Northwestern Ontario Day Care News

JULY '86

We are pleased to advise that we recently received a grant from Secretary of State — Women's Programs which allows us to continue our activities, including publication of the newsletter and the planning and organization of the regional child care forum(s).

****

NWO DAY CARE NEWS is a forum for the sharing of information between day care groups throughout Northwestern Ontario, as well as providing information about what's happening on the federal and provincial scenes, both in terms of governmental policy / legislation and with advocacy groups' activities.

We hope that this newsletter will combat some of the isolation that day care workers and advocates feel and that through sharing resources, ideas and action plans we can develop strategies to ensure the growth and strengthening of quality day care in our region.

We welcome submissions to this newsletter from every day care centre and committee throughout Northwestern Ontario. Please send articles, newsclippings, letters, etc. to Box 144, Thunder Bay, Ontario P7C 4V5.

WARMEST CONGRATULATIONS to each and every one of you who made presentations to the federal government's Special Committee on Child Care hearings in Dryden and Thunder Bay. Parent groups, day care workers, administrators, politicians, women's groups, native organizations, labour representatives, individual parents — everyone gave impressive representation and you should all be proud of yourselves. The Special Committee certainly heard — strongly and clearly — the day care issues in Northwestern Ontario and the needs of our children. But now we must keep monitoring the activities of the Special Committee and keep pressing for action on the recommendations we have made. The public hearings have now been completed. The Special Committee is expected to table its report in the fall. Ask your federal member of parliament to keep you informed of the progress of the Special Committee.

CITY OF THUNDER BAY ESTABLISHES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

We would like to congratulate City Council for establishing its Child Care Advisory Committee. The committee is made up of representatives from council and city administration, parents from day care centres and private home day care, and the president of the Thunder Bay Advocates for Quality Child Care. The objectives of the advisory committee are "to investigate issues and developments related to child care in the City of Thunder Bay and to advise the Community Services Committee of the Corporation of the City of Thunder Bay".

Some of the issues the Advisory Committee hopes to tackle in the near future include the indirect subsidy, fee increases and enrollment-based fees. We hope that this committee will be beneficial to the operation of the city's day care services and the decision making at City Hall.

DAY CARE VIDEOTAPES

CONGRATULATIONS AGAIN AND MANY THANKS TO SIOUX LOOKOUT AND MARATHON for their participation in the video project! The Ontario Coalition for Better Day Care, through an Ontario Women's Directorate grant, sponsored the project which resulted in the production of videotapes portraying the situation of day care in ten diverse communities of the province. Northwestern Ontario was allotted two of the ten tapes. Sioux Lookout was chosen

as representative of an established day care that was threatened with closure because of the indirect subsidy withdrawal. Marathon was selected as the second site because it is one of the newest day care programs in the region and demonstrates the problems faced and the commitment required of a non-profit parent organization working diligently to provide high quality day care for their children. Thanks to the expertise of Monitor North, coupled with the enthusiasm of Sioux Lookout and Marathon day care people (and Fiona and Margaret's newly-learned editing skills), we have two fine day care videos. You may wish to borrow these videos for information / education purposes. Contact Jan Garden, Marathon Day Care; Janet Wilkinson, Box 177, Sioux Lookout; or the NWO Regional Day Care Committee, Box 144, Thunder Bay.

PROVINCIAL CONCERNS

DECEMBER 31, 1986 looms closer and closer, and still no word about new provincial policy that could save our centres from closure. In the provincial budget speech, the treasurer announced that Ontario would request the federal government to negotiate new policies to make day care a public service. While this is a positive direction, we all know that federal-provincial negotiations are a time-consuming process. It would not only be ironic, but tragic, if positive new day care policy was put into effect after our centres have been forced to close. We need action now to ensure the stability of our existing centres.

The provincial day care Policy Review has not been made public. Ask your MPP what the status of the Review is.

RED LAKE UPDATE

The day care centres in Red Lake, Ear Falls and Balmertown have received COMSOC funding to develop publicity materials to promote their services.

