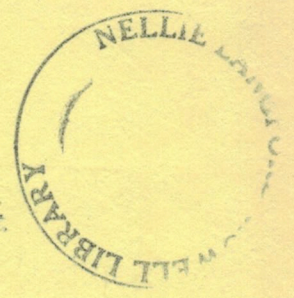


Daycare CC# 4371



The Day Care Reform Action Alliance

MEETING ONTARIO DAY CARE NEEDS

Prepared for Consideration by Members of the
Ontario Legislature

September 1974

The Day Care Reform Action Alliance is composed of parents of young children, child care staff, program administrators, educators, board members of voluntary organizations and members of community planning groups concerned with day care and the well-being of children and families.

We have come together to work toward the goals of:

- 1) ensuring that all Ontario parents have access to supervised day care for their children, and
- 2) ensuring that all day care programs in Ontario provide quality care to the children using them.

We believe

- that it is the right of every child to be given opportunities to develop his/her full potential;
- that good day care is a highly effective developmental and preventative service for young children;
- that government has an obligation to ensure that supervised high quality day care at reasonable cost is available to all who need it.

The June 4, 1974 day care policy statement delivered to the Legislature by The Honourable Margaret Birch, Provincial Secretary for Social Development outlines the Ontario government's decision to respond to growing needs for day care throughout the province

- 1) by changing Ontario's licensing requirements so that it will become possible to develop and operate less expensive day care services, and
- 2) by providing for increased, but inadequately increased, provincial funding for day care in the future.

While we support the following goals outlined in the June 4th policy statement:

- that day care services at reasonable costs become available to handicapped children, to children of low income families and to native children;
- that the development of parent-operated and other non-profit day care programs be encouraged; and
- that the development of existing community facilities, such as schools, which can be effectively used for day care programs be encouraged ;

we are convinced that the general policies and specific measures announced by the Provincial Secretary for Social Development on June 4th are based on false premises and will not promote the realization of these goals.*

Quantity or Quality -- A False and Unnecessary Day Care Choice for Ontario

In the Ontario day care policy statement it is suggested that the government was forced to choose between

- 1) a policy of moderately expanding day care services at the cost of substantially reducing the quality of supervised day care in Ontario, or
- 2) a policy of maintaining current minimum licensing standards at the cost of providing for far too slow a rate of growth in supervised day care throughout the province.

In our view this choice posed by the government is false, dangerous and unnecessary for a province with the resources of Ontario.

By having chosen to promote the growth of day care by encouraging the development of poorer quality services, the Ontario government has made it clear that its day care policies are based primarily on economic considerations rather than a commitment to meeting the needs of children and families in this province.

*While the June 4th policy statement and this position paper deal primarily with group programs, we are concerned that the Ontario government implement measures to ensure quality child care in family as well as group day care programs.

Inadequate Provincial Funding Means Continued
Inadequate Access to Day Care in Ontario

While there were approximately 63,000 Ontario working mothers of pre-school children in 1967,¹ as of June 1974 only 39,133² children could be placed in licensed day care programs throughout this province.

Serious shortages in day care services exist in Ontario:

- 1) because many parents (not only those who are eligible for subsidized day care) are unable to afford the full costs of supervised care³.
- 2) because municipalities, Indian Bands and non-profit organizations are unable to pay the required proportion of the costs of ensuring adequate access to supervised day care in their communities⁴; and
- 3) because the provincial government is unwilling to pay the necessary costs of enabling community organizations to develop adequate levels of day care, and/or enabling parents to afford to purchase these services.

Low-income parents, parents of handicapped children and native peoples are not the only groups facing serious difficulties in finding good day care. These problems are shared by working parents with moderate incomes, shift workers, parents who need temporary and emergency day care, and parents who need day care to provide their children with adequate opportunities for educational and social enrichment.

¹Working Women in Ontario, Women's Bureau, Ministry of Labour, 1970, p 15.

²Based on information provided by the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

³The current monthly costs of unsubsidized licensed day care in Ontario are infrequently less than \$200 per child per month. As of December 1973 approximately 30 per cent of Canadian families had monthly incomes of less than \$729 (Statistics Canada Daily, January 23, 1974)

⁴Inability or unwillingness of municipalities to invest in preventative services such as day care is referred to in the Child Welfare section of the Report on Selected Issues and Relationships of the Task Force on Community and Social Services. pp 13 - 14.

The problems of achieving adequate levels of voluntary funding are reflected in the experience of United Community Funds throughout the province.

While the Ontario government plans to increase its 1974-75 day care budget by \$15 million, it also plans to limit increases in future day care budgets to not more than 1 - 2 per cent above the rate of inflation. Such budgetary measures are seriously inadequate.

If provincial funding for day care is not significantly increased;

- 1) there will only be a marginal increase in day care programs operated by municipalities, Indian Bands and non-profit groups throughout the province;
- 2) large commercial chain-type operations whose prime concern is profit making rather than meeting the needs of children and families will become Ontario's major day care providers; and
- 3) the present situation of many Ontario parents not being able to afford quality supervised day care will continue.

