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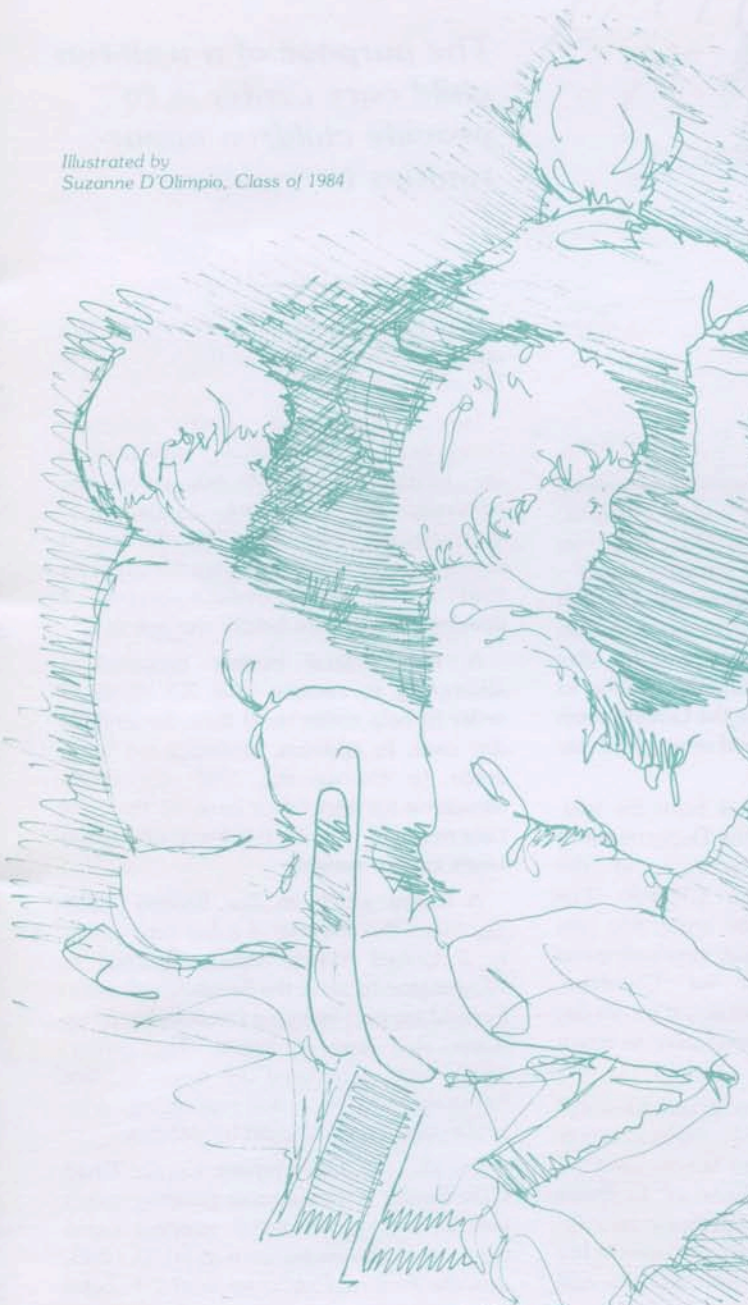
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Who Needs Day Care?

Margery A. Kranyik

A Look at Day Care in the 80s for Massachusetts

Illustrated by
Suzanne D'Olimpio, Class of 1984



Day care was a dirty word; a term once associated with government giveaways, disadvantaged families and mothers who did not wish to remain at home with their children. Circumstances, however, have changed. Day care has become a way of life for parents who are involved daily in the work force outside of the home. As a result, many family life styles have been altered.

According to the Federal Education Annual Report *The Condition of Education*, the percentage of children in preschool programs has doubled since 1968, indicating the increased involvement of mothers of preschool children who are working outside of the home. The majority of these mothers are single parents. Indications are that many more mothers in the work force would seek child care if it were less expensive. Following housing, food and taxes, day care is considered the fourth largest expense for parents.

