

A BRIEF TO THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES

BY

THE ONTARIO COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

THE ATTACHMENT OF WOMEN TO CHILDREN

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Among the twelve "Criteria and Principles" of the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, are several that have to do with the attachment of women to children. The report says that "the care of the children is a responsibility to be shared by the mother, the father and society. Unless this shared responsibility is acknowledged and assumed, women cannot be accorded true quality". One of the goals of the recommendations in the report has been "to eliminate the practical obstacles that prevent women from exercising...[their right] to choose whether or not to take employment outside their homes". The Commission sees that "society has a responsibility for women because of pregnancy and childbirth, and special treatment related to maternity will always be necessary". It is in the light of these principles that The Ontario Law Reform Commission would put equal responsibility for child care on women and men. With these principles in mind, and considering that the participation of women in the labour force continues to increase, we wish to address ourselves to three areas in which the status of women is affected: child care, crisis in the family, and pensions.

I

DAY CARE SERVICES IN ONTARIO

NEED

Because of the traditional attachment of women to children no issue is more crucial to the women of Ontario than child care. In an increasingly complex economy, more women head single-parent households than ever before, and are totally responsible for the support of themselves and the care of their children. Almost half the mothers of Ontario's children are in the labour force right now. Economists and demographers predict that this trend will accelerate. The provisions made to help those mothers care for their children are totally inadequate. In 1973, 40% of Ontario mothers with children under 16 were in the labour force and licensed day care was available for only 63,000 children under 2; 143,000 children from 2-5; and 689,000 children from 6-16. National figures show that upwards of 80% of the children of working mothers do not have access to supervised day care.

CURRENT SITUATION

Access to day care services is not improving. In 1974, the rate of increase in day care spaces was 105.81%. In

1975, the rate of increase declined to 26.77. In 1976, the efforts to close the gap in availability were lower still, at 19.39%. The trend is clear. Even as participation of women in the labour force increases, and the number of single parent households increases, the access to day care spaces decreases. In 1976, 18.38% of children aged 3-5 of working mothers in Canada were enrolled in licensed day care as compared to 17.2% the previous year. The worst figures are for infants and very young children. The percentage of children under 3 enrolled in licensed day care remained the same at 4.3%. These figures indicate how very little is being done, and how slowly, for the needs of children for secure and stimulating care.

The province of Ontario has not earmarked any new capital funds of its own for day care centres since 1974. At that time only 15 million was budgeted to be spent over three years. This is not even a minimal commitment to providing adequate day care for children of Ontario. The increasing costs of day care for middle-income families when both parents are working is exacerbated by the low level of subsidy for precisely those families. In one day care programme in Ontario in 1976, 20% of the families withdrew because they could no longer afford the cost. Ontario's subsidies make no allowance for the high cost of urban living, so that even the few spaces we do have may not get sufficiently used because the price of day care

is so high.

WHAT IS REQUIRED

The OCSW suggests that the following three points be adopted by the Ministry as the basic goals for day care in Ontario.

GOALS

- 1) A place for every child who needs one.
- 2) A cost to parents that is tenable for all families, cost to continue to be based on a sliding scale geared to income.
- 3) A change in the basic assumptions underlying the provision of day care services. Day care must not be treated any longer as a service to welfare recipients. Rather it is a basic service provided to all citizens for the long-range benefit and well-being of the whole society.

These goals are not utopian. They can be achieved. One need only refer to the history of the development of universal free public education in North America for an analogy.

The OCSW recognizes that an undertaking of this scope cannot be completed overnight or on a piecemeal basis. We

have outlined below a series of steps that must be implemented immediately in order to begin the process of building acceptable day care services in Ontario.