A 24 page handbook for parents, which includes professional photos and children's drawings, is currently being compiled and will go to the publisher in the next few weeks. The handbook will be distributed by all three centres in the fall.

The publication attempts to answer the questions every parent asks when enrolling a child in care, while also explaining the goals and benefits of group day care. In our community, many people still don't understand what day care is and what benefits it can offer families.

The project represents a cooperative effort to boost public relations and address, in a positive way, the chronic problem of declining enrollment at the centres in our area.

****

NEWS ITEMS

THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA will be holding a policy convention this fall. We understand that a position on day care will be developed at this convention. Please contact the Liberal Party representatives (especially convention delegates) and inform them of the needs, problems and solutions to the day care situation. Make sure they have a copy of your brief to the Special Committee.

We have been advised that ONTARIO ATTORNEY GENERAL IAN SCOTT, WHO IS ALSO MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR WOMEN'S ISSUES, will be visiting various Northwestern Ontario communities in September. (We believe Kenora, Dryden, Fort Frances, Grassy Narrows and Thunder Bay are included in his itinerary.) Plan to have day care spokespersons attend these meetings. It is important that Mr. Scott is made aware of our particular NWO day care concerns.

THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND LOBBY OF THE ONTARIO COALITION FOR BETTER DAY CARE will be held in Toronto, October 24-27, 1986. It is important that as many NWO delegates as possible attend this conference to ensure our perspective is heard. It is also important that we have the opportunity to share with and learn from other day care advocates — such meetings provide new energy to carry on our important work. We are uncertain what subsidies may be available, so all of us may have to think of raising some funds to assist our Northwestern Ontario delegates.

REGIONAL FORUM(S)

Plans for the regional forum(s) are progressing. We are still looking for your input to decide whether there should be one or two forums. We believe that we should hold the forum(s) as soon as possible, as it is urgent that we determine what action we must collectively take - particularly around the issue of indirect subsidy.

Response to our planning survey received to date indicates that Financial Stability of Centres is the most important issue for the majority of you. Relations with the provincial government, day care workers' concerns, and development of parent groups are also priority items.

We ask anyone who has not yet returned the planning survey to do so (a copy of the survey is enclosed).

Detailed plans concerning the forum(s) will be sent to you within a month.

****

CONFIRMATION OF A GRANT FROM THE ONTARIO WOMEN'S DIRECTORATE to assist the Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care Committee in carrying out research and public education initiatives has just been received. That assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

Local representatives address day-care issues

RED LAKE DISTRICT NEWS, MAY 21, 1986

By Holly Rupert

The Special Committee on Child Care, a seven-member federal task force studying day-care services across Canada, made a one-day stop in Dryden May 12.

The committee's terms of reference call for a review of the quality and availability of "non-parental" care, the economic implications of child care, and the role of the federal government in the provision of care.

The Dryden hearings represented a critical opportunity for parents and day-care advocates in the northwest region to make their concerns known.

Groups from Red Lake, Dryden, Sioux Lookout and Fort Frances, among others, made submissions to the committee.

The Red Lake delegation was small. I addressed the committee as a day-care parent and as a council member of the Ontario Coalition for Better Day Care, a Toronto-based provincial lobbying group. I was joined by Rhona Karschti, a former day-care supervisor in Yellowknife, N.W.T., now living in Red Lake.

Together we tried to provide some understanding of the problems parents needing child care face in our area. As the committee will discover, they are problems parents are facing across the country.

"Choice important"

Whenever the day-care issue is discussed, emphasis is always placed on the importance of choice. People believe parents should be free to choose the kind of care they want for their children. Yet, given the current situation, parents do not always have a real choice when it comes to finding child care.

For instance, parents have little choice if their children are not eligible for formal group day care.

The two municipally-run day-care centres that serve the Red Lake district in Red Lake and Balmertown, lack an infant-toddler program for children under two and an integrated program to accommodate special-needs children. This means many families in our area do not have access to the services provided in those centres.



