QUALITY PRESCHOOLS

HOMECARE AND BEYOND

Young children ne[redacted]elter for a good beginning. They need to be well cared for by their families; they need to feel protected and secure. The family, however, has never been the only agent in a child's upbringing. To achieve identity, dignity, and a sense of worth, young children have always needed a loving, caring, and stimulating environment beyond, as well as within, the home.

The family is still the crucible of a child's development and well being. Yet, in the past few decades, the world beyond the home has become increasingly important in young children's lives. The neighborhood, park, and main street still color a young child's experience. But the landscape of early childhood has been rapidly changing. Today, almost all the nation's five-year olds go to kindergarten or preschool, about two-thirds of the three- and four-year olds are in preschool or child care, and more than a quarter of the infants and toddlers are being cared for during the day outside their homes (Kahn and Kamerman 1988: 3-10). [redacted]

The need for such services has skyrocketed as more and more mothers have entered the workforce, yet the response has been inconsistent, piecemeal, and weak. Part-day educational and developmental programs like kindergarten, preschool, and Head

Start have gained [redacted] support. [redacted]

there remains in this country ~~such~~ a deep seated ambivalence about child care

ext[redacted] as [redacted]-

until v[redacted] recently--child care has lived in the shadows, [redacted]ng

w[redacted]r

[redacted] with families struggling to find support.

But the facts are clear: If all children are to come to school ready to learn by the year 2000 child care has a crucial role to play.

A[redacted]

The distinction between child care and early childhood education is one of America's less than useful legacies from the past. Indeed, to ~~some~~ a large extent, it is a spurious legacy. ~~because most nineteenth century experiments in out-of-home care for the children of working mothers were also educational in design. The "infant schools" of the 1830s and 1840s are a prime example. Developed first by the Scottish Utopian, Robert Owen, as part of his attempt to create a model industrial community, his idea of creating an "educational environment that could determine character" moved to London, and thence to America, as a tool for charity workers in the cities to reach the youngest children of~~ the working poor (Kaestle 1983:48).

The care of children inevitably involves learning--since children are always learning--and similarly there is no way to educate a child without caring. So we propose the term "Educare" when it comes to describing preschool programs, an idea -- Betty Caldwell in introduced years ago.

Owen's vision for educating young children bore a family resemblance to that of his contemporary, Johann Pestalozzi, the Swiss educator who later inspired Friedrich Froebel, originator of the kindergarten.

> Among (Owen's) rules for infant schools were: no scolding, no punishment, continual kindness, and encouragement of questions. Answers were always to be rational, instruction to emphasize the examination of actual objects, and the schedule to include plenty of exercize, music, and dance when children got restless

because almost all are in kindergarten or first grade. Like most young school-aged children, however, five-year olds usually stay with relatives or in family day care from the end of their school day to when their parents come home (Kahn and Kamerman 1987:6-10).

The numbers add up, and the sense of crisis rises as parents across the economic spectrum make phone calls, network, add their names to lists, and worry about whether they will be able to afford or place their children in "quality" care. Well publicized child care disasters magnify the anxiety most parents naturally feel. None of the major kinds of care have been exempt. The headlines have included sexual abuse at a child care center; fire in a family day care home; a little girl who fell down a well while in her aunt's care. And indeed, the kind and quality of care that children are recieving outside their homes varies greatly, even when disaster does not come into play.

Consider family day care--the choice many parents make for their infants and toddlers, and for their young children in school. So many family day care homes operate "underground," that no one even knows how many there are. Estimates vary, but the range of uncertainty is wide. Child care researchers Alfred Kahn and Sheila Kamerman note that most estimates suggest that around 5 million children are currently being served by 1.5 to 2 million providers. Kahn and Kamerman suggest lower numbers. Noting that there were 167,680 licensed homes in 1985, and accepting estimates that between 60 to 90 percent of the supply is unlicensed or unregistered, Kahn and Kamerman calculate the

total number of providers to fall between 419,200 and 1,167,680 homes (1987:204-205).

