



Our Daycare Centre

Conversations with
parents and staff of a co-operative
daycare centre

Preface

This is not a booklet of “facts” about daycare. It contains no statistics, no charts or graphs to prove that daycare is desperately needed by thousands of Canadian families — this has been proved often enough already. Nor is this a survey of what is available for those wanting daycare.

This is a book of *conversations*.

It is a book of *people*. People talking in their own words about what it's like at *their* daycare centre — their hopes, their fears, their happiness and their problems. Hopefully, it tells us something that statistics do not: what a daycare centre of your own means to staff, parents and children.

Northwest Communicare, located in the industrial city of Hamilton, Ontario, is not a typical daycare centre. It is not privately owned. It is not profit-making. It is a co-operative non-profit centre, owned and operated by those who use it and work in it, the parents and staff.

It has no director. Day-to-day administrative and teaching decisions are made by staff members co-operatively and all important financial and policy decisions are made by a board of staff, parents and community residents.

The staff are paid approximately one hundred dollars a week — considerably more than workers in privately-owned centres — and there is little variation in the salaries paid to different staff members.

It is an attempt to practise democracy as fully as possible.

It is also considered by many in the field to be one of the best daycare centres in the province. Clearly, democracy has led to quality, and this is something of which everyone involved at Northwest Communicare is justifiably proud.

As the parent of a child at this centre, I have my own views on many of the issues covered in these conversations. However, I have tried to keep my views in the background and let people speak for themselves. I have tried to get people to talk about whatever concerned *them* and have deleted my own remarks from the interviews wherever possible. But, as the editor, I must accept the final responsibility for whether or not these conversations are an accurate reflection of the life of Northwest Communicare. My main concern is that the result is interesting and makes daycare a little more familiar to you.

These conversations were recorded over a period of several months. This is unfortunate in a situation like this centre, which is always changing, and it is probably a major reason why people's interpretations of the centre vary so greatly. Bear in mind that people speaking of “recent” events may in fact be talking about events separated by several months of activity.

This booklet was published with funds provided by the Federal Government under the Local Initiatives Program, for a project entitled Northwest Communicare Services Project. The members of the Project also completed work on a home day care program, a lunch and after-four program for school-aged children, and another publication of information on day care facilities and services in Hamilton, entitled Day Care Hamilton 1973. The Project was sponsored by the Board of Northwest Communicare and ran from January to November, 1973. We are grateful to the Federal Government for its aid in making this booklet possible.

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Some General Information

to assist you in following the conversations

Of the 21 full-day centres in Hamilton, only 8 are located in the solidly working class inner-city. In fact, in the core of the inner-city (the Gage to Wentworth area north of King) there are virtually no centres at all, of any kind. Yet a study done in 1971 by the Hamilton Social Planning and Research Council found that a large portion of the population in this area were families where both parents worked or where there was a single parent supporting the family. There is a significant *majority* of children from infancy to ten years of age in this area requiring care of some sort while their parents are working. Parents have to make private arrangements or have their children bussed to another community. Despite a recommendation from the Social Planning and Research Council that priority be given to establishing a daycare facility in this area it is clear that the City at present intends to do nothing about it.

There are no municipally operated daycare centres in Hamilton for children needing full-day care. Under the terms of the Day Nurseries Act, municipalities can apply to the provincial government for grants to cover 80 percent of the cost of building and operating municipal centres but Hamilton has refused to take advantage of this despite the fact that the Social Planning and Research Council has been recommending it for nearly ten years.

The Neighbourhood

Victoria Park, the area of the city in which Northwest Communicare is located, is a largely working class neighbourhood with a considerable Sicilian population (which is noticeably absent from the centre). The area was one of those cited in a study done in 1971 by the Social Planning and Research Council, as being badly in need of daycare facilities.

Being close to McMaster University on the city's west end, and being a relatively poor neighbourhood in comparison to the middle class residential area immediately next to the university, the area has become popular with students seeking cheap housing and, ultimately with university teachers. The university, therefore, provides the neighbourhood with a distinctive middle class element, which tends to be active in any sort of 'reform' organization like Northwest Communicare.

The Centre

Northwest Communicare was set up in 1970 by a group which included the Rev. Gordon Hume and members of Zion

United Church, people associated with the Victoria Park Community Organization and one or two parents. It was assisted by grants from the municipal government, the Junior League of Hamilton, the United Church of Canada and other foundations and organizations.

Except for the fact that it still receives some financial assistance from City Hall and still rents space from Zion United Church, Northwest Communicare is today an independent organization.

It provides full- and part-day care for up to 39 children, aged 2-6, from seven a.m. to six p.m., including a hot meal at noon, snacks in mid-morning and mid-afternoon, and an afternoon nap. Although its playground is small (often a problem for inner-city centres) its other facilities are spacious: three large playrooms, gymnasium, auditorium, kitchen, two bathrooms and a small office. It has more than the required number of staff: five teachers, one assistant teacher, a cook and a part-time secretary.

Structure of the Centre

All important decisions at Northwest Communicare are made by a "Board of Directors" consisting of parents, staff and community residents, elected by the Annual General Meeting of the organization. It is perfectly clear, however, that the board is open to every member who wishes to attend and everything is done to encourage more people to take part. The Board meets once a month to discuss major financial and policy questions.

In addition, there are a number of important smaller committees, set up by the Board, to handle administrative matters. General policies are set down by the Board which must be followed by these committees. All committee meetings are open to members of the Board.

The Nitty Gritty Committee meets weekly to discuss the care of the children, problems that arise in the day-to-day running of the centre, grievances of staff or parents, and so on. It is compulsory for staff to attend these meetings. There are also three parents, appointed by the Board, who sit on this committee. This committee is intended to handle many of the practical matters that don't require full Board discussion, and also those matters, like problems with particular children, misunderstandings with parents, and so on, that are better discussed in a small, informal group.

In addition to the Nitty Gritty Committee, which is the major subcommittee of the Board, there are a number of

committees which are used to 'sort out the facts' before complicated matters come to the Board. These are the *Financial Committee*, the *Personnel and Hiring Committee*, the *Parent Participation Committee*, and the *Philosophy, Policy and Action Committee*. These committees are not allowed to make decisions, only recommendations to the Board.

Other committees are set up to investigate special issues whenever the occasion demands it (i.e. the *Bill 160 Committee*, the *Constitution and By-laws Committee*, etc.).

An *Executive* is elected from the Board members, but it is generally understood that these officers are not to make decisions independently of the Board. There is a "chairman" but Board meetings are moderated by a different Board member each month in order to encourage the maximum participation of the members.

The Infant Care Program

Northwest Communicare was actively involved in setting up a program wherein children under the age of two were cared for in private homes. Regardless of individual members' feelings about whether or not home care was better or worse than group care in a centre, this decision was largely forced on the centre by the fact that it did not have the facilities for this additional program. A staff member was employed on a Local Initiatives Project grant to maintain contact with women in their homes who would accept children referred to them by the centre.

At the moment it appears very likely that Northwest Communicare will sever its association with the Home Care Program. There is a widespread feeling that decent care and decent wages and working conditions for the daycare staff can only be guaranteed by a group care centre and efforts are presently being made to set up such a centre.

The After-Four Program

For the past few years Northwest Communicare has cared for ten to fifteen school-aged children, providing care before school opens, at the lunch-hour, and after school until six p.m. This has proved a strain on its resources and the centre is presently attempting to set up a completely separate program to meet this need.

In Hamilton at present there are no organized programs to meet this need although there are approximately eight to ten thousand children in the city who come from single parent families and families where both parents work. In the immediate area of the centre, 52 percent of the total elementary school children come from these families.

Subsidy for Daycare

Under the Day Nurseries Act, 1966, the City of Hamilton administers a subsidy to pay the daycare fees of individual children attending licensed centres. Eligibility for subsidy is

determined on the basis of financial need and may be granted in order that single parents may work, take retraining, upgrading, or post-secondary courses. It may also be granted to two-parent families whose low income must be supplemented by the working mother. Another situation which occurs is one in which day care is recommended by the Mental Health Clinic, psychiatrists, psychologists, paediatricians, or public health nurses for the benefit of the child or family. In referral cases, the financial need of the family is also taken into consideration. Each application is assessed individually. The amount of subsidy will depend on the income of the family, number of members in the family and its fixed expenses — rent clothing, medical and dental expenses, are all taken into consideration, along with payments on debts and other expenses which might affect the ability of the family to pay the cost of day care.

The Day Nurseries Act

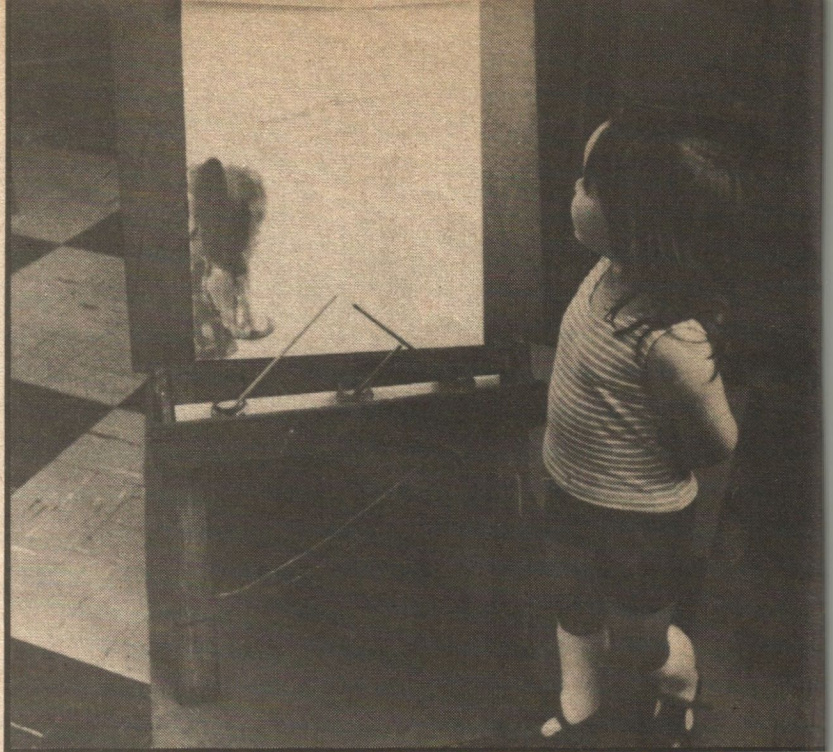
The terms of the Day Nurseries Act cover all aspects of the setting up and operation of centres. This includes building and renovations, minimal space requirements for outside and inside play areas and the condition of same; minimal staff requirements for staff and qualifications of staff; equipment and furnishings; washroom facilities; maintenance; enrolment and health records; daily procedures; nutrition; health and medical supervision; fire drill and emergency information; and financial records and returns. Programs must pass local health, fire and safety regulations before being considered for licensing under the Act and are subject to periodic inspection by these agencies and the Day Nurseries Branch. If a program described under the Act is set up without official licensing, it is illegal and liable for fines and closure.

Bill 160

Bill 160, which has recently become provincial law in Ontario, is "an act to amend the Day Nurseries Act". The major change it introduces is that it expands the definition of those "corporations" which will be eligible to receive provincial funding. Previously only municipalities, Indian bands and associations for the mentally retarded could apply for this funding. Rumour has it — the Regulations for administering the Act have not yet been released — that "corporations", as redefined, will include co-operative, community, non-profit organizations, but not privately-owned centres. This new legislation would appear to offer a ray of hope to community-operated centres in that it would allow them to take advantage of provincial funding regardless of the attitude of their local municipal government.

For further information see the companion booklet to this, Day Care Hamilton 1973, available from Northwest Communicare, 69 Pearl Street North, Hamilton, Ontario.





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a working mother

I grew up in a small town. My father worked in a factory and my mother was a housewife most of that time—she started to work at her first job just as I was getting married. I suppose most of the time I was growing up I was really denying all of that because the small town I lived in had a very rich element and I really related to these kids. I denied a lot of what I was as a person and it's taken me a while to get that all straightened out.

I really wanted to go to university because that was what all the rich kids I was hanging around with were doing. There wasn't much money to go but I managed. I didn't have any great aspirations to doing very much with my education, other than that it was a meal-ticket.

When I graduated I sort of fell into teaching—it was the kind of thing anybody could fall into—and, fortunately for me, I liked it. However, I taught in the secondary school system for four years before I realized that I liked the kids a lot but I was actually very unhappy; and it took me a long time to sort that out. I felt very inferior because I wasn't doing things the way I was supposed to be doing them and I used to blame myself a lot for not coping. And then I started to get that together and realized that I was functioning quite well, that it was everything else that was screwed up.

Then I moved into the vocational schools and, as much as I deny the fact that kids should be separated and as much as I don't like many of the principles upon which the schools are based, there *is* a lot more individual freedom; the schools are smaller, you don't have to be subject-oriented, and you can do whatever you like. Obviously they have certain things that they want—you know, they want the kids to be able to read—but nobody is ramming down your throat any particular approach to reading because, at least in the school I'm in, they're smart enough to realize that there aren't any easy solutions. So I've been pretty well left on my own. And that's nice.

Why do I work? Why do I work *now* when I've got children and when I supposedly could be looking after my children? I guess I must be hung up on work, on that ethic of work. But it's much more than that. I really like feeling a part of the world and when I was at home with the children I really felt as if the world was going on around me. That's pretty tragic when you realize that you've got these children who *can* comprise a really nice world, but I... God, I just couldn't hack it.

The school that I teach in has about forty teachers and I would safely say the majority of them can't stand their work

and can't stand being where they are. Many of them are just using it as a stepping stone to get a permanent contract and then get out into a regular secondary school and when times get kind of tough I've thought the same thing. But I don't think I would. On the one hand, I think that what I'm doing is a drop in the bucket and then, on the other hand, on the individual level, I really think that it *is* worthwhile. I think that I would like to be involved in a more widespread sort of program trying to reform the system. I'm trying at present to work in the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation. It's a place to start; it's a place to find out, anyway, what's happening. I'm not sure I know what they're doing, but they're not doing bloody much.

I got involved with the daycare centre before Erik was old enough to be in it. I got involved as a community resident because they were just trying to fill out their first board; they had just opened for operation in the fall of 1970. I wasn't in on all the legwork that went on for six to nine months, and I wasn't involved in the hiring, or the setting up of the place, or the decisions as to how it was going to be run, or any of that, but I was on the first board.

In the back of my mind, I suppose

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one of the reasons for getting involved was that it would be a nice place for Erik to go eventually, but I really felt that daycare was important—that was my main reason. At that time I was doing part-time work and I'd had to go through the scuffle of trying to find someone to look after Erik. I began to realize just how important it is that you really feel happy with this person who is going to look after your child, and I became much more sympathetic to the problems of working women. When I was working part-time I was always able to pay a woman five dollars a day to look after my kids and at first I felt that for five dollars a day she's going to do a good job—and I thought that she would feel that way too. Then I discovered that this one woman was working for twelve dollars a week with some of these children because the mothers couldn't afford much more. So I just became much more aware of the scene when I had a kid of my own.