Ten years ago the dilemma of mothers working outside the home centered around the question "Should I send my child to day care?" They were criticized for choosing to work and send their child to a day care center by those attempting to protect the sanctity of the family unit. As a result, many mothers experienced guilt about leaving their children but felt there were few alternatives, as grandparents and other family members became less available for babysitting.

What was once a fear of abandoning the traditional role of motherhood is now a matter of economic survival. Mothers outside of the home are now asking, "Where shall I send my child to day care?" "How do I choose the best center?" "Should I consider a center near my home or near my work?" For families, day care has now become a way of life.

Recent Census Bureau information indicates that half of the mothers with outside employment arrange for day care, which means that they must find a place where they feel comfortable leaving their children for the duration of the day. Parents seeking licensed child care in Massachusetts have two options -- group day care and family day care.

In a group day care setting, children are together in numbers corresponding to the center's license. The children attending may be from 2.9 to 5 years of age. The teacher (or care giver) to child ratio is one to ten children. Infant centers are available for babies from 3 to 15 months and toddler care centers accept children from 15 months to 2.8 years of age. The infant center ratio is one adult for every three children, while the toddler center is one for every four.

The purpose of a well-run child care center is to provide a service to parents by offering children opportunities to socialize, feel good about themselves and develop a sense of achievement while being with other children and adults. Both youngsters and parents learn skills related to health and hygiene. During the course of the day, care givers provide experiences for cognitive, emotional and physical development, according to the needs and experiential background of the children.

Family day care is an option for parents who wish to leave their children in a home-like setting. The licensed family care providers may take up to six children in their homes, but not more than two can be under 2 years of age. The physical setting is smaller than that of group day care so the children can receive more individual attention. The goal of the family day care providers is to maintain as much consistency as possible between their environment and the child's home with regard to care and discipline. A family day care setting thus becomes a type of surrogate family for the child.

The Office for Children of the Commonwealth oversees licensing for all group and family day care centers as well as all nursery schools. The OFC supervisors issue and renew licenses and make yearly visits to all centers to check for regulation violations. The state-supported OFC, once considered for elimination by the King Administration, anticipates an expanded budget in 1984.

single agency to oversee day care funding, administration and planning. However, there is reason now to be optimistic. Joan Quinlan, Advisor on Women's Affairs for Governor Dukakis, has been appointed to oversee the development of a comprehensive child care policy for the community, the private sector and legislators. The results are expected to be reflected in the budget for Fiscal Year 1986.

consideration of family day care as a home occupation.

On the other hand, budget cuts from Washington have recently eliminated day care services for about 150,000 children. Because of this shift to regulate day care at the state level rather than the federal level, many states have been forced to raise costs, stiffen eligibility requirements and weaken standards in order to make financial ends meet. The day care division of the Department of Health and Human Services was abolished last year.

The compensatory preschool program *Head Start*, however, has been more fortunate. Current budget proposals include an increase of \$64 million, which the

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administration claims will enable many more disadvantaged youngsters to participate in the program.

Interestingly, the recent national concerns about the status of education in the United States did not place any emphasis on preschool education -- especially day care. This lack of concern seems unfortunate, since research indicates that much of a child's cognitive development occurs before the age of 5.

A new federal budget proposal is attempting to restore Title XX funds in order to help states meet their demand for day care. In addition, attempts are being made to change the 1981 tax credit allowance for dependent care, so the child care needs of working families at all income levels can be served.

A recent article in *The Boston Globe* discussed the opening of a day care center in a United States Senate Building in Washington to serve the Senate employees. Federal support included \$20,000 in start-up funds plus donated space. The center, which was scheduled to open in late February, will be a self-supporting, non-profit operation managed by parents.