Jeanette Kostynuk, a child-care worker at Red Lake day-care centre, takes care of Taryn Vachon. Thirty-four children regularly attend day care in Red Lake.

Both centres are working to provide the best service they can given their budget and space restrictions. While program expansion is needed, it's not possible without an infusion of new funds.

Under the existing system, the only way to get new long-term funding is to raise fees. That would mean adding substantially to the financial burden day-care parents already carry.

In fact, the high cost is the main reason a great many parents cannot afford formal day care.

Although all three levels of government help to fund day care, we have essentially a user-pay system. Typically, parents must pay $2,000-5,000 per year for a licensed day-care space in Ontario.

High fees have meant that across the country, day care is fact becoming a commodity for the rich (who can afford full fees) and a welfare service for those with low incomes (who are eligible for a subsidy). It's the middle-income families, whose earnings are not low enough to allow them to qualify for subsidy, who are hurt the most under the existing system.

The user-pay system has thrown day-care services into a crisis situation and small municipally-run centres are particularly at risk.

Because many parents cannot afford day care, enrolment has dropped, which in turn means daily fees must rise to cover the cost of staffing and running the centre. It becomes a vicious cycle that can jeopardize the quality of care the children receive.

The only way out, according to many day-care advocates, including those who made submissions to the Special Committee on Child Care, is a federal funding scheme that would see new dollars flowing into the system for each licensed day-care space.

Only about 15 per cent of Canadian children receive care in the formal day-care system. Rather than expand the system, both the federal and provincial governments seem anxious to find the informal day-care market.

A babysitter, relative or neighbor — in short, anyone who cares for a child in his or her own home — is part of the informal care system.

The informal is largely unregulated, making it almost impossible to ensure good quality care. For parents who cannot find or afford formal care, placing their child in someone's home becomes the only available choice.

To fully regulate informal care, ensuring quality care, would be a massive undertaking. Some day-care advocates believe the government might attempt it as a cheap alternative to improving the formal day-care system.

It would not be cost efficient to fund the informal market at the expense of existing formal services. Already many day-care facilities across the country are not being used fully because of the critical relationship between fees and enrolment.

Taken together, the comments of witnesses appearing before the special committee in Dryden made one point very clear: Parents need day care; they want to see existing services protected and expanded.

The federal government has an obligation to provide the direction and funds to stengthen the day-care services offered in individual communities, and in so doing, develop a day-care system that meets the needs of all Canadian families.

The Special Committee on Child Care will continue its hearing until late June and its report is due to be tabled by November. The committee will accept written submissions from any concerned individuals or groups until June 2. These should be forwarded to The Clerk, Special Committee on Child Care, Suit 308, 151 Sparks St. Committees and Private Legislation Branch, House of Commons, Ottawa, Ont. K1A 0A6.

Holly Rupert is a day-care advocate and freelance writer living in Red Lake.

Child care hearings focus on costs

DRYDEN OBSERVER, MAY 1986

Day-care funding was an issue repeatedly raised during public hearings conducted by the Special Parliamentary Committee on Child Care May 12 at the Best Western Motor Inn in Dryden.

Among those making presentations to the committee were representatives of the Dryden Day-Care Centre, the Dryden Day-Care Parents Group and the Norah Love Children's Centre in Sioux Lookout.

Heather Corner, supervisor of the Dryden Day-Care Centre, told the committee, "During the years when couples are raising their families, their income is the lowest and their household costs are the highest in relationship to that income.

"Young couples are trying to purchase a home, pay a mortgage, raise a family and generally start a life. Today, many couples find they both have to work to maintain the household.

"Through affordable day-care programs," she said, "this can be accomplished."

Ms. Corner said direct subsidies will take effect in Dryden Jan. 1, 1987, "and we have tried to come to grips with this problem.

"We have lost approximately 20 children because of the implementation of direct subsidy."

