Northwestern Ontario Day Care News

FEBRUARY 1989

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

We hope that this newsletter will combat some of the isolation that day care workers and advocates feel and that through the sharing of 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, news clippings, letters, etc. to Box 144, Thunder Bay, Ontario P7C 4V5

FEDERAL CHILD CARE ACT

Well, the federal election has come and gone and we are back at square zero with the federal child care plan.

Thanks to concerted efforts of child care advocates from across Canada, and vigorous opposition from Liberal and New Democratic Party Members of Parliament, the Child Care Act (Bill C-144) was stalled and the Act died at the election call. Child care advocates breathed a sigh of relief. Our joy was short-lived however. With a majority government the Conservatives appear to be determined to reintroduce their regressive child care legislation. Consequently, our efforts to oppose this legislation must be renewed.

It is perhaps useful to summarize the experience that occured with Bill C-144, and understand the process and ways we must intervene when the legislation is again introduced.

Following the report of the Special Committee on Child Care (the year+ long, $million+ exercise) the federal government announced the National Strategy on Child Care. This "strategy" was immediately critized by the day care community (and others) and lobbying efforts, including the Picture Book Campaign were carried out. (It must be pointed out that the "National Strategy" was even more regressive than the Special Committee on Child Care's inadequate and regressive recommendations.)

Totally ignoring the opinions of child care experts, the Conservative government transposed its strategy paper into proposed legislation which went through the following process: (1) First Reading in the House of Commons; (2) Second Reading in the House of Commons; (3) referral to House of Commons Committee; (4) Committee hearings; (5) Committee report; (6) Third Reading in House of Commons; (7) legislation to the Senate; (8) Senate Committee hearings. At this point the election was called and the legislation died.

Strong criticism of the legislation was made in the House of Commons by the opposition parties at every possible point in this process. Community opposition was voiced with interventions at the House of Commons Committee hearings and the Senate Committee hearings, and with on-going lobbying of Members of Parliament, media events and public education.

CONTINUED...

The Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care Committee undertook:

- position paper responding to National Strategy
- participation in the Picture Book Campaign
- communication with all N.W.O MPs re Strategy
- meetings with Thunder Bay - Atikokan & Thunder Bay-Nipigon MPs
- participation in CDCAA lobby
- telegram to Prime Minister Mulroney opposing legislation
- telephone calls/letters to NWO MPs urging opposition to legislation
- request to appear before the House of Commons Committee hearings (we were not chosen to appear)
- on-going communication with NWO MPs re opposition to legislation
- telegram urging Senate Comm. hearings
- request to appear at Senate Committee hearings (not chosen)
- on-going public education

All this action was directed to the federal level, but we took action at the provincial level as well. We have sent telegrams and letters to the Hon. John Sweeney urging Ontario to reject the federal plan, and we have had on-going communication with NWO MPPs in this regard.



Opposition to the federal child care plan continues to grow. The most recent critique comes from the government's own advisory group, the National Council of Welfare (see separate article). Along with the C.D.C.A.A., every local and provincial day care advocacy group, women's organizations, labour organizations, teachers federations, and many other national and local groups are strongly opposing the legislation. In face of this extensive opposition we must ponder <u>why</u> the government refuses to listen to the people most knowledgable and concerned about the issue.

When questioned during the election TV leaders debate about why he did not listen to day care advocates P.M. Mulroney's response was "why should I ..."

This arrogant response forewarns us of the difficult task we have before us. It seems likely that the Child Care Act (in identical or similar form) will be again introduced when Parliament resumes in February or March.

It will be necessary to redouble our efforts to ensure this legislation is scraped or significantly amended. We must acquaint our new N.W.O. MPs with our position and encourage their opposition to the Bill. Please take every opportunity to talk to your MP about this urgent issue.

<u>GOOD NEWS</u>

The Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care Committee finally has an <u>office</u>! And soon we will have a <u>telephone</u> and an answering service. We are (almost) settled in the office space at 281 Bay Street. For the time being the office will be staffed on Mondays and Tuesdays. Our phone number will be 345-8803.

PROVINCIAL UPDATE

Direct Operating Grant

The direct operating grant has been implemented. For some centres the direct grant flowed smoothly, quickly providing much needed wages increases for staff. In other instances the implementation was slow and laborious. In certain situations the employer utilized the "exception" clause, and the grant was not directed to wages and benefits.

Information gathered by the Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care Committee in the fall of 1988 (with app. 80% of NWO centres reporting) show the following breakdown: 72% of centres applied 100% of the direct grant to wages and benefits; 14% of centres applied a portion of the grant to wages; while 14% did not apply the grant to wages/benefits.

Our observations are that the major problem concerning the implementation of the direct operating grant was created by the province allowing exceptions to the wages/benefits priority. Because certain day care organizations chose to not direct any of the grant to staff wages/benefits the wage disparity of Northwestern Ontario day care workers has widened significantly.