And I really felt that this kind of daycare was superior. I think that home day care can be good if it's run well—and probably the reason we got into home daycare at Northwest Communicare was that it seemed the easiest way to fulfill a really urgent need—but I think we would all agree that daycare 'in a building', with well-trained staff, well-regulated, and so on, is better.

I got involved right away in a fund raising drive for the daycare centre but it took me a while to really understand what was going on—I sort of sat back and watched for a while. I took over the chairmanship early in the winter of '71. The major problems in the beginning were financial. There didn't seem to be any major problems inside the staff—it was all underneath and we

didn't get into that until later. It took me a while to understand that there was a big gap between the staff and the board. The director, for example, maintained that she was the only one who should communicate with the parents and that the other two staff members weren't to communicate at all, with the parents or the board. She would allow *no* communication of any kind, good, bad, or indifferent. If you had something to say about a kid you would go to her and she would translate the information to the parents. And that's really terrible, whether it's good information or bad information. So that whole area of staff-parent communications and staff-board communications were the two big gaps that I could see.

The staff at that point weren't on the board. I didn't go into the thing with any preconceived ideas as to what a daycare centre should be. I just thought: board, director, daycare centre ... sure that's just sort of the way things worked. And it wasn't a philosophical thing — that came later — the personality thing started coming first. You know, here was Karen, who was a friend of mine, who wasn't coming to these board meetings and I was feeling that I had this *edge* on her, that I was in this superior position. Nobody even really talked about why Lesley and Karen weren't at the board meetings. They were all just like me. We were all just average people from around — there were no big, high-falutin' sort of people — we were just ordinary people who were trying to work the problems out; and in the beginning nobody even questioned the fact that they weren't there. Lesley would come to the board meetings and talk only on the financial issues; she

would stay at the meetings but she didn't talk about anything else, ever. We found out later that the director had made it quite clear to her that she wasn't to talk on anything other than finances.

I can't remember, but I'm pretty sure that we did get to the point where we invited Karen and Lesley to board meetings. They certainly didn't have any powerful *voting* rights — they were just there to kind of fill in a little bit of chitter chatter about what was going on at the daycare centre. Looking back on it now, it *was* a great gap, but we sort of thought we were filling it, because they were at least coming to board meetings. But the thing is that real, real problems weren't coming out because they were frightened, I think. Oh sure, they were frightened. Definitely Karen was frightened, there's no doubt about it. Karen went through a real hazing when she first got to Northwest Communicare. She didn't talk at first because of our relationship — I was on the board and she was one of my *employees*, I suppose, at least she saw it that way. But finally she did start to talk a bit and she'd be in tears about the director and about how she couldn't do anything right. Virtually everything the kid did was 'wrong' and she'd get told off. Around Christmas time Karen was thinking of quitting. By the beginning of the next summer things were in really bad shape between the three of them.

Then the director went on holidays and I can remember talking with Karen and Lesley while the children were sleeping, or the other kids (staff) were looking after them, and I must have had the feeling that things weren't right because I came right out and asked them and they looked at each other as if they were trying to figure out whether they should talk or not. So I encouraged them to talk and it just came out — this *venomous* sort of stuff. I just didn't know what to do. I think between the three of us we formulated a plan: we would somehow try to set up an intermediary body of some board members and all of the staff and we would try to somehow work out these really basic problems that we were

having. This was the beginning of the Nitty Gritty Committee.

We met one night — Karen and Lesley and I, down at the Wades — to kind of talk about what was happening. Both Mary Beth and Houston were hot to have the director fired and had been containing this all the time and blaming themselves that they hadn't brought it up sooner. I guess we all questioned her ability to deal humanely with people. I guess it boiled down to that.

Things were just beautiful while she was away. A number of people said that; a number of the parents said that as well. Karen and Lesley and the other two staff people had worked out what for them was a really good routine and things were just going zippity-bang. Then she came back and the shit hit the fan.

She just hated everything that had been set up while she was away. There was a period of time when schedules were changing a lot because we had started out with four children and we were gradually getting bigger and things really had to change to keep organized, to keep in control. While she was away — it was a summer program and we had these new students — things had to be changed, I don't think drastically, but when she came back she just couldn't stand the way it was and immediately wanted it put back the way it was when she was there.

It had been decided that at the first board meeting after she came back I would bring up the idea that we needed this 'operations' committee, we needed something to kind of bridge these communications gaps. She came really fired up to that first board meeting and I can't remember how the meeting went but finally she said, "Look, am I the director, or am I not the director?" And, bang, there it was. So I said, "Look, we're obviously having some problems here; what do you think of setting up a committee made up of the staff and an equal number from the board, and we'll try to meet once a week to really iron out these basic problems?" Okay, it was fine with her.

So we started these weekly Nitty Gritty meetings and we tried to tackle the basic problems of the day-to-day running of the place. I really thought

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that if we could bring her around to understanding what our needs were, and if we could bring her around to working in a group, we could have made it. She would have had to forget a little bit about what she had in her mind about being a director. Unfortunately, it *did* end up in a personal thing because *that's what we were dealing with*. The tragedy of it was that I think she tried. I think she tried as well as she knew how but she was a forty-five or fifty year old woman who really didn't know what was going on inside. It got to the point where it was just screwing everybody up so bad that Lesley and Karen both said, 'I just can't continue; it's just too hard, and I'm going to quit.' I suppose their solidarity gave them strength; obviously their position forced them together; and maybe it was harder for them to be objective about her, but they had to face a lot of hostility, so ..

The point was that we were trying. We were really making an effort to be honest about what we were doing and to try to get the day-to-day workings of the daycare centre free of the anxiety that it had been rife with for months and months.

What I'm saying is that it started out as a personality thing and then it grew into a very basic question: not only, 'Do we want her as director?' but, 'If she is going to continue, do we want her to continue the same way?' 'Do we really want a director?' It eventually got around to that.

Finally Lesley and Karen said to me that they just couldn't take it any longer and I saw quite clearly that it was either Lesley and Karen, or it was her. It just got to that. So we brought it to a head and it got really heavy at the board meeting and I ... essentially I said, 'It's either these people or you and I make my choice of Lesley and Karen and I'm therefore asking for

your resignation.' And that was it. She gave her resignation.

It was interesting because there was such a feeling of relief that it was over and such a feeling of optimism, of getting things really going the way we all had seen, a long time ago, that they should be going.

Her ideas and theories were good; they're weren't out of line with ours. We never, ever talked about 'participatory democracy'. I don't know how she felt about that. Obviously she didn't feel very strongly about it because right from the beginning she didn't say to the board, 'I want my staff with me.'

I knew she was associated with the Communist Party. I don't know how many other people knew. The people who were really involved at the daycare centre knew. As a matter of fact, I think all of us were kind of *proud* of that more than anything because we thought — I certainly thought — that this was a very intelligent woman we were dealing with, who really had some good values and ideas. If anything it wasn't a reaction of the Right against the Left. It was a radicalizing thing for all of us in that we really began to see how this daycare centre should be set up. We began to see that it should be the staff and the parents working together to solve their problems, without this spokesman running back and forth getting things screwed up.

A whole reshuffling went on after that. We immediately gave everybody a raise — she had been making six thousand and something and they were making something like four thousand — so we got everybody up to about the five thousand mark anyway. Then we restructured things. For all intents and purposes, although we never talked about it or made a big decree that now the staff were members of the board, we

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just said: there's the board, the staff, and everybody has a vote. It didn't become an issue until later; it was just taken for granted.

We had several ideas about setting up a shift system where everyone took a turn rotating in the office. That didn't work very well. We had all let Lesley successfully do that sort of work, so when it came around to everyone taking their turn, nobody but Lesley knew what to do. Then we went through a process where Lesley would try to train everyone, but then the staff grew larger and that was too hard to do.

After the big incident with the director we obviously wanted Nitty Gritty to continue because we saw, not that they would become sessions where we would engage in counselling or therapy or anything like that, but where we would try to get out some of our feelings and try to talk about what was going on; and hopefully try to lift it out of the *personal* shit we'd all been through. I think personal criticism *can* be made out of a spirit of liking the other person. I can remember once talking to Eileen about her dealings with people at the daycare centre and I said, "I think they feel put down by you and I sometimes feel that way, too." And she took it because Eileen knows to take things in the spirit in which they're given. She knew that that meant: I like you and I'm saying it because I've built up enough confidence in your ability to accept it; so take it for what it's worth. And I think she did that. That's the way I like to see things going.

In the beginning a lot of us hoped that the centre would serve the community and that we would have the children coming from all the streets around. It was always a big problem, but we just didn't know what to do about it. We never really made a very serious effort to get them there. It was the sort of thing that we would start

talking about at the end of a board meeting. We were all sort of vaguely aware that that's what we should do but we never even got to the point of investigating it. When I was going out as chairman I outlined three things that I thought needed some consideration and that was definitely one of them. I didn't have the answers but I thought it was something that we should work on and figure out where we wanted to go on this. But we just never have.

I just don't know how to solve that problem. For many of the people who live in the community it's a financial thing and we can't offer them enough enticement. Many of them are people who can't get a substantial enough subsidy. They're in that sort of 'middle bracket' where they're just not eligible. You know, the woman whose husband is making seven or eight thousand and who has more than one kid.

When we would have our *little* discussions at 11:30 we would all be exhausted after having hashed out how we were going to solve some real immediate problem. Then we would see that it was a *political* question, of how to fight at the political level, and that's where a lot of us would get stuck. We would end up throwing up our hands and saying, 'Oh shit, what can we do?' We never did get to the point where we got out into the community and out talking to politicians.

I suppose I saw the problem as being one of somehow trying to find some solidarity with other groups. That's why I was really interested in hearing from the people in Toronto — there was a question at one time of making a coalition, a daycare coalition that would try to do some political work, but it has sort of fallen apart. That kind of left us hanging because, I thought, they could kind of show us or help us.

I would like us to get involved in some sort of political action. That's all very hazy because I'm not sure how I

see that happening, but I'd like to sit down and talk about that. We've already been involved, to a certain extent, with the municipal people. Obviously, the kind of action that is required is a provincial action as well. I would like to see us begin to understand what we have to do in that area to change the whole idea of daycare, to change the legislation, to change the attitudes about daycare, and to encourage more of the type of daycare centre *we* have.

I'd also kind of like to see us start another daycare centre, but I'm not sure that we're stabilized to the point where we can do that.

I would also really like to do some more on this infant care thing. Eileen, Laura, and I recommended that the board really get into it and act as a sort of umbrella organization — which was what we sort of intended from the beginning, but it sort of mushroomed and got bigger and bigger — but the board turned that down. So what's going to happen? Merle has volunteered to kind of keep the thing together in exchange for free daycare for Jeffrey, but I think we've got to make a decision: whether we'd really like to get into infant care and continue the present arrangement, or whether we should eventually find a place and bring these women together. But I certainly wouldn't do it if it meant we had to say goodbye to Millie Selman and some of these really excellent women. But according to the regulations I think we would have to because you have to have all this special training like "Mothercraft", and I don't know what else.

I would like us to sort of scout around. We can't just go into a place and say, 'Well, here we are.' I think we need to get a group of people together and say, 'We have this expertise; now let's work together and set this thing up.' I would really like us to do that.

It bothers me to see that the men aren't more involved in the centre, and the only way I can see us getting out of that is by making it compulsory. And it seems that the general feeling at the daycare centre is that they don't want to get into that. And maybe they're

right, I don't know.

I wonder what *would* happen if the men did suddenly get involved; because I think that the experiences that we've had with men haven't been very good experiences. A lot of the experience we had with Houston was good; he was good for us and really stimulated us, and he brought a lot of knowledge and intelligence — but I think a lot of us felt kind of pushed around by him. The incident with Bill Rolfe was really weird. I don't think I felt that way about you but I think some women felt that way about you. I don't know how they feel about my husband because obviously I'd never know how they felt about him. It might be a difficult period for the women if the men did suddenly start getting involved because they might get kind of passive or something.

I see daycare as an extension of the school system in that it should be the right of the parent to have this kind of care, free. I don't see it as an extension of the system in that it's coming out of the board or the department of education, but I see it as a service that should be available to all families for whatever reason they want to use it.

I consider it an extension of my family, and it pains me when I see people who don't think of it that way. I feel really good about that place and about the people who are there. We have a lot of problems but essentially I feel really warmly about that place and those people. I just feel so *trusting* of them, too. Now matter whether they get snide, or they get this and that, there's not a person there that I wouldn't trust with my kids. I was really happy to find a place where they treated my kids the way I treated my

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I think the centre has made me more loving of other children, too.

kids.

