Northwestern Ontario Day Care News

April '86

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 NWO. Please send articles, newsclippings, letters, etc. to Box 144, Thunder Bay P7C 4V5.

This news update will be brief as we are enclosing the Coalition newsletter which provides a wealth of information about day care issues you will be interested in.

INDIRECT SUBSIDY

Be sure to read pp.3-5 of the Coalition newsletter which indicates optimism that the province will make some necessary changes. As you will see, Gerry Duda, Senior Policy Coordinator, COMSOC "agreed with Coalition representatives that it did not make sense for the province to be enforcing its instructions to municipal day care centres to increase their fees to full per diem costs at the same time the government was conducting a full-scale review of funding alternatives". Duda informed Sue-Colley "that indeed there seems to have been an oversight and the Regional Directors were meeting with the Policy Branch ... to discuss a new policy which would relax the rule requiring municipal centres to raise their fees to full cost by the end of 1986".

While this is welcome news, we cannot relax. It appears that this relaxed policy/directive has not filtered down because we keep hearing that district COMSOC officials are continuing to pressure municipalities to raise fees and to take cost-cutting measures that will erode the quality of care provided by day care centres (see Thunder Bay and Longlac articles).

It would be a tragedy if any of our NWO centres were forced to close or abandon quality service before new (and hopefully satisfactory) policies were effected. We must increase our advocacy to ensure the stability of our existing centres.

NWO DAY CARE PROJECT

Our funding request to Secretary of State to carry out our regional project from January - June 1986 got caught in the federal government "freeze", and our grant was rejected because "the Government has acted on the basis of its fundamental commitment to reducing the national debt". We fail to see how the $12,000 we were denied will substantially reduce the federal deficit ... however, the reality is we didn't get it, so our plans to conduct a comprehensive survey of day care in NWO and to convene regional forums have had to be postponed. We have re-applied for the grant for the period June - December 1986, thus hopefully the forums can be organized for early fall.

VIDEO PROJECT

The Coalition has received a grant from the Ontario Women's Directorate for the Child Care Video Project. Videotapes will be produced in 10 communities across the province, illustrating child care concerns of local parents and day care groups. Marathon and Sioux Lookout have been chosen to represent NWO day care programs and issues.

COMMUNITY NEWS

The Post Card campaign organized by the SIOUX LOOKOUT PARENTS' GROUP is well underway, with hundreds of post cards from across Northwestern Ontario being sent to Premier David Peterson urging a universally accessible, publicly funded, high quality day care system. If you need more post cards for your community, contact Janet Wilkinson, Box 177, Sioux Lookout or the NWO Regional Day Care Committee, Box 144, Thunder Bay P7C 4V5.

TERRACE BAY's Town Council approved a request by the Day Care Group and have appointed a Day Care Advisory Committee composed of Town Council and parent representatives. This committee will further investigate ways and means to develop a day care centre in Terrace Bay.

We are pleased to know that a Parents' Group has been formed in GERALDTON.

The BIG TROUT LAKE Women's Group have placed day care at the top of their priorities. They have conducted a needs survey and are working toward the establishment of a day care centre in their community.

We're happy to report that THUNDER BAY City Council is taking real leadership by urging the province to continue the 'indirect subsidy'. This and other positive actions arose from a recent meeting of the City's Community Services Committee. With day care children and their parents packing Council Chambers, city politicians gave a sympathetic hearing to the briefs submitted by the Thunder Bay Advocates for Quality Child Care, NWO Regional Day Care Committee, CUPE and individual parents. The issue arose because City Administration had put forward a report which included a number of recommended changes that would seriously affect the quality of Thunder Bay's municipal day care and jeopardize the existence of the centres. Thankfully, City Council deferred all these recommendations and will press the province for appropriate government support. (If you would like a copy of the brief we made to the City let us know.)