Other problems mentioned were that information concerning the direct operating grant was not equitably provided to those impacted by the grant (i.e supervisors, workers, and, in some cases, unions. The interrelationship between the direct operating grant and pay equity also requires clarification.

The Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care Committee made recommendations to the Ministry through the Funding Advisory Committee, as follows:

(1) That where significant wage disparities exist (based on regional norm and/or provincial standards) the Ministry instruct day care organizations to direct the 1989 direct operating grant to wages and benefits only.

(2) That full information about the direct operating grant be given to day care supervisors, workers, and where applicable, unions.

(3) That full information about pay equity provisions, and the implications of the direct operating grant on pay equity be provided to municipal day care supervisors, workers and unions.

(4) That day care organizations be assured, in writing, by the Ministry that the direct operating grant will be on-going. *

(5) That administrative procedures be simplified as much as possible.

(6) That efforts be made by the Ministry to speed up the approval process.

* This has been confirmed. A letter from the Hon. John Sweeney, Minister of Community & Social Services states (in part): "I would like to assure you that the existing direct grant program is open-ended, that the funding is ongoing and eligible for the annual economic adjustment that is provided for all base ministry programs."

Income Testing

The implementation of income testing has experienced several delays and is now planned for 1990. The Ministry is currently studying the impact of income testing. They hope to produce a discussion paper by summer 1989, with policy options. The N.W.O.R.D.C.C. will urge the province to consult with the day care community in this process.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

The Corporation of the Town of Geraldton

requires

DAY CARE CENTRE

TEACHER

Qualifications:

E.C.E. Diploma or equivalent education plus experience will be considered.

Bilingualism, while not a required qualification, would be considered an asset.

Qualified candidates should forward their application stating personal history, education and experience to:

Miss Diane Sarrazin
Supervisor
Geraldton Day Care Centre
/La Garderie de Geraldton
Box 70
Geraldton, Ontario
P0T 1M0

PROVINCIAL UPDATE

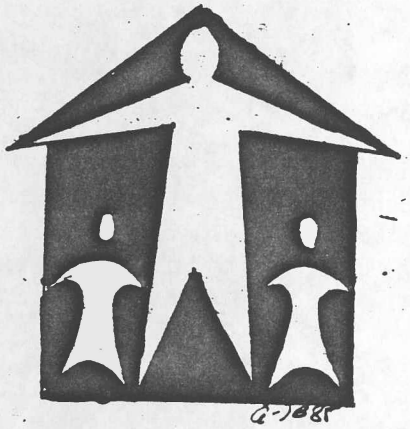
Subsidy Spaces

The most recent crisis in Ontario child care is the subsidy issue. Across the province waiting lists for new subsidized day care spaces exceed 7000. Despite this crying need the provincial government has announced that it would not pay for any more new subsidized spaces this budget year. Day care advocates are deeply concerned that the province will not adequately address this issue in the next budget year.

While the focus of this problem has been Metro Toronto with its waiting list of 5000, the problem is relatively just as serious in many Northwestern Ontario communities. In Thunder Bay some 800 - 1000 families are waiting for a day care space... the municipal program alone has a waiting list exceeding 630. District centres are similarly strained with waiting lists of 40 in Geraldton, 50 in Fort Frances, and 60 in Dryden. It is projected that 75% of those on waiting lists would qualify for subsidy.

The expansion of day care spaces in Northwestern Ontario, and the subsidy spaces allocated, are no where near meeting the demand. The province must be urged to address these pressing needs.

FORUM 1989



Plan now to attend the 4th annual Regional Day Care Forum, which will be held in Thunder Bay (Ramada Inn) Friday, March 31st and Saturday, April 1st, 1989. This FORUM is for day care parents, workers, administrators, ECE students, community activists -- for everyone concerned about the future of quality child care in Northwestern Ontario. Issues that will be addressed include: provincial policy issues - direct operating grant, income testing, transitional grants, subsidy spaces; new federal legislation; day care jurisdiction, and more.

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COALITION REPORT

by Anita Price

At the December executive meeting of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care we discussed federal developments and where do we go from here.

It was decided that the Coalition focus should be on the Provincial Government to not buy into the legislation. We must press the provincial government to have the FEDERAL - PROVINCIAL negotiations be more open. We, as a group, must focus on what the impacts will be if Bill C-144 is passed.

A kit is being prepared that will include the Coalition's brief, provincial and federal fact sheets, the political parties' positions, lobby instructions, press release, and other helpful documents.

This lobby kit is to help people get the information in the ridings. Hopefully we can regionally plan and coordinate a date... perhaps a week.



