

STUDY ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CHILD EDUCATION & DAY CARE SERVICES IN THE PROVINCE OF NEW BRUNSWICK.

The present study was commissioned by the N.B. Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and conducted by a team of researchers of the Faculté des Sciences de l'Education, Université de Moncton. The major purpose of the study was to survey present day care needs in the province and poll opinions from a variety of sources on the establishment of day care centres in the province. The study itself consisted of three separate surveys.

In the first and most comprehensive survey, women across the province with children 12 years of age and younger were contacted. They were asked about their present child care needs and arrangements; further their opinions about the possibility of day care centres for their children were solicited.

In the second survey, professionals working with individuals with particularly pressing needs were contacted, in order to determine their impressions of the day care situation among such people. The public officials consulted included social service personnel, public health nurses and mental health workers in every area of the province.

Finally, in order to determine the types of support possible at the community level, mayors of all municipalities and superintendents of all school districts in the province were polled. They were asked about their present involvement, if any, with day care in their area, and then queried about the type of support they might be willing to grant in the future.

1. Survey of Mothers.

Five hundred and ten N.B. women aged 18-54 years with children 12 years of age and less from a randomly chosen sample across the province responded to a questionnaire. The sample included approximately 1% of such women in the province.

a) Present Day Care Arrangements.

Of those women who stated they used babysitting or child care services, 25% classified themselves as regular and 75% as occasional users. The regular users stated their major reason for using child care services as being to allow the mother to work (93%). Approximately one third utilize a member of their family, another third hire a baby sitter to come into their home, and a final third prepare the child regularly to go outside the home - to a friend neighbour, or other sitter or day care centre for care. Most of these women require a sitter for more than 40 hours per two week period.

The women who used child care services occasionally, stated their reasons for using these to range from work or other responsibilities outside the home (35%), to having a needed break (27%) or an outing (52%). These women, for the most part (93%) required sitting services for no more than 20 hours in a 2 week period. They took their children in most cases to a member of their family (55%) or friend or neighbour (12%) or hired a baby sitter to come into the home (32%).

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Overall, it is quite significant to note that of those women who require a service for more than 40 hours in a two week period, in the majority of cases (64%) will call on somebody from outside the family circle to care for their children. On the other hand, for those requiring less than 40 hours of care in a two week period, more than half (55%) call upon a member of the family.

In short, where available, members of the family are a valuable child care resource where the number of hours is not excessive, but, when the need becomes more regular and constant, resource persons outside the family circle are called upon. The family is a valuable support source, it appears, but according to this survey, it is not a resource to be exploited by continual baby sitting demands. Regular baby sitting needs are sensibly recognized by mothers in our province as requiring a direct hiring of a marketable service that will guarantee continuity and consistency for the child, mother and sitter.

This same sort of observation is supported by the women's reporting on the fees they pay for the childcare services. Almost two fifths of the women report they have free services available to them, and in almost all of these cases, the source is a member of the family (89%). Secondly, for those who pay for the services, fully one half have hired a person to come into the house to care for the child.

As the present situation stands in New Brunswick, most mothers of young children use babysitting services only occasionally. In such cases the family member is obviously the first choice, with friends and neighbours and in the home sitters being available options. When the demands become more regular, such as the case of the working mother, the arrangements become more formalized, but the prime choices appear to be a family member available for such a business arrangement, or a sitter who will come into the home. External choices such as a neighbour or friend, a woman who cares for children in her own home or a day care centre are the less popular choices. Whether this situation is due to availability or desirability of resource is unknown, but the opinions expressed on day care centres, in the second half of the survey, seem to suggest that if such facilities were more widespread, the present system of finding an available adult to care for one or more youngsters might drastically change.

2. Mothers attitudes towards Day Care Centres

Perhaps the most telling response given by these women in the survey was their expression of desire to work outside the home. Almost half of the women surveyed said they would like to work (48%) and more than half of these (28% overall) were the homemakers, women who are presently at home with their children.