REPORTS TO READ

Be sure to get a copy of the Report of the Task Force on Child Care (the Katie Cooke report). This report can be obtained for $9.95 from Canada Government Publishing Centre, Supply & Services Canada, Ottawa KIA OS9. We all need to be familiar with this report and be prepared to advocate for a number of its key recommendations. Some excellent research studies have also been published (separately) by the Task Force. These are available free from the Communications Unit, Status of Women Canada, 10th Floor, 151 Sparks Street, Ottawa.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON CHILD CARE

Although the dates for the hearings in Thunder Bay and Dryden have not yet been confirmed, it appears likely that they will be held during the week of May 12 to May 16. Please plan to attend these hearings. Contact your parent group or day care supervisor for more information.

THUNDER BAY ADVOCATES FOR QUALITY CHILD CARE

Thunder Bay Advocates for Quality Child Care will be meeting on Thursday, April 17, 1986, at 8:00 p.m. at Ogden Community Centre to discuss the following:

Representations to the Special Committee on Child Care; report and follow-up to the presentation made to City Council; and plans for future activities of the advocacy group.

If you require child care, please advise by calling 345-7802 no later than April 16.

"The lack of better data on the number of children requiring child care services is, perhaps, a reflection of the profound disinterest in the lives and welfare of children and their families, which we detect on the part of government and policy makers in Canada." [The Katie Cooke Report]

Chronicle-Journal, March 11, 1986

Daycare provides hot times

By DAVID FROOD
Chronicle-Journal Staff



KARLSTEDT
..."fee hikes frightening"

An anxious crowd of 150 people, most of them women and children, overflowed council chambers Monday, taking turns to speak out against policies they feel threaten the city's daycare system.

The community services committee was faced with 10 deputations from individuals or groups involved with daycare. The message was the same — scrap social services' plan to cut back on daycare staff and pass on large cost increases to full-pay users.

"The plans are jeopardizing the municipal daycare system we have in place," said Ruth Wells, president of Thunder Bay Advocates for Quality Child Care, a new umbrella group. "Council must ask this policy be rescinded immediately."

At issue is an administration report that outlines several "cost-saving efficiencies" to maintain an "affordable" daily rate for children in city daycare. Most changes affect the 275 children under care in four organized centres. Among them:

- Fee hikes starting this September to between $26.33 and $28.86 per child per day from $17.50 currently charged, when the "indirect subsidy" from the federal government that's passed on by the province is eliminated.
- Enrolment-based staffing, using four-hour "supply" daycare workers, permanent part-timers and split shifts in place of some of the "fixed" staff.
- Enrolment contracts with parents, using a binding contract that would state the number of days the parent wants their child in daycare. This replaces the current method of billing clients based on attendance records.
- Closing two of the centres for the months of July and August, when system-wide occupancy is only 50 per cent.

ALREADY BIG PROBLEMS

Several speakers told the committee the changes could destroy a daycare system that already has problems, including its cost to the lower ranks of middle-income people and "working poor" and with low pay-levels for staff.

"Why is the city so eager to further restrict access to quality daycare?" asked Joan Williams, a parent using the city centres. "A substantial rate increase will force parents to find less expensive and (inferior) daycare."

"Compared to other increases, the extraordinary increase in daycare fees appears difficult to justify," said Wells, noting city daycare fees rose 350 per cent between 1974 and last year, double inflation's climb.

Judith Mongrain, president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees' Local 87 representing city workers, said the policies will cost both daycare workers and parents using the city service their jobs, the latter because they'll have to quit rather than pass most of their paycheques on to the city.

If the Ontario government forces the city to pass on elimination of the indirect daycare subsidy — roughly 80 per cent of net operating costs — "this will mean annual fees between $6,840 and $7,498 per child," said Wells.

"It's unlikely there are very many families who can afford these fees," she said, predicting a restriction of municipal daycare to subsidized, lower-income families and "the rich."

Several speakers contended higher fees will lower daycare occupancy rates to the point where the city will have to close one or more of its centres. Others said single parents especially have had to pass on jobs and drop out of training courses because of a lack of daycare.

Fiona Karlstedt, speaking for the Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care committee, said she found the hiked fees "an extremely frightening proposal."