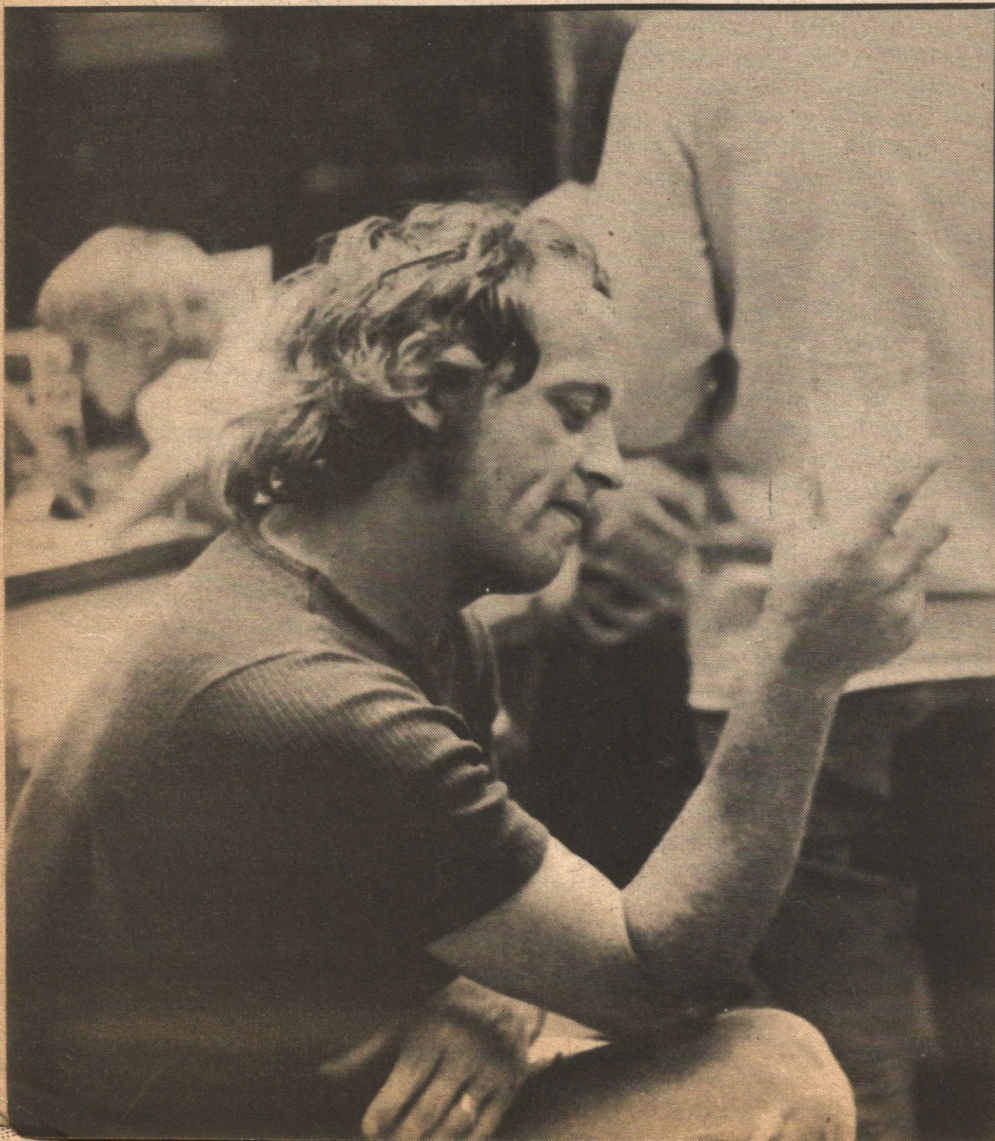
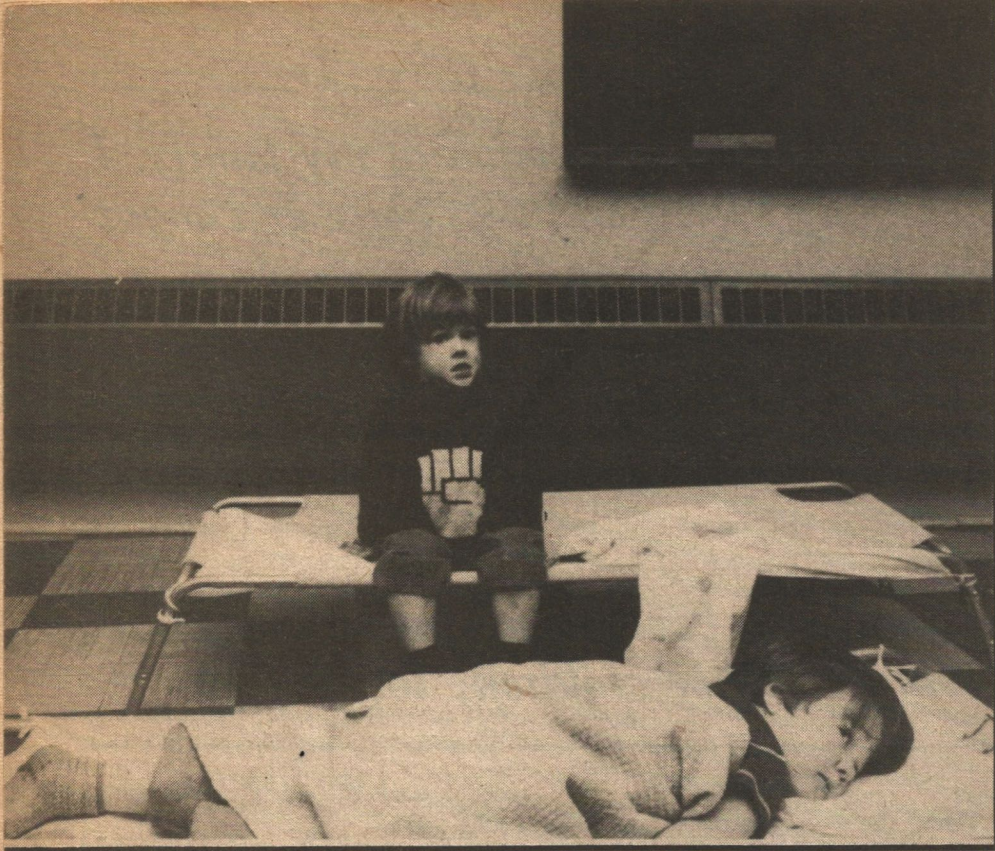
I think the centre has made me a lot more loving of other children, too. My family, like most others, I think, taught me to look upon other children as competitors, which isn't unusual when you think of the society we live in. Seeing all of these other children made me aware that they deserved the best too, because I would feel very warmly towards them as well as towards my own children.

Northwest Communicare has been a good experience for a lot of people. For me it has, anyway. It's been very good for Karen because she really speaks out now. In the beginning she just didn't say anything. You know, we'd all be there and Houston would be spouting off about all of these theories and all of these books, and so on, and she was really overwhelmed — as we all were by Houston — by the strange assort-

ment of people there. She's really come a long way.

It has had a tremendous impact on me — not that we socialize with all those people very often or anything like that. When I go there I feel really comfortable. I know that not all the people think that. That's really unfortunate and I wish we could get over that. We've had that problem since the beginning — that some parents really liked the place and felt that they wanted to be involved, and other parents couldn't give a shit about the place. Or, that some parents were being turned off.

I *do* feel that a lot of people feel threatened by the so-called 'articulateness' of a lot of the people who are there. I really do. And that's a really hard thing to deal with. I suppose it demands an exceptionally strong person to stay with it.



lesley

a staff member

I was born in Scotland. I came here when I was six years old. My father's worked at the Steel Company ever since he's been in Canada, which is about twenty years. My mother has done a lot of things: she originally was a typist-stenographer and she's now a social worker. She took courses and things.

I also was a typist and started working when I was eighteen. I worked for four years, decided that I would rather be doing something else so I went to Mohawk College when they had the Early Childhood Education course. I went there for a year and a half and I left to take a job in daycare because I wanted to be involved in the real thing rather than studying, and I finished up my courses in extension. I worked at a daycare centre for something over two years before coming to Northwest Communicare.

It was a very structured place, not very rewarding in terms of feeling that you were really accomplishing anything other than taking care of the children — looking after their *safety*. I drove the bus for them and did a lot of little things.

There was an advertisement in the paper for a director (of NWCC). I applied for that job. The job was given to someone else and I was offered the job in the hierarchy at that time of head teacher, which I took. Karen was the third person who was hired at that time. I think their feeling at that time was that they definitely wanted to have certified, trained, qualified staff in the centre, mainly because the director felt

that was the thing to do.

We began to work there two weeks before we took in children. We had three children to begin with.

The original board of people who were setting up the centre were mainly professionals or people interested in daycare. I think three of the original board had children who were either eligible to come to the centre or were going to be. There was the minister of the church, some people from the Early Childhood Education Association, some people who had been involved in the Victoria Park Community Organization, plus one or two parents with pre-school age kids, who were interested in setting up daycare groups.

All of the authority was vested in the director and she made the decisions. The staff were given to understand that it was a conventional kind of set-up. At that time there was no discussion of it being the kind of place where parents would even participate. The emphasis was on the community *ownership* and, if the parents happened to live in the community, then they could be eligible to be involved. But that was a minor detail. It wasn't set up specifically so that the parents could become involved.

The first center I worked in had had a similar set-up. Although there the board of directors was even more remote. I never met any of them except the person who signed the cheques. He was a lawyer. They had very professional people who were involved in that, mostly people who were fairly

rich and were involved in the Anglican church.

I had thought when I came that this board was set up similarly. When I was interviewed I was interviewed by the minister, Beulah, who was then in the chair, a person who was a high school teacher, who was involved in the church, and another person who was employed by the board of education in the kindergarten area. There were no parents at that time except Beulah, who just happened to be both a parent and, more specifically, the chairman.

It might have remained that way had things not developed the way they did. The original idea of the board was much different from the way it evolved.

The director had come from a co-op setting — she had worked in half-day co-op schools. She was interested in having the parents involved in the school only I think that at the time, she was thinking that the power would still be vested in her, as the director. The idea of operating democratically was not part of her platform. I think she always thought that the parents should become involved, but more in the sense that they would be 'educated' by the professionals — by the staff. It was to be more like a Home and School Association than having the power to control the school and to control what would happen within it. She conveyed to the staff that she was in control and she told us, specifically Karen, that we weren't to talk to the parents at all, about anything. If there were things to be conveyed to the board she was going

The basic question was who was going to have the power? It was a question of what kind of responsibility the staff was capable of taking . . . whether in fact the freedom which we tried to practise for the children couldn't also be available for the staff.

to do that. It created a very difficult situation for all the staff because it was such an artificial sort of thing — the parents were given to coming to talk to us and we had been told not to discuss anything other than the weather.

Eventually we changed from having a voluntary bookkeeper secretary to me doing the bookwork and, in a way, that was key to what finally happened, because when I took over the books I also started going to the board meetings. And although, according to Jessie I was only supposed to give a statement of where the money was and then keep my mouth shut, I found it difficult to do that. So I didn't. The more I became involved with the board the more I recognized that she didn't have the power that we were given to understand she had and the thing started to crack.

She threatened Karen with firing her. In the contract which was made up, she insisted that it be put down that one would obey the director (rather than the board of directors). She took me into the office once and declared to me that she was the director. She really said to me: *I am the director*, and you will do what I say you will do and if I say there's to be a half hour circle with the kids then you will do a half hour circle and if the kids don't want to that's not the point. Towards the end, before she left, she used to stand in the kitchen and watch the clock and if my break was scheduled for 10 o'clock and I came out at 10:01 then I was told that I was late. It became extreme, you know; it was like a factory where they blow the whistle and all the workers run back to their machines.

Because I had been to the board meetings I began to see that if there was going to be any firing done it wouldn't be done by her.

The original board *did* invest a lot of power in her but once more parents began to get involved her power was starting to go and I think that's why she felt she had to come on stronger to us to retain the control of the centre. It was coming across in meetings: certain suggestions would be made by her and they would not be received with great joy from the board.

If I had started in the centre in the position of underling, not having any real responsibility, I think that I would probably have stayed there, that I wouldn't have fought as hard as I ended lot of responsibility because I was the only member of the staff who had worked in daycare before, and I was enjoying the feeling that I had something really solid to contribute. But once the director learned what I knew, then suddenly she was treating me like I was an incompetent. I found that very difficult. In the other place I was sort of treated like an incompetent from the beginning and I didn't know any better, but I had felt something different and I didn't want to give it up. For me that's what made the difference. I hadn't lost my ability to do things and therefore it was an unjust situation.

I think in terms of her philosophy about the school — of what should happen to the children — I don't think there was very much disagreement. Unfortunately, I think what happened was that the theory broke down under the stress of what was happening with the board and the staff.

The basic question was: who was going to have the power? That was the whole question. The director wanted the power and others were unwilling. It was a question of what kind of responsibility the staff were capable of taking in terms of what would happen in the school, whether in fact the freedom which we tried to practise for the children, couldn't also be available for the staff. It was a basically difficult thing because we were saying that we believed the children should be free and yet it was very difficult to do that when you didn't feel free yourself. I think if democracy was going to work for those children it should also work for the staff; you know, if that little three year old can have it, why can't I? People have to feel that they have more than just a casual interest in what is happening in the school.

One can laugh about it at this time but it was a very difficult situation. Karen and I had both said, when it came to the crunch, that we would leave.

The fact that the board had parents on it was the key thing because the parents, specifically in a staff-director kind of conflict, knew the staff and they weren't a group removed. If the director was saying specific things about the staff or expressing dissatisfaction with the staff the parents were aware of the staff as people rather than as names on the salary sheets, or whatever. The fact was that they couldn't resolve what she was saying with what they knew of us. If it hadn't been parents it wouldn't have worked.

It was very scary (after she left), like leaving home or something. She like leaving home or something. She school. The director had conveyed to me that she felt that I was manipulating all the people on the board and that I had pulled the wool over their eyes and was on a big power trip and everything ... And although I don't believe those kinds of things, still it makes you wonder and you do a lot of soul-searching.

We had at that time some very, very difficult children — school-age children who were wreaking havoc on the

building and terrorizing the staff, including punching them and things, and even just physically it was very frightening to think of not having the people who at least knew how to handle them. We were afraid, partly that those kids were going to beat us up (laughs), that we weren't going to be able to keep them from hurting the other children, and so on. In fact they did beat us up, but we all survived (laughs). The new staff got their glasses punched into their faces, got punched in the stomach a few times ... However, it worked out alright. The fear was exorcised.

There was never a conscious policy to hire uncertified people. When we advertised for new staff the decision was made not to restrict the applicants to only those people who had certification. The intent was that each member of the board, including the staff, would have one vote to hire two staff they felt would be best for the school. There was a slight attempt at that time to only give the staff half a vote because I think that the people who had been talking about the power of the staff, once they recognized that it was a real thing, began to have second thoughts; and there were great discussions about whether the staff should only have half a vote. But as it turned out we did end up getting our full vote. There have been subsequent discussions about how much power the staff should have.

Often we have thought that what we really needed was a benevolent dictator because things *can* get really confused and it's a very inefficient way of handling things. Three people will do one thing and nobody will do three things because we don't have the time to have really close contact with one another and know exactly what the other people are doing. We have a scheduled Nitty Gritty meeting once a week but, in fact, it's not enough. What we should have is a daily meeting. But in terms of looking after the children it's just not practical; and also the people on the board who are on the Nitty Gritty committee are usually not available during the day. We do talk a fair amount with one another and we rotate things often enough that it isn't always the same few people talking to one another.

The fact that the board had parents on it was the key thing because the parents ... were aware of the staff as people rather than as names on the salary sheets. If it hadn't been parents it wouldn't have worked.

Usually this happens in the sleeping rooms — everybody takes different sleeping rooms at different times so that we all get to see each other and make sure that we know what the other people are doing and are aware of the difficulties we are having.

When I say that we're not always efficient I am not thinking in terms of the care of the children; because the reason why we are inefficient is that we are looking after the children. We're inefficient in terms of routine things: bills, letters, writing reports, and dealing with bureaucratic things. We're incredibly inefficient in that respect. Those kinds of bureaucratic things are always at the bottom of the list. And in some ways I'm sure it creates difficulties — we don't perhaps let the parents know about meetings as faithfully as we should. We don't send out little letters trying to drum up business for the board as much as we should. There are lots of ways in which we could probably get more support from the parents if we had the time to do those kinds of routine things.