When asked if they had ever wanted to send their children to a day care, 45% indicated they had wished to in the past. Most surprising was the 81% who indicated that if they needed day care services and these were presently available, they would send their child (ren).

Considering the great proportion of women at home who would like to work, and the overwhelming majority who would send their child to a day care if one were available, one wonders about the opportunities that would be open to women in our province if satisfactory day care facilities were available.

Likewise, when asked about the hours that these women would like a day care to operate, they are responding as if they were fully occupied in activities outside of childtending. For example, 71% would like the centre to be open between 7-9 am and 70% would want the centre to close between 5-6 pm. (A further 19% would choose a 6-7 pm closing hour). Another 15% of respondents, primarily those who are presently working, suggested a 24 hour day care service. Finally, 47% of those asked stated that they would like to have day care centres open on weekends.

Considering the conservative sorts of arrangements women presently use for having their children looked after and the low proportion of women who are employed outside the home, these opinions on day care appear startling. They might appear as wishful thinking if the questions asked about the functioning of day cares were not answered with such obvious reflection.

For example, when asked who should be responsible for major decisions made in a day care centre, fully 71% expressed willingness to take time themselves to participate. Likewise, women did not unanimously felt the day care was a governmental responsibility. When asked whose responsibility the organization of day cares should be, on the average two women in five felt it should be the government, another two felt it should be a cooperative of parents and one in five felt it should be a private initiative.

The respondents seemed to have had definite ideas on the extent to which the government should otherwise be involved in day care centres. For example, an overwhelming majority felt the government should make regulations on personnel qualifications (88%), physical structure (80%), ratios of children per adult (77%) and programs (71%). These were the options offered, but others suggested government intervention in such matters as hygiene, nutrition and fees.

Most women felt the government should spend money towards child care arrangements, but only a small proportion felt this should be a lot of money (17%), the majority felt only "a certain amount" (76%) was necessary.

This opinion was also obvious when answering whether day cares should be free or paid by users. The vast majority (80%) felt the users should pay fully or in part for the day care service, only 10% felt it should be free, while a final 10% felt it should be free for some. As the old saying goes, these women are willing to put "their money where their mouth is". Finally, regarding method of subsidization, two thirds felt the government should subsidize the day care directly, while the remaining third felt the assistance should either come directly to the parents, or to both parents and day care.

3. Survey of Professional Workers with Special Needs Clients

Fifty of the 100 questionnaires which were sent to officials of various social services, public health offices and mental health clinics across the province were received. Their impressions were asked on the present child care arrangements utilized by their clients, on their feelings about the adequacy of such arrangements, and finally their opinion about what sorts of arrangements, would satisfy the needs of the clients.

As the size of the sample surveyed was so small, and as it is unknown whether field workers directly involved with clients or whether administrative staff were the ones answering the questionnaire, only a few observations will be made.

According to the opinions registered by these workers, 60% of the respondents felt that their clients had difficulty finding someone to care for their offspring. Furthermore these respondents felt that the problem was not specifically related to time of day, or day of the week: - day or night, weekday or weekend, the degree of difficulty was seen to be about equal. Finally, a great majority of these workers (86%) stated they know of families who left their children inadequately supervised. They suggested parental negligence, lack of money and nobody being available to watch the children as major reasons for this alarming situation.

Thus, it seems that some of the clients of social services, public health and mental health are in special need situations regarding child care. The picture that emerges through the reports of these workers, is that several of their client families have basic difficulty in even finding somebody to watch their children. The lack of availability may be closely related to the clients' lack of sufficient funds to pay for child care, plus basic lack of transportation.

The horrendous situation of leaving children inadequately supervised may be a direct outcome of the parents strong need for a break, coupled with their inability to find and/or pay somebody to watch their children. The families in such need are obviously isolated from family or friendly adults who will willingly take over for them during time periods desired or needed. This situation simply cannot be allowed to continue. There must be some form of relief available to these families that recognize the rights of both mother and children to have intermittent breaks from each other.