Noting that day-care costs have risen due to declining enrolment from $19.30 in November of 1983 to $27.22 in November of 1985, Ms. Corner recommended that for parents in need, funding should be 20 per cent municipal and 80 per cent federal/provincial, and parents not in need should provide 55 per cent themselves, with 10 per cent from the municipality and 35 per cent from the federal and municipal governments.

Jeri Tymura, spokesman for the Dryden Day-Care Parents Group, said, "The need for affordable quality care for our children is real, yet this care is not accessible for reasons of affordability, availability and the lack of flexibility within the fragile support system that exists now."

She told the committee, "If child-care services are limited to certain children, whether the criteria be the age or ability of the child, or the financial status of the family, then the purpose of day care has been forgotten."

By pricing day-care services beyond the means of middle income families, said Ms. Tymura, "we are reducing its chances of survival."

In conclusion, she told the committee, "There must be a long-term commitment to affordable, quality child care in Canada.

"There must be a concerted effort to establish a reasonable and consistent means of supporting our existing child-care facilities. There must be in place a system by which the private sector, whether it be by business or industry, (can) establish child care in the workplace."

Saying it would be "disastrous to see what has evolved disappear," Ms. Tymura expressed hope that the committee will come up with some firm resolutions and direction for the future.

A written brief presented by the parents committee of the Norah Love's Children's Centre in Sioux Lookout, states, "Our children are not a social burden — they are an investment."

The centre usually has a waiting list of about 10 children, but the brief states, "Although we need more cay-care services, our most urgent concern is that we will lose those we already have.

"If need be," it suggests, "cut back on welfare programs that serve adults; had their childhood been better, they may not have needed help as adults."

Accompanied by 13 individual letters, the Norah Love submission states, "At our day-care, many of the children are from middle-income earning families.

"Without funding, fees for these parents would increase to $25 or $30 a day. Most would have to seek other, less satisfactory child care arrangements. If these parents withdraw their children, there would not be enough others to keep the day care open. Thus the service would be lost to the poor, the rich and the special needs children."

Recommendations in the brief include providing a comprehensive day-care system, "which provides numerous options to families, including leaves, infant care, latch key programs, toddler and pre-school care so that caring parents can make the best choice for their children and their economic condition."

The committee will end its cross-country hearings near the end of June and will table a report on its findings to the House of Commons in November. *

RED LAKE DISTRICT NEWS, MAY 1986

In China some parents send their children to "week care."

A firefighting team from China visited the Red Lake Day-Care Centre May 8. The children were excited with their guests and pleased with the opportunity to sing their repertoire of songs. Their Chinese guests were impressed by the centre — and the children.

There are differences in day care - like a lot of everyday things - between China and Canada, according to Ding Haicheng and Piao Jimbe.

"Some parents drop off children to day care centres during the daytime and pick them up in the evening," Ding explained. "Some centres are different - parents drop off children on Monday and pick them up on Saturday."

He explained that this type of child care is for "older children who can look after themselves." He explained that this situation happens particularly with younger couples in which both parents work during the day and go to school in the evenings.

"In China the young couples like to study," Piao Jimbe added, to increase earnings.

Ding said that generally day care centres in China are similar to the one in Red Lake, "but there are more of them and more kids."

"In China," he said, "the children are grouped in classrooms according to age because there are so many children."

He explained that most families have only one child in China.

Day care centre supervisor Lee Moorley explained what the children eat at the day care centre.

"Do the children order their own dishes," asked one member of the delegation.

After singing their guests an enthusiastic selection of songs the children listened as the men returned the favor. Each child was presented with a Panda bear lapel pin. The Panda is the official symbol of China. *

Norah Love Children's Centre:

DRYDEN OBSERVER, MAY '86

Day-care costs cause concern

Day-care for pre-school children "must be accessible to everyone," Janet Wilkinson, president of the Parents' Committee of the Norah Love Children's Centre in Sioux Lookout, told the Special Parliamentary Committee on Child Care during its May 12 public hearings in Dryden.

