



The **A,B,C's** of Better Day Care: **Alliance, Building, Caring**

Building upon a foundation of collective bargaining, Ottawa's day care staff members are trying to forge an alliance which will lead to fair-play day care for everyone involved.

The staff members hope to unite with board members, parents and concerned citizens to force out of government a better day care system—especially for the children.

The 150 staff members have united under the banner of Local 2204 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. These are mostly day care teachers, but also included are cooks, cleaning staff, home day care visitors and some clerical employees.

They're employed at nine centres throughout Ottawa. Managements at five centres were persuaded to grant voluntary recognition to their employees and to negotiate a master agreement.

At two other centres—profit making centres—Labor Board certification was required. Certification at two other centres is pending.

"We felt that it was important to win voluntary recognition as often as possible," explains CUPE's director of organization, John (Lofty) MacMillan.

"We wanted to win over the boards of these centres to the point of view that together with their staff and parents they could accomplish the most for their schools and the kids."

He recalls that in the past the board members at many day care centres have vowed they would like to improve their centres and the way the staff are treated. But they always claimed their hands were tied because of the lack of funds coming in from the provincial government.

"Now we are giving them a chance to untie their hands.

"Surely the combined pressure and persuasion of all parties will bring a better reception from the regional and provincial governments."

The funding difficulties for all centres can be seen in this one example:

The Glebe Parents Day Care Centre requested from the provincial government an eight per cent increase for 1978. It received 2.5 per cent for its infant toddler program and 6.25 per cent for its pre-school program.

Yet this is a Day Care Centre where employees received on average \$9,000 a year, a salary which exceeds those received in many other day care centres in the region.

The centre tried to keep costs down by using volunteers, applying for Wintario funds, obtaining Canada Work grants, seeking donations and conducting fund raising events.

"It only stands to reason that if this centre, and all others like it, are devoting so much time, energy and resources to finding the minimum of funds, that the program aspects of the centres are suffering," says MacMillan.

"And with such a vital resource in the community, you would think the provincial government would not be so inhumane with the needed money."

Larry Katz, of the CUPE Research Department, on the failures of the provincial government:

"The overall problem which confronts the day care community in Ontario is a lack of financial commitment to the service on the part of government.

"This results from the provincial government's



Day
Care
is
James
St.
where

you pee in the
bathroom

philosophical approach to the service. Historically, day care has been perceived as a fringe service for families in special need. Government has accepted and reinforced this notion. The service has been hampered by a static concept of the family; and of the role that women assume in it."

His suggestions:

"Day care should be viewed as a vital human service that should be accessible to all children and families. It should be seen as an essential requirement which provides children with an environment which promotes their physical, emotional and intellectual development. Changes must be implemented in the delivery of day care in Ontario: changes by simple bureaucratic re-shuffling of limited children's services is not the answer. It is time to give our children, and thus our future, the consideration and the opportunities that they deserve."

In Ontario, public funding for day care is legislated by the Day Nurseries Act. The decision to provide funds for day care, however, is a municipal or regional government decision. The Act, then, provides for a cost-sharing arrangement.

Twenty per cent is paid for by the municipality; 30 per cent by the province and this amount—50 per cent—is matched by the federal government.

Because the provincial government has announced a freeze on day care expansion and severe limits to cover cost increases for existing programs, all day care facilities are feeling the pinch.

With only .3 per cent of the provincial budget going to day care expenditures, very little is saved while so many suffer—parents, kids, day care workers and the community.

The need for expanding day care is greater now than ever before. In Canada in 1901 just over 14 per cent of the adult female population worked outside the home; by 1977, this figure has increased to 47 per cent.

"The undisputed Canadian reality is that most families require two incomes just to make ends meet," says CUPE researcher Larry Katz.

"Yet federal statistics for 1977 show that in terms of the number of children's spaces day care is on the decline," says Katz.

The unfortunate Canadian historical reality is that except during World War Two, governments have never seen day care as an important part of their responsibilities.

And this government failure hurts not only the parents, but also the kids and the community.

In the Ottawa-Carleton area, for example, day care fees range from \$10 to \$12 for pre-schoolers and \$18 to \$22 a day for infants. These fees are seen as high by most families, yet there are still long waiting lists.

The failure to provide adequate day care spaces keeps some women out of the work force; denies needed income to the family and needed skills to the community.

Women are often denied work fulfillment and income

Where
we
come
to but
I go to
Church
School too.



because governments have failed them. Parents are forced to place kids in inferior environments rather than in centres where skilled workers can care for them.