As the costs of supervised, quality day care are not high when compared with the costs of other child care programs or the long-range costs of not providing access to this basic developmental service, we would urge the Ontario government to accept its basic responsibility to implement budgetary measures which will ensure adequate access to quality day care in this province.

Quality of Ontario Day Care Endangered

The Day Nurseries Act and Regulations (1972) incorporates what are broadly accepted as absolute minimum requirements for adequate quality day care. The following changes in licensing criteria proposed in the June 4th Ontario day care policy statement:

- reductions in required staff-child ratios,
- elimination of the requirements for formal qualifications for all staff but supervisors,
- elimination of the requirement that day nurseries have kitchens on their premises, and
- altered licensing procedures pertaining to the physical standards of day nurseries

will lead to substantial reductions in the quality of care received by many

⁵While we believe the development of small, private day care businesses should be encouraged, we strongly oppose the growth of large chain-type commercial day care operations.

young children during approximately 70 per cent of their waking hours.

The factors which are inherent in quality day care programs are easily identified⁶. A safe environment, sound nutrition, ample opportunities for children to receive individual attention from adults, a relaxed atmosphere, sufficient freedom to explore and learn, and opportunities to participate in a range of interesting and varied experiences are basic to sound day care. These factors which are essential to ensuring that children in day nurseries throughout the province are provided with good care and sound opportunities for development can only be achieved by

- ensuring that Ontario day care nurseries have sufficient staff with basic abilities to care for young children in groups,
- including in the total staff of day nurseries a sufficient number of persons with specialized training related to the care and development of young children in groups (such knowledge is not possessed automatically by people who are basically able to relate effectively to individual children);
- encouraging parent and volunteer participation in day care programs (while ensuring that such participation is not encouraged primarily as an economizing measure); and
- ensuring that day nurseries implement sound practices related to safety, health, nutrition and the provision of adequate space, toys and equipment.

Programs for children with special needs, such as the physically or mentally handicapped, clearly require additional staff and facilities.

Under existing licensing and funding arrangements, many day nurseries are unable to provide adequate staffing and facilities or pay reasonable salaries⁷ and provide good working conditions for their staff. Further economies will lead to a worsening of this situation.

A minimum acceptable level of day care cannot be achieved under the proposed economy oriented changes in standards discussed by the Provincial Secretary for Social Development on June 1974.

⁶Day Care, Growing, Learning, Caring, National Guidelines for the Development of Day Care Services for Children; The Canadian Council on Social Development, Ottawa, 1974.

⁷Many group day care workers are presently paid approximately \$100 a week. Such levels of remuneration will not retain or attract the services of skilled workers and do not reflect the social value of their services. Family day care workers receive considerably less adequate remuneration.

We therefore recommend

- I that the Ontario government recognize the overwhelming need for supervised day care (both day nurseries and private-home day care) in this province by
- a) expanding future provincial day care budgets by considerably more than the 1 - 2 per cent above the rate of inflation referred to in the June 4th statement,
 - b) providing sufficient financial assistance to all families who cannot independently meet the costs of supervised day care, and
 - c) providing adequate financial assistance to municipalities and non-profit organizations to encourage and enable them to meet day care needs in their communities; and
- II that the Ontario government acknowledge its responsibility to ensure that the rights of all children receiving day care are protected by developing and enforcing regulations for both day nurseries and private home day care which will guarantee the provision of good care.

In response to the specific proposals for changes in regulations under The Day Nurseries Act (1972) contained in the June 4th statement, we would recommend

1. That criteria for licensing day nurseries continue to be defined within the regulations of the Day Nurseries Act, and that these criteria continue to be applied in assessing applications for licensing day nurseries in all parts of the province.
2. That staff-child ratios as defined in the present regulations under The Day Nurseries Act (1972) be maintained and enforced as minimum licensing criteria for all day nurseries;

3. that before permitting parents and other volunteers to be regarded as staff for licensing purposes, the Ontario government develop safeguards preventing the abuse of this provision;
4. that the Ontario government provide funding for staff above the minimum numbers necessary (for licensing purposes) in day nurseries where there is a demonstrated need for higher staff-child ratios;
5. that existing licensing criteria pertaining to staff qualifications continue to be enforced until acceptable new criteria are available, and that new licensing criteria be developed to ensure
 - a) that all child care staff in day care centres possess enough skills to provide quality care for children in groups;
 - b) that all day care programs have adequate numbers of staff with specialized knowledge related to early childhood development and the techniques for working successfully with young children in groups;
 - c) that the staff of the Children's Services Bureau consider a variety of professional qualifications, experiences and skills in evaluating individual applications for staffing day care programs;
6. that opportunities for day care staff to obtain further education be developed;
7. that day care centres throughout the province continue to be required to have kitchens on their premises;
8. that the staff of the Children's Services Bureau and local fire marshals throughout the province continue to be jointly responsible for ensuring that adequate safety standards are maintained in day care centres; and
9. that the staff of the Children's Services Bureau continue to be responsible for ensuring that all day care centres have sufficient space, equipment and materials to provide an interesting and appropriate range of activities for the children enrolled.