Day Care Centers Answer Problem Of Child Care During Formative Years

By Evon LeJeune

The rising costs of living today is forcing more and more women into the labor market.

Ten years ago, a mother with children in the home under the age of six was reluctant to seek a job and leave her home and children. Today, many of them must work to help finance even minimum living standards.

Nearly half of all American mothers have jobs today. Two out of five of the working mothers have children under six. Recent reports of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare show that almost one third of women receiving welfare are trained for and willing to work. They are kept from working to alleviate poverty in their homes by young children.

What happens to these children during the critical formative years from birth to five is a question raised by many educators, child psychologists and others with the particular stress of two working parents mean a "job-neglected" child? A child left alone or with incompetent help to shift for himself while the mother is at work?

Authorities say the sooner the child is removed from such a home the better his chances for a successful life. The very fact of the child is removed from the home for the day is often his salvation. Whatever the home situation, the alcoholic father, the neurotic or un-wed mother, or a happy one, the child will go further.

One Answer

One answer to the problem is the day-care centers which have sprung up to help alleviate the situation and provide adequate care for the youngsters.

Most day care centers provide adequate care on a limited budget. Others provide, on the one hand, more than adequate care by developing in the child a sense of belonging, a sense of his own individual worth and pride in his achievements, and an incentive to greater motivation without actually teaching.

Lloyd Cunningham, president of the 15-member Board of Directors of the Lafayette Day Nursery, is a non-profit group who work without pay, warns against unlicensed centers that open up as strictly "money making gadgets" for the owners.

He suggests in a statement given before the United States Senate Finance Committee in September that unlicensed facilities be outlawed quickly for most often they are the beginning of a one way road of indifferent care. This type of road often has a policeman at its end," he said.

Continuing, Cunningham said, "With licensing only being given to the care centers that meet standards set for adequate space and staff, then the child will bloom. We have found that once a child is enrolled into care centers, it is very easy to move rapidly into improving his health."

Through the University of Southwestern Speech and Hearing Clinic, through special education, the guidance center and youth of the medical profession, we surmount our obstacles. We utilize both private and governmental agencies to help the child in our care.

The Difference

The difference between a good day care center and an indifferent one is often the people who support it and consistently show an interest in bettering present conditions.

Mrs. J. R. Bales, director of the Lafayette Day Nurseries which has been operating for 22 years long before such programs were in vogue elsewhere noted that public support enables the center to provide more than the absolute necessities especially to underprivileged children who receive little or no cultural training at home.

Originally set up to operate on tuition alone, the center receives assistance in the form of donations of labor, money and time.

"The outside assistance we receive enables us to give every child who comes to us more time and attention, Mrs. Bales said. We have time for telling them nursery tales and fairy tales they have never heard before. And introduce them to new methods of play. We do not push the children into learning at any kind of competition that might be damaging to his ego. We try to instill in every child a sense of value - of worth. We do not want any child to emerge a failure at five."

Basic Nourishment

"With the exposure to cultural advantages, we also provide all the basic nourishment requirements the child needs in a day. If he goes home and has nothing to eat until he returns the next day, he can still remain a healthy child, ready to learn, play and be happy."

Though the Lafayette Day Nursery provides the best possible care, Mrs. Bales stated that they could still use much more help.

"We would like to see more involvement of the Negro community, she said. "There are so many things their clubs and organizations could do. Our toy requirement is fantastic. With a little direction they could help to provide doll clothes, stuffed animals, which could easily be made at home. Even the fathers could help by volunteering to build slides, climbing toys or repairing already existing toys. We would be happy to provide the materials if they would only offer a little time."

The tuition costs of $10.00 a week covers the salaries of the director, five teachers, cook and cook's helper, but it is not sufficient for obtaining additional supplies.