their family and work lives (Rothbard et al., 2005).

Theoretically, one would suspect that on-site childcare would be laden with advantages for university employees. The benefits are most obvious in regards to those particularly who are responsible for transporting their child to and from daycare. By using on-site childcare, this parent could devote more time towards his/her work and/or decrease the stress caused by the commute, which could in turn increase productivity. On-site childcare would also provide parents with easier access to their child in the case of an emergency. Additionally, such daycare centres may increase the ease by which a parent finds a childcare spot, as employees would most likely be aware that an on-site childcare centre was offered. A specific advantage that would be offered by an MU run on-site childcare centre is an increase in quality. As MU is a top-tier research institution, it most likely hosts professors, students and staff who could develop high-quality child programs.

Why would a MU student, faculty member, or staff member prefer to use on-site childcare? Although I do not discuss every possible constraint below, I instead focus on those that are most relevant to the childcare situation at MU.

The Quebec government subsidizes both of the on-site daycares located at MU. Subsidized daycares cost only seven dollars per day per child in Quebec, and this amount is further reduced through federal tax credits (Finances Quebec, 2012). Private daycares are significantly more expensive. Although it is difficult to locate precise statistics as to the average cost of private daycare, suggested estimates range from thirty-five to seventy dollars per day (Urban, 2011). The Quebec government has instituted a tax credit specifically to decrease the cost of this form of day care (Services Quebec, 2013). After all federal and provincial tax credits are taken into the account, the cost of less expensive private daycare (approximately \$35 and less) is approximately equivalent to the cost of public care for low-income and middle-income families, and remains affordable for high-income families (Finances Quebec, 2012). However, expensive private childcare (above approximately \$35) remains relatively pricey even after the private daycare subsidy is taken into account (Finances Quebec, 2012). Thus, it may be unaffordable for low-income families such as those composed by graduate students (see Appendix 2 for examples) (Finances Quebec, 2012). This suggests that the creation of a private childcare located at MU could potentially relieve the lengthy waitlist. A relatively cheap (i.e. \$25) on-site private daycare would appeal to families of all incomes, while a pricier on-site





(Cromley, 1987). On-site childcare seems to present a locational advantage when contrasted with a daycare centre outside of one's activity space.

A parent or an extended family member may care for the child of a MU faculty, staff, or student. However, in order to have such an option, a member of the MU community must have a family support network available in the Montreal region. International members of MU's community are less likely to have this support network in place. This creates an additional incentive for MU members to utilize conveniently situated on-site childcare. As MU is a global and diverse organization, this international proportion of faculty, staff, and students is not negligible. For instance, over twenty one percent of undergraduate students and twenty four percent of graduate students are from abroad (McGill, 2013b).

I hope that the information provided within this document will serve as a reference point for future discussions regarding the provision of on-site childcare at MU. A conservative estimate indicates that the demand is five times the number of spots currently available. MU, unlike several peer universities, does not run a childcare centre. The numbers demonstrate a crisis, and PGSS and MAUT are attempting to build awareness about the issue and influence decision makers.

I have two major recommendations in regards to improving the childcare situation at McGill University. Firstly, I urge MU to follow through with its plans to assign an individual to specifically provide information about family care issues such as childcare. Although new professors are currently able to receive advice from the Faculty Reallocation Advisor, it is important to grant such aid to other MU members.

Through the course of my research, it became quite clear that there were many MU members who were frustrated with the current system, but had no way to have their grievances taken seriously by MU. Thus, my second suggestion is that MU forms a sub-committee to address the childcare issues faced by students, staff, and professors. Specifically, this sub-committee would provide a forum for individuals to offer feedback regarding the current childcare situation at MU.

I sincerely hope that MU will show its commitment to creating an environment that encourages work-family balance and supports those with family obligations (Principal's Task Force on Diversity, Excellence and Community Engagement, 2011). Through the implementation of the above suggestions, MU can take a large step towards achieving this goal.

