# Northwestern Ontario Day Care News

December '85

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

## REGIONAL DAY CARE PROJECT

During the past five months, the Regional Day Care Committee has, through a Secretary of State grant, carried out a project to analyze the situation of day care in NWO; to initiate a regional network of all persons concerned with day care; to provide information from provincial and national day care organizations to NWO Groups; and to put forward a NWO perspective to governments and to provincial/national day care advocacy associations.

Our part-time project worker has travelled to Kenora, Fort Frances, Atikokan, Geraldton and Terrace Bay meeting with day care parents, workers and other interested citizens encouraging the development of active parents' groups, and learning local issues and needs.

From these visits, the need for a strong, regional organization has been expressed by many people. The networks that are evolving need continued work and the strategies of collective action must be matured. Therefore, we are applying for funds for a second phase of the project (from January to June 1986) through which we plan to conduct a comprehensive survey of day care in Northwestern Ontario (requested by several communities) and organize a forum or forums in the spring to bring together day care parents, workers, local decision makers and interested citizens.

In the second phase, our project worker will also travel to other communities not previously visited. Please let us know if you would like her to visit your community.

## "TIME FOR CHANGE" - ONTARIO COALITION FOR BETTER DAY CARE, CONFERENCE AND LOBBY, OCTOBER 26-28

There were three representatives from Thunder Bay among the 200 in attendance at the annual conference of the Ontario Coalition for Better Day Care. The theme of the conference — "Time for Change" — was appropriate on two fronts.

The Coalition was reorganized and expanded to incorporate local coalitions and individuals, as well as provincial organizations. A Council made up of representatives from various provincial organizations, local groups and individuals will meet three times each year, and an Executive elected from the Council will meet a minimum of 10 times per year. Holly Rupert from Red Lake was elected as one of the four individual representatives, and the Thunder Bay Advocates for Quality Child Care will be represented on the Coalition Council as well. The first meeting of the Council will be held January 25th in Toronto.

In light of the new provincial government and our hopes for new directions, "Time for Change" was indeed an appropriate theme for the lobby which followed the conference.

The mood in the room throughout the three hour lobby was one of excitement and anticipation. Although the Superior Room at Queen's Park was filled to capacity (reportedly 300 people), the lobby was highly organized and professional. In fact, Bob Rae congratulated the Coalition for putting on "one of the best organized lobbies he had ever been at".

Three Tories were in attendance for the full hour allotted to them. Although Phil Gillies (Brantford) attempted to articulate Tory policy in response to our questions, he did so with difficulty and embarrassment (his two colleagues were conspicuously silent).

The eleven NDP members in attendance expressed agreement with the Coalition throughout questioning and agreed that day care should receive greater emphasis.

The last but most eagerly anticipated caucus - the Liberals - had twenty members in attendance, including John Sweeney, Minister of Community and Social Services, and Ian Scott, Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Women's Issues.

Sweeney reiterated at the outset his government's commitment to day care, assuring those present that day care is a high priority for the Peterson government. While acknowledging the problems that exist, little else was offered. Sweeney expressed concern that if they tried to renegotiate Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) financing for day care, the provincial government might have to renegotiate all financing under the plan, including welfare. (CAP is the only federal-provincial program that is still open-ended — that is, the federal government's contribution to it is limited only by the amount the province spends.)

The policy to withdraw the indirect subsidy is a result of CAP (welfare) funding for day care. Sweeney stated that withdrawal of the indirect subsidy will take effect at the end of 1986, rather than 1985, as previously planned. When questioned about the possible closure of day care centres due to this policy, Sweeney indicated that he would deal with each situation on an individual basis.

While the politicians were impressed by the lobby, it was evident that we must keep up the pressure on all fronts.

Back to the Conference! Saturday was spent in large part at a series of informative workshops. One workshop, "Alternative Federal Funding Mechanisms", looked at the present system of funding and the alternative proposed by the Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association (copies available from CDCAA, 323 Chapel Street, Ottawa K1N 7Z2). This proposal integrates principles, services and the role each level of government would play regarding funding, and would be extremely valuable to anyone preparing a submission on child care.