Or sometimes parents don't work because of inadequate day care and a tense and unhealthy atmosphere exists as a result in those homes.

The Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto found that:

"When asked about their own ideal arrangements for their children, regardless of constraints of family finances and time schedules, the order of parents' preference is: day care centre, followed by sitter care, with only 20 per cent of parents identifying care by a relative as their ideal type of care."

Workers in the existing day care facilities and kids with inadequate provisions are the ones who have been subsidizing day care.

These are the conditions which led Ottawa day care workers to decide they needed to take action.

Early last year, day care teachers, who were already part of the Ottawa-Carleton Day Care Association, met to discuss social service cutbacks and the impact these were having on their work.

"While many of the teachers were part of the Association, we never really had a separate forum for those people employed by the centres to get together," explains Day Care worker Penny Lane.

"Out of these discussions on cutbacks the topic of

unionization came up.”

She said the association had served, and still does, a useful function in bringing all people in the day care community together, but it has not been able to force concessions from governments.

“It was at this time that the concept of a united front to face the provincial government started to take form.”

The employees first agreed that unionization would be the important first step in forging this alliance. And then they set out to determine what that union would be.

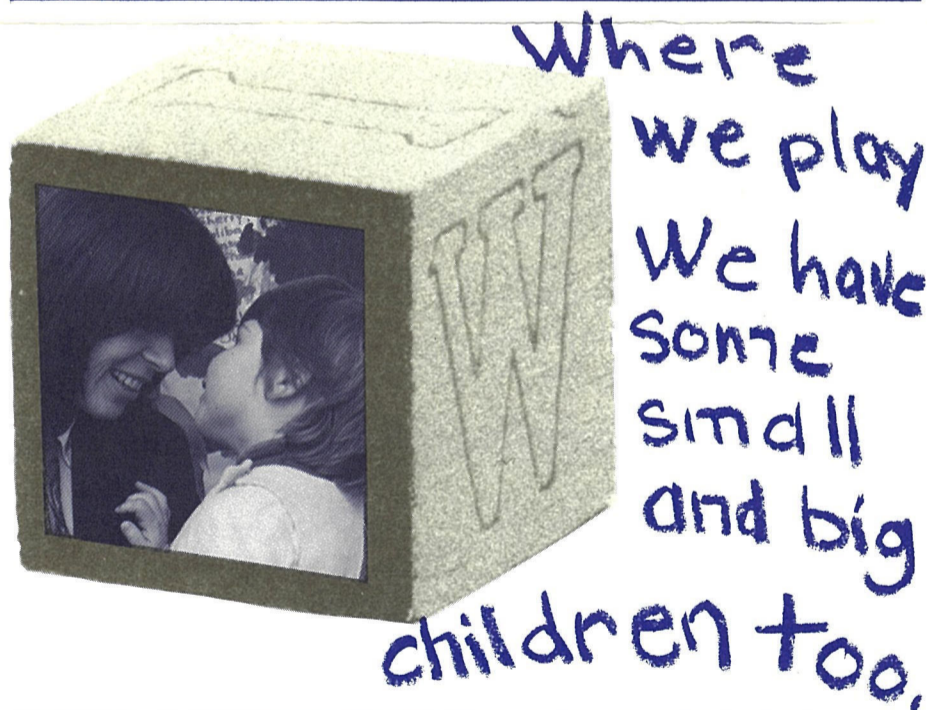
They looked at the idea of an independent association, several small unions and CUPE.

An Ottawa Day Care Workers’ Committee on Unionization explored the various possibilities and heard delegations.

In its reports it said:

“We feel that CUPE is the union that can best represent us:

1. It is a strong union that can offer us a solid working structure, qualified staff and resources.
2. Within this structure we would form our own separate local—this allows us necessary autonomy to set our own policies and priorities (with our own collective agreements).
3. CUPE has already demonstrated its opposition to social service cutbacks in Ontario.
4. It is a Canadian union and through CUPE we will be in contact with other day care workers throughout the country.



5. Municipal day care workers in Ottawa-Carleton are already members of CUPE.”

The committee’s report concluded:

“After much discussions of the options, it was the opinion of this committee that our interests are best served by joining CUPE. CUPE’s commitment to fighting social service cutbacks, its strength and its present day care membership were some of the major factors that brought us to this conclusion.”

The committee’s recommendation was accepted by the day care staff members and the long process of winning recognition and negotiating first collective agreements were begun.