Ms. Wilkinson attended the hearings along with fellow Sioux Lookout area representatives Deanna Koval, day-care supervisor; Madeline Blum; Garnet Angeconeb; Delma Clace and Margie Perros.

Anticipated federal cutbacks to day-care subsidies have resulted in the province's decision to only fund those day-care clients who qualify for full or partial subsidies through a special needs test.

Margaret Mitchell, Vancouver East MP and a committee member, said the day-care system "is for the rich or for the poor" and that middle-income working people don't really have any means of funding at all.

Reading from a written brief, Ms. Wilkinson told the committee, "This is not a woman's issue.

"This is a children's issue. It is their well-being which is at stake. Therefore, if it is given that women will be out of the home for whatever reason, young children must be given the best care and nurturing that can be substituted.

"This is an all-encompassing goal but better that than to lose forever the enthusiasm and creativity of early childhood to our society," she said.

"Consequently, your committee must look at program removed from welfare that will serve all children."

Ms. Wilkinson said children are "an investment" as opposed to a "social burden" and suggested, "If need be, cut back on welfare programs that serve adults; had their childhood been better, they may not have needed help as adults."

Telling the committee the Norah Love Centre serves about 75 parents using 48 full-time spaces for children and that it usually carries a waiting list of about 10 children, Ms. Wilkinson said, "Although we need more day-care services, our most urgent concern is that we will lose those we already have."

Many day-care children are from middle-income earning families, she said.

"Without funding, fees for these parents would increase to $25 or $30 a day. Most would have to seek other, less satisfactory child-care arrangements. If these parents withdraw their children, there would not be enough others to keep the day-care open. Thus the service would be lost to the poor, the rich and the special needs children."

Among the recommendations the parents' committee made at the hearings is "a comprehensive day-care system which provides numerous options to families, including leaves, infant care, latch key programs, toddler and pre-school care so that caring parents can make the best choice for their children and their economic situation." *

Federal government must be convinced more money needed for child care

By JO-ANN MIHALICH
Chronicle-Journal Staff

The Chronicle-Journal
Wednesday, May 14, 1986

The federal government must be "convinced" that more money has to be placed in child care including extra grants for Northern Ontario communities, says a member of the Federal Special Parliamentary Committee on Child Care.

MP Margaret Mitchell (NDP-Vancouver East) also said she recommends the federal government establish day care legislation that will eliminate the Canada Assistance Plan and place day care under a new act which makes it available to families of all incomes.

The committee's purpose is to examine the role of the federal government in child care in light of the shared responsibility for care among parents, the private sector, the voluntary sector and governments. In developing alternatives for future action by the feds, committee members will take into account, the special circumstances of various families as well as the financial implications of any govenment initiatives. Following presentations by groups, an open public forum was allocated during the end of each session.



THUY LY

Thuy Ly, co-ordinator of the Immigrant Women's Employment Place in Thunder Bay told the committee it's "not fair" for low income earners to pay the same price for day care as high income earners. She said most immigrants see day care "an expensive thing." The needs of immigrant women, especially day care, must be met.

Ly, came to Canada from Vietnam in 1980 with her husband and two children. She said they departed from their homeland for freedom, which they thought they would obtain here. But they found otherwise.

"I left my country to find freedom. But sometimes, we feel that we don't have freedom at all!" she said.

Wally McKay, executive director of Tikinagan Child and Family Services in Sioux Lookout discussed the need for appropriate community-based child care facilities in the area served by the agency.

"At the present time, there are no day care or child care programs at all in our region. We urge the federal government to support the development of child care programs here and correct this inequity," said McKay, whose Indian organization serves nearly 10,000 Cree and Ojibwa natives living in the North from Thunder Bay to Hudson Bay (all but three of the communities in the region are fly-in only.

Tikinagan staff are working on proposals for day care programs in a number of the communities it serves. McKay says several communities have told them they have not been able to arrange upgrading or skill development teaching programs because "the women who express an interest cannot find adequate day care for their children."

