Northwestern Ontario Day Care News

JUNE 1987

NWO DAY CARE NEWS is a forum for the sharing of information between day care groups throughout Northwestern Ontario, as well as providing information about what's happening on the federal and provincial scenes, both in terms of governmental policy / legislation and advocacy groups' activities.

We hope that this newsletter will combat some of the isolation that day care workers and advocates feel and that through the sharing of resources, ideas and action plans we can develop strategies to ensure the growth and strengthening of quality day care in our region.

We welcome submissions to this newsletter from every day care centre and committee throughout Northwestern Ontario. Please send articles, news clippings, letters, etc. to Box 144, Thunder Bay, Ontario P7C 4V5

RE-CONVENING THE FORUM — A SUMMARY

Northwestern Ontario regional day care representatives met in Thunder Bay on April 24-25, 1987, to continue the process of collective Northwestern Ontario action to ensure the security and development of day care services in our region.

The Forum began with reports from all regional representatives, including the viewing of the video that the Geraldton Parents' Group produced. Delegates reported on the various local campaigns that had been organized following the September Forum, which involved massive letter-writing campaigns and telegrams to Premier Peterson, the Honourable John Sweeney, and local MPPs and MPs, as well as various local events to raise public awareness and enhance community support. The comprehensive action taken by many communities was very impressive and produced position results. As Committee Chair Fiona Karlstedt told the gathering, "It was your letters, your petitions, your videotapes, your lobbies, your action that resulted in our meeting face-to-face with John Sweeney, Minister of Community & Social Services, to discuss our concerns following our September Forum. Although we didn't achieve our first goal — to get the provincial government to rescind the withdrawal of the indirect subsidy — we can take credit (even if we can't prove it conclusively) for the implementation of the transitional grant which ensured the short term financial stability of our existing day care centres. We have proven that by working together, we can have an impact, we can make a very real difference. It's an uphill struggle most days, but if we all stand together and don't lose sight of the broader and deeper vision of the ends to be served, we <u>will</u> succeed in our efforts."

The Forum was a hard-working session with workshops for Municipal and Non-Profit day care people on Friday afternoon, and Commercial Issue and Workers' Concerns workshops Friday evening. The Commercial Issue workshop participants viewed the video "Child Care: The Price of Profit" and discussed the implications of public funding of for-profit day care.

Carrol Anne Sceviour, Director of Human Rights, Ontario Federation of Labour, was the guest speaker at the Friday evening dinner. Carrol Anne discussed labour's role in day care and the value of building coalitions to achieve day care goals.

Saturday morning was information-gathering time with Julie Mathien (a Board member of the Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association) speaking about federal policy and the problems posed by the recommendations of the Special Committee on Child Care. Sue Colley (Executive Coordinator of the Ontario Coalition for Better Day Care) then provided a provincial perspective and discussed both short term and long term provincial issues that day care

groups must address. These sessions provided Forum participants with a comprehensive information base from which to develop Northwestern Ontario action plans.

At lunch Saturday, Iain Angus, MP for Thunder Bay—Atikokan, and Forum delegate, briefly addressed the gathering, indicating the value of continued advocacy by community groups to ensure that day care is adequately considered within the busy and diverse political agenda facing all politicians.

Saturday afternoon participants divided into workshops to plan Northwestern Ontario action for the next six months. Commitments were made by delegates for action in their local communities by (1) participating in the "Countdown for Child Care" petition campaign, and (2) planning local action in preparation for the forthcoming provincial election.

The Forum resolved to send telegrams to Premier Peterson, the Honourable John Sweeney, and Northwestern Ontario MPPs (1) to advocate for provincial direct grants to non-profit (including municipal) day care services, and (2) to oppose the provision of public funds to for-profit day care.

In order to strengthen the ongoing work of the Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care Committee and to ensure more active involvement of regional representatives, Holly Rupert (Red Lake), Phyllis Kellar (Fort Frances), Brenda Rikkonen (Thunder Bay), Judith Mongrain (Thunder Bay), Diane Sarrazin (Geraldton), Naomi Vodden (Marathon) will join core Committee members Fiona Karlstedt, Liz Poulin, Joan Williams and Margaret Phillips in directing the activities of the Committee for the next six months.

The Forum will re-convene in the early fall of 1987.

NOTE: If you would like more details about the workshop discussions and action plans formulated at the April Forum, contact your Centre Supervisor who has a full report. (In Thunder Bay, contact Joan Williams (Thunder Bay Advocates) at 767-9582.)

NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO DAY CARE STUDY

The two reports detailing results of the surveys of Northwestern Ontario Day Care Services and Northwestern Ontario Day Care Workers undertaken by our Committee are now available. We feel the reports provide a very useful data base from which long term planning — locally and regionally — can begin.