The workers expressed the opinions that either a day care (52%) or a babysitter in the home (36%) would respond to the client needs. They also felt that in one third of the cases in which a day care would be needed, it would be to serve children from birth to two years of age.

Upon verifying with Social Services we have found that funds are available to clients in need for babysitting services, even for "social" reasons such as giving the mother a needed break. The mother must take her child to a day care if one exists in the area, or, if not Social Services will pay for a homemaker to enter the home for the time needed. If the mother is able to pay the homemaker, Social Services will still be able to find the qualified person.

It is suggested that if clients and government agencies alike were aware of these services, the incidences of leaving children inadequately supervised would be reduced. It is also commendable that at least the Department of Social Services has recognized the very real need of mothers to have an occasional break from their offspring.

4. Survey of Municipalities and School Districts

In the final survey, mayors (115) of all municipalities in N.B. and superintendents (23) of all N.B. School Districts were sent questionnaires relating to day cares in their jurisdictions. Two thirds of these people did in fact return the questionnaire, for a total of 91.

These individuals were asked the extent of their current aid to day cares in their areas, their attitudes about the need for day cares and their willingness to contribute to a day care if one were to be established in their area. Only 2 municipalities and 4 school districts are providing some form of assistance, primarily in the form of a locale for the day care centre.

When asked if they felt there was need for a day care, it was only mayors of some of the municipalities who registered negative votes. Twenty-one of the 72 mayors responding felt there was no need. Otherwise, all other municipalities and all school districts who responded to the question felt there was a need for day cares in their area.

Finally, when asked the type of contribution they would be willing to provide a day care in their jurisdiction, only 30% of these respondents did not volunteer any such readiness. Of the 46 assenting mayors, assistance was seen possible to be provided in the following forms: locales (25), consultation (13), organization (9), financial aid (8), office support (5) and administration (4). Likewise, of the 22 school district superintendents feeling they could provide some assistance to day cares, locales (11), consultation (7), furnishings (3) and organization (1) were specifically mentioned.

Thus, it seems that the type of assistance most likely to be provided to a day care in this province would be the provision of space for getting established. The types of available space specifically mentioned were: community centre (24), unoccupied classroom (21) or room in a church (21).

Finally, the respondents replied freely that they know people who could provide the following sorts of essential services to a day care centre: voluntary help (34), organization (33), administration (27), monitors (20), secretarial services (15), food related services (13) and maintenance services (11).

On the basis of this survey, it is apparent that, at present, day care centres are not widespread in the province. Municipalities and school districts do not have a high profile in helping these centres in any way. However, according to the results of this opinion poll, most of these officials are open to the idea of day care centres opening in their jurisdictions, and are willing to provide some form of assistance, however limited. As a major reason for day cares failing in the province has been seen to be related to financial difficulties, the provision of free space and voluntary services by members of the community might be a very viable means of support for competent day cares that could be established in the province.

CONCLUSION

As the child care situation presently stands, women in the province are for the most part using babysitters only on an occasional basis. The arrangements they organize involve largely family and friends and quite often these services are free. About one quarter of the women polled work outside the home, and make more formal child care arrangements. These may involve taking the child (ren) to a woman outside the close family-friend circle, who offers child care services in her own home, or utilizing a day care, or hiring a woman to come into the home to care for the offspring.

Women's attitudes on day care are unrelated to their present child care arrangements. Most women polled would welcome a day care centre in their area. In fact, according to the hours these women would like such centres to be open, it appears as if they have some regular activity in mind that would be possible only so long as such facilities were available. As almost one half of the women stated they would like to be employed full time at present, perhaps the inadequacy of present child care services is the major fact in preventing them from seeking employment.

The women do not feel that day care centres are the exclusive responsibility of the government. They expect some government financing, and some government interventions on day care regulations, however, they expect to pay for the services, and wish for the most part to be involved in major decisions in the centre.