Stella Fiddler and Phyllis Dudley flew in from Big Trout Lake to represent their female Cree community. Big Trout Lake, located 400 miles northeast of Thunder Bay, is also in desperate need of a day-care centre.

"Before I describe why this is a priority for us, let me note that relative to the rest of the Canadian population, our population in Big Trout Lake is very young. 1981 Census figures show that over 60 per cent of our population is younger than 25 years of age, 40 per cent is under the age of 15," said Fiddler.

She added, "We have a very high number of families with young children; many of us are single parent women between 15 and 21 years of age. So the need for good child care facilities is far more likely to increase in Big Trout Lake than decrease over the next 20 years."

The women recommended to the committee that there be flexibility in program and policy development to reflect the nature of their people as well as adequate resourcing for day-care centres. Fiddler and Dudley explained the addressing of day care needs of Indian communities should not be subject to jurisdiction disputes between federal and provincial governments.

Thunder Bay alderman Dusty Miller, chairman of the community services committee told the five-member panel that the federal government must establish a standardized formula in determining the per diem as well as eliminate indirect administrative costs from the per diem formula.

The needs of the community regarding child care must be a factor in the delivery of service, Miller explained. The "Toronto" experience should not dictate regulatory measures. Regional disparities must be taken into consideration.

Miller, former city mayor, added that the committee needs to recognize that in northern cities such as Thunder Bay, higher costs for food and heating create higher facility costs, thus higher per diems. Salaries of clients are not necessarily higher, she said. A special Northern reduction should be included in the per diem formula.



FIONA KARLSTEDT

The Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care Committee, represented by Fiona Karlstedt, told the federal-appointed committee that an investment in the well-being of children and families makes social and economic sense. The commitment they seek is the development of a comprehensive child care system that would meet the needs of all children and families.

"We require a child care system that is accessible to all families irrespective of their economic status, their employment status or their geographic residence," noted Karlstedt.

N.W.O. is a vast region and is serviced by approximately 12,000 miles of highway with many communities accessible only by rail or air. Approximately 236,000 people live in one city, seven towns, 36 townships, three improvement districts, 51 Indian reserves and 73 rural communities.

"Of the 171 communities in N.W.O., only 18 provide day care services," she said.

Karlstedt said that the stabuity of existing day care centres can only be accomplished by the reduction of user fees charged to parents.

"We, therefore, rcommend that the federal government immediately provide direct grants to municipal and nonprofit day care centres to stabilize the existing service and ensure the continued operation of the centres."

Karlstedt spoke about the situation of rural families. Research has indicated that farm women have no alternative but to take their children into the barn or field with them while they work.

"A study by the Farm Women of Rainy River District pointed out that women are often restricted from attending farm meetings because of inadequate child care and/or lack of finances to pay babysitters."

Day care should no longer be viewed as an "urban phenomenon," said Karlstedt. The N.W.O. Regional Day Care Committee has studied the Report of the Task Force on Child Care, chaired by Dr. Katie Cooke. The committee agreed with most of the recommendations made in that report.

Marathon's Carol Vien, a community development worker and Jan Garden, business administrtor for the Marathon Day Care Centre noted that funds are desperately needed to finance their nonprofit day-care centre, located in the basement of the Pentecostal Church.



BEV ROMANIUK

"Every month we're just running in the red," said Garden, adding they are loosing $1,000 a month.

Bev Romaniuk, social services administrator for the Town of Geraldton pleaded with the committee to not place day care out of reachfor middle income families in small N.W.O. communities. Romaniuk said middle income earners are the "backbone" of our tax baseand already pay more than their share for these services.

"Ontario is giving southern and eastern Ontariomore subsidized spaces. Give Northern Ontario back indirect subsidization and help us keep our day cares open. As of December 1986, will see many of us having to close our doors due to lack of enrolment as day care becomes more and more unaffordable. We do not have enough community-based services for our people now," she said.