Clearly, generalizations about quality cannot be made when the size of the field is so imprecisely known. Yet visit a number of these homes (you have to network with your friends and acquaintances to find the unregistered ones), and you'll see that they are as various as the women whose homes they are. Some of these caregivers see themselves as professionals or semi-professionals. They are usually licensed or registered with the state, and are often sponsored by an agency that provides referrals, opportunities for training, paperwork support and business advice. They may have toys or books at home that they've borrowed from their sponsoring agency, and they usually try to include educational activities and trips in the routine for the children under their care. A few have expanded their business by hiring an assistant so that they can take more children and qualify to be a "group day care home;" others have even branched out with a friend to provide additional services to their clients--grocery shopping, for example, or errands around town (Kahn and Kamerman 1987:231).

Another type of caregiver, found much more often than the semi-professional, is "the warm 'mother' or 'grandmother' who operates a day care home as an attractive family environment," rather than as a mini-preschool (Kahn and Kamerman 1987:231). Many of these women are committed to child care for the long term, motivated by a love of children and by the small income their business brings in. Many remain underground, because "they

do not know about formal requirements, or may see the licensing process as frightening, complex, or costly...(or) by the desire to avoid income taxes and social security taxes or to hide income from public welfare authorities" (Kahn and Kamerman 1987:223-224). Others license or register their homes, making them eligible to receive public child care subsidies for poor children, and rebates for the meals and snacks they serve through the federal Child Care Food Program.

At their best these caregivers offer children a warm, secure, and stimulatng home experience; near the lower end of the scale, one may find women who spend most of their time tending to the needs of their own household, and talking with their friends, while subjecting the children in their care to near neglect. As volunteer observers for the National Council of Jewish Women learned back in the early 1970s, the range of styles is wide, indeed:

> This day care home is cheerful. She (the day care mother) is a lovely person--very dedicated to her youngsters. She has structure for activities--playtime outdoors, fingerpainting, story time...--and this is because she uses every opportunity for 'teaching' the children. Her whole backyard is palnned for the children--equipped with a 'fort,' jumping board, sandbox, picnic table....
>
> This day care mother is a woman of boundless energy who has great rapport with all children. She is active in scouting and P.T.A., is extremely creative and the children placed with her have unusual opportunities to take part in the many experiences, such as dancing, ice skating, art, etc. that her own children enjoy.
>
> This day care mother has a heart of gold. There are no toys or equipment at all but she loves children.
>
> No toys (puzzles, crayons, etc.) indoors and no facilities outdoors...(But) she is a huge, loving woman with a great heart for children.

> The children spend most of their time in the basement playroom watching T.V. The four-year old has no one to play with and sleeps most of the time. The proprietor is well-meaning and conscientious but is unaware of the potential of good day care. Serves a baby sitting function with great concern for health. Very little play equipment.
>
> Doesn't think she needs toys, just books to teach children about God and respect. Had paper for coloring but it got torn up....She said she 'tries to make them mind, love each other and stay out of trouble.' She says 'the Lord will help her teach them the right way with the help of a switch.'
>
> (Keysering 1972: 148-151)

A similar spread characterizes a third, and numerically quite important category of family child care providers: mothers who are staying home with their own children and decide to take in a few others as well. Most think of themselves as only temporarily in business, and may see licensing or registration as a nuisance they do not need. Some do register, however, and some join networks of child care homes for the referrals and client screening they desire. One, a Mrs. MacDonald, who belongs to such a network, was featured recently in a local newspaper with her own two toddlers and six-year old David, whom she takes care of after school. Mrs MacDonald is a special case, because David is a hyperactive child whose mother had trouble placing elsewhere for care. As Mrs. MacDonald explained, "I'm home anyway. Why not help somebody out" (LoBiondo 1988:4B).

A parent who chooses to place a child in a day care center instead of a day care home must generally be prepared to pay more for care, but will have fewer possibilities from which to choose. She may be less likely to find a center that matches her

own preferences in such key matters as hours, food, rest, activities, discipline, or style. Still, she may be willing to trade these advantages for a more structured program, especially for a three- or four- year old. Some parents combine both worlds by sending their children to a part-day preschool program, and then to family day care for the rest of the working day. Others prefer the convenience and continuity that a full-day child care center provides.

