

# Richmond Hill Thornhill day care waiting list is long, long, long . . .

By Margaret Lade

Richmond Hill Day Care Centre opened November 1, 1969, with nine children. Today, a little more than five years later, it has 78 children enrolled and a waiting list of 200.

It came into being as a result of the determined and prolonged pressing of community conscience by the small but dedicated Richmond Hill Social Planning Council. This effort was supported by the Ministerial Association and others who believed there was urgent need for organized public day care for pre-school children.

The struggle was long and full of frustrations. It was a major triumph when the town council recognized the need, appointed a board of directors and agreed to lend financial support to the venture.

The first public day care centre in York County opened in St. Mary's Anglican Church, where it continues to thrive. At the end of five months it was operating smoothly, occupying two classrooms and serving 35 children.

Two years later, when the province transformed York County into the Regional Municipality of York, the centre became a regional responsibility. Its area of service was expanded, two more classrooms were made available by the church, and additional staff hired.

#### Children in day care

Who are these children, where do they come from, and what do they and their parents think of Richmond Hill Day Care Centre?

Of nine parents interviewed by The Liberal, five were single parents. The others represented families where both parents work. All were unanimous in their opinion such a centre provided the best care for their children.

They like the security of knowing the centre is in operation five days a week, 52 weeks of the year. It does not get sick, go on vacation, fail to show up — experiences most had encountered in trying to provide home day care for their children.

Their children, the parents report, thrive on the balanced program of organized play, free time, active and quiet times, creative sessions, hot well-balanced mid-day meal followed by rest period, and the disciplined atmosphere in which they can learn to get along with other children and with adults.

#### More centres opened

Regional and provincial grants made it possible to open other centres, in Aurora and in Newmarket, and the social and family service committee of regional council pushed for subsidies for parents who could not afford to pay the full rate of \$25 a week charged for care.

With the very practical argument it is cheaper to subsidize day care to free a parent to go to work than to pay that parent family benefits or welfare to stay at home, it won subsidies not only for parents putting children in public day care centres, but also for children in approved private day care centres.

It was a blow to parents such as Gail Varga who placed her son, Justin, in such a centre in July, 1972, when they were informed that, effective January 1, 1974, subsidies would no longer be paid to children in private centres.

#### Private care too costly

Separated from her husband, Mrs. Varga said she had a lot of trouble with private day care before moving to Thornhill. Besides, private care and home care were too expensive.

For two months she desperately communicated with federal, provincial and regional political and administrative officials. Finally, in February, a place was found for Justin in the Richmond Hill centre.

Despite the inconvenience of taking Justin, now five, north to the centre, then travelling to work in Metro, Mrs. Varga is very happy with the care her son is receiving. He is happy, well adjusted and well fed.

#### No worries

Mary Fletcher, who is helping her husband establish a family business, had her first experience with day care when she took her son, Morris, 4, to the centre in September. She stayed at home when her other children, now eight and 12, were pre-schoolers.

At the centre, says Mrs. Fletcher, Morris is better disciplined and makes better use of his time than when he was at home alone with her.

"I have no worries about him at all."



Wednesday is a special day at Richmond Hill Day Care Centre in St. Mary's Anglican Church with special activities in each of the four classrooms. In the picture above Billie Davis, age 2½, jumps in one of a series of specially designed exercises. Other children (left to right) are Jayish Sonagra, Jeffery Kusmenko, Travis Zimmerman, Kevin Mortelliti and Dee Dee Fowler.

#### In good hands

Stephen Hary, 3, has been at the centre for over a year. His mother, Liddy, a school teacher, is very happy. "It is good for him here. I had a girl in before, but I was always worried. I did not know what was going on at home. Now I am confident he is in good hands."

Her husband is also pleased with what is happening with Stephen. "He likes the balance of discipline and freedom. They are not just allowed to run," said Mrs. Hary.

#### Creative program

Ann Armstrong, a divorcee, had baby sitters in, or took Sheri, now two and one-half, to someone else's home until she was old enough to be admitted to the day care centre in September.

A nurse, Mrs. Armstrong said, "I am really pleased. It is nice to go to work, not to be concerned. They have an excellent, creative program".

#### They really care

May McGeachie, who is separated, joined the chorus, describing the program as "fantastic, a terrific balance in everything".

Mrs. McGeachie has two children, Susan, 5, and Derek, 3, at the centre. She had had baby sitters before moving to Richmond Hill a year and a half ago.

