

Restraint may kill day care program

A dispute between private day care centre operators and Halton Region could scuttle a subsidized day care program for low income families.

Rather than establishing its own day care centres, Halton buys space from private operators and subsidizes the fees for families who meet a regional standard.

For 1984, however, Halton has told the centre owners the fee set down in their purchase of service contract will be increased by only five per cent.

At least one operator, has since said she will not renew her contract on that basis.

The cause of the trouble is a decision by the provincial Ministry of Community and Social Services to increase its grants to the region by only five per cent.

Day care centre operators have said their costs are rising by as much as eight per cent and the increase offered by the region means their full fee paying clients would be doubly subsidizing the clients of the region.

Brenda Eastwood, operator of BJ's Day Care in Burlington, said she has increased her fees by 6.5 per cent and unless the region provides more than a five per cent increase she will not renew her agreement.

"I really don't want to keep coming back here to argue my case, I would be quite happy to withdraw my contract with the region," she told members of the health and social services committee last week.

Mrs. Eastwood said her centre is licensed for 45 children and she provides nine of those spaces to the region, while she has a waiting list of people willing to pay the full rate.

"People are willing to pay a fair rate for fair day care," she told the members.

Peter Knoepfli, speaking for the operators association, said other centres may drop out of the regional program unless the fee hike is increased this year.

"Our full fee paying parents are starting to object. They feel they are subsidizing children from the region and it's a double subsidy because public money is being used in the first place," he said.

"We honestly do not feel we can keep our operating costs within a five per cent range," he added.

"This is a very uncomfortable feeling for us because we do not want to have a double standard of care."

"It's becoming a question of will the quality be maintained and will the spaces be available from the private sector," he added.

"We would like to provide these spaces, but we don't feel we can at this rate."

Some of the higher rates the operators are facing, he added, is because the provincial government has dictated a new set of standards for licensed day care centres.

"It is going to be increasingly difficult for us to provide these spaces in the future be-

cause the incentive certainly isn't going to be there," he added.

Mr. Knoepfli said some operators have submitted applications to renew their agreements with the region at the five per cent increase "because they didn't think they had a choice," but they are not happy with the arrangements.

Committee members agreed to stall recommendations approving the renewed agreements until some comment can be obtained from provincial officials on support beyond the legislated five per cent increase.

If these extra grants are not available, according to chief administrative officer Dennis Perlin, the region would be forced to finance the total cost of any increased fees beyond five per cent.

Halton's current policy is not to finance anything beyond the limits of provincial grants.

The only other available option, he said, is to open more regionally-operated day care centres and the cost of this would be even higher.

"We're trying to point out to the province that the five per cent guidelines isn't realistic and if they stick to it we are going to lose the private sector," she said.

Burlington Mayor Roly Bird suggested taking money away from the budgets for the regionally operated centres and giving that to the private operators.

Social Services, she said, "and to this date no funds have been allocated to Halton to cover the cost of Day Care."

Miss Oakley said such retraining programs, aimed at women with limited employment experience, or those who are returning to work after several years, are an important tool in allowing them to get off welfare or other forms of support.

"Without day care, many women will not be able to participate in such programs..." she said, adding "to only accept women with older children will leave women on public assistance for the period of time when their children are young and then it is more difficult to make the changes in lifestyle, as they are more established in a routine and older themselves."

Retraining programs will suffer

Women hoping for a new life off the welfare rolls may have their dreams shattered in Halton by a lack of subsidized day care.

According to a report presented to members of the region's health and social services committee last week, Halton has filled all the spaces it has for subsidized day care, meaning women with children hoping to enrol in retraining programs operated by Sheridan College and other institutions may not be able to take part.

Social services director Debbie Oakley said women involved in programs such as Focus for Change, Women in Trades and Technology and Introduction to Non-Traditional Occupations are paid a small allowance while involved in the training program, but they frequently need the low

cost day care services available through Halton's subsidized program.

"At this time we have reached our maximum level of subsidized day care service and new applications are being placed on a waiting list," she reported.

Miss Oakley added seven such retraining courses are due to start in the first two months of 1984, but Halton women may not be able to take part.

As many as 50 requests for day care subsidies would normally be made at this time of year, she added.

In order to provide all the services which will be requested, she said, as much as \$52,200 in extra provincial money will be needed.

Meetings have been held with officials of the provincial Ministry of Community and

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