The Day Care Services report will be sent automatically to each person who completed the centre survey. Additional copies will be available to any Northwestern Ontario person who wants one.

The Day Care Staff survey report will be sent to all respondents who provided us with their name and address. Extra copies will be sent to all Centre Supervisors. Additional reports will be available from the Committee (Box 144, Thunder Bay, Ontario P7C 4V5).

A very sincere thank you to everyone who participated in the study. We hope it will be helpful to you.

ONTARIO COALITION FOR BETTER DAY CARE 5TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE & LOBBY

Advance notice of the Coalition Conference and Lobby to be held November 6,7,8 and 9, 1987 has been received. We really hope to have a large delegation of Northwestern Ontario day care people attend this year's conference and lobby. Set aside the dates November 6 - 9, 1987 and plan to attend.

LONGLAC

Lots happening in Longlac. A Parents' Night was held in May where everyone enjoyed a delicious home-made supper. While the children watched films, the parents listened to Supervisor Agnes Vincent explain the challenges and concerns facing day care at present, viewed the video, "The Price of Profit", and discussed future letter-writing plans.

The children of the Longlac Day Care Centre recently sent an artistic, creative message to the Honourable

Mr. Sweeney. A collage of children's drawings of their families was sent to the Minister with the message:

"Dear Mr. Sweeney: These families of the Longlac Day Care Centre would like to see direct grants implemented to maintain adequate funding to support the continued quality care that exists at this centre. Our children like it here."

Longlac participated in the "Countdown for Child Care" campaign, and future plans include having a booth at "Summerfest" in July.

CHILD CARE: THE PRICE OF PROFIT

The NWO Regional Day Care Committee has purchased the video "Child Care: The Price of Profit" which is an excellent vehicle to use to promote discussion of the commercial issue. This video is available for use by any Northwestern Ontario day care group.

CHILD CARE UNDER DEBATE: REPORT ON THE CHILD CARE FORUM, DRYDEN, APRIL 21, 1987 — Holly Rupert

On April 21, representatives from the Ontario Federation of Labour brought their pre-election campaign on child care to Dryden. They met local labour leaders and spent the morning discussing the commercial issue on the local open line radio program. The real purpose for the visit was the evening forum on child care sponsored by the OFL and the Ontario Coalition for Better Day Care. I participated as the OCBDC representative.

About 25 people attended the forum and three formal briefs were presented to the panel.

While Carrol Anne Sceviour, the chief OFL spokesperson, reiterated concerns about public dollars going to commercial operators, this was not the focus of the forum from the standpoint of the other participants. Instead, the arguments put forward largely echoed those we all made to the Special Committee on Child Care last year.

The first presenter was Doug Miranda, the provincial NDP candidate for the Kenora riding. He spoke of the role day care plays in meeting the enrichment needs of children in small communities in which few other recreational programs are available. At the same time, he stressed that day care is an employment equity issue; when child care is not available it becomes the key barrier to women entering the workforce. Miranda added that shift work is a fact of life in the North, yet our day care services do nothing to accommodate workers on this schedule.

Carol Wicks, President of the Women Teachers' Federation (FWTAO) in Kenora, was the first of two teachers to speak. She opened with the FWTAO policy statement on child care ratified in March 1987, which stated that all children should have access to child care programs with parents determining the level of each child's participation.

Wicks discussed the merits of establishing day care centres in schools as a way of improving the continuity of care, particularly for junior and senior kindergarten children. She also pointed to a successful pilot project for latch-key kids which the Windsor Board of Education has undertaken. She noted that, to date, none of these program improvements has been considered by the Kenora Board.

The third brief was presented by Julie Notta, a Family Studies teacher at the Dryden high school. She pointed to the need for more day care spaces in Dryden and, like Carol Wicks, she felt the Board of Education could play a role in providing those spaces. Her discussion centred on a cooperative child care program offered in the school setting and tied to senior Family Studies child development and parenting courses. In this program, the Grade 11 and 12 Family Studies students become day care "teachers" who regularly interact with the children, under the supervision of their teacher and the centre supervisor. Pilot programs have been successful in other communities, notably London, Ontario.

In the past, such programs have been funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Julie Notta saw this model as a useful way to provide non-profit spaces, while working toward the neighbourhood hub model for child care services.

When asked for my comments, I stressed that it was the continuing uncertainty of the provincial policy that was causing much anxiety for the municipal centres throughout the region. Centres which had manageable to healthy enrollment have lost ground because of the uncertainty over fee increases. Building confidence among parents will take time.

I also stressed that lobby efforts can have a powerful impact and it is important not to underestimate that power. The efforts of the Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care Committee on the indirect subsidy issue are the best case in point.