FORUM 1989 (continued)

Guest speakers, panels and a variety of interesting workshops will give everyone much food for thought. Guest speakers will include Kay Eastham, Director, Child Care Branch, Ministry of Community and Social Services, and representatives of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and the Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association. Detailed FORUM information including registration forms, subsidy information, etc. will be forwarded in a few weeks.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WELFARE REPORT

The recent release of 'Child Care A Better Alternative', the report of the National Council of Welfare, came as a pleasant surprise to day care advocates. While many of the recommendations are those that day care advocates have been making for years, the source of the report is encouraging. The National Council of Welfare is a government appointed body, whose mandate is to advise the Minister of Health & Welfare on matters pertaining to welfare. Surely, one would hope, the government would listen to its own advisory group (???)

Key criticisms advanced by the Council's study are (1) that the government's strategy was designed to limit federal spending on child care; (2) that the emphasis was on funding parents rather than creating needed child care spaces; (3) that the strategy would fund commercial, profit making centres; (4) that an improved parental benefit policy was lacking from the plan; (5) that national standards were not spelled out.

TABLE 1

LICENSED CHILD CARE SPACES AND CHILDREN OF WORKING OR STUDYING PARENTS, 1987

	Number of Licensed Child Care Spaces	Number of Children Under 13 With Parents Outside the Home	Percentage of Children Under 13 In Licensed Child Care
British Columbia	18,595	184,631	10%
Alberta	43,082	213,452	20
Saskatchewan	5,720	84,586	7
Manitoba	10,526	76,916	14
Ontario	94,018	766,751	12
Quebec	58,425	479,355	12
New Brunswick	4,503	44,041	10
Nova Scotia	5,397	48,298	11
Prince Edward Island	1,264	8,135	16
Newfoundland	1,318	30,998	4
Northwest Territories	240	-	-
Yukon	475	-	-
TOTAL	243,545	1,937,163	13%

One of the difficulties advocates have faced in the child care debate is overcoming public misconceptions about the reality of the government's funding plans. (To a taxpayer not conversant with the funding implications the announcement of $6 billion for child care services seems like a lot of money.... and why are we complaining?)

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TABLE 2

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR CHILD CARE, 1986-1987 FISCAL YEAR

Federal	Government Spending ($ millions)	Percentage of Total
Canada Assistance Plan	$136	20%
Training Subsidies	51	7
Care on Indian Reserves	6	1
Child Care Expense Deduction	170	25
Subtotal	$363	53%
Provincial & Territorial		
Canada Assistance Plan	$136	20%
Other Day Care Subsidies	113	17
Child Care Expense Deduction	70	10
Subtotal	$319	47%
TOTAL	$682	100%

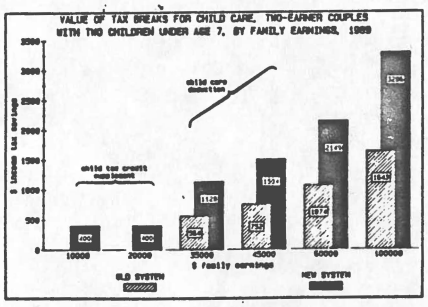
This study provides some useful documentation that can help clear up some misconceptions. For example, the report describes what is 'old' money and what is 'new' money. (A fact the government conveniently forgets to mention in its propaganda.)

The study also graphically demonstrates the fact that upper income families will benefit the most from the new tax provisions. Families with incomes of $100,000 will have tax savings of $3286, while those with $20,000 will benefit by only $400.

Even under the current system 35% of government "child care" spending is on tax deduction that mainly benefits higher income families.

The Council, whose focus is poverty and social policy, clearly points out that the lack of day care spaces means that the majority of low income families who would qualify for child care subsidy, in fact, do not receive it, because there is no space available. On a national basis only 15% of those eligible for either a full or partial subsidy in 1987 actually received assistance. In Ontario, the figure was only 10%.

FIGURE A



'Child Care, A Better Alternative' provides an alternative that "puts all available resources into child care services and none into tax breaks". Their recommendations include:

- The federal government should reverse its decision to supplement the refundable child tax credit as part of its child care strategy and should use the money instead to increase the supply of licensed child care spaces and to provide more subsidies for maintaining those spaces.

- The federal government should increase the amount of money available for capital grants to $1.5 billion over the next seven years.

- Ottawa should not impose any fixed ceilings on the amount of money it is willing to spend to help the provinces and territories cover the operating costs of child care programs.

- The principles of the new child care system should be spelled out in the Canada Child Care Act, much as the goals of medicare and the obligations of the provinces and territories are spelled out in the Canada Health Act.

- The federal government should include a "grandfather clause" in the Canada Child Care Act to allow operating grants to existing commercial centres, but no new ones. Alternatively, the government should require that all commercial centres convert to non-profit centres within a reasonable period of time if they wish to continue getting federal funding.

- A programme of parental benefits should be added to maternity benefits under unemployment insurance.

Copies of this report may be obtained by writing to the National Council of Welfare, Brooke Claxton Building, Ottawa,K1A 0K9.