Locally, the Government Center Child Care Center in the Kennedy Building serves federal employees. Initial support came from various agencies such as HUD, HHS, and the Federal Executive Board. Federal

The status of day care is rapidly changing. No longer does day care exist solely for disadvantaged families and single parents. It is a necessity for all parents who need to work outside of the home. The cost of college preparation has made it desirable for many professional parents to pursue their careers in addition to rearing children. The economic crisis has made it necessary even for many two parent families to work in order to maintain a comfortable life style.

For example, many of the children who attend the Family Day Care Center in North Easton come from families in which both parents are professionals. The center provides infant, toddler and group day care as well as an after-school program. Director Linda Rappaport feels that the center is one of the few in the area that "meets all the day care needs of a working family." The center's youngest child is 4 months old while the oldest child in the after-school program is 8 years of age.

Day Care Policy in Massachusetts

Day care in Massachusetts appears to be in a state of flux. Until now there has been no comprehensive child care policy and no

Governor Dukakis appears to be seeking equitable solutions to the budget dilemma. The Governor's Working Committee on Day Care -- a statewide advising group -- includes child care providers, parents and advocates who will serve as a liaison between the administration and the day care community. Their function will be to review policies and advise the Governor on various day care issues and unresolved day care problems.

Another bright spot has been the two-year federal grant from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Massachusetts Office for Children. The project will emphasize the group day care needs and will focus on day care policy and local OFC Councils for Children, computerized information about group day care and helping the community to solicit employer-supported day care.

Since day care is one immediate source of help for the apparent increasing incidents of child abuse, the legislature has directed the Department of Social Services to make protective service child care its top priority. Additional legislation is being sought in the areas of off-hour day care services and

support now consists of reduced rates for space, while other support comes from grants and parents' fund raising efforts. Television coverage was recently given to the opening of the Commonwealth Children's Center in the McCormack Building for children of state employees. Finally, the Commonwealth's commitment to day care was apparent during the 1983 legislative session when a bill that protects space in state facilities for future day care centers to meet the needs for state employees was passed.

Help From The Private Sector

Recent state and national proposals for public education have indicated a need for involvement by the private sector, specifically industry. However, child care has not been totally ignored by those hospitals, businesses, colleges, and universities which have been forerunners in supporting child care options in an effort to cultivate more effective employees and students. Those businesses that have become successfully involved have experienced a more reliable and stable work force with less tardiness and absenteeism. Employees, moreover, feel a greater satisfaction and security knowing that their company respects their need for quality child care.

Industry has several options in providing child care for employees. Some have chosen to incorporate on-site facilities, enabling parents to spend lunch and break time with their children. Many parents enjoy the advantage of spending the time traveling to and from work in the company of their children. The Stride-Rite Children's Center in Boston's South End has long been recognized as a national model for on-site child care. Employees of the Stride-Rite Company who enroll their children in the center pay fees calculated at ten percent of their gross weekly wages.

The Eastern Uniform Company in Norwell has become the first South Shore business to open an on-site day care center. The center serves not only the children of the Eastern Uniform Company employees, but also children of parents employed by companies in the nearby Assinippi Industrial Park.

Other companies contract to pay independent centers in return for guaranteed slots for the children of their employees. The John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company donated \$100,000 to the Parent Information and Referral Service of the Child Care Resource Center and several child care facilities in the Boston area.

Still other companies, such as Polaroid and Zayre, have elected the voucher system

for their employees. Polaroid pays a subsidy for employee child care costs in licensed facilities for families earning less than \$20,000. Zayre provides up to twenty dollars per child per week for children in regularly-scheduled care.

The Gillette Company and the National Bank of Boston have contracted with the Child Care Resource Center for parent information and referral. The CCRC maintains special telephone lines for those employees and provides occasional on-site parent workshops.

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Other companies have acknowledged child care needs by organizing parenting seminars for families who must juggle child-rearing and employment simultaneously. These cooperative efforts educate employers to the problems and concerns experienced by their working parents. Employers are beginning to recognize that child care is as important to some parents as health insurance and other benefits.