Clients of the N.B. Departments of Social Services, Mental Health and Public Health nurses appear to be in a particularly strong need situation. From results of a poll with personnel from these departments, it appears as if the mothers of young children have more difficulty finding competent babysitters than the average N.B. women, and in many cases cannot afford to pay somebody to care for their children for short breaks. The incidence of leaving children unsupervised appears alarmingly high, according to the professionals polled. Day care centres are a particular need of these people, where the fees will be supplemented by the government.

Finally in a brief survey of school district officials and mayors of municipalities, it seems as if there are some facilities at the community level which could be provided gratuitously to a day care centre becoming established.

The results of this poll are particularly encouraging for people wishing to establish a system of province wide day care. Women are particularly open to the idea of day care, willing to contribute financially to the service and eager to partake in decision making. Professionals working in related fields (social services, mental health, public health nurses) are particularly well disposed to the idea of day care centres, and point out the glaring needs for such facilities of particularly client groups.

Finally, mayors and school district supervisors in whose jurisdictions they would be established, are not at present very involved or even informed on day care, but are willing to provide some free facilities and/or services if one were to commence in their area.

The next step, now, is a practical discussion of the means by which a system of financially feasible day care centres can be established, with pertinent legislative backing to ensure adequate physical facilities as well as stimulating program content.

Of particular interest to the N.B. ACSW is the present system of subsidization to parents. If there is no licensed day care available to take a working mother's child, then she cannot collect the subsidy, this is especially difficult for mothers of 0-2 yr olds, who often are too young for day care centre policies.

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April, 1980

RECOMMENDATIONS PERSUANT TO:

STUDY ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF EDUCATION & CHILD CARE SERVICES IN N.B.
Report by a research team of La faculté des sciences de l'éducation,
Université de Moncton
18 April 1980

GENERAL RECOMMENDATION

That the government recognize its obligation to provide parents the opportunity to adequately fulfill their parental responsibilities, and that it contribute by providing children an environment conducive to their development, by favoring the establishment of a network of educational day cares and to make them financially available to all members of the population.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the government recognize the following types of child care services, to allow each to respond to family needs, and that it determine for each service, minimal norms of functioning.
 - a) day care - establishment that receives one or more groups of children under 6 years, to whom it offers, during one part of the day, care and attention and a program of activity aimed towards promoting their physical, intellectual and social development.

A day care can also offer its services to children 6 years of age and over for after school hours, so long as this does not disrupt the program.
 - b) occasional use - a day care service used intermittently and according to need, which could be provided in health establishments, or in social or commercial services, that allow parents time for medical or psychosocial consultations or to take courses.
 - c) family day care - a day care service offered in a private residence, other than that of the parent or guardian. The family day care centre does not receive more than 5 children under 12 years of age.
2. That the government establish criteria concerning the granting of licenses, and means of inspections, not only for accredited day cares but also for all homes where more than three children who are not residents of that home are cared for regularly.
3. That the government establish regulations concerning the competence, training and upgrading of personnel opening day care services.

4. That the government allocate study grants that allow day care personnel to become qualified according to the regulations.
5. That the government develop an outline program that will help day care centres to plan their physical, intellectual and social activities. That all day cares submit annually their programs to the government for approval.
6. That the government allot to day cares a grant for establishing and outfitting the basic facility adapted to the children's needs and in accordance with the established norms for such a facility.
7. That the government allot to day cares an annual equipment grant in order to permit each centre to acquire and replace basic materials needed for their program of activities.
8. That the government allot to day cares an establishing grant to cover costs of opening the day care (location, manpower, publicity) and the first weeks of functioning.
9. That the initial grants for establishment and equipment be calculated taking into consideration the age of the children and the number of places allotted to the day care centre.
10. That the government take the necessary steps so that municipalities and school districts place certain services at the disposition of the day cares, such as empty classrooms or community centres, at the actual cost of use.
11. That the government establish a program of fiscal incentives that will encourage industries to establish child care services.
12. That the child:staff ratio be studied with a view towards determining if revisions are needed.
13. That the day care itself anticipate such activities (meetings, discussions) to encourage parental participation in decision, orientation and activities at the day care, that will better insure the wellbeing of their children.

(a translation)

May, 1980