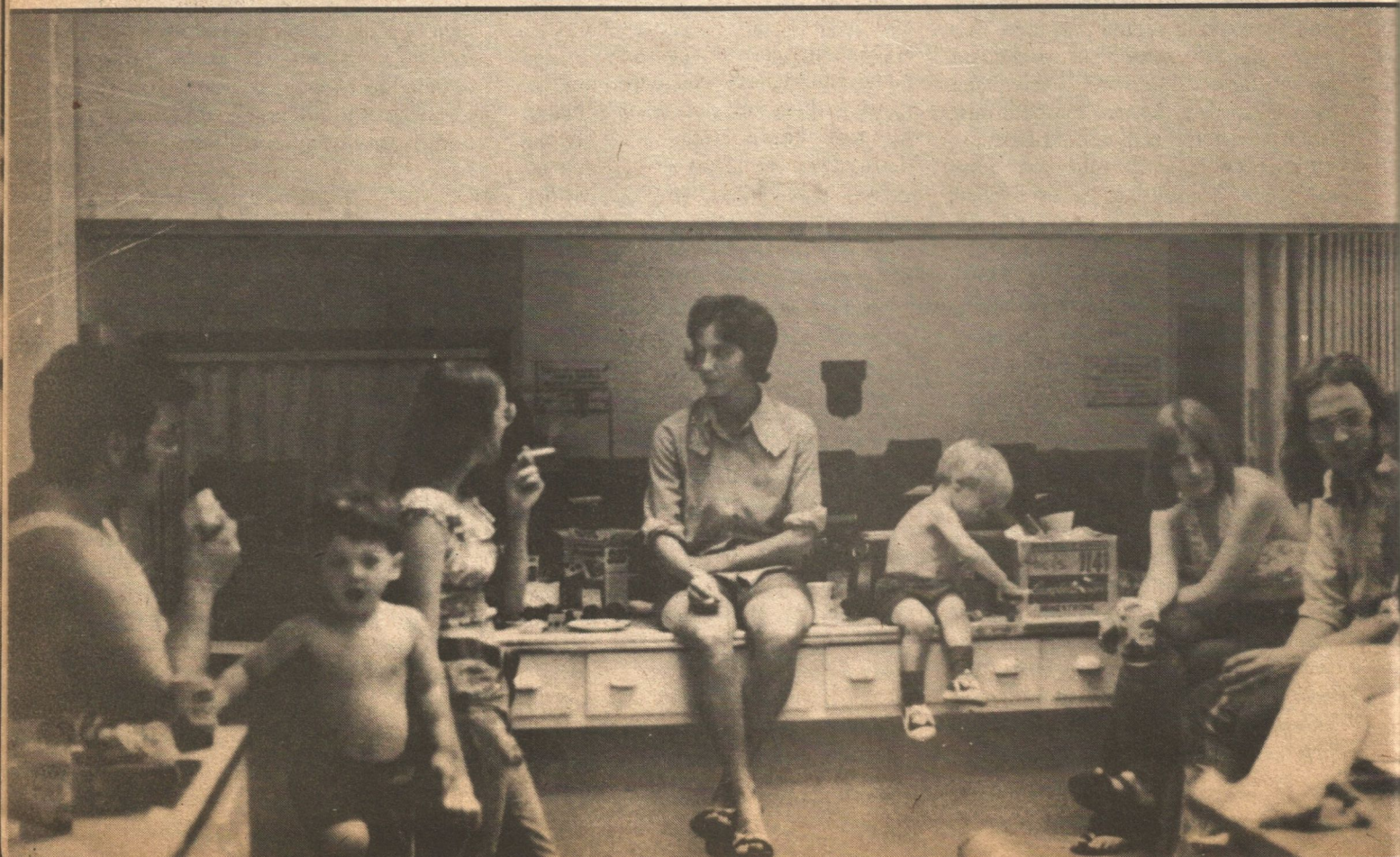
There's sometimes the implication that the staff's interest is not the same as the parents' interest and, at the present time, I think that's not the case. In the long term, the power of the staff is something that ought to be examined because one can't *always* be sure that the staff's interest is going to be the parents' interest. There's some protection needed in terms of the proportion of staff on the board, and so on. Over the last few months it is the staff who have shown the greatest amount of interest in the centre, which is understandable because it's a big part of their life. They're more actively involved in it — more deeply involved.

I think, therefore, that the fact is that the staff does have a lot of power. That's mainly because the interest of the parents comes in waves and then diminishes — every so often we get a storm and then we get a lot of interest — but the staff's interest is consistent because they're there every day and they have to be interested in it.

I think there were points where the staff, with a couple of exceptions, have been the *only* group that's been interested enough to come to meetings and make decisions. The parents, because most of them are working, cannot be and aren't as vitally involved in the centre. They have children to look after. It's important to them the kind of place their children are in, but they see so little of their children anyway that giving up more time for meetings and so on is an additional burden that's hard for a lot of them to bear.

I think that daycare should be available at minimal cost, if not at no cost, to parents who want to use it. I think that to try to financially handle the expenses of a daycare centre from individual fees is ridiculous. Part of having a good centre is having enough *money* to have a good centre. I think government needs to subsidize proportions of budgets of daycare centres. But parents, if they have a lot of money, should pay a certain amount.

The subsidy as it's presently administered is much too restrictive. One has to be living a hand-to-mouth existence and maybe not even quite that before one can get any assistance with fees. I think that people are working for the money they are going to get and if they have to sacrifice a



large proportion of that money then it reduces the reward of what they are doing. I don't think that should happen. They shouldn't be punished or caused hardship because they happen to have a child who's under the age of five, or two children, or three. Children in the public school system are given an education which is provided for through taxes; at the magic age of five they seem to be eligible for all these things and below that age they're not. I think it's pretty arbitrary.

Daycare is available to people who have a lot of money or to people who have none, but people who have an average amount of money have to make a big sacrifice for daycare. This makes it much more difficult specifically for women to work in the kinds of jobs that are available for women, which aren't paying well in the first place, and I think often it's the woman's wages that pay the daycare centre.

There's a certain amount of fear of putting a young child into an institutional setting — and no matter how long you look at it, it is still an institution. Parents might feel that their child might be lost in the shuffle. I think that can happen in daycare. In *poor* daycare I think that that *does* happen, that children who are much too young to resist are put into a situation where they are restricted in terms of their freedom — where it's almost militaristic. For a child to retain its personality in the face of all this opposition is very difficult. I think that that's a valid sort of fear.

I think also there's what some people might think of as a sort of "moral" issue of children being looked after by their mother, and at the very least if they're not being looked after by their mother that they be looked after by some *one* person who's going to be a substitute for that mother — that children are not ready to relate to a lot of adults. I think, to a point, there's a lot of validity in the fear that a small child will be overcome in a big setting. I think it can happen. Often centres are operating so minimally in terms of equipment and staff that to cope — to just keep things under control — there

The idea that individuals should make a business, and try to make a profit out of looking after children is a basically wrong one. That's the reason why we have a public system of education and it's also the reason why we should have a public system of daycare. The profit motive and the care of children are mutually exclusive.

have to be terrific pressures on the children to behave in a certain way. You know, if there's one staff with fifteen children then that staff, in order to prevent utter chaos, has to restrict those children. They have to say, okay, everybody sit in their chairs, everybody do this, everybody do that, and there's no allowance for children to move and do and be in the place they want to be in.

On the other hand, a *good* daycare centre can be an enriching and enjoyable experience for children.

The children are given freedom to engage in activities of their choice within the broad limits set for them. They can explore and experience things at their own level, enjoy satisfying relationships with other children and adults. There are also routines that are followed and I hope we have a good balance between freedom and structure which will enable the children to "be themselves".

This kind of experience does not happen by accident. It takes time, money and the interest and enthusiasm of all those involved with the children — parents and staff alike. Our centre is the kind of place it is — and I think it's a good place — because parents and staff have supported it, defended it, criticized it when necessary, and always believed it was worth the extra time it takes to operate democratically.

The idea that individuals should make a business, and try to make a

profit out of looking after children is a basically wrong one. That's the reason why we have a public system of education and it's also the reason why we should have a public system of daycare. The profit motive and the care of children are mutually exclusive. If it's a case of fifty cents for a can of juice for the children that's good, or ten cents for a package of Freshie then the tendency is going to be to buy the Freshie because the children won't know and there'll be forty cents left over for the pocket.

I wouldn't want to see daycare become like the public school situation, however. I don't know what sort of answer there is for daycare. I guess I think that our kind of situation is the answer but I don't know that it isn't only the answer for us. I don't know whether it's the answer for other people because other people would have to do the kinds of things that we've done. Whether there can be enough daycare provided by similar groups of people is really a big question. Probably I would rather see publicly-owned daycare than I would see privately-owned daycare if it came down to that, but the struggle and the way that we formed our center — that is the way that centres should happen. But it's a unique situation and I don't think that it would happen enough — that there would be enough daycare. The basic thing is to have enough daycare, however we get it.

Daycare is available to people who have a lot of money or to people who have none, but people who have an average amount of money have to make a big sacrifice for daycare.

I think that the situation in Hamilton is going to change pretty drastically when regional government comes in. The whole mess of providing daycare I think is going to change. It is entirely possible that either the city will set up new centres, or they will buy existing centres, or they will take over the operation of existing centres. In fact, when we made our proposal for financial assistance to City Hall, although we were not in favour of it, that was *one* of the suggestions that we made: that the staff of the centre become municipal employees and be paid directly by the City. *They* said that this would not change the control of the school; the theory was that we would become municipal employees but the power would still be retained by the parents and the board. I think that it just wouldn't happen. It would be the thin edge of the wedge. One would never have the kind of control that we have now. There might be a sort of token group which sat around discussing theory but I don't think it would be *real* control because where the money is, is where the control is, and that's the fact of it. Whoever's paying the piper is going to call the tune. I don't think that the City Council is going to look at the budget and see \$55,000 to Northwest Communicare without somebody saying, "Who's watching how this money is being spent? Who's got control of this \$55,000 a year?" I just don't think they're going to let it happen. I don't think they're going to give us any presents. If we take the money we're going to pay in the loss of control. Yet I do think that something similar to that has to happen because day care centres cannot exist financially

on individual fees.

It's hard to tell where the centre will go from here. The enrollment we have at the moment is what we have because in the beginning we didn't have any children so we weren't going to get choosy about who we were taking and say that, since we had ten people with university degrees we weren't going to take any more children whose parents had university degrees (laughs) ... In fact, I think you have very little control over the sort of people who use the centre unless you start to make arbitrary rules about the kinds of educational backgrounds you accept in certain proportions, and so on. Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who could have made good use of the centre but for economic and other reasons they didn't use it. They didn't trust us. And what happened was that a certain group of people began to use it ... With exceptions ... There are people who came strictly from looking it up in the yellow pages. I think there is a fairly broad range of children but the largest percentage of people using the centre are certainly involved in some way with the university. If one thinks of daycare as being useful to working people then we probably have quite a large percentage of non-university educated people in the centre, but the majority of children come from homes where the parents are university educated. I don't know that they *earn* that much money because the majority of the children are subsidized — I don't think they're 'rich' people.

In fact, I think we can't have any control over the way it's going to go unless we're ever in a situation where we have to make a lot of decisions about

which children we're going to take. Then we'd have to decide whose application has priority and perhaps decide to consider things other than who came first. I think it would be really difficult to decide, for either the staff or the board, which family needs it more. The person from the university background might have more options in terms of the kind of childcare they can get but, as far as the children are concerned, which child needs it most? You can't tell. One child might manage fairly well in another centre ... It's hard to tell. The solution, in fact, is that those people who are most capable of doing it, or who feel the most strongly about it should definitely start another daycare centre.

Infant care programs like the one we have — where women care for several infants in their homes — need to be controlled very carefully. I think that, in fact, what should happen is that the women who are looking after the children should receive a salary which does not change according to the number of children they are looking after, and that the decision should be made as to how many children that person should have, and that person should get a salary and all the regular benefits that the people at the centre get. If they're going to earn an income then it should be a stable income and not dependent upon looking after five children, especially when two may be all that individual can handle.

The regulations are that you can only have one child in each age group — you can only have two children under two, three children under three, four children under four, but they can't be all babies. So actually, as the children grow, it can probably create all kinds of situations. If a child passes his second birthday and is suddenly three, suddenly you're technically capable of looking after one more child, when actually only a day has passed and that child is no different. It's a very strange sort of rule. I think that a decision about that sort of thing should be made by a larger group of people and not by an individual. That individual shouldn't have a vested interest in taking more children than they can handle. It's virtually a privately-

operated small daycare centre. I think it *could* work but it needs money like everything else.

If the infant care program is a part of the centre, then the centre needs to devote a lot more energy to it. The basic decision needs to be made about whether we are a part of it or not. In fact, what should be happening is that the infant care parents should be taking more of a part in the infant care program. There just aren't enough people on the board to devote themselves to the struggle. It's not something that can be done with the energies of a few people.

It can't be handled the way it is. And it certainly shouldn't get very big. I'm just not crazy about the idea of having a hundred satellite daycare homes right across the city of Hamilton. I think that the City's proposal for home daycare is just horrendous. They're talking in terms of a worker, an employee of the welfare department, who would be the home visitor and the people would be visited only once every quarter. And this person will undoubtedly have an enormous caseload.

In fact, people can still take lots and lots of children into their homes as long as none of them are on subsidy. The subsidy thing is the key to applying the regulations. People who are operating as private baby sitters are still going to continue to operate. They can take five children but that also means they can take five babies.

But I think the key about the infant care program is that we need some infant care parents on the board. We can't handle looking after the infant care program unless we have some parents to help.

In the small group of parents who are involved there's a relatively high number of men. The reason I think that the board meetings always appear to be so female is that all the staff is female. I think if one looks at the parents who are at the board meetings, if there are four parents and one male, it doesn't look as though there are so few as it might appear initially. In fact, in a lot of situations at the centre there are women who are alone who bring their children to the centre and the

The kind of support that you feel at times when interest is high and enthusiasm is there, is really terrific.

male parents aren't even involved with the children on *any* level, never mind at the centre.

In the families where there are male parents in the home, neither of the parents are coming to the meetings. But it's not just a lack of involvement of the males; it's a lack of involvement of the *family*. If we look at the parents who *are* involved, many of those women are women who are alone. It would remain to be seen whether, if we could get those families interested, the males would be interested. But the situation as it is now I don't think is any indication of lack of *male* interest; I think it's lack of interest, period.

There's a certain amount of supportiveness in the group. If a parent feels isolated in terms of raising their child they might look to a situation like this to hear about what other people are doing if they don't have a partner to discuss it with. I think that single parents might tend to be less socially involved, and to have more time to devote to the centre. Couples with children tend to be more active and, therefore, they wouldn't have the time.

I like my work. I like the kind of feelings that there are at the centre. It has certainly made me more aware of my rights as a human being. I think one is kind of taught that you do what you're told and you don't have any rights, that you're constantly being supervised in one way and another by other people. At the centre one feels a fair amount of control over the direction that you take, and I think that that makes you think a lot more about what you want to do and what you *are* doing, rather than just saying, well, this is what I'm supposed to do ... I enjoy having the freedom to do what I think is good, and having it such that I get a chance to think a bit about what I'm doing. If I have to *decide* what I'm going to do I have to think about the possibilities. The kind of support that

you feel at times, when interest is high and enthusiasm is there, is really terrific. You feel as if you're not working in a vacuum.

We've all had to learn how to be *people* at work (laughs). I don't think most people get the chance to be people at work, and we've all had to do that.

I think probably a high percentage of workers might find this kind of situation attractive. I'm thinking in terms of the students that we had at the centre from the community college, and we attempted to let the students have as much to say about what we were doing as all of us did; some of them really liked it and others didn't at all. They had been taught, as I had been taught, that it's much better to have somebody to tell you what to do. I think that in the long run it could be good but people would have a lot of trouble handling it. If you were to go to a meeting of daycare workers and say, this is the way it can be, I don't think everybody would stand up and cheer.

I also think that 'workers control' would be more difficult the bigger the situation you were dealing with. In other words, at Northwest Communicare we have seven staff and we can handle it, but if we had seventy staff, I think it would just be more difficult. The fact that we get to know the other people we're working with very, very well adds a certain ingredient to it. If I was working in a factory with many, many other workers, although we might have control, we wouldn't have the same kind of feeling about being a staff person that I have at our centre because I know all of the people who work at the centre well enough and there's a closeness there that many wouldn't get. In the centre there's a personal element that makes the job itself more pleasant — and looking after kids I think it's essential that it be a very real, personal situation.



bob

a working father

I was born in Toronto. I've lived all over the place — Quebec, Northern Ontario, Niagara Falls . . . My dad was working for Hydro and he travelled all over the place; naturally everybody followed. After he died we came to Hamilton and I've been here ever since.