MONIQUE MORGAN-MERCIER AND JORDIN BONIFERRO
...time to play during committee's hearing here

In a city of shift workers, day care does not fulfill the needs of the public, said Judith Mongrain, president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 87. Mongrain, whose local represents about 800 members told the committee in Thunder Bay, services provided at the municipal day care level, are almost totally for those working days.

"There is not adequate funding available for child care expansion to include the needs of families with shift workers," she said, noting that the majority of local families must still depend on informal or private care as city services do not answer their needs.

Doris Rossi, a member of the provincial women's committee of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union is one of seven women representing 56,000 public service employees in the province. Rossi told the panel of MPs that unions have been bargaining for day care for some time.

"It has been an issue that has been fought both at the bargaining tables and in legislatures across the country. However, perhaps like medicare and pensions, unions will have to win child care at the bargaining tables before legislators will be pressured to act."

Rossi says both unions and management must eye the child care issue to see what can be done, "the best way." She said the federal government is also an employer and that OPSEU expects "a leadership role" in legislative changes, which then would lead to ... tudinal change.

Should informal home day care be regulated by government?

TORONTO (CP) — Diane belongs to an underground, self-employed workforce that makes hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

She is one of an unknown number of people who provide day care in their homes for an estimated 400,000 children of working parents in Ontario alone.

Often out of desperation, parents turn to people like Diane because of the scarcity and high cost of spaces in formal, licensed day-care centres. She charges $50 a week per child — about half the rate of a public centre.

Diane, who didn't want her last name used, cares for seven children at her Toronto home and doesn't declare her income.

Under Ontario's Day Nurseries Act, she should only be handling a maximum of five children, including no more than three kids under three years old and two under the age of two. To care for more than five children requires a licence.

But Diane doesn't have a licence for her informal day-care operation and no level of government is aware of what she's doing.

MOST UNREPORTED

A study by the Ontario Coalition For Better Day Care, a private lobby group, indicates that 80 per cent of these informal providers in the province take their fees under the table, ignoring any kind of bookkeeping.

The situation isn't unique to Ontario —authorities agree it applies in other provinces.

"Nobody knows much about them (home day-care workers), aside from the fact they are mostly women who want to make a little money on the side," admits Paul Siemens, manager of the children's unit at the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services.

"We don't even know their numbers, and they aren't telling us because they don't want government interference."

The ministry can only guess — by rough census calculations of the number of single parents and two-working-parent families — that about 500,000 children in Ontario are receiving some form of day care. Further estimates indicate that only about 20 per cent of them, or 100,000, are in licensed day care.

RAISE FEARS

Horror stories abound at what happens in some of the private homes —such as 10 children being kept in the basement where a television is the real babysitter.

And once in a while a tragedy occurs.

Last November in Bolton, near Toronto, a 49-year-old woman and the four children she was looking after died of smoke inhalation when fire swept through her home. A coroner's inquest revealed the woman had consumed the equivalent of 12 bottles of beer and significant amounts of anti-depressant and diet drugs, making her incapable of reacting to the emergency.

These revelations came as a shock to the parents, who from their limited knowledge of the woman's life had been satisfied with the arrangement.

"There's always a clinging kind of fear in the back of your mind that something's going to go wrong," says Brigette Vianna, administrative assistant with the Ontario Status of Women Council, who at one time had her son in private home care.

BE CHOOSEY

Erika Baker, who cares for five children at her home near Toronto, says parents "just have to be a little more choosy.

"If the person is doing it under the table for half the price, there must be a reason. I have to keep very strict records in order to claim expenses. But I do have to pay income tax at the end of the year and that's why most people don't give out receipts . . . they don't want to give up that money at the end of the year."

However, many day-care critics argue that parents often have little choice about where they can place their children.

Vianna finds fault with the whole government philosophy of providing subsidized formal day care for the poor but little for the middle class.

