

Area centres offer day care diversity

By SANDY HAZELL

This is the third in a series of articles on area day care centres. This week Milliken Mills and Stouffville are examined. Next week, private in-home day care will be featured.

MILLIKEN MILLS DAY CARE

1151 Denison St.,
Markham.

When Tina Haji moved to Milliken Mills four years ago, she tried unsuccessfully to get her children into a day care centre.

With an Early Childhood Education (ECE) diploma and experience in supervising a day care centre in Ottawa, Mrs. Haji decided to open her own facility.

"I thought there was so much need for day care, I started looking around for space," says Mrs. Haji. "It's so hard to find a place. The owner of this building said take the whole thing or nothing."

With financial backing, she opened the Milliken Mills Day Care Centre in five units of a medical building.

Today 90 children, including infants, are divided into classrooms according to age. Rates are \$135 per week for 4 to 18 months; \$110 for 18 to 30 months; and \$90 for 2½ to six-year-olds.

"Financially, it is very difficult to have infant care, but some parents do need it," says Mrs. Haji.

"You have to be very, very careful with infants in keeping the room clean. And if two babies get sick, I still have to pay my staff."

A maximum of seven infants are in one room with two ECE staff.

"We take children strictly full time," she says. "The program isn't structured, but organized. Themes are geared to each age group, using a different approach. We are not a babysitting program."

RAINBOW CORNERS DAY CARE CENTRE

5000 Steeles Avenue East,
Markham.

When Ebenezer United Church built its new addition two years ago, space was allotted for a permanent day care centre within the expansion.

Today, the nonprofit centre is completely run by a volunteer board of directors.

Five full time ECE staff and two part-time staff care for the 32 children aged 2½ to 5 years. Weekly rates are \$90.

"We have flexibility within a structured program," says Assistant Supervisor Cariee Marshall. "We follow the Children's Development Guide to use as a checklist in an informal way to see what stage of development a child is at."



Learning the basics of the alphabet are a part of the curriculum at local day care centres. Here, instructor Brigitt Knoll of Unionville Day Care Centre helps four-year-old students Michael Cunningham (left), Vanessa Mok and Jeffrey Hamilton learn the letter 'B'. —Sandy Hazell

Supervisor Janice Freeman adds, "We try to keep the parents informed of their child's progress and development. By praising them and encouraging self-help skills, you can make the children feel good about themselves."

The original church facilities are used by the children during inclement weather as well for naps.

"I don't believe there is any money to be made in day care once you've used the funds for top

quality toys and good nutritious meals," says Mrs. Freeman.

"I think the government should give more grants to help establish more nonprofit centres, she adds. "Local community groups should also be encouraged to support day care centres. There definitely is a need for more day care. We have a waiting list of at least 30 people already."

ST. MARY OF LEUCA DAY CARE CENTRE

290 Risebrough Circuit,
Markham.

When the Daughters of St. Mary of Leuca moved from Scarborough seven years ago, most families from their day care centre followed them to their large new location in Milliken Mills.

"From the 50 children we had, 45 families bought houses in Markham, Richmond Hill, Stouffville, Whitby and Ajax," says Sister Addolorata Obal. "The parents brought their children here. Parents feel we are just one really big family. Most children started with us when they were 2½. Now it's like an extension of home."

Three sisters preside over four classrooms of 25 children, who are divided according to age, from 2½ to 6 years. The weekly fee is \$70.

A before and after school program is also available for children aged 7 to 9 years.

"Most of the parents are young couples and immigrants," says Sister Addolorata. "We want to help. You could say we are a humanitarian service."

The 14 sisters at the centre speak various languages and come from Italy, India and the Philippines. The 100 children at the centre represent 35 nationalities.

Members of the community assist with the children frequently, such as volunteer parents, and students doing field work from local high schools and colleges.

"Our program goal is to provide children with a creative atmosphere in which they can gain social skills and intellectual competence," says Sister Addolorata. "There is a tremendous need for day care. We have a two-year waiting list."

CHICK-A-DEE DAY NURSERY

34 Albert St. S.,
Stouffville, Ont.

"Our kids are separated by age, but we try and make it like a home away from home," says Heather Preece, owner of the Chick-A-Dee Day Nursery.

Four ECE's and an assistant supervise the 35 children, aged 18½ months to 5 years. Part-time and full-time programs are available. Weekly rates are \$76 for preschoolers and \$85 for toddlers.

Although the program isn't structured, and children aren't formally assessed, "The children learn through the different areas

we set up regarding our weekly theme and through playing," says Miss Preece.

She's been able to keep costs down with the help of parents bringing in art supplies.

In her 10-year ownership of the centre, she has encountered problems in obtaining qualified staff "that fit in with what you want and are willing to put in extra hours when required."

THE CHILDREN'S HOUSE DAY CARE CENTRE

22 Church St. North,
Stouffville.

Ten years ago, Chris Suzuki and Sue McKinnon opened The Children's House Nursery School in Stouffville.

Prompted by parents from their program who were considering a return to work, the owners added a day care centre to their program three years ago.

"It was just a matter of changing our facility to meet the demand," says Chris Suzuki.

The fully-integrated centre has a capacity for 50 children, aged 18 months to 5 years with ECE teachers and 5 assistants. Weekly rates are \$110 for toddlers and \$100 for 2½ to 5 year olds.

"The staffing is the most important thing in day care," says Mrs. Suzuki. "Parents should really watch the interaction between the staff and children."

"The bottom line is they should be careful that their emotional needs are met in a warm, accepting environment. Parents should feel really comfortable with the staff and philosophy of the centre."

Mrs. Suzuki says costs for running the centre have been "extremely high."

The recent \$2 per day fee increase has not been sufficient to meet increased mortgage expenses, staff salaries, food and insurance, she says.

"It's a big responsibility, trying to meet all the needs of the children and provide a quality program with proper nutrition and proper equipment," says Mrs. Suzuki. "I'm really hoping the provincial government can subsidize staff salaries."

UNIONVILLE DAY CARE CENTRE

Marklee Branch,
100 Lee Avenue,
Milliken Mills, Ont.

Located in a former public school, the Marklee branch has the same program as the Unionville branch, but offers only day care, and has been operating since 1984.

Total capacity is 88 children. Each of the four classrooms are supervised by one ECE and two assistants, with children divided according to age. Fees are \$115 per week for 18 months to 2½ years and \$100 per week for 2½ to 5 year olds.



Five-year-old chums Kelly Brigdon (left) and Kimberley Armstrong look like they'd prefer to something other than learn French. Instructor Agnes Margrain points to the image board that illustrates "les fruits" at the Children's Academy of Markham. —Sandy Hazell



Children at Milliken Mills Daycare Centre are taught early on the meaning of the word sharing. Here, instructor Zety Shaboo encourages her charges Miranda Rupall, six months, Jennoi Ennis, 14 months and Sheldon Titus, 11 months to share. —Sandy Hazell