I'm working as a serviceman for an electronics company today. My wife is a registered nurse. We've been married three years and have one child.

He was just a little over two years old when we came to the centre in June. We looked all over the place to find a good centre but we found that most of them didn't open until eight or nine o'clock, which was no good because I start work at eight, and sometimes seven thirty, and sometimes earlier than that. My wife starts work at seven o'clock when she's on day shift. So we had to find a place that opened at seven o'clock.

Up until then we'd had babysitters who came in. Most of them were good but every now and then, like every normal person, they'd like an extra day off so they'd call in sick. Or something went wrong and they couldn't come in. Naturally that meant I had to take a day off work, or my wife had to take a day off work. Eventually we just got fed up and decided to look for other places, regardless of what it cost. It had to be open and since I'd be paying by the week I'd know that if I took my kid out for two or three days on the fourth day the place is still going to be there for

him when I go back there.

It costs us more at the daycare centre. We used to pay the girls three dollars a day, which made them quite happy I guess, but when they had a day off it would cost us twenty and thirty dollars a day.

We didn't know much about daycare centres up until that point. We knew there were a couple around but we never bothered enquiring until we finally got fed up. Within a week we ended up at Northwest Communicare, after all the looking around that we had done.

I've got the car. I take my wife to work about ten to seven, I take Donny to school at seven o'clock and then I start work at seven thirty. Everything blends in just right.

At night time, my wife will get home about four o'clock. This gives her time between the time she arrives and the time I arrive to get supper and clean up the house from the day before. I usually pick up Donny around five or five thirty and we're usually home at six o'clock.

You've got to be there for at least a month before you can really decide how you like the place.

I saw a notice the first week in July for a board meeting and I enquired about it. I was told what it's all about and told that if I was interested in finding out more to come out and see what it's all about. Being the type of person I am — not nosy or anything —

just to find out what was going on I decided to come out. I figured at the time that if ever I was going to meet anybody, especially other parents from the school, this would be an ideal time and an ideal way to do it.

I figured it was an organization more or less owned by the City or something, and people were hired and fired as goes. If they did a good job, fine; if they didn't, well that's tough. But I had no idea it was operated by the parents and the staff.

Personally, I'm not one to sit around and not ask questions. I figure the best way to learn anything is to ask questions, keep your eyes and ears open, and if you're not happy keep asking until somebody gives you the answer you want to hear.

The first board meeting I didn't know anybody and I didn't know anything about it so I kept my mouth shut and my ears open. The second board meeting I opened my mouth and I looked a little less and I heard everything that had to be said. I think it's coming up to the fifth or sixth meeting now and I'm right in there.

I think it's great. You can say what's on your mind and there's nobody there to say, well, that's tough. As a rule, if somebody has something to say, and it's said, it's considered. It's put through the mill and if it's a good idea it's done, if it's a bad idea the person is told about it. And the reasons are spelled out when the person is told. And if they don't like the way it is

25 dollars if just part of a day's pay. If I had to lose a whole day because of a babysitter who doesn't show up I might lose anywhere from thirty to forty dollars a day.

there they can always go to the Nitty Gritty meetings and there are people there who will accomodate you. If you have something to say, you say it. If you get told off that's part of the game. And if you're agreed with that's part of the game too.

Up until now I've only been to one Nitty Gritty and that was not because I had a complaint, but because I had a request. That was about taking care of Donny after six o'clock if ever I got hung up working till seven or eight o'clock at night. I was told if ever something came up to the point where I would need this type of assistance, to let them know during the afternoon and if one of the girls were available and if the time and place were available, I could just pick up my kid wherever he was when I got off work. That was quite nice because I've had many offers. I've never had to use them yet but I know that they're there whenever they're required.

As far as the centre being a "community" project, I think that's a lot of hogwash. I'm willing to bet that 99 percent of that community does not go to Northwest Communicare, or even know about it, so it can't be a community project. You can have people down the street who don't even know what it's all about. They know there's kids there, they know there's a form of babysitting, but other than that I doubt very much that they know what happens on the board or inside the hall, or anything else. So I can't really see it as being a community project.

So far as our 25 dollar a week fee is concerned, that is very little as far as days and time are concerned. 25 dollars is just part of a day's pay. If I have to

lose a whole day because of a babysitter who doesn't show up I might lose anywhere from thirty to forty dollars a day.

Maybe there should be an allowance for the guy who's not making as much as me. However, I think welfare has a subsidy plan for this business. If he can't get off his can to go down and enquire about it, if he's broke every week, that's his tough luck. There's always somebody willing to pay at the welfare office if he is willing to go down and find out the particulars.

I think everybody could make good use of daycare as it exists right now. Personally, I think people don't get it because it's a pain in the neck. You have to get up in the morning, dress your kid, give him breakfast, get his clothes on, drag him all the way down to the centre, and then go through the whole procedure again at night. It seems to involve quite a bit of time. I think this is the biggest burden that people can't be bothered with. If they had a babysitter they could get up and go to work at seven o'clock, the babysitter could come in at seven o'clock, the kid could stay in bed until eight or nine o'clock, then he could get up and have breakfast whenever he pleases. He's always in the same home, he's familiar with the backyard and the kids in the surrounding area, he knows which toys are his, so there's nothing for him to have to re-orient himself to. With the daycare centre there's new toys, there's new kids — now you don't fight with one kid around the block, but you've got to fight with half a dozen to get a bike, so to speak.

My wife was working even before the child was born. The fact is that we have bills to pay like everybody else, and we

like to blow money like everybody else. When she works, it's available. And we blow money as fast as it comes in: hamburg joints two or three nights a week, rum and coke when you want it, friends over to the house whenever you want it, pizza or submarines or chinese food when people drop over to the house — you can always send out and you've got seven or eight dollars to blow — things like this are convenient. If you've got friends over and you've only got two bucks in your pocket that will only buy you a case of coke; it won't even begin the thought of submarines or pizzas, so right there your night is shot all to hell. And if your friends come over you don't ask them to go dutch.

Not only that, but there's fixing up the house. I do all the labour but the materials still cost money.

Most of the people we know, if the husband makes a hundred bucks a week, there's no bills to pay and they're just getting by, they're happy. So the wife really doesn't have to go out and work and they don't bother looking for daycare centres. But the majority of the people we know who have some knowledge of daycare centres and know that my kid is in one of them think it's a fantastic idea because the kid can learn to get along with other kids, especially if he's an only child.

So far Donny is an only child. He's not spoiled but he doesn't really have any playmates. At two years old we don't let him go out on the road, we don't let him go up on the sidewalk, and most of the kids in the area are four years old and up and he's too young to get involved with them anyway. So he gets stuck in the backyard all summer.

Up to now he's got on pretty well in the daycare centre. He's learned to speak more. His vocabulary has increased a considerable amount.

He's quite happy. As a matter of fact, you can't get him there soon enough in the morning. They've got two animals (white rats) down there that he seems to adore, even though I couldn't bring one home because my wife would go nuts. He learns how to look after the animals. He's got the responsibility of picking up toys and

preparing himself for dinner. He goes to sleep in the afternoon with all the other kids without a hassle and that training alone is worth a million dollars in time because kids that don't sleep in the afternoon are usually grumpy as hell the rest of the day.

(Interviewer: What is it that interests you about the place?)

Kids. I bend over backwards to do something for a kid. My old man died when I was two years old and I was in an orphanage in Kitchener for eight years while my mother worked. I went in at four and I came out at twelve.

I belong to the Big Brothers Association and when my services are required I'm there. I think little kids, two or three or four years old, are unbelievable, and I'll do anything to make them happy. So I make it my business to know what goes on and if I can help in any way I let people know about it.

And if you're going to be writing this down I'd like to say that I'd like to see more people come out to the Volunteer Work Days. The first time I was there there were only twelve people there but we had a lot of fun. Of course we had to sweat a little bit. I think we could have had a lot more fun, and got a lot more work done, if there had been maybe five or seven more people.

I think it was just great. And the kids were having a ball. They had a babysitter and were playing in the gym. And the opposite parent, who didn't come that day, had a chance to clean the house or get business cleared up and it just turned out being an A-1 project all around. I'd like to see it happening about two or three times a year.

But I think that if you had to lower the fees or something in order to get people to work around there it would be just as well to get parents who are already interested. I wouldn't expect to be paid for my interest. If I'm not interested I wouldn't care if you lowered it down to five bucks a week. If the interest wasn't there I wouldn't go.

I think little kids are unbelievable, and I'll do anything to make them happy. So I make it my business to know what goes on and if I can help in any way I let people know about it.

You never get something for nothing. If the government has to pay for daycare services you're going to have to pay for it through your taxes. Any way you look at it it's going to cost you money. If I don't want to pay for daycare I won't send my kid to the daycare centre; and if I want him there, I'll pay for the services. It's as simple as that.

And if you didn't have a kid that went to a daycare centre and the government was paying for it you'd still have to pay for the thousand other kids that do go. That's not fair. I can't see paying for something that you're not using. Like, I can't see paying school taxes every year for a school that I don't even use. When my kid goes to school then I'll be more than happy to pay for it.

On the other hand, my kid is going to start school when he's five and he'll be in school until he's at least eighteen. In those thirteen years the government is going to spend more money on teachers, books, stationary and so on, than I could ever afford to pay in thirteen years. So for the little money that I have to pay in my tax dollar for education, I get it back a hundred percent for one year's service.

But I don't think the same thing should apply to daycare because the government is *forcing* me to put my kid in school but no one is forcing me to use a daycare centre.

The only reason people send their kids to daycare centres is because they want to work. Now, if it's necessary to work, then fine, you've got to use these services. But if you're sending

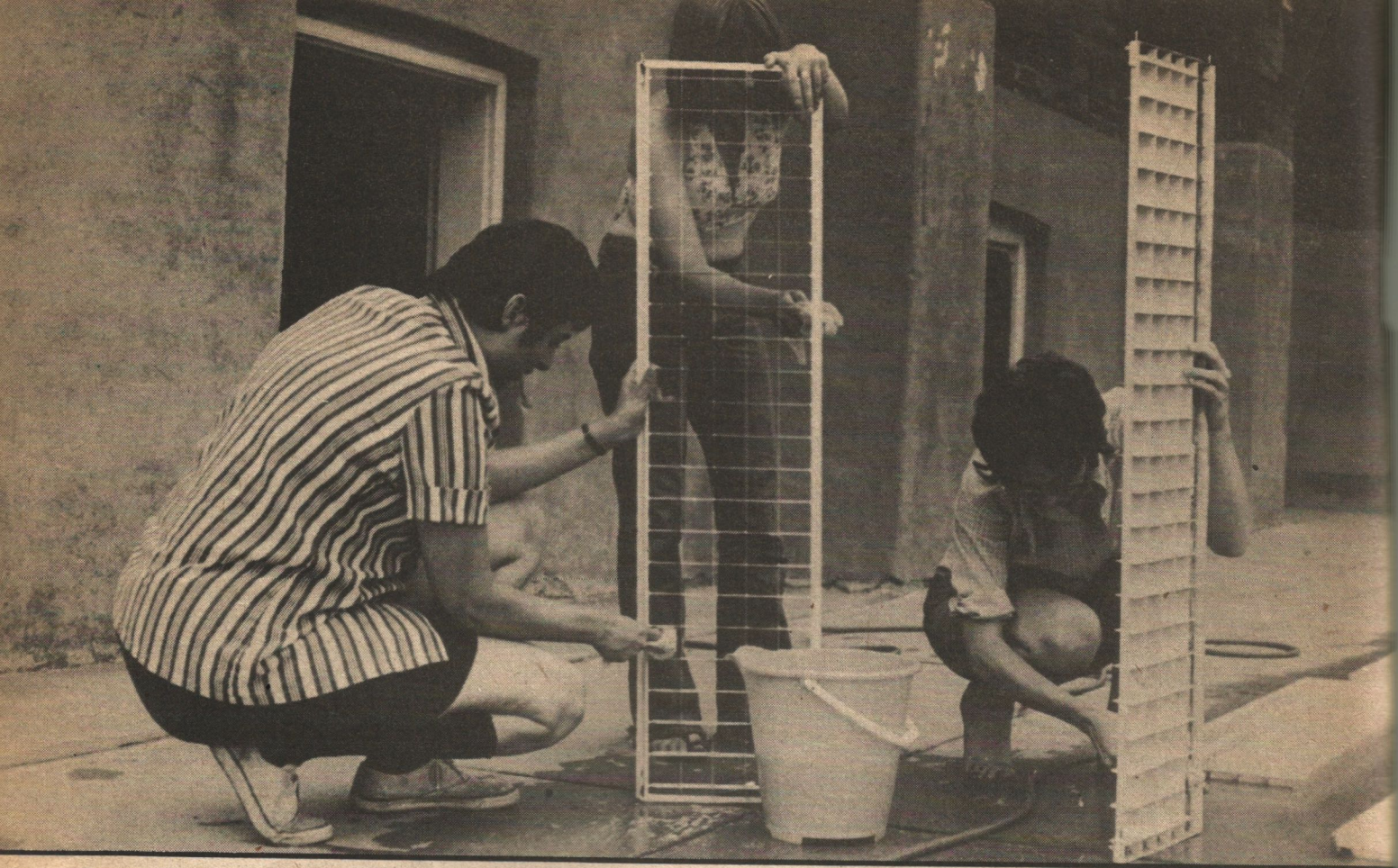
your kid there just to get him out of your hair there's no reason why the government should pay for your freedom of time and luxury. And if you're working, surely you can afford to pay for it yourself.

I have found now that I have my own kid that it was an act of selfishness that brought it about and I really wasn't doing a favour to anybody. I wanted the kid; I made sure I got him; now I have to pay for the fact that I have him. If I didn't want one at all I would have made sure I didn't have one. So you pay for what you get.

The government's not responsible for you having a kid. So why should they pay for something that they had absolutely nothing to do with?

I think the girls at Northwest Communicare are doing one hell of a good job. I've yet to see any of them get angry or upset at anything in particular.

I know that some people have been criticizing the centre but I don't think it amounts to anything. The people who are doing all the loudmouthing are the people who are never there. Going there for five minutes to drop off your kid and five minutes to pick him up isn't enough time to justify making a complaint. I think if anybody's got anything they really have to complain about they should stick around and see how things are before they make their decision. Like they say, you can't tell a book by its cover, and if you've never read it, you can't criticize it. I suggest that anybody who's got a complaint go down there and find out what's going on first.



carol

from parent to staff member 1

I had been home for three years and just decided that being home was not for me. I had worked twelve years up to that point, in various jobs, and really didn't like staying in the home and knew that I had to get out. And Sherry being an only child I thought it was best for her to be with other children. I felt that I could take a couple of days a week to myself to do the things that I wanted to do and then maybe branch out into full-time work if everything went well.

I had heard about Northwest Communicare through a friend of mine who had a child in there; and I heard quite a few favourable things about it. I had checked into some others that I didn't like. One was only half-days; the other centre was in the downtown area, I didn't like the set up of the rooms, and it was run by an older group, and I just didn't want anything like that.