Tax advantages have encouraged many companies to support child care. The Economic Recovery Act of 1981 offered tax incentives to employers who provide child care services to their employees. Through the Dependent Care Assistance Program of the Recovery Act, employees with children under 15 years of age can deduct child care expenses providing their employer has a formal day care plan. Employer-sponsored child care, then, is mutually beneficial from the standpoint of taxes to the business and the employee.

Colleges and universities have been instrumental in sponsoring on-site facilities for their students and staff. Support for these programs varies. Some are extensively subsidized, while others merely occupy space and operate independently.

The Early Childhood Learning Center at Bridgewater State College opened in 1972 with support from the Student Government Association. The College donates the space and utilities and the SGA continues to subsidize the center. A college or university-based day care center offers children the benefit of campus educational resources, materials and personnel. According to Diane Sherman, director of the ECLC and a Bridgewater graduate, "Our children have opportunities to work with student teachers and work study students. The physical

education department works with children through their methods classes. They also have a chance to see children's theater productions here in the campus auditorium."

Also locally, the Veteran's Administration Hospital in Brockton operates the Tyke Site, a non-profit preschool program. Like Bridgewater State College, the hospital provides space, utilities and maintenance, but unlike the College, does not subsidize the program. More than one-half of the twenty-five licensed slots currently serve employees. Jeanne White, also a Bridgewater graduate and Tyke Site director, points out the advantage of her program: "Many of the families come from great distances. The travel time they have together is important, especially if there is more than one child in the family." In addition, Mrs. White adds, "Many of the children have local doctors and the parents can make appointments for them at lunch time."

Tyke Site has fifty children on the waiting list. One parent has been on the list since she was three months pregnant. Director White sees a great need for more infant-toddler centers to meet the needs of mothers who must return to their jobs soon after their babies are born.

We cannot expect the private sector to solve the day care problems that the rest of the community has ignored. However, private sector support is gaining credibility with a modest beginning in the investment of the citizens of the future.

Involving the Public Schools

Use of the schools as day care centers can be an important service to working parents. Proponents of day care have been looking toward the public schools that have been closed because of declining enrollment as a source of sites for child care centers. Many towns have contracted out such schools privately in an effort to maintain use of the empty buildings. Still other day care supporters feel the need for more public school involvement. Federal money is available in the form of public facilities, easing the need for local tax support.

If day care programs were to be operated by the school system, high quality staffing could be insured, providing sound educational experiences for the children. A secure and satisfactory preschool program in the public schools is apt to attract parents who will keep their children in the public school system at a later time. Gordon Mitchell, Superintendent of Schools in East Bridgewater, feels that public school systems should become involved in preschool education. Although East Bridgewater does not have the resources for such a program, Superintendent

Mitchell believes "preschoolers profit from being a part of an organized program. Children whose developmental deficiencies have been diagnosed in first grade may have been helped earlier if they had been in a structured preschool program in the public school system."

Use of the public schools for day care may be sound public relations to show members of the community that school personnel are concerned about the care of *all* the children. The amount of financial support given by the system may have to be determined by taxpayers. Day care in the public schools may be an opportunity for businesses and schools to work together to provide solid community relationships.

A bill currently before Congress is designed to provide seed money to encourage the use of public schools for before and after school care of *school age* children. This particular need for child care has been a concern of many teachers, parents and employers.

Many school age youngsters of working parents come home to unsupervised environments after school every day. Employers have experienced the "three o'clock syndrome," in which their employees receive telephone calls from children who are concerned about finding something to eat, fighting with siblings or strangers at the door.

Parents are concerned because, despite stringent house rules, some children become vulnerable to peer pressure when friends say, "Let's play at your house. Your mom will never know." Children have great difficulty resisting temptation when they are called "chicken", and they fear a lack of acceptance by their friends.