Another related workshop, "Task Force Update" was originally to have focused on the findings of the Day Care Task Force chaired by Dr. Katie Cooke and set up under the former Liberal government. However, as the final report was not yet available, the focus shifted to preparations for the next Task Force on Child Care. It was emphasized that we should be ready for it when it came. We were encouraged to lobby to have hearings scheduled in more than one city in each province and, if unable to attend the hearings, to make written submissions both as groups and individuals. (Given that the establishment of the Parliamentary Task Force on Child Care was formally announced a month after the conference, this workshop was extremely helpful.)

Those of us attending the conference and lobby came away energized and eager to continue our efforts to attain better day care.

## INDIRECT SUBSIDY

For NWO children to be provided quality day care in 1986, the fees charged to parents must be affordable. Of course, day care must become a universal service but being realistic we know this is a long-term goal. Right now, we must ensure that we do not lose the day care centres we presently have in NWO. This means that the provincial government must be persuaded to continue the "indirect subsidy" to municipal day care and/or provide a direct grant to all non-profit day care centres.

In the past several years, because of the provincial directive regarding the elimination of indirect subsidy, day care fees in NWO have increased annually (or more often). And every time an increase occurs, a number of families find that they have to withdraw their children. The fees are just too high. In fact, because of the high fees, there are a number of NWO day care centres that today have unfilled spaces! And many children who need day care are not served, but rather are placed in less expensive, unsupervised, unregulated arrangements. Because of short-sighted funding policies, young children are being denied the benefits of a quality day care program.

Unless provincial policies change, this situation will only worsen. The current fees charged in NWO centres range from $13-18. Without the indirect subsidy the fees will jump to $25-35 per day. Up to 75% of the municipal and non-profit day care centres in NWO could be forced to close.

Individually and collectively, NWO day care advocates have been raising the issue of indirect subsidy / direct grant with provincial politicians. This issue was an important feature of the Coalition lobby of all provincial politicians. Members of the NWO Regional Day Care Committee have discussed this issue with the Hon. John Sweeney, Minister of Community and Social Services, and with the Hon. Ian Scott, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues. Thunder Bay Advocates for Quality Child Care have met with Jim Foulds, MPP - Port Arthur, and Marathon Day Care has communicated with Gilles Pouliot, MPP - Lake Nipigon. We all must continue to impress on our political representatives the urgency of providing quality, affordable day care.

The effect of our lobbies has had only limited results. At the Coalition lobby, the Hon. John Sweeney announced that the provincial policy re the elimination of indirect subsidy was postponed until December 31, 1986.

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## PARLIAMENTARY TASK FORCE

The federal government has just announced the establishment of the Parliamentary Task Force on Child Care. This Task Force is extremely important in that its work will point the direction for day care policy for the years ahead. In a sense, this Task Force is our <u>last chance</u> to influence the development of adequate day care policy.

The Task Force intends to hold public consultations and we have written urging the Task Force to hold public hearings in Northwestern Ontario, and to provide travel subsidies for district travel to these hearings. We'll keep you posted.

It is <u>vital</u> that submissions from <u>individuals</u>, as well as groups, be made. If you are concerned about the future of day care, please plan to make a statement to the Task Force (and please let us know of your willingness to make a presentation).

We have sent a package of resource material — background information, recommendations for federal action, Task Force terms of reference — to all the day care centres in NWO. Contact the supervisor of the day care centre in your community for more information or write us at Box 144, Thunder Bay.

OVER 50% OF MOTHERS WITH CHILDREN UNDER 5 ARE IN THE PAID LABOUR FORCE. YET THERE IS A CHILDCARE SPACE FOR LESS THAN 1 IN 10 CHILDREN NEEDING ONE.