I had heard there were parents — and staff — involved on the board of Northwest Communicare and I thought it was really great that I could have a say about what was happening to my child. That was one of the things that prompted me to put her in there.

I took Sherry there when she was two years old. I put her in for two days a week and she had quite a hard time. I think because it was only two she found it very hard to adjust to. It was at the beginning and end of the week. She was crying all the time and had come down with an ear infection. I spoke to the doctor and she suggested that Sherry should be away for at least ten days. So I

withdrew her from the school and spoke to the staff and decided that she wasn't ready yet. I just felt that she was too immature, at two years old, to be in the school, and asked them if there would be a chance that she could come back later on.

When Sherry was three years old I put her back in and she seemed to work out fine then.

I went over a couple of days and, of course, not working, and being a great talker, stayed on talking with the staff.

I found it quite a *warm* place. I found that I could hang around there without feeling I was being in the way. I just felt that I was always welcomed when I was there. I guess I also realized that the staff were very busy with the children and there were times that I didn't bother them; I saw that they were busy and I went off and did the odd little thing here or there. But I got on very well with all the people there.

They were short-staffed one day and I just sort of helped around and then a couple of days later they called me and asked if I'd like to come in as a substitute staff for them. Then I started supply teaching, with pay, for them. That was in November and then in January, when the LIP grant came through, they asked me if I'd like to go on the LIP grant. I really liked the place and I thought there were some new people coming in at the time and some really great things could happen there. That's one of the reasons I was in-

terested in taking the job.

I enjoyed working with the kids, which really surprised me. I'd never been around children that much — that *many* at the same time — and I rather enjoyed it.

The first meeting that I went to was a board meeting — it was for the approval of the constitution. It was quite a frightening meeting to a person coming in cold like that. I know it was a very important meeting, but it was very frightening to me. I had read the constitution beforehand, so I knew a bit about what was going on, but just found it very, very hard.

I knew maybe two people there and I really didn't have anything to say about what was going on because I didn't *know* what was happening. I was a bit confused because I'd never been to that type of meeting before. I didn't really feel all the *uncomfortable* because I was with someone I knew and they were explaining it to me as it went along. But I find meetings very hard to sit through at any time and that one I found it a little difficult.

I didn't want to go on to board and I think that first meeting scared me. I kept refusing every time I was asked, even when I was working as a substitute staff. I kept refusing to go on the board meetings and I volunteered to do the food for the meetings so that I could stay off in the kitchen and not have to take part in these discussions. I did sit through some meetings when I started

I found it quite a warm place. I just felt that I was always welcomed when I was there.

doing the food for Nitty Gritty meetings and didn't mind that at all, in fact rather enjoyed it. And then, when I went on to LIP I was automatically on board and on Nitty Gritty and that's probably the push I needed. I probably would never have gone on no matter how much I liked the people there.

Do you want to know what I think about the meetings? I find I'm not too upset by Nitty Gritty. I find them more relaxed and I feel free to say what I want. If there's any problems it's really a great thing that they can be brought to Nitty Gritty and they can be discussed there and *usually* at Nitty Gritty they are *solved*.

Board is a different thing with me. I get uptight for about two days before board meetings. I find board meetings quite often a bunch of bull. I think a person like myself, who hasn't been to university or whatever, coming in to board meetings ... I find people sort of changing before me. I don't know what it is. Maybe I just don't understand a lot of it. I just find that a lot of people with university degrees — maybe I should say well-educated people — tend to go on at the mouth for hours and accomplish nothing. I can take on a job and I can do it. I can't stand things constantly being put off, table this, table that, you know.

And it goes on forever and ever. I know there's a lot of cases that you can't solve something right away, and there's reasons why you can't — maybe you have to talk to the church or whatever — but I feel a lot of times that if we had a few opinions on the subject, or everybody's opinion on it, I could take the job and do it myself without all this hassle. You know: 'Well, maybe we should do it this way ...' and some twit goes on for two hours on what he's read in books or whatever. And I really can't take that. I get very nervous by it. I've never sat through meetings like

that before, and I just find it very, very hard to do.

It just seems to be more *formal* at board meetings. Nitty Gritty is not that way at all and people just bare their souls if they feel like it. But I find that at board I seem to be sitting with a group of people that I know but I really don't know at all. It just takes on a formal and very tense kind of atmosphere.

If there are *attacks* made on the school or on the staff people *do* tend to come out and be themselves. Not everyone. There are people who never *will* speak, but enough come out to satisfy me. I find it very, very hard to give an opinion at board. Maybe it's my problem, but I get very, very nervous about something I'm going to say because I think someone else can put their point across more effectively than I. And yet afterwards I feel that I could have said the same thing in a lot less time and had the very same meaning. This is what I find so hard to deal with. I think it wastes a lot of our time.

It really bugs me. I just feel like standing up and yelling, "Look, just cut out all the bull and get down to business!" I think it might freak a few people out if I did, so I hold back a bit.

But if someone comes out with an attack on staff or the centre, I'm going to defend myself and certainly expect the rest of the people involved to do the same, right? So that's when I do come out. But I find that when I do come out that way maybe I come out a little hostile or something, because I see the staff and I see a place I really believe in being attacked, and I'm just not going to sit back and let that happen.

A lot of the time I just feel that if I put an idea on the floor I know that they would recognize it all right but you can almost look around the table and watch sort of bored looks on certain faces. I don't mean b-o-a-r-d, I mean

b-o-r-e-d.

I find, too, that there's too much pussy-footing. There's just not enough straight talking. I think if you have something to say that you should be able to come out and say it. There's too much soft soaping laid on. They're always trying to prevent arguments. Now, I don't like arguments, that's for damn sure, because I do get really, really upset. Yet, I find that when an argument does break out it actually brings people a lot closer together. If everybody started to say exactly what they thought, I think it would be the best thing that ever happened.

And I think that if you're only getting two or three people speaking all the time it's not good. So if you go around the table and ask each person to give their opinion then maybe people are going to feel freer and are going to start coming out a little more. But you need more opinions; it just seems to be the same people all the time, doing all the talking.

This was my first experience with meetings, outside of when I worked in an office and we had small office meetings. See, I've never been through this and this is probably why I find it so difficult. A lot of people who have been to university come by this very easily because they're involved in so many things.

I have sat in on meetings in one office where I worked where we had twenty-three girls. But here you had a *boss* who did the speaking, you had an *under-boss* that spoke, and you had a *purchasing agent* that got up and spoke, and *your* opinions were not worth a damn when it got right down to it. That part of it really bothered me immensely and so I just cut them out, whether it meant my job or not. I never got to say what I meant to say so I just didn't go anymore.

But here I recognize that I can come out and say what I want and I think that's really great. But it's probably going to take me a little bit of time before I can do that without being really, really nervous. At a board meeting when you go to speak, all eyes are suddenly upon you, which I realize is quite natural. I hear my own voice coming out and I can tell that my voice

is nervous and I forget. I start thinking: what are they going to think? Are they going to think I'm stupid?

Most things that come up at board meetings I try to look at as a parent and not a staff member, because I was a parent when I first got there and I'll be a parent all my life.

The parents work all day the same as we do, and they have children to look after, also. I think if they have enough interest in the centre that they're going to be able to find one night a month to take time out. Now, if the meetings would run two hours and no more than that, I think you would get a lot more people out. But we're famous for saying, 'We'll stop this meeting at nine' and ending up at eleven or twelve. And I think it's just too hard, speaking for myself, working all day, coming home — and a lot of women are alone or are in the same position I am with a husband who works shifts — and you still have your child to look after when you get home and the next day you can't function properly at all.

I would rather put my efforts into the daycare centre with the children the next day. It bugs me when I'm not doing the job I could be doing, and it's just because I'm tired from the night before. I think it's *emotionally* draining and I find it very difficult the next day to go in and work when you're emotionally and physically drained. So a lot of people just think, 'Oh, I just can't go to that meeting. It's going to go on for ever and ever.'

I think what we need, really, is someone at the centre to give out information about our board meetings — how they're run and how the centre's run. I think that's very, very important. I would have known none of this if I hadn't had a friend who was there. If it was explained how board meetings were run, and a little of what to expect there, then maybe people wouldn't be so nervous.

But I think we could also make them a little less formal. I don't know exactly how to go about this. If we could stop a bit of the pussy-footing I think that would help a lot.

I kept refusing to go on the board meetings and I volunteered to do the food for the meetings so that I could stay off in the kitchen and not have to take part in these discussions.

Being on the late shift for a number of months, I get to talk to a lot of the parents when they come in to pick up their kids, and I really enjoy that. A lot of the parents like to talk about their children. They like to know who their children are playing with, are they mixing in well with other kids, and so on. But there are a lot of people who would automatically avoid getting involved in the *meetings* at the centre. A lot of people use it just as a service and don't want it for anything more. They have things going before they ever came to that centre and don't care to take on anything else. I know right now if someone phoned me up about something else that I really believed in I just couldn't handle it.

One thing we *could* do is that at each Nitty Gritty meeting maybe have a half an hour set aside for a parent to come in and talk about their child. They could ask any questions they might have, and we could tell them some things they might want to know about how their child is doing. I don't know how that would work but I just think that it would show that you really *do* have a lot of interest in what's happening to their child. And that might get the parent more involved. You'd let them know ahead of time that it was going to be a nice pleasant discussion.

Now, I don't think it should be done, say six to one. Maybe this should be done two to one. That might scare me off a little bit if I thought I was going to go to a meeting and face six people. And it has to be something that's handled very, very delicately; you have to be really careful when you're talking about someone's child.

Things like the potluck dinner, that are one night and not a commitment

for one night a month even, are a *fun* thing, not a business thing. It's just friendly conversation and you don't have to hand out opinions and things like that. Christmas parties are the same thing. I think Volunteer Work Days are a good way of getting people together. They find that this really is a friendly group and they really do fit in. That's why I think that we should have someone at the centre to inform parents of these things.

If you're a friendly, out-going person you're going to have no problem; but if you're a reserved sort of person then it can be a little difficult, because the staff *are* busy and may not always have time to talk to you enough.

In the last little while the board meetings started to get a little better and I wasn't feeling quite as uptight about them. Now I feel they're heading the other way again.

I think this idea of having a rotating moderator (a different member acts as 'chairman' each board meeting) which has just come in recently is a really good idea, even though I refuse to do it myself. I don't think you should force people to do it, but it's a good idea if people are willing.

But you can be really involved in the place without ever taking a turn as moderator of board meetings. It's not necessarily going to make people more involved, in fact, it might scare people away. If I kept getting pressured too much and I didn't want it, I think that would frighten me away. This is why we don't pressure parents to be involved. I think things like maybe a potluck supper and getting things like that going will maybe be the answer.

I try to look at it like this: if I walked into the centre now would I feel the

People have put their kids in and then had to take them out because they couldn't get the subsidy and couldn't afford to pay fees. I think it's a real crime.

same way about it as I felt a year ago? And I have to say yes. I still think the centre is a very warm and interesting place.

But I can see someone walking into the centre and — our staff room is in the kitchen — seeing maybe five people sitting around that kitchen ... I don't know if they would walk over there and say, 'Hi, I'm so and so'. Most people wouldn't. That's why I think we really have to set up a committee off on the side to start talking to parents, to really get through to them and explain that this really is a great place and that we *do* need them.

One of the things we should be explaining to the parents, too, is the subsidy. I know myself, if I came into the centre and I was in the position of having to go down and get subsidy for my child and I was told, you have to go to Victoria Avenue, to the welfare office, I might be a little upset if it wasn't explained to me in more detail, with a few examples given to me: so and so was down and this is what happened to her; this is who you go to see; and this is what you do. Like: it isn't a bad thing at all. This is what you *deserve*. This is your *right*. You're not going begging.

I think it would be a good idea if someone were to offer to go down with them. I've sat in the welfare office with a few of my friends and it awakened *me* to many things. For a lot of people who've always been fairly well off, it would freak them out to just sit there for a couple of hours.

I sat in that welfare office and saw a guy collapse waiting in line for his prescription. He fell and cut his head and everybody was just walking around not knowing what to do. So I jumped up and asked, "Is somebody gonna help this guy?" I was so mad, I said,

"There's a hospital right across the street." And I went up to someone at a wicket and said, "Have you got help for this guy yet?" And she said, "The hospital has been phoned."

Mind you, I was just sitting there as a friend of a friend and I had nothing to lose because I didn't need their assistance, but would I have done that if I was down there seeking welfare? It might have been a different story. I might have thought that they would think she's causing a disturbance or something.

It's a hell of a degrading thing to have to go down there. I don't care what situation they are in people have feelings. It's like a bloody cattle call where you take a number. And you see people getting fed up waiting and passing off numbers. You know, someone's got number 60 and they hand you 38 and you go, "Wow! Number 38! It's okay now, we don't have too much longer to wait!"

Mind you, when you apply for daycare subsidy you have a private interview and it's not that bad. Still, with a mother who's maybe just separated and has children, she has enough problems right then and there as it is without having to go down there without any kind of personal support. I think it would be a tremendous idea to have a friend go along.

But I think we also need someone to explain subsidy to people before they go down. I know we don't have enough staff at the centre to do that; I think we'll have to set something up. And it has to be a person who's well-informed on everything that's going on.

I've seen people at Northwest Communicare who've put their kids in and then had to take them out because they couldn't get the subsidy and couldn't afford to pay fees. I think it's a

real crime. I really do.

Those kinds of cases aren't rare by any means. There's one case right now where they're taking the child out because they can't afford to pay — they're paying themselves — and I haven't really gone into the circumstances of it but it's really a sad case because the child has come a long way and yet has not been there long enough. If the child were there for another year, good things could happen. It's cases like that that bother me. I get really frustrated by it. It really upsets me because I feel, why *can't* this person get subsidy? Or, can't we do something to lower our fees? Why is the government not doing something about it? Why can't we get help?

Even in my own situation, when I leave, there'll only be Mike's wage coming in and that puts us in a position where we can't get subsidy and I would have to pay a hundred dollars a month to have my child go to daycare. And I really feel it's important that she goes to daycare, and yet a hundred dollars a month, when you start thinking about it, is a lot of money. And I don't think I'm being *selfish*, it's just that there's things in life that I'd like to do, too. I don't want to put that much money into daycare. That frustrates me.

I think with Sherry being an only child she really benefits from daycare. What's going to happen to her just being with adults all the time? And in an apartment? It's an adult building she's in. So what is she going to be, a forty-year old four-year old? Socially she needs it. She needs to learn to get along with other children. She needs to learn to share. I certainly don't want a selfish child if it can be prevented; and I think this does happen a lot if it's just adults around the child because the child's with you constantly and you find yourself giving in when you shouldn't.

She has to go to school when she's five years old and what's going to happen to her then? Is she going to be all screwed up because she doesn't know how to get along with other children? She'll get along fine with the *teachers* but she may not be able to get along with the kids. And this is really

scary to me.

(Interviewer: Do you think daycare should be free?) You're damn right, I do. Anyone who needs daycare should be able to have it. Anyone that can benefit from taking their child to a daycare centre — child or parents — should be able to.

I don't mean to open up daycare just as a babysitting service for anyone who felt like using it, because that's something I *wouldn't* want to see happen. And I think the only way you can probably get around that is by really looking into each case individually — and there would be a preference where the need is greatest.