IMPLEMENTATION

- 1) Establish an ongoing Day Care Task Force immediately within the Children's Services Division, to facilitate development of services, monitor quality, and direct and co-ordinate research activities. We recommend that this task force take up and continue the excellent exploratory work done by the Advisory Council on Day Care. Ideally, it would be composed of Ministry employees, leading professionals, and user representatives.
- 2) Provide, by November 15, 1977, a sound financial plan and funding source for day care services:
 - i) Assess the cost of day care in context rather than as a huge sum of new expenditures. Readily accessible, "unstigmatized" day care costs must be measured against offset costs for abandoned, battered, disturbed or delinquent children and the cost of family assistance to maintain parents at home. Preliminary studies indicate that the cost of day care viewed in this light is less than maintaining the mother and child on social

assistance. If the indirect social costs arising from inadequately supervised children were to be considered the picture in favour of day care would be even more attractive.

- ii) Guarantee that the current reorganization of funding between the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government projected, does not increase the burden upon municipalities and does not diminish access to day care services for all children who need them. To ensure this, the Government of Ontario should designate 25 million dollars as a fund for the municipalities to draw on during the next budget year, to be available for 100% of the cost of capital funding for purchase, conversion or renovation of day care centres in Ontario. Project Day Care in 1971 allocated 10 million dollars in such a programme, and 62 day care centres were built to serve 2,850 children. The Day Care Expansion Programme of 1974 spent 10.5 million dollars for 2,941 day care spaces, in 96 centres. The provincial government should ask for federal funds for this programme, as well as committing its own funds.
- iii) Base funding provisions for day care centres on enrollment rather than attendance.

3) Maintain and improve the standards governing day care facilities.

- i) Establish a permanent Day Care Research Centre that will develop a wide variety of innovative demonstration projects and monitor all day care centres on a cost-benefit basis. Demonstration projects should include, as a minimum, infant care units, satellite programmes for support of private caretakers, after school programmes, emergency drop-in programmes, programmes to study variations in child/staff ratios, and the number of children in a group in order to determine optimal provision of service.
- ii) Provide co-ordination with the Ministry of Education to maximize use of existing facilities and staff.

4) Public Information

- i) Collect data in a standardized form and prepare regular statistical reports on the provision of day care services and expenditures.
- ii) Publish and distribute free public information on day care services.

5) Improve the working conditions of day care professionals:

- i) Raise the salaries of all day care workers in government sponsored service to an equitable level

with other skilled child care professionals such as teachers, nurses, rehabilitation experts.

- ii) Develop meaningful and challenging career ladders for day care staff to enhance further the attractiveness of the occupation.
- iii) Provide a wide range of institutions and options to enable day care professionals to train and upgrade their qualifications while remaining active in the field.
- iv) Ensure that day care centres have access to health personnel.

II

OCSW--CRISIS INTERVENTION HOMES FOR WOMEN WITH CHILDREN

NEED

The crisis intervention home as a service is related to the attachment of women to children: in some cases of family breakdown (especially involving domestic violence) it is important to provide temporary shelter and a "home base" which can prevent more serious family disruption. The extent of such a need often is not apparent until a facility actually is available for women who might feel obliged to remain in the family home for the sake of children, rather than expose the latter to an uncertain future. A wife's choice is often between leaving the children behind to questionable care, or remaining in the home, thereby subjecting everyone to danger or, at the least, harmful behaviour patterns.

As in the case of daycare, merely not providing facilities for women and children will not have the effect of reducing the need for such service--rather, it will lead to unsatisfactory ways of responding to the situation. High social costs may be expected to result from such continuance

of untenable family situations. We would prefer to see a surviving family unit--probably mother-led--with improved internal relationships and community support.

CURRENT SITUATION

"Crisis intervention" homes for women with children are now handled under the General Welfare Assistance Act, with facilities, if available, funded by the province and municipality respectively on an 80%-20% ratio. Funding is established according to a per diem rate calculated by the home occupancy and covering costs of bed, board, and "personal needs". Presently, the province is willing to pay a \$13 per diem, while actual costs in Toronto break down to \$16-18 a day per person; the usual interpretation of "personal needs" is extremely limited. The woman entering a home must fill out a welfare application form; thus, strictly speaking, working women are not eligible for such a service.