## POST CARD CAMPAIGN

The Sioux Lookout Parents Group are organizing a "Post Card Campaign" and are seeking the support of other day care centres and advocacy groups in making the campaign effective. The post card (the exact wording of which is still to be finalized) would indicate support for provincially-funded day care and be signed by parents and other concerned citizens and sent to MPPs. If the politicians receive many post cards, an impact will be made.

Plan now to support this important project. Let the Sioux Lookout Parents Group know how many post cards you will need, and whether or not you can share the cost of printing them. For more information, contact Janet Wilkinson, Sioux Lookout Parents Group, c/o Norah Love Children's Centre, Box 177, Sioux Lookout, Ontario.

## THE SCHOOL HOUSE PLAY CARE CENTRE OF LAKEHEAD

The School House Play Centre opened its doors on September 3, 1985. Our centre is unique in that it is the first workplace day care centre in the Thunder Bay area. Although it was established to accommodate children of Lakehead Board of Education employees, space is also available for other children in the community.

Our priority is quality day care. The home-like atmosphere of the centre provides a welcoming environment to both children and adults, in which the individual child's needs are met through a wide range of creative, stimulating and nurturing activities and programs. It is important to us that parents know their children are being well-cared for by qualified staff who truly enjoy working with the children.

We hope that our centre is only the first of many workplace day care centres in Thunder Bay. Although enrollment continues to increase, spaces are still available.

For further information, please feel free to contact Kelly Joblin at 344-8719.

## DAYCARE UPDATE: RED LAKE

The Women's Information Group, an ad hoc group in Red Lake concerned with the broad spectrum of issues affecting women, targeted day care as one of the issues needing a higher profile during the November municipal election.

The group produced a pamphlet, with assistance from Secretary of State, which explained the funding crisis affecting day care services in our community. The pamphlets were distributed at two all-candidates' meetings, at which specific questions about day care were put to the candidates.

Before election day, Jennifer McKibbon, a candidate supportive of day care, and myself met with the workers at the Red Lake Day Care Centre. The workers have concerns about their chronically low wages and a pay scale which does not fairly reflect employees' years of service at the centre.

The workers are encouraged to know that as a member-at large of the Ontario Coalition for Better Day Care Council I can take their concerns beyond the community to a supportive organization committed to improved child care services.

In the new year, I plan to meet with the director of the Balmertown Day Care Centre.

— Holly Rupert

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE INCLUDE Ruth Wells, Margaret Phillips, Kelly Joblin, Janet Wilkinson, Holly Rupert and Fiona Karlstedt.

We hope you will consider contributing to the next issue.

**Day Care in the News: Red Lake, Dryden, Terrace Bay** ——→

THE TIMES-NEWS, Tuesday, July 30, 1985

# Daycare - a definite need

By CHERYL HODGINS
Correspondent

TERRACE BAY— Day care in Terrace Bay, a telephone survey conducted recently by Project Mayday has concluded.

Project Mayday conducted a sruvey of 400 residents of the community and of that number 126 indicated they felt there was a strong need of such service for the town.

The majority concluded their children would benefit from some type of organized Daycare service which included care for children, before and after school, part-time daycare and full-time daycare. Another 37 persons interviewed said they had an immediate need of full-time daycare.

Wednesday, July 17, a meeting of interested parents was held to discuss the results of the survey which was carried out last month. Committees were formed to investigate possible locations and sources of funding for daycare.

Mrs. Angela Gereghty heads the location committee while Mrs. Carol Quesnelle will chair the fund raising committee.

Community resources worker Ms. Cathie Smith, who also attended the meeting, informed the group that the province has withdrawn its financial support of such services. She said that the province previously provided 80 per cent of the funding, while parents and municipal governments picked up the balance of the tab.

Ms. Smith pointed out that because of this withdrawal of funding, the cost of such services to users has risen to as much as $35 per day in some cities. This is beyond the financial reach of most middle and low-income families.