"The children are extremely creative since they have been here, and they have a good routine." She gives full credit to the staff.

"There is a strong feeling between staff and children. The staff really care for them as individuals."



With an enrolment of 78 children and waiting list of over 200, the centre is a very busy place. Activity times, quiet times, hot noon meals are all part of the program. Child care staff of 10 includes supervisor Johanna Kunze. A cook, assistant cook and a few students assigned on a part-time basis from Don

Head Secondary School provide a happy and healthy atmosphere for the children. Circle games, music and movements are popular. Pictured above with such a group are (left to right) Don Head student Paul Yates, and teachers Lynn Ryan and Maria Vespi (back to camera).

#### Appreciate guidance

David Baker of Aurora and his wife both work. Their son, Brett, going on five, has been at the centre for nearly three years.

"It has taught him to get along with people his own age as well as with adults. We really appreciate the guidance he receives. It is forming a firm foundation to grow into a socially well adjusted adult."

#### Mind at rest

A widow and a switchboard operator, Ann Weir has been taking her son Scott, four and one-half, to the centre for more than two years.

He likes it here. He likes the teachers. He gets affection as well as discipline, and my mind is at rest while I am working," said Mrs. Weir.

#### Fussy about nutrition

Barbara Farquharson, a teacher of children with learning disabilities, had misgivings when she took Kristen, 2, to the centre in September. She was afraid the program would not be sufficiently creative, but she felt, too, that her daughter should be with other children.

Her husband is spending the year working toward a doctorate on the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. This is Mrs. Farquharson's first experience with day care centres. (She had had part-time home help before.)

As for Kristen, "She loves it," her mother said, "and they (the staff) are fussy about nutrition. The meals are good. The cooks are super people. They take a real interest in the children".

Mrs. Farquharson is also very happy about her language and visual development since Kristen came to the centre.

#### Several baby sitters

Before bringing Greg, 5, to the centre Phyllis Boose had had several baby sitters. "But they were unreliable and it was very upsetting for Greg."

He has thrived here. He is happier, his speech has improved, and he likes and needs the discipline. It is a very healthy atmosphere."

A single parent (separated), Mrs. Boose has two other children, 12 and 15. "If it is necessary for a child to be in day care, it should be in a day care centre," she said. She, too, praised the meals, adding that one of the cooks is Greg's favorite person.

Greg, along with other five-year-olds, goes to kindergarten for half the day. Most of them attend McConaghy Public School, just north of the church on Yonge Street. Half of them go in the morning, the

others in the afternoon, and three go by school bus to a Roman Catholic kindergarten.

#### Need pre-nursery

One mother, who is expecting another baby this spring, expressed concern that there is no pre-nursery care for infants. (Children at the centre range from two to five). Others were concerned because there is no provision for care for children attending school full time, no before and after school and lunch hour facility. They are worried about what will happen to the children when they reach grade 1.

The centre's supervisor, Johanna Kunze, sympathizes. She agrees there should be nursery care for infants, but feels care for children over five should be provided in the schools.

#### Up to the parents

"If the parents are really concerned about their children, they should take action, go after the school boards to provide supervision," said Mrs. Kunze. She suggested part-time people could be employed for this purpose, but it is up to the parents to pressure whatever authorities are responsible to bring this about.

"The parents have to do something for themselves," she said.

Mrs. Kunze has been supervisor ever since the centre opened. She now has a staff of 10 child care workers and teachers, two cooks and a housekeeper.

The staff is supplemented during the school year by part-time helpers, students from the nearby Don Head Secondary School who are interested in working with children and need an incentive to stay in school.

#### New Thornhill centre

A new centre is scheduled to open in about six months in Thornhill, in the large community and recreation centre at Bayview Avenue and John Street. It will provide space for 55 children.

This will include facilities for about 10 infants, says the region's administrator of day care centres, Betty Stokes. It will also have an area for day care for ten to 12 handicapped children.

Approval has also been given by the Town of Richmond Hill and by the region for inclusion of a day care centre in the education and recreation complex planned for the Hillcrest community south of Vaughan Road and west of Yonge Street.

The facility will serve all of Richmond Hill in addition to residents of the new development and the older, established Richvale community.



Creativity is considered an important part of early childhood education, and at Richmond Hill Day Care Centre children are encouraged to develop their talents and learn new skills. Thoroughly enjoying a

creative craft session are (left to right) Navine Chuan, Sherry Armstrong, April Hutchings and Chuck Frazier.