It was decided that all staff from throughout the area would be in one local union, but that each day care centre, would have its own sub-unit and have representation on the local executive.

Penny Lane, who was elected president of the CUPE local:

“The union was formed in order for day workers to have an impact on the various levels of government which fund day care. It is recognized that the employers at individual centres do not control the funding and that in fact we have a common goal in obtaining more money for day care.

“It is basic to our approach to the government that we have the support of boards by presenting a joint appeal.”

She explains that the lack of adequate funding leads to “low salaries, lack of job security, reduction of spaces for children and an ever present threat of deterioration of the quality of service.”

Therefore, when the goal of higher wages was determined it was not just to give a better income to the workers involved.

“Sure we want a more decent income level for our members, but we are confident that a more reasonable income level will lead to an increased and improved day care system. High turnover, low morale and inferior work conditions will all be corrected with improved wages.”

The local also set among its goals the re-structuring of the existing subsidy system and the setting of a ceiling for fee paying parents.

The philosophy of the local union is set out by Petra Pupp, local vice-president:

“Our day care union recognizes day care as a beneficial experience for children contributing to their physical, emotional mental-social growth.

“We want to see day care facilities expanded so that all children will have an opportunity to enjoy the positive experience day care can provide.

“We find the current one space for each 10 children in need of day care unacceptable.”

And the union’s view of day care staff:

“The union recognizes the staff’s job as one requiring special skills and qualifications. It is a mentally, physically and emotionally demanding job requiring special understanding of children and family needs.



This is
a day
care
house
Jamie
and Paulie,
their home



“Day care workers are underpaid by any standards. Some are below the poverty line. We want day care salaries and conditions improved to a realistic level.”

That level should be one already reached by day care workers employed by the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Government.

Those people earn between \$2,000 and \$5,000 per year more.

“Our proposal is a modest one,” says president, Penny Lane. “We want to close the gap over three years, thus giving the regional and provincial governments time to adjust to these increased costs.”

Improvements to welfare benefit plans is a high priority. For example, pension plan, OHIP coverage, group life insurance, and extended health care are being sought. Even these most basic of fringe benefits are now denied day care workers.

Also, they seek particular clauses tailored to their work setting. The preamble to the proposed collective agreement proclaims the joint employer-employee determination:

“To maintain a high standard of care for children and promote their intellectual, physical and emotional development;

“To encourage and promote co-operation and mutual support between day care workers, the employer and parents, recognizing that all these groups have an essential interest in obtaining the best conditions for day care generally and are adversely affected by attempts to restrain or cut back government expenditures for day care; and

“To encourage and promote the development of accessible, quality day care as a universal right for all parents and children.”

Another proposed article:

“The employer and the union agree that a reasonable ratio of adults to children in a Day Care Centre is essential if the children’s physical, intellectual and emotional needs and potentials are to be given proper attention. Therefore, the employer agrees that the adult/child ratio shall not exceed the minimum established by the Ontario Day Nurseries Act as of 1976.”

Similar provisions have been negotiated by CUPE day care workers in other centres.

“Collective bargaining is a new experience in the Ottawa day care community,” explains CUPE researcher Katz.

“So that has meant educating both the day care boards and our own members. But initial fears have been set aside and negotiations for the five non-profit centres are proceeding smoothly.”

In the meantime, Local 2204 members have taken seriously the need to forge the alliance with board members and parents and to get involved in the political process.

In recent municipal elections, local members canvassed all candidates and sponsored an all candidates meeting on day care. Post-election activity has included educating civic leaders and winning friends among parents and board members.

At the same time contact has been made with other day care workers in Ontario and the local has affiliated with Ontario CUPE Social Services Workers’ Committee.

The purposes of this committee are:

1. To break down the isolation and estrangement between social service workers in Ontario;
2. To develop positions on social issues in order to confront government policy and turn the social service resources of Ontario towards the real needs of clients and workers;
3. To use the combined strength of the CUPE membership to fight cutbacks in the social services; and
4. To encourage the organization of unorganized social service workers in Ontario.

Larry Katz:

“CUPE is strongly committed to improved and expanded day care facilities. Even if we didn’t have one member employed in a day care centre, we would see it as our responsibility to support and advance this essential service. We would remain committed to winning proper government support for day care.

“It is an exciting prospect for the future that together with our members in this field, we can work toward proper government funding and an improved, enriched setting for our children.”



DayCare
is a
centre
with
kids
and
teachers

that I like