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Appendix 1  
Magnitude of Childcare Waitlists

Assuming no child is registered on both the MCC and SDC waitlists:

$$\frac{\text{Number of children on waitlist at MCC} + \text{Number of children on waitlist at SDC}}{\text{Number of MCC childcare spots} + \text{Number of SDC childcare spots}}$$
$$= \frac{749+291}{106+40} = \frac{1040}{156} = 6.666\dots$$

Assuming all children registered on the SDC waitlist are also registered on the MCC waitlist:

If a couple with a one hundred thousand per year income and a child in subsidized daycare will pay under three dollars per day after federal tax credit deductions (Finances Quebec, 2012). If the couple transfers their child to a private daycare charging twenty-five dollars per day, the cost of childcare is roughly unchanged after all tax credits are applied (Finances Quebec, 2012). However, if the couple chooses a thirty-five dollar per day private daycare, their cost increases to nearly seven dollars per day (Finances Quebec, 2012). If the couple's income then rises to one hundred and fifty thousand dollars per year income, they must now pay over eighteen dollars per day (Finances Quebec, 2012).

*Cost of childcare for one day for a family with one child less than six years old enrolled in daycare for a family income of \$25000 (Finances, 2012)*

<u>Public daycare</u>	<u>Private daycare</u>
<u>(\$7/day)</u>	3299992 459 c36

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Benefit

Child care expense	-\$1.29	\$0	\$0	\$0
deductions				
Working income tax	\$0	-\$2.08	-\$2.47	-\$2.47
benefit				
GST credit	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Universal Child Care Benefit	-\$3.30	-\$3.30	-\$3.30	-\$3.30
Child care expense deductions	-\$0.88	-\$3.13	-\$3.37	-\$3.37
Working income tax benefit	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GST credit	\$0	-\$0.68	-\$0.77	-\$0.77
<b>Federal Assistance</b>	-\$4.32	-\$7.61	-\$7.98	-\$7.98
<b>Subtotal</b>	\$2.68	\$1.89	\$5.56	\$15.56

See notes for Table 4.

Table 6

*Cost of childcare for one day for a family with one child less than six years old enrolled in daycare for a family income of \$100000 (Finances, 2012)*

	<u>Public daycare</u>	<u>Private daycare</u>	<u>Private daycare</u>	<u>Private daycare</u>
	<u>(\$7/day)</u>	<u>(\$25/day)</u>	<u>(\$35/day)</u>	<u>(\$45/day)</u>
Gross rate for the parent	\$7.00	\$25.00	\$35.00	\$45.00
Refundable tax credit for child care expenses	N/A	-\$14.25	-\$19.73	-\$19.73
Canada Child Tax Benefit	-\$0.14	-\$0.50	-\$0.54	-\$0.54

Universal Child Care Benefit	-\$2.84	-\$2.84	-\$2.84	-\$2.84
Child care expense deductions	-\$1.29	-\$4.59	-\$4.95	-\$4.95
Working income tax benefit	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GST credit	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b><i>Federal Assistance</i></b>	-\$4.27	-\$7.94	-\$8.33	-\$8.33
<b><i>Subtotal</i></b>	\$2.73	\$2.81	\$6.94	\$16.94

See notes for Table 4.

Table 7

*Cost of childcare for one day for a family with one child less than six years old enrolled in daycare for a family income of \$150000 (Finances, 2012)-*

	<u>Public daycare</u>	<u>Private daycare</u>	<u>Private daycare</u>	<u>Private daycare</u>
	<u>(\$7/day)</u>	<u>(\$25/day)</u>	<u>(\$35/day)</u>	<u>(\$45/day)</u>
Gross rate for the parent	\$7.00	\$25.00	\$35.00	\$45.00
Refundable tax credit for child care expenses	N/A	-\$6.50	-\$9.00	-\$9.00
Canada Child Tax Benefit	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