I've been at the centre for a year and I've seen some really constructive things come out of there in the last six or eight months.

The workshop (a public meeting on daycare for working women), for one, was a very good thing.

I think the place is getting a lot stronger, too. Maybe it's just something I feel within myself. Like, I feel a little more secure there. To me the centre's not just stale. It's not just sitting there. It's starting to branch out into other areas. I think this is really a great thing.

I realize that the number of staff that we have can't do all this work in these other areas, so we have to get other people.

The after-four program is a very important thing, and it would be another first if they get it. Now, there would be different people working on that, with Northwest Communicare, I hope, giving it a lot of support.

This is where the parents should come in and help support a lot of these different things. And if the after-four program comes through, the parents of the children in the program should be urged right off the bat to get in there and support that program and help the people who are working on that

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program in any way they can. That should be stated right at the start, when applications are being taken. I don't mean a pressure job, but: are you interested in what is happening to your child? Do you think you could come out so many nights a month?

I think these people on the after-four program should come to our board meetings and report on what's happening to the program and we should give them all the support we can. And I don't mean just a few people. This happens a lot, that it's always the same few people doing the extra work of these outside activities. And it isn't fair. I feel once I'm not working there anymore that I'll be quite capable of doing a lot of extra things.

I'd sooner be organizing a party for the kids than, say, working on the pamphlet (a daycare information pamphlet being prepared by others at the centre). Maybe I don't have the capacity to do that; and I'm aware of it, so I do the things that I know how to do best.

I would like to see a male on staff at the centre. I was asked by one parent just this week whether there were men working in the centre. It would be a good thing because there are a lot of children at the centre from split homes and I don't think it would hurt at all to have a male figure there.

There's a fair number of men involved on the board. But they certainly don't dominate anything there. The women have as much to say, if not more, because the staff know what's happening in the centre since they

work there every day, and they are all females.

It's so different working there than working in an office. For one thing, at the centre there's no director, which I feel is a tremendous thing. You don't go around doing your job feeling that Big Brother is watching you. You can work at ease. In an office situation — which I had twelve years of — you get the bosses throwing things at you every five minutes. ... 'Do this, do that, where's my coffee?' You're being put down all the time. And if you're the kind of person who's shy you can get awfully passive. I could see that happening to some of the women at the centre if they had ended up in an office position rather than working here.

There is *pressure* at the centre, but working under a boss is a different kind of pressure. You can't think for yourself. You can't do things the way you would like. At the centre you're much freer. You can make decisions on your own and then talk about them at meetings. If you make a bad decision you can talk it out and then right it. And you don't feel that somebody is watching you over your shoulder all the time. It's a hell of a great feeling after having worked in a factory or an office for years. It was very hard for me to come out of factory and office work after so many years to a situation like this where I could start thinking for myself again. And I really thought that I was strong and *had* thought for myself all along. And in a lot of ways I had. But I think a person working in the centre needs a heck of a lot of initiative.



eileen

from parent to staff member 2

I was born in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. My father, who was a miner before I was born, tried his hand at mixed farming for nine years and failed, like a lot of people in Nova Scotia. And, like a lot of people in Nova Scotia who didn't have any job, he moved to Ontario, 'the land of milk and honey', and got a job in a factory. I think he worked up here for a couple of years before we all moved to Ontario.

My father's worked in factories ever since, and my mother stayed home and looked after the six kids until we were all grown and gone. Now they're both retired.

I was one of the 'chosen ones' of the six kids in the family. Other than my brother, who took courses at night school for years and finally became a teacher, nobody in the family had anything better than a high school education. Except for me. I went straight from high school into university, which was some sort of phenomenon in our family. I had some scholarships, I worked in factories during the summers, and I borrowed a ton of money from the government.

After university I got a job in the library in Hamilton. I worked there for a couple of years during the course of which I got married and left when I was going to have Jeremy. I stayed home and took care of the baby for approximately a year and then I got a part time job. When Jeremy was two years old I put him in the daycare centre —

they could accept kids at the age of two — and took a full time job. We didn't have any money, and I wanted to work anyway because I was tired of staying at home and thought I could do something better if I was out working.

Actually, if the truth be known, I thought I'd go crazy at home alone all day with a little kid as my only company other than the TV. I couldn't stay there and be any kind of mother to him, with all the mix-up I was starting to feel about what I was doing with my own life.

As far as Jeremy is concerned, he seems to love the place. Like a lot of kids, he was scared when he first went but he's an old hand at it now and he's made a lot of friends — both kids and adults. He sees the teachers as *people*, I think, not as *teachers*. And he's learning a lot of things from other kids, especially how to get along with people. He was very shy of other kids before he went into daycare, although he knew a fair bit about how to wind adults around his little finger.

I like the free structure of the programme for the kids. I didn't want him having his every move planned in advance eight or nine hours of every day. There he can make up his own mind about what he wants to play with and I especially like the fact that he's allowed to settle certain problems between himself and another kid by himself without an adult jumping in at

the first sign of an argument and telling him how to act. Up to a point, he can find out for himself how to get along. After all, that's what he's going to have to do when he grows up, isn't it?

I got involved in the centre because I'd heard it was the best for kids in town and that's what I wanted for my son — I guess what everybody wants. Anyway, I found everyone there very good to him and to me, too, and so when I was asked to come to a meeting to see if I wanted to be on the Board, I went and decided to work for it because I liked the idea of having a voice in how my child was handled.

At first though, I didn't want to go because the title "Board of Directors meeting" made me think of a really formal thing — sort of boring and useless — and I found out it wasn't like that after I went there. Of course, the first few meetings are always a little confusing until you get more familiar with what's going on.

I worked for the centre as a parent for about a year on the Board and the Nitty Gritty Committee and worked outside on a couple of useless and low-paying jobs. Then we decided to apply for the Local Initiatives Program grant and I wrote up the application. When we got the grant, I was hired as the person doing the books and also doing research on daycare. Then Christine decided to leave the staff and I applied for the job and was hired so now the centre is my

I feel pretty strongly that people who have an advantage — and I think we have one — are obligated to work to spread it around a bit more.

job as well as the place I put my son while I work.

Another reason why I got involved so much there was that I had been really interested in women's liberation and wanted to do something for that. I felt that daycare was the most important step for women with kids — like me — if they're going to be free to do whatever they want with their lives. If you want to change something you should start with your own situation and others like it because you know from experience what you're talking about. It was logical, in my mind, for me to work for daycare.

For a long time, though, I felt that I was getting a cool reaction from people because of my politics — the way I think the world should be, so to speak. That's changed some, but it's hard for me to say how much. I never pushed a hard and fast political "line" there, although I talked about the working class and women's liberation a bit more than anyone else. I think a lot of the reaction I was getting was based on a pre-conceived notion of what kind of person I was, because I had been involved in political activities before I put my son in the centre. Some people already saw me as a leftist or radical person. Some people still see me that way.

It's a bit different now, maybe because some of the new people don't know my history at all and just accept me as another parent and a member of the organization. Also, some of that feeling came, I think, from people who had very middle class attitudes and didn't want to hear about politics. Some of these people aren't there anymore, and some of the new people — ordinary, working people — don't

find my ideas that strange.

When they first arrive, most people don't see this place as being any kind of progressive step in a chain of events leading up to a progressive society. They see it on a day-to-day basis as a nice place, or a progressive place or a unique place, but they don't see the long range things that could be done by publicizing the centre and trying to expand it, or the idea of it, into other centres. They see it as a 'complete' place, whereas I see it — and most people when they've had a chance to become more involved in the centre — see it as something which is still in an embryo stage.

I can't understand the people in the centre who don't see any reason to discuss things outside, you know, like trying to change how subsidy is given out, or starting other centres and all that "political" stuff. I mean, they seem to agree with the way Northwest Communicare is run and disagree with the things we think are wrong outside. They think it's a good place for them, or their kid, or the parents, but they don't seem to feel any responsibility to get the same for other parents or daycare staff or whatever. It's a confused attitude to put it mildly. I feel pretty strongly that people who have an advantage — and I think we have one — are obligated to work to spread it around a bit more. Anyway, I feel it's a responsibility for me. Talk really is cheap. It's not talk that keeps the centre alive; it's the work that a lot of the people there do when they might rather be home having a beer and relaxing.

Even if the centre didn't have any long range goals — like setting up other

centres, expanding its services to include infant care and 'after four' programs for school children, or getting involved with unionized women or the Community Use of Schools Committee — even if this group of people just organized their meetings and took care of running the centre itself, you could still have a certain amount of *political education* going on. Just organizing people to run that centre in a democratic way could make them realize that it's better to run things democratically and give them experience in acting democratically, to the point where they feel there's something better for them and that other things should be run the same way.

The centre changes people's attitudes because they aren't used to democracy and they find it difficult to maintain. It's a struggle. It's "easier" to walk into a situation where there's a boss, because that's the sort of thing you've been brought up to expect. When you walk into the daycare centre it's run democratically and it's not as easy to understand and it's not easy to know how to act because you're not used to doing things that way. And people don't always have the discipline that it takes. What I mean by discipline, I guess, is *self-discipline*. If no one is telling you to do something, you have to tell yourself.

Sometimes people get tired of meetings and making decisions and they slack off. They miss meetings or cancel meetings because they've been wanting a rest. But decisions still have to be made and someone else will have to do their part. At other times, maybe someone will promise to do something and forget about it, while everyone else is expecting it to get done. Or someone will have an idea or an opinion on a tricky issue and will keep quiet because they don't want to get into an argument or because they want the meeting to end so they can go home. Maybe instead of leaving quietly they should raise the issue of why the meeting is taking so long or something. Do you see what I mean?

The kind of politics that would seem to be evolving there now — and the one

that I support — is basically *working class politics*, the political idea that working people are the majority and that daycare centres and other institutions should be set up to serve the needs of these people. Things are not, at this point, set up to serve these people, but they should be and our goal is to provide a service aimed at these people and to try and understand the needs of these people and how they can be involved.

In the private centres there isn't any discussion of politics. It's just a custodial service. There's the director who runs the staff, the staff who are very poorly-paid, and the parents who are not involved at all. The parents are not asked what they need. The service is set up by the director according to whatever the director feels is most profitable and if the parent can pay the fee then they can put their child in there while they work. If they can't afford it they can't get the service unless they're destitute or they're a single parent or something and can apply for daycare subsidy. There isn't any question of analysing the fee, or whether the parents have the right to say this or that about the centre. They don't have any rights. If they don't like the service they have the choice of taking their kid out and if they don't mind the service they put their kid in, but there isn't any opportunity for them to say what kind of service it should be.

In the parent-controlled co-operatives — which are usually university-based centres — where the parents have to do some work in the centre, they are usually involved in deciding the kind of service they want. But it's not the same as a centre like ours because the people, by virtue of the fact that they're in university and are students, can be involved in that because they have the time to devote to volunteering in the centre and all that sort of thing. A centre like that necessarily excludes all parents who work at ordinary jobs — nine to five and eight to four and so on — because they just can't be involved during the day. The fact that they set up these centres which automatically exclude

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working parents indicates that they are not seeing the problem from an understanding of the working parent's point of view. Their big interest is in parent control first and foremost, and they don't want to settle for less.

Now I think the crucial issue for working people is that there is not enough daycare for them in the first place, of any kind whatsoever, and so discussion of exactly what kind of centre and what kind of control, and so on, that kind of conversation isn't as relevant for people who don't have any daycare at all. It's an unrealistic view of what the discussion should be around the issue of daycare. Don't get me wrong. I think parent-controlled daycare is very important, but universal daycare is more important right now.

Our centre is set up differently because it has a more realistic approach to the fact that working people are *working*. Northwest Communicare has more or less had to end up expressing the working parent's point of view because it was set up in a community rather than on a university campus or something, and because it was open

from 7 in the morning to 6 in the evening and didn't make parent involvement compulsory, so working parents put their kids there. The fact that working parents put their kids in there had an effect on how the centre ended up and what it turned out to be. The people who set it up were progressive enough to want parent and community involvement — wanted it to be a community centre, so to speak, so they had to find a way other than the one where parents had to volunteer to work in the centre like in the university campus ones. It had to be a parent involvement that took place after an eight hour working day. The reality of the situation forced them to find a solution that was good for working parents.

The solution was to have a staff of people hired to take care of the children during the day with no compulsory participation or any kind of help by parents. We had to have a lot of staff to take care of the kids because it was ludicrous to imagine that a working class person could have time to do it, and then some sort of organization or system set up whereby the *decisions*

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were made by the staff and parents. First of all, by the parents — the staff weren't involved at the beginning.

I think they set it up that way but they didn't really foresee what was going to happen. They had a director at the beginning and all that sort of thing, and yet they wanted the parents involved. Well, when they got the parents involved then there was a confrontation between the parents wanting to have a say, the staff wanting to have a say, and having this structure, of the director and all that sort of thing, which prevented that from happening.

Of course, what ended it was the Jessie incident where the parents and members of the staff objected to a director and felt that she was impeding their control over the situation. And after the director was fired, or asked to resign, they saw that they would have to set it up in such a way that the parents and the staff had direct control of the situation and so set up a joint, parent-staff co-operative board — with some community members. There aren't actually many members of the board who are just 'community' people and have no children in the centre — there's just a couple. And my feeling is that it is questionable whether they should be there at all since they don't have any vested interest in the centre. To me, the community isn't whoever lives within certain boundaries or streets, but who is directly involved in the situation, like parents, staff and kids.

Although it's hard to see at first, I think there's quite a struggle going on in this place. There's lots of

really heavy discussions and arguments that go on and the points of view aren't necessarily clear but you find it all has a direction. Not many people here would say it the way I do, but I just feel it's a struggle between what I call working class attitudes and middle class liberal attitudes. These two points of view aren't the same, but in some places aren't opposites either, so we have to argue it out sometimes to finally decide what it is we agree on or disagree on.

There are people in the centre I might say had more of a middle class attitude, but are working hard for the centre and are really trying to understand the problems of working parents and how we can solve them. They don't get riled up over political talk. They try to see the centre as a possible example to others. But there are other people who cannot give over their ideas that everyone should always be "nice", that there should be no political talk, that we should only talk about the kids and the rent and all that. Those people get tired very easily and they quit, usually without ever telling everybody what's really bugging them. They can't stand the struggle and they find it almost impossible to criticize each other or take criticism without there being hard feelings.

I think, deep down inside, that all those people who have left have felt that it wasn't really all that political a place — or shouldn't be — and that the people who were talking about it as if it were, were in fact unrealistic, or were making it something it isn't, or were making it a big political cause when in fact it was just a little daycare centre.

I'm one of those so-called political people. I talk about who we should be serving and the places where I don't think we're doing it, and how we have to expand the idea of Northwest Communicare and advertise it and daycare in general. When you talk about these ideas as strongly as I do, sometimes people get scared, you know, and they feel as if you're being a "red" or something.

I'd say the people who react most negatively to political talk about social change, are the people with middle class attitudes. The working parents don't react as strongly to that kind of discussion.

I suppose it's fairly understandable, though. If we get into a discussion about how people with lower incomes should be given daycare first then a parent on the Board who's making a pretty high salary or who only wants daycare a couple of days a week, is going to feel someone's trying to shaft him or her. On the other hand, I feel our responsibility is to the working parent with a low income and I can't see any reason to not speak my mind just to keep from hurting someone's feelings for a while.

