
Course Offered to Child Caregivers

By *Janine Roelens-Grant*

In Ontario, a variety of child care options exist for parents - some regulated, some unregulated. It has long been recognized, however, that child care services and facilities are inadequate. In the last decade, some funding has been provided to encourage and support new and better approaches to caring for children. Several successful local projects have emerged. To meet the needs of their locality, the Twin Lakes Child Care Management Program in Orillia has been organized recently.

The idea originated in the Fall of 1988 with Luc McWatters, Adult Education Co-ordinator at the Twin Lakes Secondary School (TLSS) in Orillia. Luc was aware that participants enrolled in the newly formed adult education program were having difficulty finding day care. Recognizing this need, he approached Sue Kerteston, a teacher of Family Studies at TLSS, to help organize and instruct a course for child caregivers.

A survey conducted in and around Orillia revealed a real need for child care services. Not surprisingly, it was discovered that none existed in the rural areas. And, the majority of children in urban communities were in private home or informal day cares. "A lot of them do a good job, but a lot are just babysitters who don't provide much stimulation," Sue explained.

In the Spring of 1989, Sue began working on a proposal for a Child Care Management course. In the early stages, resource people from the Ministry of Community and Social Services were contacted for advice. They provided information on sources of funds and how to write a proposal.

By November, the Twin Lakes Child Care Management Program was approved. The Program was jointly funded. Health and Welfare Canada, under their Child Care In-

itiatives Fund, helped pay administrative, staff and material costs. And Employment and Immigration Canada, under their Job Re-entry Fund, allotted a training allowance to participants.

"The primary objective of the course is to train informal caregivers to provide good quality care," Sue said. "This entails providing a clean and safe environment, nutritious food, appropriate stimulation, and an awareness that caregivers play an important role in the development of a child," she added.

The Twin Lakes Child Care Management Program was offered for the first time in February 1990. It was an 18-week long course; the time evenly split between the classroom and placements. The course emphasized child development and the different needs of different age groups. Guest speakers covered a variety of topics - behaviour and stress management, self esteem in children, story telling, co-operative play, and first aid and CPR.

As well, information was provided on various aspects of operating a small business, including marketing and book keeping.

"And simple things like getting parents to fill out information forms and providing them with parent handbooks outlining their policies means that child caregivers are taking a more organized and professional approach," explained Sue. "The idea is to saturate participants with practical ideas on how to run an effective day care service."

Each student also experiences a variety of child care environments through their 22 different placements in day care centres, nursery schools, junior kindergartens, kindergartens and private homes. "A large part of their placement," Sue explained, "was simply observing ways of doing things."

A pamphlet advertising the Twin Lakes Program was included with the hydro bill in the Fall of 1989.

Ads were also placed in local newspapers. Respondents were initially screened over the telephone, and then asked to attend an information session. They were also screened by a home visit, using criterion set up by the Simcoe County Private Home Day Care Agency. The suitability of the individual was explored; for example, just how interested were the applicants and what were their views on discipline and nutrition. The suitability of the home, especially in terms of safety, was also investigated. And all applicants and residents in their home had to agree to a police check.

Thirty women of all ages applied to the Program. The number accepted was limited to fifteen. "We wanted to keep it to a manageable size for placements," explained Sue. Of the fourteen individuals who graduated, twelve are child caregivers in their own homes, one is working at a day care centre, and another is employed at the Huronia Regional Centre for the handicapped.

Recognizing the importance of networking, the participants in the Twin Lakes Program started meeting on a monthly basis last September. Four resource booklets full of ideas have been compiled and a newsletter for the exchange of ideas is being produced. Other support services include a toy and book lending library and child caregiver registry.

"I was really excited about how things went," explained Sue; "I think its important to improve the quality of child care. That's the bottom line, and it worked."

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