"The greatest danger of this," said Ms. Smith, "is the likelihood that daycare will become ghettoized. After all, why would a parent, who could afford to pay $35 per day for child care, not hire a nanny instead? Thus group daycare will be used only by the less affluent members of our society, such as single working mothers," she said.

A result of this could be the deterioration of the standards of quality in service that the children receive, she added. She stressed that it was therefore imperative that "both governments and individuals realize the importance of making affordable daycare available to all parents, regardless of income status or geographical location."

In spite of the obstacles presented by government's indifference, enthusiasm prevailed at the meeting.

Possible fund raising ideas, including the staging of a concert and asking various community and national groups for financial assistance were tossed around among those present.

Ideas for a daycare site included using existing facilities, such as rooms in a school or constructing a new building as was done in Longlac three years ago, were also discussed.

In September, a community meeting will be held at which time the committees' findings will be discussed and further action taken.



Interested parents plan strategy on daycare

# Day-care concerns voiced at meeting with town council

OBSERVER SEPTEMBER 25, 1985

Uncertainty continues to be the catch-word for the future of the Dryden Day-Care Centre, with pending financial losses causing continued concern.

At a special day-care information meeting in the Dryden municipal office Sept. 23, 15 interested citizens heard Dryden Mayor Tommy Jones say that although council will continue making representations to the Minister of Community and Social Services in an endeavor to keep day-care centres from closing, the Town of Dryden may increase its daily day-care rates in the 1986 budget.

Mayor Jones also said the town would review its current subsidy eligibility criteria.

In January of this year, the federal government announced it would stop its day-care subsidy starting Jan. 1, 1986. Mayor Jones said he recently learned that date has been changed to Sept. 1, 1986. In response to the federal cutbacks, the province intends to only fund those day-care clients who qualify for full or partial subsidies through a special needs test.

Diane Conway, program supervisor with the ministry in Kenora, told parents at the meeting that the Liberal government is proceeding as originally planned with the subsidy cuts. She said she is trying to help centres find methods of lowering the per diem rate for parents to avoid any future closures.

"The ministry has made a commitment to ensure no day-care centres close as a result of the policy," she said, adding most middleclass parents with two children would qualify for some subsidy.

Calvin Green, a program supervisor with the ministry in Thunder Bay, said the additional time (to September of next year) was allotted by the government because of the recognized difficulties.

A written brief distributed by council at the meeting notes the 1985 user fee portion increase in the daily fee from $10.50 to $15 per day and states, "it appears likely that further increases will follow in 1986."

In 1984, Dryden consumers paid $10.50 a day, with the remaining $14 covered 50 per cent by the federal government, 30 per cent by the province and 20 per cent by the municipality.

This year, the per diem cost is $22.80, with the maximum user fee effective Sept. 1, 1985 at $15. The shortfall of $7.80 is covered as follows: $6.24 by the province and $1.56 by the municipality. For parents who are fully subsidized, the rate is $1 per day, with the remaining 80-20 split covered by the province and municipality respectively.

Children from the unorganized territories who are deemed as being in need are 100 per cent funded by the province, and if not in need, the same 80-20 split applies.

Of the average of 32 children currently using the centre, 12 to 15 are non-residents.

Mayor Jones said, "We believe day care is an asset to the Town of Dryden and the users . . . if we could increase the numbers in day care, we could then decrease the per diem rate."

He said there are not enough children in need at the Dryden centre and said the needs eligibility criteria would be looked into after Mr. Green suggested a review.

Ms. Conway said if occupancy was increased to 90 per cent, the per diem rate could be reduced. The ministry is trying to achieve a rate near $18 for every day-care centre in the district.

Coun. Susan Wells suggested there could be room for a lot of cost reductions in meals and snacks, but Paul Heayn, chief accountant, said 70 per cent of the $160,000 annual cost is for staff, with food costs at less than 10 per cent.

Mr. Heayn also said some

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operational changes were made since July of this year in an attempt to reduce per diem costs. They include only allowing children two servings at lunch, curtailment of staff snacking privileges, including soup and sandwiches once weekly on the menu and advising staff that they will have to pay for their lunches at some point in time.