WHAT IS REQUIRED

While reorganization is going on within the Ministry of Community and Social Services in regard to services to children, the OCSW feels that this provides an opportunity to frame new legislation more adequate to deal with the situation of women and children together in need of temporary

shelter and support for the family unit which survives the crisis intervention. At present, neither the GWAA nor the Charitable Institutions Act seem the appropriate vehicle to deal with the facilities required, or their funding. New legislation and regulations would have to take into account several factors, such as:

1. Facilities and services--Types to be provided by crisis intervention homes: bed, board, personal needs; counseling to mothers (in life skills, determining their future, employment possibilities, legal advice, etc.); facilities for children's activities (supervised play, toys, etc.). There should be recognition that a certain amount of flexibility must be allowed regarding occupancy rate, length of stay, informal guidance provided by staff and volunteers. Guidelines could be set out.
2. Funding--Such facilities require a firmer funding formula than the current one operating in Toronto, which calculates the per diem rate on 80% occupancy. We recommend the use of a yearly allocation for each home, based on a 100% occupancy rate.
3. Community support--To prevent troubled families from returning to an unchanged environment, several support services are indicated. Since many mother-led families are involved, the emphasis should be on helping these women to be independent and to keep their children with

them. It should be taken into account that women have more limited access to better-paying jobs, and that separation and/or divorce bring a major reduction in income. Mother-led families often face discrimination in tenancy. More public initiatives are necessary and research is needed to suggest possible ways of dealing with the special problems of families coming from intervention homes. For instance, new approaches in housing are required: this could vary from "second phase" shelters (such as support houses for 3 to 5 families with visiting personnel) to forms of community-subsidized housing, other than public housing settlements.

4. Research--Government policy-makers should be sure that as the new "services to children" area is organized, personnel are assigned to evaluate crisis intervention homes, to see how they can be most effective through co-ordination with other programmes. Because such homes are a relatively new community resource, the experience of those involved in their staffing should receive much consideration in coming to an understanding of how government services should develop to respond to the need met by such facilities. Guidelines and programmes should be established, with adequate budgets. Research data should be freely available to the public.
5. Providing new facilities--When the GWAA is used as the

vehicle for funding crisis homes for women with children, the onus is on municipalities to initiate a new facility. Groups wishing to set up a home are sometimes met with protest against increases to the welfare budget and changes in zoning by-laws. We feel that framing legislation separately for crisis intervention homes and providing suitable funding arrangements could aid such groups of concerned citizens. The provincial government should make funds available for capital financing of new facilities or renovations at a 100% basis for the next budget year. There should be more support from the government with information to local groups as they go about initiating such facilities.

III

THE CANADA PENSION PLAN

CURRENT SITUATION

On April 18, 1977, the Federal Government introduced legislation that would permit couples to split Canada Pension Plan credits if their marriage breaks up. The Federal Government also introduced a proposal that would allow men or women who leave the labour force to raise children under the age of seven to eliminate those child-rearing years from the calculation of average lifetime earnings for pension benefits.

To the knowledge of the OCSW the Government of Ontario supports the first proposal but rejects the second. In opposing the second proposal Ontario exercises a virtual power of veto that prevents all Canadian parents who would benefit from the proposal from doing so. This Committee strongly urges the province to withdraw its objections to the Canada Pension Plan drop-out amendment.

WHAT IS REQUIRED

- 1) While we appreciate some of the reservations about the drop-out provisions, we are certain that it is a responsible proposal. Surely the support of nine other

provinces for the principle speaks for its validity. The National Council of Welfare, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, the Federal Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and others are urging that Ontario adopt the drop-out amendment. In view of the general Canadian approval and the acceptance of the other nine provinces for the drop-out amendment, the OCSW urges that the Government of Ontario support the proposal as well.

- 2) On April 6, 1977, Premier William Davis announced to the Legislature of Ontario that a Royal Commission had been established to examine the state of pensions in the Province. He stated:

Before Ontario embarks on any changes in its own pension legislation or agrees to changes in the Canada Pension Plan, it is absolutely essential to know the impact of these changes.

Since the economic impact of the drop-out proposal has been analysed by the Federal Government, we strongly urge support of the drop-out amendment without delay. Support from the Ontario Government should not be delayed until the Commission publishes its findings.