

Plante: Night-time childcare essential to shift workers — and a great ByWard Market goal

Think about it: the city, and especially downtown, has a lot of employees who contribute to the night-time economy. It's difficult for them to both operate businesses and start families, yet our day-care system rarely accounts for their needs.

By [Stéphanie Plante](#)

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Ottawa Coun. Stéphanie Plante wants practical support for shift workers who start families. PHOTO BY ASHLEY FRASER /Postmedia

One of the first jobs I had when I moved to Ottawa in the mid-2000s was working at a bar downtown. One by one, the other girls I worked with who got pregnant would quit their jobs post-maternity leave — after serving up to the very end of their pregnancy because the tips are always much better with a protruding belly. Their options for childcare, however, were limited. If their partner was also in the service industry, the options were even fewer.

I often think about those women, and we have remained in touch thanks to social media. Their children are teenagers now. Back in the day, many of them wanted to open their own restaurants, go to culinary school or do public relations and event planning. Very few of them could make those careers work. Watching their lives unfold has made me think about people who don't work 9-to-5 hours but want to raise a family. What childcare options do they have?

There is already a critical shortage of [childcare spaces](#) in Canada and families who do shiftwork are not often part of this conversation. Even the words "day care" connote parents only needing childcare during the day. I want to change that narrative. As we look toward the preparations for the 200th anniversary of the ByWard Market in 2027, I think a great legacy project would be for the city to create a childcare space that serves people who work in the night-time economy, recognizing that the [ByWard Market](#) has always been an area that operates well beyond traditional 9-to-5 hours of work.

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Think about it: the city, and especially downtown, has a lot of employees who contribute to the [night-time economy](#): nurses, 911 dispatchers, taxi drivers, servers, paramedics, midwives, firefighters, security guards, water treatment plant operators, personal support workers, cooks, police officers, janitors, hotel staff, transit operators, delivery drivers, harm reduction workers, maintenance crews, TV and radio broadcasters, coffee shop baristas, to name a few. My neighbour stocks shelves at Loblaws after it closes, and we know from the pandemic that having our shelves replenished at grocery stores doesn't happen magically. We should be shaping our city and our country to support shift workers who want to raise a family but require basic services to do so.

I am in the process of meeting with experts such as Morna Ballyntine and other Ottawa daycare providers, as well as our nightlife commissioner, [Mathieu Grondin](#), to brainstorm how we can make an overnight daycare work. There is no doubt the need exists, but the practicalities of opening a childcare space go beyond simply signing a lease.

There are provincial rules around square footage and the ratio of children to caregivers. The requirements for things such as outdoor greenspace for overnight care are different than for daytime care. This new space also needs to accommodate people under the federal [Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care](#) (CWELCC) system. Would this new location be overnight only or accommodate all kinds of shift work? Could it offer short-term care of only a few hours for people working part-time or in the gig economy?

Back in 2022, I worked with the Sandy Hill Community Association to name a park after a retiring childcare worker, Cindy Mitchell, who ran the Bettye Hyde Nursery in Sandy Hill on Blackburn Avenue for 27 years. As we plan celebrations and commemorations for ByWard Market's 200th anniversary, we should be thinking about childcare spaces to support the people and families who make our downtown and our city great. I know those servers back in the day would have appreciated it then, and hopefully our shift and frontline-worker parents of the future will benefit.

***Stéphanie Plante** is the councillor for Ward 12, Rideau Vanier, and the daughter of shiftworkers.*