"There is a huge gap," she says. "Expensive day-care spaces are readily affordable for the well-to-do working couples but there's not enough help for the middle class."

COST IS LOWER

A space in a day-care centre can cost $5,000 a year, while unlicensed home care usually costs much less.

Although Linda Becker feels fortunate to have her two-year-old daughter under Baker's care, she acknowledges the uneasiness of first seeking out home day care.

"Here I was, begging a woman to take my child and I didn't even know her," says Becker. "But I was referred to her by a friend and I went over to see her house and talked to her for quite a bit.

"What I think when I hear horror stories is, 'Thank God I have Jodie where she is.'"

A parliamentary committee on day care currently making its way around the country has found that many parents are staunch supporters of home day care.

IN NEIGHBORHOOD

"People prefer day care to be in their neighborhood and in more familiar surroundings," says Shirley Martin, the Conservative MP for Lincoln who heads the all-party study, which began in mid-March and will report to the House of Commons in November. "And in other areas, such as rural communities, they see it as the best way to meet their needs where no formal day care exists."

Noting that the situation in Ontario is typical of the rest of Canada, Martin said she expects her group to take a more far-ranging approach to the day-care issue than a recent federal task force headed by sociologist Katie Cooke. Last March, Cooke recommended a universal day-care system be established in the country.

"I think a lot of people were scared off by the figures that were mentioned," said Martin, referring to an estimate in Cooke's report of $11 billion for child care costs to all governments. "We want to understand the various needs of parents and provide alternatives."

Martin admits she doesn't know yet what structure could be developed to screen home day-care providers or how they would be encouraged to come forward and conduct their services in the open.

But Baker isn't sure any incentives would be attractive enough since "the bottom line is you're not going to make a lot of money" providing home day care.

"You do it because you like kids otherwise you shouldn't be doing it at all."

Public support for day care rivals other issues, poll finds

Canadian Press — Globe 29 July 1986

OTTAWA

Three out of four Canadians say child care is an important issue that should be high on government priority lists, according to a poll commissioned in June by Canada's two largest unions.

The poll sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the National Union of Provincial Government Employees also showed a majority of people favor government support for non-profit day care centres over profit-making enterprises.

Karen Stotsky, a research officer for CUPE, said the results confirmed and "substantially supported the views that we've had on the issue of day care, particularly the importance of day care to the public.

"A lot of times people feel child care is not as important as other harder economic issues such as free trade or matters of the economy," Ms Stotsky said. "But these results clearly show, I think, that child care is a very important issue to Canadians and it's something that governments have to deal with and are expected to deal with."

Lise Corbeil-Vincent, a spokesman for the Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association, said the findings confirm what the special parliamentary committee on day care heard from hundreds of people across the country during public hearings this spring.

The poll, based on 1,200 random telephone interviews between June 7-20 with people over age 18, found 38 per cent of respondents feel child care is very important compared with other issues, while 37 per cent said it was somewhat important.

Women, younger people, parents with children under 6 years, those with lower incomes, part-time workers and those "leaning in federal politics toward the Liberals and New Democratic Party" were more likely to find the issue very important.

Just over half of parents rated day care very important, compared with 35 per cent of non-parents.

Ms Corbeil-Vincent said she is pleased non-parents rate it as highly as they do.

"Hopefully it's because people understand that children are Canada's most precious resource and something has to be done for the crisis that exists in Canada around child care," she said.

Other poll results, accurate within plus or minus three percentage points 95 times out of 100, varied little between parents and non-parents.

Sixty-one per cent felt day-care money should go to child-care centres run by non-profit groups. Only 18 per cent supported more centres run by government and 13 per cent favored more public dollars spent on centres run by companies for profit.

And 56 per cent of Canadians felt government money would be better spent on more non-profit centres rather than subsidies paid to parents to take time off work to care for their own children. Thirty-two per cent favored subsidies.

Ms Stotsky said the unions will send the results to the parliamentary committee, which has concluded its public hearings and is drafting a report due in November.