But First, what about supply? The number of preschool programs ~~in session for only part of the working day~~ has risen ~~considerably~~ greatly in recent years, especially if kindergarten is counted in. Public school kindergartens are now provided in all the states, and while only a handful require that five-year olds attend, half the states require kindergarten to be offered in all school districts. Experimental public school programs for four-year olds--usually for poor children or those judged to be developmentally at risk--have been initiated in seventeen states and in the District of Columbia: a few of these programs even include three-year olds. And, although its funding level only allows Head Start to serve a small fraction (about 18 percent) of eligible poor children, the program now includes 1200 regular centers across the country, primarily for three- and four-year olds; 15 programs for the young children of migrant workers; 95 programs for Native American children; and 30 parent/child centers for infants and toddlers and their families. Finally, rounding out the supply of part-day preschool programs are the private nursery schools, which almost doubled their enrollment of

three- and four-year olds between 1970 and 1985 (Kahn and Kamerman 1987:4-5; Grubb 1987:15-17).

Day care centers have also become more numerous, more than doubling from approximately 18,300 licensed centers in 1977 to 61,079 in 1985 (Kahn and Kamerman 1987:5). Yet the field is quite diverse, being equally split between nonprofit centers--some receiving public funding and some not; and proprietary,or for-profit, centers--some connected with large chains and others run by mom and pop. Nonprofit centers may be sponsored by community organizations, like the YWCA, by churches, or by employers. And, although programs, quality, and costs can vary tremendously, most have at least one thing in common: a waiting list.

We visited one employer-sponsored center, for which the long wait to have one's child accepted was clearly worthwhile. The employer, a university, provides a building rent-free, maintenance services, and about half of the seed money necessary for the center to receive public funds to support lower income children from the state's federal Social Services Block Grant (the other half comes from United Way and some other community groups). In return, the Center is obliged to fill two-thirds of its 73 places with children from families who work for the university. But the university does not have other policy roles: the board of directors is entirely parents and staff, and their university laison person is so quiescent, that the director deals directly with the university service people when she is in need.

This center, open from 8 AM to 6 PM during the ten-month

school year (with a smaller summer program available) shares the building with a part-day nursery school, affiliated with the university in a similar way. The director of the day care center does not like the day care/nursery school distinction, however, because it leads people to assume that day care centers do not have educational programs. In fact, she believes that there is no such thing as a facility for children without an educational role: there are bad programs and good programs, but all are educational. The director believes that her educational program is very good. And, because they have the full day, they can be relaxed about it: they don't have to rush to get everything in.

We liked what we say in the center's four classes--one each for two year olds (15 children), three-year olds (18), four-year olds (20), and five-year olds (22). The children at the center have a reasonably broad range of background and income; the ratio of children to adults is excellent (5:1 for the two-year olds; 6 to 1 for the three-year olds; slightly higher for the fours; and 7 to 1 for the and fives); the teaching staff is well-trained and reasonably well paid ($8.80 to $11.10 an hour), and turnover is very slight (one new teacher had been there only one year, but the other seven had been with the center from four to fourteen years). The rooms were large and cheerful, with lots of play and activity spaces, the children had free access to the toys and books, and the outside playground was attractive and well-equipped.

A general, but flexible, schedule is followed in the center each day--although the teachers were quite free to shape things

in their classrooms as they wanted. Children arrive between 8 and 9:30 AM, and work on art projects, puzzles, and toys. Around 10 or so there's a snack (fruit, milk, cereal), bathroom, and group activity (stories, singing, games). Then there's clean up and outside activity from 11:00-12:00, followed by wash up and lunch. Rest-time comes next, on mats or cots, for at least an hour (the oldest children) or an hour and a half (the younger ones): usually with music or story records playing. Then it's up, bathroom, free play, snack, and outside. This was a nice, relaxed place for children--and adults--and everyone looked like they were having a good time.