KRAUSE BOOED

Ald. Peter Krause (McIntyre) got a boo from the partisan crowd when he suggested the indirect subsidy might not entirely be needed and questioned "whether, at times, that (daycare) need is being placed where it belongs."

But Krause's insistence the real problem lies with the federal and provincial governments, who should be "pressured" to change their plans, met with agreement from the majority of the committee.

A team from city social services, led by Jim Dolph, told the committee the elimination of the indirect subsidy, now set to occur at the end of the year, was the chief factor prompting the report.

Also, "if we don't move to enrolment-based contracts, the province could cancel all other subsidies," said Dolph.

Dolph and other staff explained later the daycare enrolment contracts will not penalize parents for suddenly-changed circumstances. The agreements will contain cancellation clauses based on only 48-hours notice, allowing parents whose work hours, family conditions or locations have changed to avoid paying for unused daycare time.

Dolph said currently only 69 per cent of city daycare spaces are occupied and that a target of 90 per cent is needed to stave off the impending fee hikes.

Nonetheless, many aldermen expressed concern with the report's suggestions and the committee deferred the most controversial six of 11 recommendations after committee chairman Ald. Dusty Miller relayed some recent developments on the provincial level:

CITY TRAPPED, BUT...

"We are truly caught between a rock and a hard place — however, there is a little light at the end of the tunnel," she announced.

Miller said provincial officials have recently admitted the plan to recover the full cost of daycare from (otherwise) unsubsidized families is "at odds" with the Liberal government's expansion of such services:

"Regional directors (of the Ministry of Community and Social Services) will be asked to relax this policy" while the government prepares a white paper on all daycare issues, she said.

"I've heard more than enough to convince me we're jumping the gun on this issue," said Ald. Betty Kennedy (McKellar). "There are numerous long and short-term implications, like daycare centre closures."

The committee deferred the items on the fee increase, summer closures, inclusion of younger-aged infants and an April 1 target date for dropping the indirect subsidy. Social services will modify its proposals in time for the committee's April meeting.

The committee, however, agreed to drop its minimum user fee (about $25 a year) for welfare clients and to raise the standard deduction used to calculate the daycare subsidy "means test" from 10 per cent of net income to 25 per cent, broadening assistance eligibility.

The city will also place the issue squarely on the shoulders of the province and attempt to lobby for retention of the indirect subsidy.

Times-News, March 11, 1986

Parent awareness meeting at Longlac day care centre

By BEA AKERS-BYRON
Correspondent
(Telephone 329-5711)

LONGLAC — Government subsidy ends for the Longlac Day Care Centre on Nov. 1, and the administrators are planning ahead.

About 15 parents attended a parent awareness meeting where they were given an opportunity to direct their questions to local day care leaders and Calvin Green, program supervisor with the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Increases in day care rates ar scheduled throughout the year to incorporate a user pay policy. The per diem, what it costs to operate per child per day, is $20. The people are paying $13 a day. The province pays 80 per cent and the town pays 20 per cent of the amount not paid by parents.

Rates will increase $1 for the first child in both June and November.

"The costs are pretty well fixed," said Jane Jantunen, social service administrator. Those include hydro, heat and salaries.

The more children that attend day care, the less the costs. If people take their children out of the day care, the cost per child will go up, she added.

Parents were encouraged to complete Form 7, which is a Needs Testing Format, to determine whether they would be eligible to receive a subsidy to assist them in paying for the cost of keeping their child in day care. Jantunen stressed that the assistance is not welfare but a subsidy. Through this format, partail subsidization can be available. Eligibility depends upon income and monthly bills, with available income as the key.

A policy, to say that all parents would complete a needs test, was an idea presented at the meeting. This way there would be no set fee. A lot of people try to reduce their income tax, this is a way to reduce individual day care fees, said Greene.

Running an efficient day care reduces operating costs, and one way to do that is through utilization of staff. If enrolment is 100 per cent capacity it reduces costs. Present capacity is 45 children. Enrolment is about 100, but attendance varies to meet the needs of the parents.