Coun. George Boissonneault expressed concern that, "If you have two or three kids, the cost is astronomical."

Coun. Cary Case suggested that if the current eight-to-one staff/child ratio for 24 to five-year-olds was reduced to 10 to one, cost savings would be more substantial than through any food-oriented measures.

However, Heather Corner, Dryden day-care supervisor, said, "There goes your quality day care," adding that it would be just one step from there to a further staff-child ratio reduction.

Following a discussion of several measures suggested by council and the ministry to tackle the day-care funding problems, Mayor Jones said, "Hopefully, some of the things we've talked about will have some effect."

He also suggested that concerned residents should write to the minister.

In an interview after the meeting, Ms. Corner said she was pleased the government has extended the date of the subsidization cuts to Sept. 1, 1986 and said the town definitely has to look at the ceilings on the eligibility needs test, noting that none of the three residents tested who she thought would qualify for subsidies met the necessary criteria.

Although licensed to serve 45 children a day, the current average is only 32 and Ms. Covner said that if council again increases the rates in 1986, more clients could be lost.

She said the re-examination of the needs test "might make a difference" but that while she hopes the government will reverse its decision, "I don't really think they will."

# Need for adequate day care is emphasized in many ways

## Speaking of Children

By HOLLY RUPERT



Before attending a conference sponsored by the Ontario Coalition for Better Day Care, the major advocacy group for child care in the province, I hadn't recognized the urgency of the day care issue.

More mothers of young children now work for a wage or salary than stay home full-time, and their numbers are increasing. At the same time, it is women who bear the primary responsibility for the care and upbringing of their children.

These two facts mean there is pressing social need for adequate child care when parents are not available to provide it.

It's not only women with school-age children who have entered the labor force. The participation rate of women with children under six has increased by 271 percent in the past 15 years. A majority of women with children under three now have jobs outside the home as well, according to the Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association (CDCAA), a non-profit, voluntary organization based in Ottawa.

The royal commission report by Judge Rosalie Abella, published last fall, observes that, "By Canadian law both parents have a duty to care for their children, but by custom this responsibility has consitently fallen to the mother." Studies cited in the report show that more than 90 percent of all day care arrangements are made by mothers.

It is the inability to find suitable day care which makes it impossible for many women to seek paid employment.

A Canadian labor force survey has shown that about 121,000 working mothers had to leave or refuse a job in 1980 because of inadequate child care arrangements.

To complete the statistical picture, approximately 2,000,000 Canadian children need some form of child care; more than half of those children are under six. Yet in 1983, there were less than 140,000 licensed day care spaces in the whole country.

The current day care system is, at best, a hodge podge of municipally-run and private licensed centres, family day care (homes which care for up to five children), and informal care arrangements.

Babysitters, relatives and the neighbor down the street make up the "informal" system, which provides care for about 85 per cent of children.

Some of these arrangments are excellent; some are far from adequate. The concern with informal care, according to most day care advocates, is that it's not licensed and therefore not well regulated; that in turn, means quality care is difficult to ensure.

Day care services are not distributed evenly across the country. Parents in rural areas may not have access to licensed child care, a situation which is compounded by regional disparities. According to the CDCAA, the number of spaces per 1,000 children under six varies from a low of nine in Newfoundland to a high of 84 in Manitoba.

The key limiting factor for most families is the prohibitive cost of day care. Typically, parents must pay $2,000-5,000 per year for a licensed day care space. For children under two years, the cost can be considerably higher, as much as $7,000 per year.

The current system of funding for day care involves all levels of government. As the most critical and complex area of the day care issue, I'll examine it separately in my next column.

It is fair to say that day care is fast becoming a commodity for the rich (who can afford full fees) and a welfare service for those with low incomes (who are helped by a subsidy); it's middle-class parents who are hurt the most by the present day care systems.