Various community groups have addressed this issue by providing after-school child care in supervised settings. Many school systems offer such care and provide bus transportation to a central location. In addition, YMCA, YWCA and other youth-oriented groups in many communities are open to youngsters for after school and school vacation programs. Day care centers have begun extended day sessions in an attempt to meet the needs of working parents. All of these programs provide recreational and hobby-oriented experiences and are not intended to operate as an extension of the school day.

The after school program at the North Easton Family Day Care Center, for example, provides sports, outdoor activities, cooking, arts and crafts, group games, creative writing and opportunities to select their own activities. According to Director Rappaport "The children can create their own program. We have structure, but allow for flexibility by

providing numerous activities from which they can choose."

Often, the difficulty parents encounter is convincing their children of the need to be in a supervised activity program during after school hours. Perhaps the dangers of being alone and the need for adult supervision are subjects that teachers need to explore in the classroom setting.

Day Care Leaves Its Mark

The need for child care is not restricted to any socioeconomic, racial or ethnic group. Quality care is needed for many young children. Last year in Southeastern Massachusetts alone approximately fifty new day care centers were licensed. These centers are being operated by highly-qualified teachers. Because of the current surplus of public school teachers, the majority of Early Childhood Education majors who graduated from Bridgewater State College are working in preschool settings. The main problem these new preschool teachers are facing is wages. Many are working for the federal minimum wage with few or no fringe benefits. One recent BSC graduate was offered a teaching position at a franchised day care center in the region for \$3.45 per hour. The only consolation for the low salary is that these young teachers are having the opportunity to work in the field they have prepared for during their college years.

Various early childhood teacher organizations are attempting to seek legislation that sets wage scales in an attempt to upgrade the salaries of day care providers. In the Boston area, day care workers have formed a union, The Massachusetts Association of Day Care Agencies, to seek greater recognition for the members of the profession.

There are still unresolved issues about the effects of day care on young children. Day care can never replace the attention young children receive from their parents; this is not the intention. For some youngsters, day care provides a more stable environment than their own. Children benefit in some way from all the experiences they receive in social and language development, two important components of day care. Jerome Kagan of Harvard University, author of *The Effects of Infant Day Care on Psychological Development*, reports that no intellectual or social differences were apparent between those children cared for by mothers and those attending day care.

Nevertheless, there can be noticeable differences in the behavior of kindergarten children depending on whether or not they have attended day care. On the positive side, Margaret Meyers, a kindergarten

teacher at Halifax Elementary School, notes that "children share better when they come from day care than when they come to kindergarten straight from the home. They also have less difficulty adjusting to working in large group situations." On the negative side, Mrs. Meyers feels that when children have been in a cognitively oriented day care center, some have "had it" with tracing, coloring and other small motor activities by the time they arrive in kindergarten. She finds kindergarten a difficult adjustment for children who have been in day care for several years. She comments, "They are tired of the regimentation. They like kindergarten because it is different, but they really don't want to do the work." Mrs. Meyers suggests that working parents be "day care shoppers," if possible, and advises that they "consider changing day care settings so children do not get bored."

Child care advocates are taking steps statewide and nationally to promote quality day care, but we are a long way from having an acceptable policy. Day care is here to stay and the need is steadily increasing. The Urban Institute predicts that by 1990 there will be 23.3 million preschool children with mothers working outside the home. These children will need care. Although many steps have been taken to help working families, several questions still need to be answered in greater depth: What form should government support take? How can the private sector participate most effectively? Should the public schools be involved in day care? Should uniform sliding fee scales be implemented on a nationwide basis? It seems that these questions will be answered only when we have a highly-organized state and national child care policy.



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A resident of Hyde Park, Dr. Kranyik is active in the local Y.M.C.A. where she has served as Chair of the Board of Directors and the Reach-Out Fund Raising Campaign.