Day care centers are not all like this. Valerie Suransky has described "The Lollipop Learning Center, Inc.," a mom-and-pop for-profit center, which, ~~like the university center~~, shared its building with a part-day nursery school under the same management. The seventy day-care children, however, were from predominantly low-income minority families, while the nursery school children were predominantly middle-income and white. The facilities were crowded, and the nursery school children had priority for everything, including the better food for snacks. So overt was this discrimination, that the day-care children wore tags identifying themselves as "day care," and were systematically shooed away whenever they ventured on nursery school territory where they did not belong. The doors of the rooms where the children were herded for their various activities were kept locked (to prevent them from straying or running away), and the atmosphere in the daycare classes was chaotic and

violent, physically among the children themselves, and psychologically between adults and children (Suransky 1982: 107-133).

Could the parents have known what was happening at this center? It's hard to know, because the directors were seldom frank in describing the program, and parents were not encouraged to visit while the day was in progress. That in itself is a danger sign that no parent should ignore. Other signs might have included class size: the seventy day-care children, aged 2-6, were divided into only two groups (35 children each), and despite the size of the building, the day care children were crowded into very small spaces throughout the day. The staff? With a rapid turnover of hassled, demoralized, poorly paid, and poorly trained teachers and aides, the children were barely supervised, seldom comforted, and almost never taught (Suransky 1982: 107-133).

Fortunately, most large scale studies of day care centers suggest that there are relatively few so bleak as the center Suransky describes (Sources). Yet while the 1980s have seen considerable expansion in the child care field, they have not been especially good years for regulations that might assure at least an acceptable minimum standard. Indeed, when federal funds for day care were shifted to the Social Services Block Grant in 1981, the former Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements were dropped, and the states were left to devise their own standards for centers receiving public funds. Yet, as Kahn and Kamerman note:

> State standards vary enormously regarding which providers are covered and what specifics are required.

> Many states leave family day care providers subject to no requirements for licensing or registration. Others omit church-sponsored child care services from such requirements, and still others exclude part-day programs. Given the extensive growth in infant and toddler care, many states have especially inadequate standards for this type of care....Finally, even where regulations are imposed, many states have curtailed their enforcement, staff and/or reduced the number of inspections carried out (1987:23-24).

The variety of daycare available in America today is both a weakness and a strength. The strength is in the potential for meeting family's varied preferences and needs. The weakness is in the potential, ~~demonstrated by Lollipop Learning~~ Center, Inc., for inequity and abuse. Is day care an area in which our society really wants to apply the principle of caveat emptor? Let the Buyer Beware? Or is it an area which could be better modeled as a partnership between parents and others in the local and national community for the education and well being of the very young.

Policy Choices

The questions that are being asked right now in congress, in state legislatures, and in communities about how best to expand, administer, and pay for high quality child care and preschool are of urgent importance to the families and children of this nation. But the anxiety so many Americans feel about child care must also be addressed. What is happening to childhood in this new era of upbringing away from home? Who is responsible for the well-being of little ones in kindergartens, preschool programs, nursery schools, child care centers, and family child care

Third

~~Second,~~ this nation ~~needs to~~ recognize the value of ~~the work~~ that ~~caregivers in~~ child care ~~homes and child care centers~~ perform. These ~~people~~ are ~~currently~~ among the most poorly paid

homes? As child psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner phrased the issue, years ago: "Shall we...allow a pattern to develop in which the care of young children is delegated to specialists, thus further separating the child from his family and reducing the family's and the community's feeling of responsibility for their children? Or, shall our modern day care be so designed as to reinvolve and strengthen the family as the primary and proper agent for the process of making human beings human?" (1972:xvi).

In providing child care, the nation must recognize a shared responsibility between the family, the private sector, and all levels of government. With cooperation among them, a quality child care system, sensitive to the needs of America's youngest children, can be achieved.

in America, yet a child care system of quality cannot be built on exploited backs. The women (~~and men~~ mainly) who work in child care need decent salaries, opportunities for training in early childhood care and education, community recognition, and networks of support.