It's valuable any time more than two people gather to talk about the day care issue. After the formal briefs were presented, there was a lot of worthwhile discussion around the day care issue. It was especially encouraging to identify some new supporters in Dryden and Kenora.

THUNDER BAY ADVOCATES - UPDATE

(1) OFL Forum: The Ontario Federation of Labour has been working closely with child care advocates to lobby the government to take responsibility for the child care crisis. To provide concerned people with an opportunity to voice their concerns and views, forums were held across the province during April and May. A public forum was held in Thunder Bay on Thursday, April 23rd, just prior to our own Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care Forum. Thunder Bay Advocates provided their support and assistance in the organization of the Forum. We appreciate the priority given to the "Kids Not Cash" campaign, and we wish to extend our thanks to Doris Rossi for her work in organizing this effort.

(2) Countdown for Child Care: This national petition campaign appealed to the federal government for direct funding to non-profit centres, rather than the tax credit system. The campaign culminated with local organizers across Canada stapling the petitions to a green ribbon and sending them off to Ottawa to be presented to the Prime Minister on June 18th. Hopefully, this demand for action will positively affect the federal policy promised for the end of June. Locally, our "Countdown for Child Care" event took place June 13th at Waverley Park, where 500 balloons were released high into the air by local dignitaries and children.

(3) Ontario Coalition for Better Day Care: May 24, 1987 Meeting. This Council meeting was most interesting and informative with a variety of workshops offered and issues discussed. Ruth Wells was replaced on the Executive by Joan Williams. Discussions with others revealed once again the vast differences in municipal policies, as well as disparities in provincial policy and practices from one centre to another, and served to further reinforce our urgent need for a comprehensive, unified system.

PROVINCIAL POLICY

The long-awaited Ontario policy paper on day care, "New Directions for Child Care", was tabled in the legislature by the Honourable John Sweeney on June 4, 1987.

"It's the first good news regarding day care in ten years" was Margaret's initial reaction.

We hope we aren't being overly optimistic but from the statements reported it does appear that the government has listened to the recommendations that parents, workers and other day care advocates have been putting forward.

Mr. Sweeney stated "The government of Ontario has stated its commitment to

building a comprehensive child care system in this province — one that recognizes child care as a basic public service, not a welfare service." He also acknowledged that "... child care is a necessity ... it is also essential to make the equality of women in the workforce a realizeable goal". Mr. Sweeney talked about building "a comprehensive, integrated and affordable child care system" and how the new moneys the province expends "will be used to strike a balance between expanding the availability of services and improving the affordability and stability of services".

The initiatives outlined in the policy paper include:

- Direct operating grants to non-profit day care in this fiscal year
- Change to income testing (from needs testing) in 1988-89
- Capital funding for non-profit day care for new construction and renovations
- Child care spaces in all new school construction
- Projects to strengthen Boards of Directors and involve parents in child care decision making and management.

The major problem is that insufficient funds are being allocated to really produce a comprehensive system. SO OUR ADVOCACY WORK IS NOT YET DONE!

However, the direction of the policy seems positive and, hopefully, our future discussions with Mr. Sweeney and other politicians can focus on re-building a QUALITY system, rather than our consistent crisis problems of the past (and present).

The Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care Committee plans to do a thorough analysis of this policy paper. We have concerns still about the commercial issue (which the paper indicates will be conditional on federal — provincial negotiations). We are also concerned that the province implies that "informal" care is part of the "system".

We have asked Ministry to forward a copy of "New Directions for Child Care" to all Northwestern Ontario day care supervisors/administrators and parent group representatives. We would be pleased to have your feed-back about this paper. If centres, communities or individuals want additional copies of the paper, you could ask your local MPP to obtain them for you.

DRYDEN - UPDATE

Parent meetings are being held once a month; an Executive was elected in May to plan activities and fundraising events.

In June the children gathered at the local radio station to record "Children of the Day Care". The song was played at the Town "Safety Night". The children have been invited to sing their song to residents of Patricia Gardens, following which tea and dainties will be served.

All but three parents were able to attend a Bag Lunch picnic on June 15th. Balloons were blown up and released to mark the local "Countdown for Child Care" campaign. The event received good press and radio coverage.

June 19th was "Circus Day" at the Dryden Day Care Centre with the children performing various circus acts for their friends and parents.

Fundraising activities of the Parents' Group include a raffle, and a Clown Face-Painting event held June 27th.

In July the puppeteer from "Fraggle Rock" will be in Dryden to put on a show for day care children and parents.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE INCLUDE Holly Rupert, Karen Warbin, Joan Williams, Agnes Vincent, Margaret Phillips and Fiona Karlstedt.