I think there's going to have to be a lot more practice at talking straight out about being working class. It's not *that* unified, you know. In fact, there are people at the centre who don't even believe there is such a thing as a difference in groups of people, or if there is, it has no relevance to us. I think there's more approval now of talking about working class and middle class and what is best set up to serve working class people, and that sort of thing, but we shouldn't act as if that's the sort of discussion that goes on all the time. The majority of working people don't just come in and start talking about working class politics. But I think that as far as talking about the needs of working people, and that kind of thing — in practical terms — that we're at a point where we can talk that way, you know.

I don't think we should give the impression that working parents can walk into that place and feel automatically that this is something

that really expresses their point of view at this point. Still a lot of them are intimidated by the whole structure of people with all this specialized knowledge — or what they see as specialized knowledge — talking about legislation and regulations and all that kind of thing, in a way that seems to them to express a lot of expertise on the subject. And they feel intimidated by that kind of talk. And they still don't feel comfortable for a long time when they go in there but I think that there's more of a feeling among the people involved in the place that that is a problem.

Board meetings are a good example of what I mean. The board meetings are the place where where people are really asked to become involved in the place. They're held once a month and there's approximately 15 people, including the staff and people who've been involved in the centre for years, and they're sometimes very disorganized. People have a tendency to talk as if everyone sitting around the table knew everything they knew about the subject. This is a problem particularly with the staff because they have a tendency to know more about what's going on because they're there all day long and they talk it over and come up with a sort of summary of what's going on. When they get to the board meeting there's a tendency to give the summary rather than explaining the issue in detail. If there's a new person sitting there, or parents who aren't involved in the place that intimately they get the feeling that it's already been decided, or that they really don't understand what's going on but this person seems to know what they're talking about, and they feel that they don't have much to say. But, like I said, at this point there's more of a realization that this is a problem than there has been during the whole of the last three years.

Particularly in the last six months there's been a lot of discussion about the fact that parents weren't becoming involved and that somehow we were doing something wrong. And now there's more of an attempt to get new people involved and to really explain to them what's going on and why they should be interested. There's more of

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an attempt to have other kinds of activities happen where people don't have to come and give their "all" to the centre. Going to a 'board of directors meeting' is not the sort of thing most parents see themselves doing. They like the sort of thing like having a day to clear up jobs that haven't been done and that would cost a lot of money to have done, like repairing cupboards and putting casters on things. A lot of people came to the last one we had, who didn't come to anything else, who were never seen there before. And I think that they were treated very well and everybody was friendly and everything and they got a chance to come in and do something and get to meet some people without becoming involved in something they knew nothing whatever about — like discussions about whether or not we were going to build a new building.

Maybe some of these people will become more involved in the place and feel better about coming to a board meeting and making, you know, the bigger decisions that have to be made.

Also, there's more of an attempt to inform the parents about the meetings and about what's going on, whether they come to anything or not.

Basically, I think that more people would feel like getting involved if they just knew what the hell was going on. But to put up on the blackboard "Bill 160 Meeting Thursday Nite" is useless — no one is going to come to something that says "Bill 160 Meeting Thursday Nite". So now we have a newsletter and we send it out and if they read the newsletter they get an explanation of what it means when we say "Bill 160", you know, and if they want to come to a meeting about Bill 160 they already know what we're talking about when they come.

We've had a couple of chairmen who

have gone on what is called a "power trip". They've become sort of disillusioned with the disorganization of things and felt that they would take it upon themselves to organize everything and tell everyone how everything was to be done. Both times when this occurred, of course, it met with violent reaction from everyone else and resulted in both chairmen being driven out, more or less. Neither one of them were asked to resign, they just resigned, but it was obvious that if they hadn't resigned they would have been asked to.

I think that this wouldn't have happened if it weren't for the fact that there wasn't enough parent participation in the first place. There weren't enough parents on the board who were confident enough to take on the position of chairman of the organization. The chairman ended up being someone who seemed to be the only logical person to take the job and the only person willing to do it. And when they were in the midst of a lot of disorganization, and lack of parent participation, and weakness on the board, they were driven into this position where they felt they had to take over and do it their way.

People let that situation happen. They let the chairman fumble along and fumble along and the staff ended up doing a lot of things that should have been done by staff and parents together, and then a reaction would set in against that where the chairman felt that the staff was taking too much control or something. Then there would be this power play.

Then people would see the problem, you know, and they would react against it and start trying to undo all the things they'd done. But it took a confrontation, you know, to sort of raise their consciousness enough to know that they had chosen someone for

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chairman without considering whether or not this person was going to make a good chairman, or whether or not they were strong enough to lead the organization, or keep it organized, or get the parents involved, or whether they had any kind of outlook on what the place meant in general.

It may not have been a bad thing because each time it causes people to think: what the hell's happening here?

The organization was set up so that everyone would have control of the situation together; and I think that people set up the organization with that ideal in mind but didn't have any idea of how hard it was to make sure that everyone has enough information and enough 'say' to keep control of the situation. They really did want to maintain their control but they were easily lulled into the feeling that they *had* control over the situation and there wasn't any problem and that everything was being sorted out.

It's not until someone tries to take the control away from them again that they see that it's still something they have to fight for. And every time that happens, where the chairman or someone else tries to run things or to organize things without everyone's knowledge, you can see that people actually *do* believe in having control over the situation, because whenever this happens they never allow it to go too far. They don't *talk* that much about having control over their own situation, but whenever someone tries to take it away from them you can see that that's what keeps them there.

I think that this daycare centre, and probably almost every other daycare

centre by virtue of the fact that it allows women to put their children someplace while they work, does a lot for the consciousness of women. We've had a lot of women come in here who've been in somewhat of a state because they were at home with the kids and they get a job and put their children in here, and we've seen cases of women who've changed vastly after they put their kid in daycare and get a job.

And I think that the women who become involved in working for the centre — on the board or as staff — change a lot. They become more conscious of their ability to run something and to control something. They begin to see that they have something to say and that they can control this situation without having to depend on men or any kind of boss.

I think that everybody who gets involved in the centre, you can see them changing and becoming more interested in a long range view of things. Like, they start out maybe with a lot of interest in day-to-day things at the centre — how the building is run, and how the centre itself is organized, you know, and making decisions about the rent, and all that sort of thing — and then you can see them becoming more interested in the more far-reaching goals of the place, and what it means as far as doing something for social change.

I think that Lesley and Karen are a good example of that sort of thing happening. They may have started out just working as a staff member at the centre and first wanting control over the decisions that they would make in the centre — you know, wanting control over what they were going to do

with their days and what they were going to do in the centre — then getting involved in making decisions about the money in the centre, and then making decisions about whether or not we should do some sort of project as a group, and then beginning to realize that it means more than just running this little centre and taking care of forty particular children, that it means that we should do something about all those *other* children, all those *other* women and working people who don't have daycare.

We have an infant care program operating out of homes around the daycare centre because we don't have the facilities to put infant care into our own daycare centre. It's actually, according to the government, called *home care* and can take any child from three months, or whatever, up to ten years, but basically the people who put their kids in places like that are people who can't get their kids into daycare centres and that would be children under two. We have homes that take three or four of these children under two. The person who takes them in is maybe someone who has a child of their own and can't go to work because they have an infant and there's no place to put their infant, so they take in three or four other infants and the mothers of *those* infants get to go out and work or do whatever it is they're doing.

I don't like it at the moment because there are no decent wages or job security for the people who substitute for the mothers and take in these infants. They're alone with these infants all day long, they're isolated with more children than they would be isolated with if they just had their own, they're responsible for all these kids, the money fluctuates up and down, they have no job security and no reason to believe that they'll ever be able to get a job doing that anywhere else. After the kids go I presume they have to clean the place up or leave it dirty. I think it's just all around a bad situation, particularly for the people who take in the kids.

There hasn't been that much discussion into what these homes mean or what's going on there or anything,

you know. There are people who feel, as I do, that it's not a good situation and that we should have a facility that includes infants, who are properly taken care of in a warm, intimate situation, and not an "institutionalized" situation.

I think it's an emotional issue because a lot of people will go for the fact that it's alright to put a two year old into a daycare centre but it's not alright to put a one year old into a centre because there's still a feeling left over that the *baby* needs some sort of *mother*-type of relationship. And they don't seem to feel that any kind of friendly or warm relationship could be achieved between someone and a baby in a centre situation the way it could be in someone's home.

Now, I don't understand the logic of that because to me a room is a room, you know, and it's what you do inside it that's important. It's not necessarily true that simply because a baby is in a "home" that it's being given any kind of more special relationship than is being given in a room at a centre by someone who's assigned to take care of that baby. I don't think it's impossible to attain that kind of relationship with a baby in a centre. But it's still an emotional thing. A lot of people don't feel that it's possible to have a centre with babies in it unless they're going to be treated like little *bundles* and not given any kind of special treatment.

One of the problems with all groups who try to act democratically is how to do a really hard job, working closely together, and still learn to get along with each other. When everyone has the right to a say, some way has to be found to get opinions laid out on the table and a decision reached, on whatever it is. Sometimes a person's opinion on an issue becomes the person and if the person's behaviour is the issue, it becomes very difficult to talk about. But we should try to talk about it anyway, preferably without things turning into a therapy session or something equally as horrible.

We all have to learn to be a lot more openly honest about the way we treat each other. In the centre there's a great tendency to take issues

People don't talk that much about having control over their own situation, but whenever someone tries to take it away from them you can see that that's what keeps them there.

as a personal thing and not act politically about issues, you know, to get personally involved in your feelings about certain *people*.

Like, well, I'll just give you an example. We had a situation where we discovered that we had been putting the cook into what amounted to an oppressive situation, that the cook had always had a lot of duties to do and that perhaps all the things that the cook had been doing were too much for one person to be doing. And the cook's job is an isolated kind of job because there's only one cook. When we got a new cook we discovered that the new cook didn't feel that she should put up with the things which she felt were oppressive about the job and she spoke up about some of the things in the job that were oppressive. A couple of the things that were oppressive were understood and taken out of the job immediately. Other things became an issue. For instance, she felt that she shouldn't have to wash the dishes, that if she was going to provide a good meal and home-baked snack and all that sort of thing, that we wanted for the kids, that doing the dishes for forty kids or thirty-five kids, or whatever it was at the time, was too much for one person to handle. Consequently, she felt that the board should consider giving her a dishwasher or a person to wash the dishes.

Now, some people felt that since the cooks before her had done the dishwashing this cook should also do the dishwashing. And the issue was complicated by the fact that the person was a university graduate and people were getting very involved in the situation according to their personal feelings about her attitude being a result of her background. Particularly

the working people involved in the centre reacted really strongly against her attitude and felt that she was only asking for a dishwasher because she was an uppity university graduate who didn't feel she should do the work. Basically it was the working people, and particularly some of the people on the staff who did a lot of bad jobs — changing diapers and wiping noses and lifting heavy equipment — who felt that she was asking for privileges that she didn't deserve.

Now, it's sort of a classic issue in our centre because it points out a lot of things.

It was very difficult when the issue was on to get people to talk about it as an impersonal thing. They couldn't analyze the job and decide whether or not the job was too much with the dishwashing for one person, no matter what kind of background they may've come from. They couldn't divorce that from the fact that they didn't have the same attitude to life that the *person* doing the dishwashing had. So it became a very polarized issue, a very personal thing, where people were saying *she* doesn't deserve this, rather than saying, is this too much for the job? It was very difficult to decide whether or not it was a bad working condition that should be removed or not because the whole issue was clouded by the fact of whether or not the people speaking liked the cook or whether they didn't like the cook, you know. In fact, there may be some question of attitude that should be discussed, but it shouldn't be discussed mixed in with a decision on whether or not the dishes should be done by someone else.

If we're going to be able to work democratically as a team then we have to be able to honestly say what we think and criticize other people without any kind of personal tinge or grudge coming across.

This has happened over and over again. A lot of issues are very exhausting to discuss because people are not yet at the stage where they can divorce their personal feelings from whatever it is they're discussing. The diswashing incident, and other incidents with the cook point out that we still have a lot to learn about criticizing each other.

I think that there is a general up-tightness about saying *exactly* how you think because people naturally tend to regard criticism as *destructive* rather than *constructive*. Every time a tricky issue comes up, people fear a clash of some sort and, although they state their opinions strongly in the background, they can't repeat it in the open. The only trouble is, usually the background talk gets around almost as fast as if you'd said it straight out only then there really is a clash — only it's just in feelings and tensions — not in words. I think that's much more dangerous to the organization than saying how you feel right to somebody's face and getting it hashed out.

Perhaps the other solution for somebody who doesn't want to express a beef right out, is not to express it at

all — to anyone. Both solutions are equally difficult to achieve, of course. But, if there's any bitching to be done, we should be the first to know, as the saying goes.

We've had some disagreements on issues which I felt went too far because they started small and were kept in until they got out of hand. It's a vicious circle because the more that happens, the more people try to keep their criticisms to themselves and the people who agree with them. Everybody does it. It's like self-defense or something.

It's too bad because we'd save a lot of energy if we could talk right out more but I guess that problem will be with us for a long time to come because people aren't used to criticizing each other and they feel bad about it. And no one is there long enough, really, to get used to it. That's not really a problem just in the centre, but outside as well, so we can't expect to perform magic on people. I don't know, I guess I just think that if we're going to be able to work democratically as a team then we have to be able to honestly say what we think and criticize other people without any kind of personal tinge or grudge coming across, because we all have to

stay together regardless of whether or not we disagree on a certain issue, as long as we agree generally.

I think that we may be making a start on sharing the work more nowadays, which is good. There's still a smaller group of people who tend to take on a lot of the work but I think it's getting better and people are taking on heavier jobs than they used to. I get the impression that when Teri was chairman the first time, she did most of the work, other than day-to-day things. That's a good fast way to wear out somebody's enthusiasm. Now there are more people doing the bigger jobs, I think. Of course, sometimes it's still pretty heavy on certain people, like Lesley, for instance, but I feel the answer is more people who believe it's a thing worth doing, more parent involvement and a dozen more people like Carole and Harleen and Linda.

I hope I haven't sounded too critical about the centre. I think people like me have a tendency to start talking right off about what they'd like to change when they're working on something. But if I thought it wasn't a great place to work in, I wouldn't do it at all. Actually it's pretty fine and the people there really care about what they're doing and how they're doing it. There's a lot of extra time goes into running the place after it closes at night and I've seen the staff sacrifice a lot to keep the place together at its weak moments — not mentioning the fact that they were due for a raise when they knew there wasn't any money to pay for it and so on. We've got the normal problems a group like ours has, you know: time, money, sometimes disorganization, but we know that we have those problems and we're serious about solving them.

This is not a booklet of “facts” about daycare. It contains no statistics, no charts or graphs to prove that daycare is desperately needed by thousands of Canadian families — this has been proved often enough already. Nor is this a survey of what is available for those wanting daycare.

This is a book of *conversations*.

It is a book of *people*. People talking in their own words about what it's like at *their* daycare centre — their hopes, their fears, their happiness and their problems. Hopefully, it tells us something that statistics do not: what a daycare centre of your own means to staff, parents and children.