Day care critics cling to myth that children belong at home with their mother. But the reality of middle-class Canadian life in the '80s is that both spouses need to work. If one parent of those working couples stayed home, about half of those working couples stayed home, about half of those Canadian families would fall below the poverty line.

The neglect of a comprehensive day care policy in Canada shows that as a society, we haven't sorted out our values with respect to children and parenting.

As the CDCAA told the Abella commission, "How can we not afford to support the modern family in carrying out its most fundamental role of all — child rearing?...As a people, Canadians must respond."



# Quality day care more costly than average family can afford

**Ed. Note: This column appeared in the Nov. 27 issue of the Regional, however several columns of type were in the wrong order. It is being rerun here for clarity.**

People concerned about child care services in Canada all agree on one point: high quality care costs more than most parents can reasonably afford to pay.

Yet most parents cannot look to the government for financial assistance. Under the existing system, day care is considered a welfare service, which means subsidy is only available to those who earn very little income.

Seventy-five million in federal dollars are spent each year on day care through the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP).

Under the plan, the federal government pays 50 percent of child care costs for families "in need", and the province either pays the rest or splits the remainder with the municipality. The subsidy is adjusted according to how much help the family is judged to need.

The problem with CAP is that it helps only a small number of families.

In Ontario, only 30 percent of children in licensed care receive a subsidy; the rest must pay full fees, according to the Ontario Coalition for Better Daycare, a Toronto-based lobbying organization.

When CAP was introduced in 1966 to provide social assistance and welfare services for a selected segment of Canadians, it was never intended to become the only federal funding scheme for child care services. Yet that is the situation which has evolved.

Many families look to the child care tax deduction of up to $2,000 per child allowed on federal income tax as a means of defraying the cost of child care.

Although the federal government effectively transfers about $105 million to parents through this deduction, about half of this benefit goes to families with incomes of $45,000 or more.

Middle income families are hurt the most by the existing systme. They are not helped by CAP or the tax exemption, funding schemes which do nothing to build a comprehensive day care system in Canada.

As one veteran day care advocate said,

## Speaking of Children

By HOLLY RUPERT

"Day care is subsidized by the people involved with it. Either the children subsidize the service by accepting low quality care, or the parents subsidize the service by accepting low salaries."

With no government funding flowing directly to the centres, they remain financially fragile. If there is a drop in enrolment one month, a centre goes into debt, or raises its fees, which in turn can lead to a further drop in enrolment.

At the same time, under the current system, any increase in staff salaries can only be reflected in increased fees to parents.

The day care field has become a female job ghetto with chronically low wages. In Ontario, the average annual earnings for day care worker is $13,884, and over 60 percent leave their work after one to three years, according to research commissioned for the federal Task Force on Child Care.

Advocacy groups like the Ontario coalition and the Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association (CDCAA) see direct funding as the only way to build a day care system which truly meets the developmental needs of children.

Direct funding would stabilize the funds needed to develop high quality programs. It would allow children from across the socioeconomic spectrum to have access to a range of child care services. Access to care would no longer by limited by a family's ability to pay or meet financial criteria.

The CDCAA also points out that direct funding would allow those who provide child care to earn adequate wages.

There are concrete funding proposals on the table.

The CDCAA has called for a federal child-care financing act to provide federal and provincial funding for day care on a non-restrictive, universal basis.

The act would include funding to existing licensed spaces based on a formula of $5 per day to every licensed or supervised centre or caregiver for ever approved space.

As a short term measure, the grant would stabilize the existing day care system, bringing us a step closer to universal funding without increasing fees.

As Judith Martin, founding chairperson of CDCAA said, "The neglect of a comprehensive family support and day care policy in Canada intrudes severely on the privacy of the family by limiting and shaping the choices parents can make. Why are working families expected to deal with child care as an individual problem?"

More than a year after its election, the Mulroney government has not devoted a single new penny to day care. But as any parent in the system can tell you, the day care crisis in not going to go away.