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Date: May 10, 2021 at 8:58:11 PM PDT
To: Mayor <Mayor@burnaby.ca>
Cc: peter.cech@burnabyschools.ca, shawna harrison [REDACTED], Sara Johnston [REDACTED]
Subject: Daycare space in the Burnaby Heights Area

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To: Mayor Mike Hurley and Councillors,

We are writing to you today to bring to your attention that Puddle Jumpers Daycare is at risk of closing at the end of this summer. We hope that you are able to guide government policy to increase daycare spaces and reduce costs for families living in North Burnaby. More details of what Puddle Jumpers means to our family are included in the attached letter.

Thank you,
Erik Johnston

May 10, 2021

To whom it may concern,

As residents of the Burnaby Heights area for over 10 years, we love the spirit of the community: the friends and family that live here, the shops and restaurants and the outdoor spaces. We bought our first home, celebrated at community festivals, and grew as a family here.

However, our community is at risk of no longer being family friendly. Puddle Jumpers, one of the area's longest operating daycare facilities for both preschool (ages 3-5) and after-school (ages 5 and up), is at risk of closing due to sudden and drastic increasing rent costs. They have been an integral part of the Burnaby Heights community for nearly 25 years. Losing Puddle Jumpers would be a significant blow to the community and the families that have come to depend on their services.

We need your help to make sure this valuable service continues for future generations of Burnaby Heights residents. If the daycare closes, we will have no other options for before & after school care, as the only two other facilities that serve Gilmore Community School are full, with years long wait lists. There are no licensed facilities for under 5-year-olds of similar long-standing reputation and expertise in the community.

Childcare in our Burnaby Heights neighbourhood is scarce and expensive. Our two children went to local infant daycares (Little House Daycare and Care Bear Daycare) after being on several waitlists. When it was time for them to progress to preschool age care, the best choice was Puddle Jumpers. We heard extremely positive reviews of Shawna Harrison and her team, and we quickly learned how incredible the facilities were. We have been part of the Puddle Jumpers family for 6 years now! This is the reality for most Puddle Jumpers families: we begin at age 2.5-3 years and stay until the child ages out (age 12). That means the families all get to know each other and celebrate milestones and birthdays together. It helps build a strong and vibrant community.

Shawna efficiently and effectively operates three childcare centres in North Burnaby. The staff are exceptionally professional, while giving our children the

care and education they need. The staff at Puddle Jumpers have helped our family through early childhood education, grief, toddler tantrums, potty training and have become role models for all the children. Many of the staff have been consistent at the daycare for many years, which stabilizes daily routines even more.

Currently, the after-school program is focusing on building a better world by looking at worldwide role models and how the children can take action to contribute to society. Our daughter (age 7) routinely comes home, after discussing very serious issues, with positive actions she plans on accomplishing. Last December, there was a segment on giving back to society. Our daughter chose to share clothes with other families in need. Children in this age group can often be more self focussed, so this was an important lesson for her to learn.

The preschool-aged children, including our son (age 3), are constantly learning about gardening and nature. Both our children come home filled with interesting facts on their days. They even had butterflies in the classroom and observed their life cycle before setting them free. By prioritizing school-like schedules and learning, our daughter was more than ready for kindergarten. The teachers at the school can easily recognize when a child has been to a daycare and when they have not.

In addition to the learning, structure and great staffing, our children's closest friends were established through interactions within the daycare. Those relationships have extended to the school system and beyond. Shawna's philosophy of building community through the daycare programming (Winter Concert, photos, etc.) has been very important for our family. This has been especially true during COVID to have friends and a support network. We will never find that daycare family at another facility.

Working families like ours desperately need strong and safe childcare within the community or else we will need to leave to find alternate arrangements. This has been made even more important through rising housing costs and COVID. The federal government's recent budget announcement for significant increases to childcare funding are very encouraging. Childcare costs are a significant portion of living costs for most families. This new funding will help make more childcare spaces affordable for families, at the same time as raising wages for childcare

professionals. Accessibility of childcare is a particular issue in our neighbourhood, so preserving existing spaces and creating new ones will help build a strong community and economy. More parents will be able to participate in the workforce, comforted knowing their children are getting the professional care needed to nurture their young minds.

Puddle Jumpers Daycare is a central part of the Burnaby Heights community and it is important to be able to keep this facility within the community.

Sincerely,

Erik & Sara Johnston

