

August 13, 2020

Dear Ascot Families

Thank you everyone for making the time today to join us via zoom after a busy night. Normally the AGM is held in June, but due to COVID and the delay of our Audit we could only do it now.

I want to start off by acknowledging 2019/2020 as one of the most challenging years in the history for Ascot Daycare – it truly was an unprecedented year.

I want to thank all the 3 directors – Carol, Cathy and Teresa for working hard and all the staff at Regal and Oakwood sites. Over the last few years serving as a board member and as a president last year, I've come to appreciate the hard work of our ECEs and the Management at the centre as a great team giving the best experiences to our Ascot children and families. You can say that I am biased but speaking on behalf of the Board, the Ascot team goes above and beyond and I want to thank them for their hard work. That goes ditto for our Board members for their time and dedication, especially the Executive committee - Sachin, Karen and Donna - for their hard work and who have done so much work behind the scenes and preparing and helping to lead monthly board meetings.

September 2019 was a fresh new year with a new collective agreement in place for staff and management.

Early in school year, the Board got bigger as we cast a wider net for Ascot parents to join the board of directors as we had many departures from last year as we needed more members for various committees to help us run the organization.

We also started the year with the support staff strike and then, with both centers being at an Elementary school and a High school, we had challenges with rotating strikes from both Teachers' unions. The management and staff at Ascot were able to manage a lot of unexpected challenges and I thank all the staff and board members for their hard work putting plans together to get through the TDSB labour disruptions. I also want to thank the parents for their understanding, cooperation and patience that helped us get us through all of this.

Due to the Days of Action with the support staff strike, we had to cancel our Fall Fair event where the families and children of Ascot were in the past invited for pizza and entertainment.

Both centers successfully implemented a quarterly Newsletter to parents until the COVID closures.

The feedback survey about the summer program was a huge success from parents and we will continue to use this type of survey to gather information about the services of Ascot in the future.

This year, we only had a fee increase for the Pre-school room which brought us more in line with fees at comparable childcare centres in the neighbourhood.

We continued to have challenges at both daycare centres with respect to managing operations, specifically managing financial duties, budgets and policies. Since we expanded the Oakwood site in 2017 for infant, toddler and pre-school kids, we really needed to update our policies and get more timely financial information and the directors were strapped for time to do this in addition to their day-to-day responsibilities.

Both directors felt they were not able to get their work completed and required additional staffing that would help them with finance and admin duties. With the help of independent consultant Sue Hunter and City Consultants Sandy Couto-Green and Marry Peddie, we were able to reorganize the structure of our organization that provided relief to both directors and improved our finance and admin functions.

We hired a part time Finance and Admin Director, Cathy O'Toole who works 2 days a week with our financials, budget and policies. This enabled us to free up Carol and Teresa's time so that they could focus 100% of their time on their respective sites. We also were able to hire part-time admin help for both directors to better support the growing needs of the organization.

Pre-COVID we had 23 full time staff, 3 Directors and 182 kids at both Oakwood and Regal sites - perhaps the directors will give you an update of the current numbers after COVID as some families have decided to withdraw since some are working from home.

COVID imposed many challenges for everyone at Ascot. Without enough notice from the Government, there were sudden closures of childcare centres and as a result of this, we were challenged with CUPE action. Without getting too detailed, there were many moving parts which made the pandemic closure of Ascot challenging including paying staff salaries when there were no fees coming in. Our finance team worked very hard to find the right solution and we were able to secure the CEWS (Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy) from the Federal Government that enabled us to preserve our workforce while Ascot was closed. Even if the centres were closed, the Board and the management worked hard in the background to keep the centre afloat by keeping busy with completing the much needed work in the finance & policy area and get the financials up to date due to our backlog.

At the end of the school year we switched to a new bookkeeper who works very well with our Admin Director. She started in July and was able to work with our Finance Director and Auditor to get the audit completed virtually which is always harder than doing it face to face. Again our finance team has done an excellent job through out the summer getting us back on track.

We have also identified a system called TellPay which enables parents to pay for their fees electronically. Using this tool, it's easier to reconcile the deposits this way than if we receive fees via an e-transfer. TellPay is a Canadian company which is widely used in other daycare facilities. This will be rolled out in the fall.

Since 2017, the year I started with Ascot board, I've seen so much growth and hard work from the Board members looking for ways to make this centre one of the best in the community. Ascot's board of directors are volunteers, parents of the children from Ascot and they continue to work hard so daycares like this can thrive in the community and represent you in this area. We need your continued support as the board works hard supporting the management, in addition to their day time jobs, and being a parent. Taking care of Ascot is not easy when you look at the size but what's amazing is that they continue to advocate for all our Ascot families. I am not saying this since I am a board member but it take a solid team to bring it all together so it runs smoothly.

Next year plans include working with Oakwood CI to revamp and renovate the playground. This is approved by TDSB and we didn't get done this year due to COVID.

We will also be getting indoor locks for Oakwood as well as swipe card system for added security at Oakwood site. Again it was supposed to be implemented in the summer but got delayed due to COVID.

In closing, On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank you again for being with us tonight and choosing Ascot as your daycare community partner. My child attended Ascot and I know that it was the best part of her day. Don't get me wrong, she loved school but she loved her teachers at Ascot and the activities she did with her peers at Ascot made such a difference in her day. I couldn't thank them enough for taking such wonderful care of our children, and for being a safe place for our kids to grow up. I feel so proud to have been part of such an organization.

Warm regards,

Siva Swaminathan
President, Board of Directors
Ascot Avenue Community Daycare