

Open Letter Issued by the Bureau of Municipal Research, 24 Isabella Street, Toronto 5



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*An independent fact-finding organization
reporting to the public on civic affairs.*

CIVIC AFFAIRS

March 16, 1951

DAY NURSERIES AND DAY CARE CENTRES

Fellow Citizens:

Lively discussions have been evoked from time to time by two activities under the Welfare Department that are a direct outgrowth of the recent war--day nurseries and day care centres. Both are civic centres for the care and feeding of children whose parents are unable to look after their youngsters at home, because either the sole parent or both parents go out to work. The day nurseries take children of pre-school age; the day care centres, boys and girls from six to sixteen. Both nurseries and day care centres charge fees which are supplemented from City taxes; the day nurseries, in addition, are further subsidized through Provincial grants.

The facilities of day care centres are used also for another purpose. Because the City's emergency housing projects were badly located in relation to schools, the civic authorities undertook to provide--free of charge--noon meals for primary school children resident in these emergency housing units. Supervision before and after school hours was not made available, since the question of working parents did not enter into the arrangement.

NURSERIES: In preparing the 1951 City estimates, one question under review has been whether the amounts being charged for use of the day nurseries are scaled appropriately and are high enough. It is being recognized that conditions have changed and costs have gone up since the rates were established. The formula for setting fees is rather involved and need not be reproduced here. It is enough to say that, on their present basis, the fees charged are not directly related to ability to pay and the amounts collected meet only one-fifth of the actual cost.

Day nurseries are a recognized welfare service of proven value, especially in a great industrial centre. The children are at an age when qualified supervision is essential, and the civic facilities are in strong demand. Although the current fees seem out of line, few people would dispute that the day nurseries merit a measure of financial support from the public purse.

DAY CARE & FEEDING CENTRES: The case for day care centres is quite different. There are at present seven centres with a total capacity of 715 children. In January, the maximum enrolment (including about 40 percent coming from housing projects) was only 567, or just under 4/5ths capacity. The average attendance for the month was only 2/3rds capacity. The upper age brackets are becoming less and less represented.

The charge for day care enrolment is 35 cents a day for the first child in a family and 15 cents a day for each additional child. Whether the child gets the noon meal or complete day care, the price is the same. Nonetheless, a substantial proportion of the children do not and never have availed themselves of either the pre-school or the after-school care.

During 1950, the cost of operating the day care centres and one additional feeding centre that has since been closed amounted to \$100,200, while the net cost after payment of fees was \$82,600. At the present time, slightly lower net and gross expenditures are being forecast for 1951. An exact breakdown of costs represented in services to working parents and to families resident in housing projects is not available. However, in 1950, just over 112,000 meals were served; of these, approximately 54,000 were supplied without charge to children from the emergency housing projects. Meals, together with the facilities for serving them, constitute the major item of expense.

The provision of noon meals for children living at some distance from school and, equally, day care for others whose parents are out working, are both solidly commendable objectives. And in Toronto's total budget, the combined outlay even under present arrangements does not represent a large item. Yet, bearing in mind the source of funds, the absence of Provincial encouragement, and the limited demands for day care, the extent of present subsidization is surely open to question. It is not necessary, contrary to some opinion, to provide a service at public expense to prove it a good service.

- The Bureau therefore recommends that the City re-consider,
- a) the question of furnishing meals free to children from City housing projects,
 - b) whether there is sufficient demand to warrant publicly-sponsored day care facilities for school-age children or, alternatively, if public feeding centres for noon meals would meet the essential need,
 - c) the appropriate charges for day care (or for noon meals) with a view to recovering a larger portion of the cost.

E. J. ...
President

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