~~Third,~~ parents need to be empowered in their search for care for their children, and they need ways to stay involved in the homes, preschool programs, or centers they choose. No parent should be encouraged, either explicitly or implicitly, to think that their task is limited to selecting an arrangement for their child, dropping the child off in the morning, and picking the child up in the afternoon. Quality child care involves an ongoing partnership between parents and caregivers: it is not a simple business transaction of service rendered for payment received.

~~Finally~~ Above all, families and government should not be seen as alternatives in the field of day care, but as partners. The role of the federal government should be one of leadership. It should be responsible for tasks such as helping states and local communities to coordinate existing services and in setting standards. Government also has a responsibility to help working parents who cannot afford child care costs. Current estimates are that it costs $3,000 a year for quality care, and--if caregivers are to recieve decent salaries--it will soon cost more. Special programs for poor children, like Head Start, should be expanded; but additional support also needs to be given to enable low income families afford a broader range of care for

their children than they can now. Poor children are disadvantaged in so many ways already: the nation cannot allow them to become further disadvantaged by disparities in the out of home care they receive.

Two recent developments in early childhood care and early education have rich potential for helping the nation to achieve its child care goals: The first--Child Care Resource and Referral agencies--have been around on a relatively small scale for some time. At their best, these networks bring parents seeking care together with caregivers seeking clients, and provide information and support to both. Yet Resource and Referral agencies need not be limited to serving parents and caregivers alone. Local R & R agencies can use the information they have about needs and resources to educate the communities they serve, and to keep community planners, policy-makers, legislators, and employers awar# of their responsibilities to the community's children. In this sense, they can provide a forum in which parents, caregivers, early childhood educators, and child care sponsors can play a vital advocacy role, strengthening partnership between public and private sectors. As Gwen Morgan, manager of a national network of local R & R agencies, testified at a Congressional hearing:

> This community linking mechanism offers the best opportunity to create a public/private system that governments, parents, charitable organizations, and employers can use as a vehicle to support a single day care system driven by parent choice, rather than a system segregated by funding category and by social class (U.S. Congress, 1984: 31)

And what about the public schools? The states have already taken the lead by initiating programs in early childhood education for three- and four-year olds in the schools, a move complemented in some school districts by sponsoring or coordinating, before- and after- school programs for young school-aged children, often with some other community agency. The potential for schools to become an integral part of the day care system is clear. Edward Zigler, Director of the Yale University Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, has made a compelling case for such a move:

> The child care system that we provide, and the child care services in that system, must be reliable and stable. We cannot wait each year to see if the federal government will appropriate the required monies. The child care system must become part of the very structure of our society. It must be tied to a know major societal institution (Zigler 1987:8).

Professor Zigler envisions the schools as centers not only for formal education, but also for a separate system of on-site child care for 3- to 12- year olds and for outreach programs for children under the age of three. In this plan, new workplace policies would allow mothers to stay at home with infants for at least four months, and then have child care provided until age 3 by family child care homes. The schools would act as centers of family child care networks that would monitor, train, and support caregivers, and would in addition provide outreach for parenting education and social services to the children's own families. Three- and four-year olds would go to the preschool programs housed in the school building, which would also house before and after school care and vacation care for school-aged children up

to the age of 12 (Zigler 1987; Morgan 1987)

Another plan has been proposed, however,--one that would build more on the day care programs currently avialable. A community-based Resource Center could provide services to parents and child care providers, without centralizing the management of the programs. Like Zigler's plan, it would encourage supportive workplace policies for new mothers. But, although schools would be encouraged to expand their programs to serve younger children and to offer longer sessions, day care and early education would continue to be provided by the current wide variety of programmers (Morgan 1987). This plan has the virtues of not overburdening schools, diminishing the variety of parents' day care choices, or limiting the responsibility of employers and other community organizations.

Nonethless, the fact remains that schools are available in every community, and all parents know where the schools are. We believe that a compromise can be found, by placing the community-based Resource Center in the school.

(PLEASE NOTE: I HAVE TRIED TO BUILD, BUT NOT REALLY ILLUSTRATE AN ARGUMENT IN THIS LAST SECTION. THERE IS MUCH ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL ON RESOURCE AND REFERRAL CENTERS AVAILABLE, THAT I HAVE NOT YET WRITTEN UP)

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