Contracted enrolment, which would maintain maximum use of the day care staff, is another efficiency means. This would involve committing parents to bring their child to day care.

Judy Costello asked what would happen if a child was sick and had to be left with a sitter. "Who can afford to pay two times?" she asked.

"We would have to give a financial break for people under contract," Jantunen answered.

Agnes Vincent, day care supervisor, was previously questioned by parents concerning the cost of part-time day care usage. It is harder to schedule staffing for part-time day care, so that raises the cost, she said.

In an effort to maintain stable working conditions for the staff, therefore reducing the possibility of loosing staff, Jantunen asked parents to consider having the day care closed for two months in the summer or make it available for full time working parents only during that time.

Desneiges Blier, a member of the staff, introduced the integration program for mentally or physically handicapped children. Children placed in this program can be assisted in learning and can improve in basic skills. Parents of special needs children should contact the day care centre for further information concerning th program.

Fee calculation for children with special needs are different, said Vincent.

Green, who has been associated with the program for about four years, said he found the Longlac day care centre unique. "Because of the French immersion that is here. And it works," he said.

"Day care has undersold the quality of care (available) as contrasted with the baby sitter," said Jantunen.

"The biggest question," admitted Bernice Picard, an early childhood worker, following the meeting was "why the government doesn't see day care as important."

Daycare studying finances

meetings with M.P.P., council

Jan 29/86

Marathon Daycare is investigating alternatives to finance its centre on Hemlo Drive. The board that oversees the operation of the centre met with M.P.P. Gilles Pouliot last week to enlist his support in attaining funding from the provincial government.

Daycare president Kim Ransom says that Marathon Daycare is the first facility in the north of this type "that isn't going to get funding." The Ministry of Community and Social Services (COMSOC) funded the operation costs for a start up period and contributed some of the capital to purchase equipment but continues to fund only subsidized spaces.

Ransom said that Pouliot promised to talk to some people in Toronto and see if there was some financial support available. Ransom said his board told Pouliot the centre is a growing facility and "not a white elephant". He said that money is needed to get it through the growth years. "We've got the basics," he said, but stressed that the centre needs some "frills" to make the service a daycare "that more people will be happy with."

The board isn't putting all its fund raising eggs in one basket. It intends to approach corporations in the community to ask for a per hour grant in exchange for guaranteeing spaces. The centre could fill the reserved spaces on a conditional arrangement until the corporations wanted it. The corporation could offer guaranteed spaces as part of the benefit package for employees.

The first corporation to be offered this arrangement will be the Township of Marathon. The Daycare Board has asked to meet with the council to discuss this and other ways the municipality can offer assistance. This includes asking the township to cover 20% of the cost of subsidized spaces (COMSOC only pays 80%) and providing or subsidizing services such as solicitors.

Local service clubs have also been asked to consider purchasing equipment for the daycare.

Raising the profile of the daycare as a service provider is another strategy the board is pursuing. For instance the centre currently offers a "latchkey" program in the morning for public school students. Parents can drop their children off at the daycare anytime after 7:30 where they will be looked after until the school bus arrives in front of the centre.

A reorganization is taking place at the centre. The day has been broken down into "blocks" which are offered at a reduced rate for part time daycare users that contract a week ahead. Ransom calls the system "contract billing." Besides the latchkey block a morning and afternoon "socialization" block is available so that children who are dropped off can be involved in a complete program instead of coming in the middle of something.

The system is helping the centre rationalize its scheduling. It's easier to determine how many staff members are needed, how much food should be available and removes the surprises in the workers' day. Drop-in daycare users that don't nofity the centre of their intention by the Thursday prior to using the service will pay the premium rate of $3.00 per hour. Users taking advantage of the contract billing save 75¢ per hour.

"We're not a squeaky wheel," says Ransom, "We scramble but we provide a service." The service is growing steadily he says. The centre is holding its own with the equivalent of 14 full time participants.

Marathon Mercury,
January 29, 1986